

Source: <http://www.everyonehasopinions.com/2008/02/glb-issues-children/>

Introducing GLBT Issues to Children

February 16, 2008

I have wondered when or if there is a time when it is too soon to introduce homosexuality and/or transgenderism to a child. It is likely that in most school districts, there are children who are suffering in silence because their parents are gay, lesbian, or transgendered and they are afraid they will be picked on if other children find out. The reason why we even question when the time is right to talk to children about these topics is because there is still a stigma attached.

In my way of thinking, it isn't a choice. Nobody chooses to be hated and treated like crap and I can't think of one person in the GLBT community that has not been hated, made fun of, or treated poorly because of who they are. Honestly. Who chooses to live a hated existence? This is just part of why I believe there is no way it can be a choice. With millions of GLBT Americans out there, it's hard to believe everyone chooses to deviate from what is considered normal. Sorry, but there just isn't enough incentive, to choose to be gay or transgendered. It's not a choice.

You can argue with me until the cows come home on this topic, but this doesn't really change the fact that there are thousands of children living in GLBT households and it is only through compassion and understanding that these children are going to be accepted. I guess if you have to blame anyone, blame the parents, but don't make the children suffer because you don't agree with their parents. Going further, this means that children do need to learn about other cultures. Yes, children of GLBT parents live in a different cultural environment. Just like teaching children about the customs and cultures of other nations, it is imperative to be inclusive so children of GLBT parents have a place in both school and other social environments.

This brings me back to my original question. Is there a time when a child is too young to understand homosexuality or transgenderism? Children are incredibly resilient. They understand more than you can imagine and their level of compassion and understanding puts most adults to shame. I know that my son was eight when he learned that Daddy was transgendered. He didn't fully understand what transgendered meant, but he knew that I was born like most girls were born, but I always felt different and that I always felt like a boy.

He also understood I was and had taken steps to become a boy. He was, perhaps, the most understanding of all I told. When anyone slipped and referred to me by a female name or feminine pronouns, surprisingly, he was the first to correct them. He accepted it wholeheartedly and comprehended it to the point where introducing me as his father (I have been with his mother since he

was 7) was nothing he was ever ashamed of doing. Some children of GLBT parents aren't so lucky, as they live in less accepting towns and environments.

When a child is introduced to homosexuality or transgenderism, they shouldn't be told anything too in depth. Something like, "Uncle Marvin is going to marry his friend Chris because they love each other very much" is more acceptable than "Uncle Marvin's gay. He plans to get married. Gay means they he only has sex with men. Of course, his marriage isn't legal." As it is, children are still coming to terms with their understanding of sex and sexuality. From the ages of 4 until their tween or early teen years, sex is still a foreign and often misunderstood concept, so introducing homosexuality, which deals specifically with sexual orientation, is not advised in terms of sex talk, especially for younger children.

Transgenderism may be easier to talk about because children seem to see things as either black or white. For me, my son realized, I wasn't a girl or that's not how I saw myself, so that must mean I was a boy. It's a bit simplistic in terms, but it worked in helping him to understand my name change and other aspects of my transition. Even if a child doesn't have a GLBT parent, chances are they have some relative who is GLBT, a family friend, or someone in their school has a GLBT parent. Introducing your child to the possibility of other families coming in different shapes, sizes, colors, and parents is important for building up tolerant and compassionate children. With one simple talk, you never know. Your child might become the one to comfort the child in their class with the GLBT parent who has been shunned by the rest of their class who judges without understanding the child's home environment.

I should also add that there should be no issue of parenting when it comes to GLBT parents. Studies have repeatedly shown that GLBT parents are just as capable of raising children as heterosexual couples. Children of GLBT parents are often more sensitive and compassionate towards others as a result of their parentage. There is also no correlation between the amounts of GLBT individuals having gay parents. Just as many GLBT people come from heterosexual parents. In fact, the overwhelming majority of GLBT people have straight parents. Their parents come from a mix of religions, belief systems, and political spectrums. Everyone from Dick Cheney to Cher have GLBT children, so if that's not diverse, I don't know what is.

Back to the issue of children, the more open we become as a society, the more resources are available for children. Whether you're GLBT or not if you have kids, I highly recommend you check out the following books. These books run the spectrum from offering a simple, easy to understand explanation of GLBT families to dealing with more complex issues like legal battles children face when they have a GLBT parent. If you wonder what others are saying about these books, check them out at Amazon before purchasing them. Using books has always been a productive tool for explaining those hard to understand or talk about concepts with children. From why hygiene is important to sex talks as your children grow, books can pave the way to understanding and acceptance.

The Family Book - This book was written and illustrated by Todd Parr. This book explores all the differences families can have and how similar they are when it comes to simple emotions like love and sadness. For example, all families understand the importance of hugging, no matter whether they are a family of mixed races or there are two dads or two moms.

King and King - This book was written and illustrated by Linda de Haan and Stern Nijland. It's a modern day fairy tale where a King looking to find someone to lead his kingdom with him finds the perfect suitor in a handsome Prince. This book has a highly controversial past as schools have tried to ban it from their bookshelves due to prejudice by some who hadn't even read the book.

And Tango Makes Three – This book was written by Justin Richardson and Peter Parnell. It tells the true story of two penguins, Roy and Silo, who fall in love and just happen to both be male.

The White Swan Express - This book was written by Jean Davies Okimoto and Elaine M. Aoki. It involves the adoption of four baby girls in China and their American families, including a lesbian couple, who have come to bring them home to live a new and exciting life.

Mom and Mum are Getting Married – This book is written by Ken Setterington. It's a story that looks at the wedding of Rosie and her brother, Jack's adventures as their Mom and Mum get married.

The Skull of Truth – This book is by Bruce Coville. Charlie has a skull that makes people tell the truth. At dinner, he gives the skull to his uncle, who unwillingly reveals his roommate is actually his partner. Charlie must deal with the uncomfortable reality of the truth he thought he wanted to hear. This book is for pre-teens and young teens.

Living in Secret – This book is by Christiana Salat and is geared towards a pre-teen audience. When Amelia's father is awarded custody since her mother is a lesbian, Amelia and her mother run away to live a new life with her mother's partner in California. Though this book does not advocate parents kidnapping their children, this book does paint a realistic portrait at the strain judicial systems put on children of GLBT parents. As Amelia is forced to live with a father she feels is being selfish, she must come to terms with the injustice of a system that, though vowing to protect her, makes her long more than ever for the mothers she considers her true family.

Am I Blue? Coming Out from the Silence – This book is an anthology with many different authors. It is geared toward a teen audience and offers stories of kids and teens with GLBT parents as well as those dealing with their own sexual identity.

Other books of interest:

The Order of the Poison Oak

No Big Deal

Mama Eat Ant, Yuck!

Jenny Lives With Eric and Martin

My Really Cool Baby Book

Not the Only One: Lesbian and Gay Fiction for Teens

Daddy's Roommate

Ten Out of Ten

When Grown-Ups Fall in Love

Young, Gay, and Proud

How Would You Feel if your Dad was Gay?

Who Framed Lorenzo Garcia?

Molly's Family

My Two Uncles

The Arizona Kid

Anna-Day and the O-Ring

The Duke Who Outlawed Jelly Beans

November Ever After

Keeping You a Secret

Rainbow Road

One Dad, Two Dads, Brown Dad, Blue Dads