



HOW TO TALK TO YOUR CHILDREN ABOUT HOMOSEXUALITY

A GUIDE FOR PARENTS

JEFF JOHNSTON

PRESCHOOL

AGES 2-5

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PLEASE NOTE:

This resource provides ideas and guidance for parents who are having conversations about homosexuality with children as they encounter the topic in the culture. It does not provide information or advice about helping children or teens who “come out” and identify as gay or bisexual; question their sexual identity; or struggle with gender confusion.

For assistance and resources for serious concerns such as these, Focus on the Family Canada offers a one-time complimentary consultation from a Christian perspective. To reach our counselling department by phone, call 1.800.661.9800 weekdays 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. (Pacific Time). Please be prepared to leave your contact information for a counsellor to return a call to you as soon as possible. The consultation is available at no cost to you.

PRESCHOOL

AGES 2-5

FRAMING THE ISSUE: A FOUR-PART STORY

Teach your children a simple four-part story of our world.

1

God made a good world

2

People did not obey God and sinned

3

God forgives, saves and transforms
those who follow Jesus Christ

4

He will gloriously remake both this
world and those who trust Him

When children take in and process new information, they start from what they already know, connecting new information to their previous knowledge. ***So, before your children are even aware of homosexuality, begin by giving them a biblical view of the world.***

As you do so, you frame the issue by teaching them about God and His redemptive plan for fallen people, providing your children with a basic understanding of our world. We want to start first with what's good when talking about difficult subjects, so begin by teaching about God's plan for us. This lays a solid foundation for your children.

Find a children's Bible or Bible storybook and read it with your child. This biblical framework provides the starting place for discussing difficult issues.

WHAT TO TEACH AND DISCUSS

1

CREATION

- God made the Earth and all that's in it; He is the source of all life.
- God made people in His image and loves us very much. Remind your children, "You are deeply loved by God."
- God separated humanity into male and female. Both boys and girls (and men and women) are good, but different.
- Children come from a mother and father; God intended parents to love, care for, protect, teach and guide children as they grow.
- God gives us good gifts, like friendship, marriage and family.

2

THE FALL

- Adam and Eve disobeyed God and sinned. They did not trust God and did what He told them not to do, eating from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.
- Adam and Eve's disobedience had bad consequences, as sin and death entered the world.
- People do wrong things, even moms and dads, and we all need God to forgive us and help us do what's right.
- When we do something wrong, we admit it and ask those we've hurt to forgive us, too.

3

REDEMPTION

- God had a plan to bring salvation to the world despite our disobedience, promising to Eve that a Saviour would come.
- This thread of salvation and redemption is woven throughout the Old Testament, as God makes promises to Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses and all of Israel.
- Jesus Christ fulfilled all these promises, living a perfect life, dying for us, coming back to life, and rising up to heaven.
- The good news is that Jesus' life, death, burial and resurrection bring salvation and freedom from sin!
- When we choose to put our confidence in Jesus and follow Him, we are born into God's family. God gives His children the Holy Spirit to guide and transform us in a fallen world.
- God helps us treat all people with kindness, even those who sin against us, who are different from us or with whom we disagree.

4

GLORIFICATION

- Scripture portrays our future union with Christ as a wedding feast, a celebration.
- Just as marriage unites a bride and her husband, Christians will one day be united with Jesus Christ.
- Those who follow Jesus will be with Him forever in a new Heaven and Earth.
- The Bible tells us that Heaven will have no pain, sin or sadness.
- We have a future and a sure hope because God has made these promises to those who follow Him.



A FIRM FOUNDATION:

BEGIN TEACHING GOD'S DESIGN FOR MARRIAGE

Use simple Bible stories, such as the Creation story, to show how God made Adam and Eve for each other and created the first marriage. You might use the story of Noah to show the animals, male and female, going into the ark. Even young children can understand that a “mommy” animal and a “daddy” animal together have a baby animal.

Point out examples from life to teach these truths. Explain, for example, that Mom and Dad are married—marriage is a good gift from God. When a child sees something bad, remind them that sin brought pain into the world. When your children start noticing that boys and girls are different, teach about God separating humanity into male and female. Life is full of such teachable moments!

REAL-LIFE SCENARIO

Your family is travelling and visits a new city. It's June, when schools break for summer vacation.

As you enjoy the sights, you begin to notice rainbow flags, T-shirts and displays, and your family sees some same-sex couples holding hands. You've stumbled into a gay pride celebration.

