



BOOKS FOR PARENT'S WITH AN LGBTI BRANCH ON THE FAMILY TREE

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The following document was originally written some years ago for an assignment as part of my *Postgraduate Diploma of Counselling* at *Murdoch University*. It has been amended for a “non-academic” audience, (although full reference details are included for those needing them) and includes, (where possible) links to copies of the books in the West Australian Public Library System.

There have been significant gains in the status and tolerance of Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals, Trans, Intersex, and Queer (LGBTIQ) people overall, since the times of the Stonewall riots in New York in 1969. (Which are often seen as the start of the modern Gay Liberation movement.) However even now, although parents may well be accepting of LGBTIQ people in general, there is still potential for their children to experience trauma (or trepidation, at *potential* negative reactions,) misunderstandings, and strained relations (if not the risk of being ostracised,) within the family when they as LGBTIQ offspring “come out” to their own families.

Books, dealing with integrating into ones life, and feeling more comfortable with the fact that one has a Gay, Lesbian or Bisexual sibling, child, friend or acquaintance, are nothing new. A 30 year old example is Don Clark's (1977) *Loving Someone Gay*. For parents in particular, there are books like Betty Fairchild and Nancy Hayward's *Now That You Know - What Every Parent Should Know About Homosexuality*, from about the same time, in 1979, (again, like Clark's book reprinted and updated many times).

This document was originally written to provide fellow counselling students who may not be familiar with GLBTIQ issues, what I felt would be worthwhile modern books (primarily) for parents, that professionals can refer clients to, that deal with this subject. Also in choosing books, I felt that the books should be fairly readily available, either via the public library system in Western Australia, or online booksellers, apart from anywhere else.

McDougal, B. (Ed.) (2006) My child is Gay: How parents react when they hear the news. Allen and Unwin: Crows Nest, NSW.

<http://catalogue.slwa.wa.gov.au/record=b2421936~S2>

This is an Australian collection of letters, from parents. The authors (some anonymous,) come from across the country, and a wide range of backgrounds and ages. The stories length vary from less than a page, to about seven pages, but on average are about one and a half. A number of the authors are involved in the group PFLAG, or *Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays*. Some stories also include names of books that the individual author's found of assistance to them.

I should also say when I looked through this book, I recognised straight away the first story, by John Pugh, who I know, along with his (Gay) son Jeff who along with his partner, are friends of mine.

Also included are contact details for PFLAG Australia-wide and other resources, the editor's own story, and an excerpt from Bryce Courtney's book *April Fools Day* about the effects of another family's son disclosing both his homosexuality and his status as HIV positive.

Welch Griffin, C, Wirth, M. J., & Wirth, A.G. (1997) Beyond Acceptance: Parents of Lesbians & Gays Talk About Their Experiences (Revised and Updated Edition). St Martin's Griffin: New York.

<http://catalogue.slwa.wa.gov.au/record=b1161113-S2>

This American book is more structured than McDougal's book, referred to earlier, in that in the main body of the book, are ten chapters, and each deals with different aspects of responding to, and dealing with the disclosure of homosexuality, including the initial disclosure.

Therefore this may be more applicable to someone needing ideas, or wanting to find out about a particular aspect. For example; *Finding Out; What we learned from books; Communicating with others; Religious Thinking in Transition; Changing inner perceptions; Taking a stand and telling others; The rest of the family; Levels of understanding; Contrast and comparison of what was and what will be* and; *About AIDS*. (As well as having an index.)

As with the McDougal book, this book has the advantage that it is not written solely by a "detached professional" (the authors are parent's of Gay's themselves,) but also, as the *Introduction* says "In these pages, heterosexual parents share with other heterosexual parents information they found trustworthy and helpful." (p.xv).

Savin-Williams, R., C. (2000) Mom, Dad. I'm Gay. How Families Negotiate Coming Out. American Psychological Association: Washington, DC.

[Not available via the WA Library system, but at *Curtin University Library*, see: http://link.library.curtin.edu.au/p?pid=CUR_ALMA2183334220001951]

The author (who has written widely on youth and GLBT related issues,) notes that this book is intended for both youth and their families. Also, unlike most other books on the subject, the majority of people quoted are in fact young people, rather than parents. He notes that:

As such they often explode myths—for example, that a parent's reaction to the news of a child's same-sex attractions is ineluctably negative, violent or retributive. As readers will see, it seldom is. (p.4)

He also observes that:

... these perspectives [of parents,] are usually derived from parents who attend support groups or have had traumatic experiences with a gay child, altogether poor venues for eliciting diverse opinions given the selective nature of those who join such groups. (p.4-5.)

This is a positive addition to the available books, quite different to those usually written for parents, being written from a youth (rather than parent) perspective, while still widely quoting parents, (from secondary sources).

Herdt, G., & Koff, B. (2000) Something to Tell You: The Road Families Travel When a Child is Gay. Columbia University Press: New York, NY.

[Not available via the WA Library system, but at *Edith Cowan University Library*, see: <http://library.ecu.edu.au/record=b1347549-S7>]

This book was written for both parents and professionals, and combines the stories of families, parents, and youth, with research. Its genesis was a 1987-1990 research project in Chicago, looking at "...the identity development of gay and lesbian teenagers and their families and communities in the metropolitan area of Chicago..." (p.xvii). This involved administration of various paper and pencil tests and a semistructured interview to approximately fifty parents of lesbians and gays, combined with a developmental identity study of 202 youth aged 13 to 20, from the same area.

The book is based on the interviews with parents of Lesbian and Gay children. (The parents were not a part of clinical samples.) Subjects were mainly recruited via local PFLAG chapters, and a local agency dealing with GLBTIQ youth.

Overall the book is written with two related observations in mind. Being that *both* young GLBTIQ people and their families are often unprepared to handle the conflicts related to the *coming out* process.

Jennings, K., & Shapiro, P. (2003) *Always My Child: A Parent's Guide to Understanding Your Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgendered or Questioning Son or Daughter.* Skylight Press/Simon & Schuster: New York, NY.

<http://catalogue.slwa.wa.gov.au/record=b2066172~S2>

Written by Kevin Jennings, Executive Director (and founder) of the (US) *Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network* (www.glsen.org) this book looks at both parents issues and concerns, as well as broader societal issues, primarily in educational settings. He also notes in the introduction that:

“...this book is particularly unusual because it explores three other issues that other parenting books don't discuss: the concerns of transgender teens, questioning teens, and teens of colour. [As well as affording each a separate chapter.] (p.12-13.)

The book has twelve chapters, (plus resource list, bibliography and detailed index,) which like the Welch Griffin, Wirth, and Wirth, (1997) book referred to earlier, may be of particular use to those wanting specific information and resources, specifically in the education sector. Jennings in some of the later sections also provides guidelines for parents wanting to take a more “activist” or “advocate” role in the face of discrimination, and less than equal treatment of their offspring.

References.

Clark, D. (1977) Loving Someone Gay. Signet Books/Celestial Arts/New American Library: New York: NY.

Fairchild, B., & Hayward, N. (1979) Now That You Know - What Every Parent Should Know About Homosexuality. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich: New York, NY.

Herdt, G., & Koff, B. (2000) Something to Tell You: The Road Families Travel When a Child is Gay. Columbia University Press: New York, NY.

Jennings, K., & Shapiro, P. (2003) Always My Child: A Parent's Guide to Understanding Your Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgendered or Questioning Son or Daughter. Skylight Press/Simon & Schuster: New York, NY.

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