

IV. GAY PARENTING

And now, the children.

We are, after all, fathers — and damned good fathers too; proud of our kids, protective of their well being, loving. We willingly give of ourselves for them. We invest our time and money, our emotions and intellects in their welfare; we have our dreams, hopes, and ambitions for them. We want them to do well, to be healthy and happy.

We *don't* want them to go through what we had to endure: the unnecessary guilt, the self-doubt, and the recrimination. We want, simply, a better future for them. Just like fathers and mothers everywhere.

Fortunately, our children are like children in loving families anywhere. Many of them are aware of the Gay Fact in their lives — at least as far as their age and maturity allows this understanding — and they accept it. The attitudes of others to the Fact do trouble them from time to time and this reaction in them causes us distress, but it does not make us deny the Fact or regret it. Instead we talk to them, as we have before. So their understanding grows, they come to feel better again and they go on with their lives as before. They can do so because they accept and love us and because children are never frightened by love even when they see it between men and men or between women and women. It is hate and fear that are destructive to children. So the Gay Fact need not affect our children adversely, if we ourselves accept the Fact. It cannot hurt them if we neither hide nor ignore it, nor give it undue emphasis and importance.

In society's eyes, we already have one, or maybe two, strikes against us as parents. We are expected to be like Caesar's wife — beyond reproach. We are, in fact, as conscientious and concerned about our children as any good parents — perhaps more so. Indeed we are deeply concerned for our children's welfare. That's why we've written this book. A similar concern may explain why you're reading it.

A concerned parent will want close contact with his or her children. This may not always be possible, especially when access has been limited by a hard-line court decision. Some judges who still act out of a hypocritical Victorian morality may award the homosexual father, or (worse) the one who is openly gay, only the briefest and most difficult access. In such cases the father can end up with only two hours a week on Saturday night or on specially-arranged occasions, perhaps once every three or four months, when some other "responsible adult" can be present in "neutral surroundings," that is, not in the father's home. While such decisions are less common than previously, they are by no means rare. And there is no doubt that the homosexual parent who goes into court does so under a disadvantage that does not apply to heterosexual parents. They are under special obligation to show that their homosexuality will not adversely affect the children. This difficulty can best be avoided if the parents can agree on custody and visiting rights and, indeed, upon all other circumstances of the separation. In many cases where separation has occurred, parents can agree on suitable access. In a small but growing number of cases the gay father may be given full custody.

We present here three modes of gay parenting, beginning with shared parenting, which is the most common form of parenting after the gay father has come out. The other modes we discuss are sole custody and gay parenting within marriage.



Shared Parenting

When a marriage or relationship ends in separation or divorce, the children of the union may still be raised by sharing responsibility for them between the mother and father. Indeed, when heterosexual unions end, the courts recognize the continuing interests and rights of the natural parents with respect to their children even though the separated parents may now establish new relationships with other people. This principle is coming to be recognized also in cases where one of the parents is homosexual. Such parents too have continuing interests in their children and, even though they are homosexual, they also have continuing rights and obligations with respect to their children. What most separated parents who are homosexual ask is simply the chance to exercise their rights and discharge their obligations with respect to their children. Indeed, no matter what causes the union between the parents to dissolve, the children may still be raised by sharing the mother's and father's responsibility for them. The responsibility for a child may indeed be shared equally between the parents even though the child spends different amounts of time with each parent.

If children are to adjust to a separation of the parents they should not be used as weapons in a war between them. Although the parents may be hostile or indifferent to one another after the separation, they have common interests in their children and should recognize the advantages to all of cooperation in raising the children. Of course, hostility between the parents makes cooperation difficult. Although there are many possible ways of co-parenting, it may be helpful to look at one example of how the arrangement works, while keeping in mind that it is only one of several arrangements that could be made to suit circumstances where one of the parents is gay.

Terry's Story Continues

When my wife and I decided that separation was inevitable, we had to decide how the separation would affect us as parents of our son, Dean. It was fortunate that my wife is supportive of gay people and there is no hostility in our present relationship. My wife read about the many cases of judicial prejudice toward a gay parent in custody cases and said that I would not lose any part of my role as Dean's father.