Then your young child suddenly asks, “Why are those two men holding hands? Why are those two women kissing?”



POSSIBLE RESPONSES

These depend on the age of the child, his or her level of concern about this scene and his or her verbal and abstract ability:

■ “God planned marriage to be between a husband and wife. But sin came into the world and causes all of us to do wrong things. One wrong thing some grownups do is change God’s plan for marriage so that two men or two women can marry.”

■ “Not everyone follows God’s plan for marriage, so sometimes two women will act like they are married. But they can’t really be a husband and wife because they are both women. Sin has confused them; they need God’s help to follow Him.”

■ “God made marriage to be between a man and a woman. But not everyone obeys God and follows His plan. So sometimes two men will decide to marry. But we believe that marriage is between a husband and wife.”



A WORD OF CAUTION

At this age, children don’t need information about specific sexual activity; they’re not equipped to handle adult sexuality. Furthermore, we suggest waiting until kids are older before introducing terms such as “homosexuality,” “heterosexuality,” “gay,” “straight,” or “LGBT.”

Boys may be confused if you say, “Those men are gay; that’s when two guys love each other.” At this age, boys are typically relating to and identifying with other boys. So a boy might think to himself, “I’m a boy, and I like boys. Does that mean I’m gay?” Some children have come home from school lessons on homosexuality and asked this very question.

The same would absolutely apply to girls. *We suggest you avoid such statements as, “Being homosexual or lesbian is when two girls like each other.”* This takes what is a normal, healthy developmental stage—girls liking and connecting with each other—and equates it with homosexuality. Young girls should attach with and love their mother and other women and girls as they develop their growing feminine identity.

ELEMENTARY

AGES 6-12

FRAMING THE ISSUE: MARITAL LOVE IS DIFFERENT FROM OTHER LOVES

Marriage between a man and woman is different from other relationships. God has given humanity a number of good gifts, including marriage, love, friendship and family. Begin with God's good intentions for human relationships before discussing problems and sin.

Borrowing on C.S. Lewis' ideas from *The Four Loves* this would be a good age to explain to your children that there are different types of love:

- Our "love" (or liking, really) for food, things and activities.
- Love for Creation, including our care for animals and the environment.
- Friendship and love for our friends.
- Love for family including parents' love for children; children's love for mom and dad; brothers' and sisters' love for each other; love for other relatives.
- Marital love, which includes romantic or private (sexual) love, the love between a husband and a wife.
- God's love for us and our responsive love to Him.

Children can compare and contrast these types of love. You could discuss the different types of responsibilities and activities associated with these different levels of love and relationship. Depending on the age of your child, you might also discuss ways that sin damages and destroys love.

Marital love has purposes and characteristics that are distinct from other loves. As appropriate, talk to your children about these marital traits, including:

■ Permanence:

Friendships may change, but marriage should last a lifetime.

■ One Man/One Woman (monogamous):

We may have lots of friends, children and family members, but only one husband or wife.

■ Male And Female:

God separated humanity into male and female; marriage brings those back together.

■ Oneness:

Marriage unites a couple in a special way; that's why sexual expression is intended only between a husband and wife. Intimacy, pleasure and joy are a significant part of the marital union.

■ Familial:

Marriage between a man and a woman often brings forth new life—children.

■ Societal:

Children do best when raised by their married mother and father. Parents raise the next generation, so a married mom and dad raising healthy children benefits all society.

■ Symbolic:

In the Bible, marriage is the primary picture of our relationship with God.

■ Glorifying God:

