Information Packet

LGBTQ Youth and Spirituality

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April 4, 2009
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The safety of youth is one of the core values of child welfare. In fact, the United States Department of Health and Human Service’s Administration for Children and Families has published an online policy manual (2009) that can be considered the bible of, or primary source of guidance and information on, child welfare in the United States. Laws, regulations, and policies have been created based upon and drawing from this source. The canon of child welfare policies is based on three commandments: Permanency, Well-being, and first and foremost, Safety. It is from this standpoint that this information packet has been created in order to provide information and resources pertaining to the cross section of spirituality and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) youth.

The realities of LGBTQ youth experiences are troubling. Discrimination, anti-gay harassment, depression, fear, isolation, substance abuse, and even violence are commonplace experiences for LGBTQ youth (Gold & Drucker, 2008). In fact, in relation to heterosexual teens, LGBTQ teens show a much higher risk of suicidal ideation and actual suicide attempts (Cerel, Duberstein, Knox, Pena & Silenzio, 2007). These risks are exacerbated when combined with so called “reparative therapy” in which attempts by therapists or ministers are made to turn LGBTQ individuals into heterosexuals (Just the Facts Coalition, 2008). In addition, for LGBTQ children and youth, religious condemnation eliminates an important source of support and comfort (Brill & Pepper, 2008). These real dangers are exemplified in the autobiography, Prayers for Bobby, which tells the story of a religious mother who, following her gay son’s suicide, reexamines her attempts to change him and the terms of her own faith (Aaron, 1996).
There is an abundance of discussion and debate surrounding LGBTQ individuals and religion. A search for the term, “gay religion” in the Google search engine yields fifteen million results. In addition, there is extensive research into scriptures and the way religious text actually interprets sexual orientation (Helminiak, 2000; Helminiak, 2006). There is also an array of autobiographies documenting the coming out process within a religious context (Chellew-Hodge, 2008; McGinley, 2006; Gold & Drucker, 2008). Even cinematic productions have depicted the debate and problems in the mergence of faith and homosexuality (Dubowski, 2001; Dubowski & Sharma, 2007; Karslake, 2007). The discussion is far from over, but it is noteworthy that there is now discussion where there was once silence.

Though it may seem like spirituality may be damaging to the well being of LGBTQ individuals, research has suggested that the opposite is true. In fact, a study conducted by Tan (2005) shows that there is a direct correlation between spiritual practice and a positive sense of well being amongst LGBTQ individuals. In addition, religion, faith and spirituality have proven to be helpful in the healing process and self-affirmation of LGBTQ people dealing with the homophobia of religious fundamentalism (Blando, 2009), substance abuse (Kus, 1992) and terminal illness (Miller, 2005).

Though slow, there seems to have been a shift towards greater acceptance of LGBTQ adults and youth within religious organizations. Bayly (2007) has published a guide geared towards creating a safe environment for LGBTQ youth within Catholic schools. Churches, pastors and congregations have also been encouraged by clergy and parents to promote an affirming place for the LGBTQ community (Hobbs, 2008; Saunders, 2004). Even LGBTQ- and queer-friendly congregations and religious
organizations are becoming ubiquitous (Johnston, 2004; Maher, 2006) [see website resource list in this packet], and many find their own way of positively reconciling spirituality and sexual identity (Smith & Home, 2007; Sullivan-Blum, 2004).

The experience of coming out or having a child who identifies as LGBTQ within the religious context is not a solitary one. Many queer youth and their parents have gone through the process only to emerge stronger and ready to inspire others (Cole, 2006; Curoe & Curoe, 2007; Karslake, 2007; Lawson, 2007; Marcolina & Grimaldi, 2006; Taylor, 2007). Practice wisdom shows that families should use their faith and values to support their LGBTQ children (Brill & Pepper, 2008). In the heart of all world faiths is the notion that we are never alone; for the safety of our children, it is important to affirm LGBTQ youth that they too are not alone and they are always in our hearts.
Bibliography


Dubowski, S.S. (Director). (2001). *Trembling Before G-d* [Motion Picture]. Israel:


Maher, M. J. (2006). A voice in the wilderness: Gay and lesbian religious groups in the


Website Resources

LGBTQ Youth and Allies resources

http://www.alexsanchez.com/gay_teen_books.htm
   A personal website with an extensive list of books related to LGBTQ teens.

http://www.gayteens.org
   A website dedicated to gay teens around the world. The site provides news, resources, support, and discussion boards.

http://www.glsen.org
   The website of the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network that strives to make communities and especially schools a safe place for LGBTQ youth.

http://www.outproud.org
   A website dedicated to gay teens in the U.S. The site provides news, resources, support and discussion boards.

http://www.pflag.org
   The official website of Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays. The site provides news, resources, support and discussion for the LGBTQ community and their allies.
LGBTQ and Spirituality Resources

http://faculty.shelton.cc.al.us/~dbell/religion2.htm

An extensive bibliography from 1950 for LGBTQ persons about religion and spirituality.

http://www.prideagenda.org/OurPrograms/PrideinthePulpit/LocateaCongregationinYourArea/tabid/106/Default.aspx

New York State’s Pride Agenda website which offers extensive lists of LGBTQ affirming and welcoming places of worship for all faiths.

http://www.religioustolerance.org/homosexu.htm

Website created by a multi-faith group, with an extensive discussion of world religions and the way they view homosexuality.

http://www.hrc.org/issues/religion.asp

The Human Rights Campaign is America’s largest civil rights organization working to achieve lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender equality. This section of the Human Rights Campaign website focuses on “Religion & Faith”. The Human Rights Campaign Religion and Faith Program mobilizes people of faith to advocate for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people.
LGBTQ Resources by Faith

Baha’i

http://gaybahai.homestead.com

Buddhism

http://www.gaybuddhist.org/

http://www.religioustolerance.org/hom_budd.htm

http://www.religionfacts.com/homosexuality/buddhism.htm

Christianity

http://www.gaychurch.org/

http://www.gaychurch.org/Find_a_Church/united_states/us_new_york.htm

Hinduism

http://www.religionfacts.com/homosexuality/hinduism.htm

Islam

http://www.al-fatiha.org/index.htm

http://www.religionfacts.com/homosexuality/islam.htm

Judaism

http://cbst.org/index.shtml

http://www.glbtjews.org/

Sikhism

http://www.sarbat.net/private/index.html