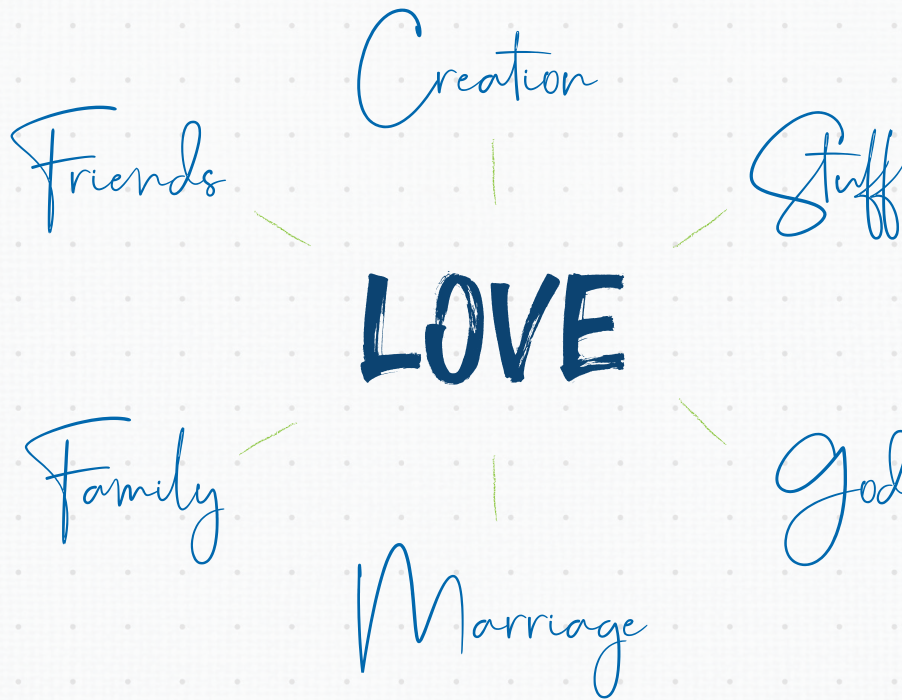
Following God's intentions for marriage brings glory to Him.

If the issue of homosexuality comes up, you can then explain that it is one distortion of God's design for human love. Two men who "marry" are missing something—the femininity of a woman. A child raised by two women is deprived of a father. Two moms can't be a dad.



OTHER IMPORTANT IDEAS TO COMMUNICATE

- Your children need to hear from you directly that they may safely talk to you about difficult issues. **Don't assume:** Ask questions, listen well and encourage them to speak freely.
- They're also watching to see that you love and respect others, speaking truth courageously and gracefully.
- People are worthy of respect. As followers of Jesus Christ, we don't bully other people or use demeaning terms or expressions.
- You're now expanding their knowledge of male and female differences, why these matter and how marriage brings the two halves of humanity together.
- Not everyone has a Christian world view, but we love and respect them anyway.



REAL-LIFE SCENARIO

You're in the kitchen on New Year's Day, making breakfast and watching the Rose Parade, a family tradition. Your syrup-faced children are staring at the screen when a float goes by with two men holding hands while a pastor performs their wedding ceremony. Your children turn to look at you for a response.



POSSIBLE RESPONSES

These responses depend on the ages of your children, their level of concern and their verbal and abstract ability:

■ “We’ve talked about how God made marriage to be between a man and a woman. That’s what the Bible teaches. But because of Adam’s sin, the world is not as it was meant to be. Some men, because of sin in the world, want to marry other men. Some people agree with them, and even change God’s design for marriage to allow two men to marry.”

■ “You know how we’ve talked about different kinds of love, like friendship and marriage? Most people grow up and marry someone of the opposite sex. Because of sin in the world, some people get off-track. Sometimes men and women want to marry someone like themselves rather than the opposite sex.”

■ “Marriage brings together a husband and wife—that’s God’s intention. But this world is not perfect, and not everyone follows God’s design. Some people have changed marriage in our country so two men or two women can marry each other. The Bible says that’s not good. Why don’t we pray right now for these men to come to Jesus and follow God’s plan for their lives?”

REAL-LIFE SCENARIO

Your sixth-grade daughter comes home from school. She is very quiet and seems upset. You ask what's going on, and finally she blurts out, "Well, I was talking to Olivia at recess and some girls called us 'lezzies.' What's a 'lezzie?'" (Olivia is your daughter's best friend.)



POSSIBLE RESPONSES

First, stay calm, keep cool and pray for wisdom. Then, ask your daughter questions, such as, "What do you think that word means? How did you feel when those girls called you names?" After she has a chance to describe her thoughts and feelings, you might give a simple explanation, such as, "That word is used to attack and belittle people. It's short for 'lesbian,' which means a woman who has romantic attractions toward other women."

"Your friendship with Olivia is good. It was wrong of those girls to bully you and Olivia and call you names. Most girls your age have other friends who are girls, and sometimes they even have a 'best friend.' That's really good and healthy. You and Olivia are precious and valuable to God."

"Words can really hurt, can't they? Did you know that Jesus was called all kinds of names, too? He knows how you feel and wants to

comfort you. Let's pray right now to take those words off you and place them on the cross. Then, Mom and Dad will bless you by praying good words over you."

"I'm so sorry that happened to you and your friend. Mom and Dad want to protect you as much as possible, so we'll be talking to the school about working to keep students from hurting other kids with mean words."

"Because people are made in God's image and are very precious, it's wrong for anyone to call people mean names or bully another person. When we are hurt, it's important to pray until we can forgive the person who hurt us. Forgiving someone doesn't mean that you don't hold them accountable or try to stop them from hurting you again, but that you release them from your judgment. When you're ready, let's talk more and pray about forgiving those girls."

Sadly, our hyper-sexualized culture is ready to steal innocence from children. And the rapid rise in the visibility of homosexuality makes it all too easy for some to cast a shadow on the goodness and necessity of same-sex friendships. Same-sex friendships are a vital part of growing up. It's an integral part of the developmental process where girls identify and connect with other girls, and where boys connect and compete with other boys.

Your children may hear or see homosexuality-related words from neighbours, classmates, television or social media. If you hear them using inappropriate language, this would be the time to explain that God loves all people and they are worthy of being treated kindly, so we don't use unkind words. Words are powerful and can hurt people.

**GOD LOVES ALL
PEOPLE AND THEY ARE
WORTHY OF BEING
TREATED KINDLY.**

Ask your kids questions, "Where did you hear that word? What do you think it means?" Then, you might have a short, frank discussion about God's design for healthy relationships and marriage. You can explain that those words describe things that go against God's design.

Some older children, especially those who understand human reproduction, may ask about the sexual activity of gay identified men and women. Answering this question is up to your discretion, but we suggest reminding children that when a husband and wife unite sexually, they form a single reproductive unit. Their bodies are designed to fit together naturally. Same-sex couples can never form a reproductive whole. You might tactfully and carefully tell them that homosexual activity is fundamentally different from a marital union.



A WORD OF CAUTION

As with younger children, we suggest being careful how you explain things. Saying, "Being gay is when two guys like each other," is confusing to boys who are strengthening their internal sense of masculinity. Part of this involves distancing themselves from girls and identifying with and relating to other boys and men.

The same would apply to girls. We suggest you avoid such statements as, "Being homosexual or lesbian is when two girls like each other." This takes what is a normal, healthy developmental stage—girls liking and connecting with each other or following older girls as role models—and equates it with homosexuality.

MIDDLE SCHOOL & BEYOND

AGES 13+

FRAMING THE ISSUE

Discuss deeper questions of life with adolescents and teens: "Who am I and why am I here? Do I have a purpose which God will help me discover? Or is it up to me to create my own meaning for life?"

If your kids are at this life stage and you haven't already taught them the big picture frameworks suggested previously in this resource, it's never too late! The four-part story of humanity, different types of love and the unique characteristics of marriage are topics you can still discuss with older children. Middle school students and older should know and understand these basic truths.

But teenagers are also able to deal with more abstract concepts. So as part of setting the framework for talking about homosexuality, ***it would be helpful to talk to your children about two competing world views*** that attempt to define who we are, why we are here and where we derive our answers to those questions.

The first world view comes from the Bible and historic Judeo-Christian teaching: ***God designed us and created us for***

a purpose—to love and know Him, to love and know others, and to do good work in this world. We have intrinsic value and meaning that comes from being created in God's image and likeness. The good work that we do includes creating and nurturing families.

God gives us many gifts—creativity, reason, family, relationships, sexuality, feelings, language and more. As we grow and connect with God and others, we grow in these gifts and in our discovery of who we are. We have meaning and purpose, which we discover and fulfill with God's help.

Our bodies have purposes, too, and when a husband and wife unite sexually, they form a complete reproductive system. Their union has the capacity to bring forth new life. Homosexual unions lack this significant capability.

**THE UNION OF MAN AND WOMAN
HAS THE CAPACITY TO
BRING FORTH NEW LIFE.**

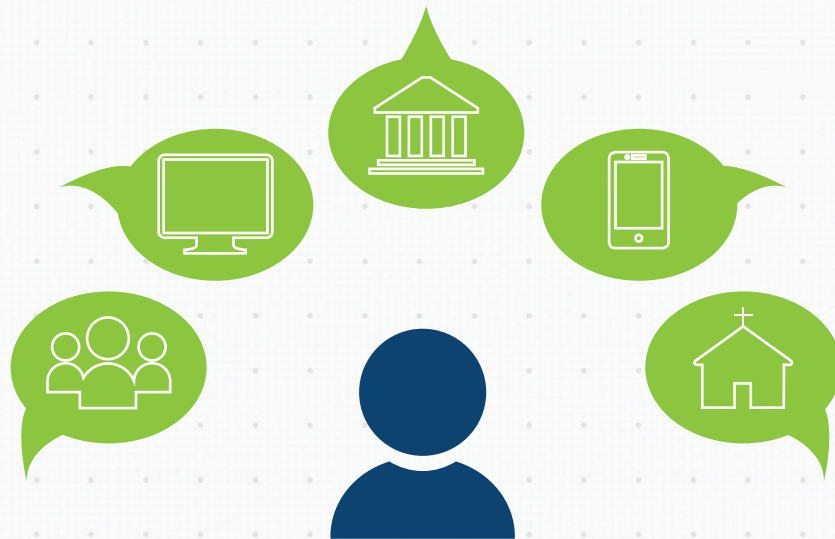
Scripture also teaches that God gives us the ability to make choices. But our freedom to make choices has been damaged and distorted by sin. Sin causes us to want to do wrong. And ultimately, freedom is lost as sin takes control. We become enslaved by sin and can lose our ability to choose to do good instead of bad. We are separated from God and unable to grow into all we were created to be. The good news is that Jesus opened the kingdom of God to all. Because of His life, death, burial and resurrection, we can become His children, be free from sin and discover our purpose.

In the Jewish and Christian view, marriage between a man and a woman is a gift from God, with family flowing from the joining together of a husband and wife. Most societies recognize the good of marriage between a man and woman and set marriage apart as the best place for sexual expression and creating family. Family is the basic building block of society, nurturing and educating the next generation.

On the flip side, the secular world view says, "There is no God," and "The only real meaning I have in life is what I choose. I don't have a purpose or ultimate end; I can be whatever I want." In this view, we define ourselves, and many people end up defining themselves by their sexual attractions or actions.

In this world view, there is no larger purpose and nothing is sacred—not sexuality, marriage, family or children. So marriage can be redefined to be something that it's never been before: two men or two women. Likewise, sexual relationships have few or no limits.

In this non-biblical, human-centred view, sexual activity is separated from marriage and procreation, and even from being a male-female union. It becomes more about seeking pleasure or self-fulfillment.



Who is your child listening to?

WHAT TO TEACH AND DISCUSS

1

God created you to know and love Him, to know and love others and to do good work with Him in this world.

4

We treat all people with kindness, love and respect.

2

Identity, meaning and purpose come from being created and redeemed by God, from being in His family.

5

We live in a world with competing world views; the Christian world view is in direct conflict with the dominant, secular world view that rules much of culture.

3

Marriage and family have God-ordained meaning, value and purpose— far greater than the arbitrary and changing definitions assigned by society or individuals.

6

The world is increasingly antagonistic toward Christians and God's design for sex and sexuality. Our children need to be prepared to be bold and courageous, speaking the truth in love.

YOUR THOUGHTS?

REAL-LIFE SCENARIO

Uncle Mike has come out to the family as gay and is bringing his same-sex spouse to the upcoming family get-together.



POSSIBLE RESPONSES

These depend on the ages of your children, their level of concern and their understanding of relationships and sexuality:

■ “Uncle Mike now identifies as gay; he is romantically attracted to other men and embraces this as his identity. He is bringing his partner to our next family gathering. He and his partner were married in a ceremony last month. We still believe God designed marriage and sexual love to be between a husband and wife. Even though we don’t agree with Uncle Mike and his partner, we will treat them with kindness and respect. Please come and talk to me or mom if you have any questions.”

■ “You know God made us male and female in His image, and the Bible explains that God gave us marriage between a man and a woman as a good gift. Well, not everyone follows God’s plan. Uncle Mike just told us he

identifies as gay, and he wants to follow those feelings in his life. He is now married to a man and will be bringing his partner to the next family get together. We love Uncle Mike and pray he’ll return to following God’s design for marriage and sexuality.”

■ “We don’t believe that Uncle Mike was born gay or that God made him homosexual. And we don’t know all the factors that have influenced him in that direction. We are going to love him and his partner, and we’ll pray for them. We disagree with his decisions, but that doesn’t mean we love him any less. It’s hard when someone you care about moves in a direction contrary to God’s plan.”

REAL-LIFE SCENARIO

Your teenage daughter has a good friend, Bradley, who has just confided in her that he thinks he's gay. She's come to you with questions and is looking for advice and support.



POSSIBLE RESPONSES

Your daughter needs to know that you are safe to talk to, and that you love and care for her.

She also needs to know: She can't carry this issue alone; it is not her responsibility to rescue Bradley; you will help her set healthy parameters on her relationships; and you care for her friend and his well-being.

We believe the family is foundational for individual health, growth and security. ***However, while parents should be the safest people to talk with about sexual struggles, this is not always the case.*** So while we believe, at some point, this young man will need to talk with his parents about his homosexual struggles, we don't suggest you rush out and tell them—or anyone else.

Your role in his disclosure depends on your relationship with Bradley and his family. Not all parents handle this situation well. You should ascertain first, by discussing with him, whether his home situation is one of safety and security. If you are able to, talk with him about how he thinks his parents will respond and about resources and help that are available if they don't respond well.

Depending on your family and Bradley's, you might reach out to involve him in some of your family activities, such as dinners, movie nights or game nights. Dad, especially, should take the initiative in connecting with Bradley. It's not good for your daughter's relationship with him to develop separate from and outside of your family. It's fairly common for guys who struggle with same-sex attractions to connect emotionally with girls when they also need to build healthy, non-sexual relationships with other boys and men.

Here are some ideas for talking with your daughter:

- “How can we best help you in this situation? What kind of love and support do you need from us right now? How are you doing with what Bradley shared?”
- “You know that we believe God made us male and female in His image, and designed marriage for a husband and wife. We also know that sexual struggles impact a person deeply. How can we communicate truth and love to Bradley in a helpful way?”
- “Sweetie, we’re so glad Bradley felt safe to talk to you about these difficult issues. That’s a heavy burden for him to carry. We are praying for God to move in Bradley’s life so he will know God’s love and follow Jesus. If he wants it, there is good Christian

counselling that can help him understand his attractions and respond to them in a biblical way. Can we pray together for Bradley?”

- “It’s important that Bradley’s parents know, at some point, about the issues he’s struggling with. If we can help by meeting with him and talking, we’re willing to do that. We could help him think through what he wants from his family and how he thinks they might respond. We’d also be willing to be there when he talks to his family. Please let him know we are willing to do that.”

As your family relates to Bradley, and as he is open to you, it would be good to communicate:

- You love him no matter what.
- Love doesn’t mean you agree with every choice he might make in response to having same-sex attractions.
- His primary identity is as a man created in God’s image, and if he is a believer, he is a child of God, a follower of Christ. “Being gay” isn’t his core self.
- It’s important to have non-sexual relationships with other Christian guys.

- Some research shows teens that identify as gay don’t always have the same identity later in life.
- He can follow God’s design for sexuality, in spite of same-sex attractions.

Some teens may ask about the sexual behaviour of homosexual-identified men and women. Of course, answering this question is up to your discretion, but we suggest not going into a lot of detail. Keep it short and simple, but honest. Remind your kids that when a husband and wife unite sexually, they form a single reproductive unit; their bodies were made to fit together naturally. Same-sex couples can never form a reproductive whole. Homosexual activity is fundamentally different from a marital union.



RELIABLE RESOURCES

Middle and high school students are very tech savvy—connected to both friends and the Internet. Often they're exposed to viewpoints that might be contrary to Christianity and their parents' values. So they may challenge you with questions or statements:

■ *"Does the Bible really say homosexuality is a sin? I heard about a group that says you can be gay and Christian."*

■ *"People can't stop being gay. Don't you think it's hateful to force people to try and change?"*

■ *"Science has proven that people are born gay. My friend showed me an online article about it."*

■ *"I read part of a book that proves that God is okay with gay marriage. He loves everyone, doesn't He?"*

Focus on the Family Canada has additional resources—including articles, books and downloadable content—for understanding and teaching your children about marriage, relationships and sexuality.

See FocusOnTheFamily.ca/Series

Don't worry; you don't have to know all the answers.

We suggest keeping this a discussion, not getting into an argument. You might say something like, "That's a really good question. Are you open to hearing other answers? May I find some resources with a different viewpoint, and let's look at your article and mine together?"

We want your biblical values—and those of your children—to thrive in today's culture.

Realizing your children and teens may have other cultural issues not addressed in this resource, we encourage you to:

1. SIGN UP

For Focus on the Family Canada's free *Focus on Parenting* e-newsletter at **FocusOnTheFamily.ca/Subscribe**.

2. CONTACT US

For help with any serious parenting concerns. To send us a prayer request, or to request a free, one-time phone conversation with one of our professional counsellors, visit **FocusOnTheFamily.ca/Help** or call **1.800.661.9800**.



CONTACT US

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