Before we separated I was often in tears over what I thought would be a serious rupture in my relationship with my son. I was upset that I would not be able to give him his bath *every* night, or read him his bedtime story *every* night as I was accustomed to doing. How would he handle living in two different homes? My fears did not last after the separation. Dean is adjusting quite well. Knowing other gay fathers and their children will be a big help to Dean over the growing years. He will be aware that many children have gay parents and that other children have two homes also. We incorrectly assume that because the nuclear family has been the norm for some time, children cannot be raised to be healthy adults in other nurturant settings.

Dean's mother and I both share any major costs related to our son. Any medical costs above the provincial health coverage and pharmaceuticals are split equally. The expense of winter clothing — raincoat and other items that he only needs one of — is shared. Although we do not have a legal separation at this time we have both agreed to live on our own earnings and there is no child-support money exchanged. Therefore, an equal sharing of costs was deemed fair, especially since Dean spends an equal amount of time with each of us.

We both discussed what nursery school Dean should attend, and we share the monthly cost equally. Similarly, we decided to send Dean to a French-immersion school near his nursery since I have spoken French to our son since birth, and we both wanted him to continue in a bilingual environment if possible.

There are a variety of ways we cooperate since we are fortunate enough to hold no malice toward one another. One point where we are definitely in accord is Dean's knowing that his father is gay. Dean has several other openly gay relatives and cannot help but be in their company. Dean's mother now knows many gay people and has read to obtain a wide knowledge of homosexuality. I would not ever consider keeping my gayness from him now, and fortunately Dean's mother also wants him to be brought up in a gay as well as a heterosexual milieu. Thus if he is gay he will have parents who are understanding and supportive of him and he will see as well many healthy gay people who provide fine models that he may wish to emulate. Similarly if he is heterosexual he will have plenty of examples of decent gay people to buffer him against the traditional bigotry and myths about gay people, as well as heterosexual family members and friends of both sexes for him to identify with who will help reinforce that heterosexual self-identity.

Dean's mother and I live relatively close to one another which makes this equal sharing, especially the half-month he spends with each of us, possible. In the future if either of us changes careers or moves to another city, then there will be problems with equal sharing. Hopefully Dean's

mother and I will be able to adjust to these changes through the cooperation we have been able to maintain up until now.

Sole Custody: A Gay Father, His Lover, and Their Daughter

Derek, Joel, and Zoe's Story

Those of us who have sole custody of our children are truly fortunate, considering the painful experiences of those who have even been denied access to their children because of their sexual orientation.

In my particular case my sexual orientation was not an issue in my divorce, but the fact that I have raised my daughter since she was approximately thirteen months old puts me in an enviable and unique situation, namely, a homosexual solely performing the parenting function. (Actually, that should read "homosexuals" since my lover and I share the responsibility.)

Our child has known of our sexuality since she was seven years old. A situation presented itself which prompted the revelation. I had a mobile hanging in my study; it consisted of small cards with a sexually-oriented word printed on each. Seeing this mobile for the first time, she asked me what the words meant. I proceeded to tell her. When the word "homosexual" arose, I told her what it meant. In her perceptiveness she asked me if that was what Joel and I were. I answered in the affirmative. And that was all I said. I felt that no more needed to be said at that time. We have added to the original story as circumstances have warranted.

In addition to the mobile, Joel and I were sharing the same bedroom, one that was adjacent to hers. This physical proximity certainly must have been a contributing factor prompting the question and the subsequent realization that her parents were homosexual.

Joel and I consider, to greater and lesser degrees, my daughter to be "our" child. In order to remain a family unit there was no other alternative, and besides, I really wanted it that way. Zoe has done many of the things her peer group has done, including such things as climbing into bed with us because of fear during thunderstorms, sharing Sunday morning breakfast in bed, and sitting on the bed while telling a story about some particular event that might have occurred at school or elsewhere. She has had girlfriends to stay overnight and has had the typical pajama parties, birthday parties, and so forth. The fact that her parents have been two gay men has not caused us to deprive her of these kinds of memorable childhood experiences. As idyllic as all of this may sound, there have been difficult and unpleasant moments, but, then, our heterosexual counterparts have these kinds of moments, too.

A decided advantage that Joel and I have had is that Zoe is an extraordinarily capable person in practically every respect. Without exaggeration, she has yet to cause or create major problems. She has tremendous forbearance, insight, and sensitivity, particularly for those who are less fortunate. In short, she's an incredible child and as her father I'm thankful every day for this beautiful gift.

It is not possible for me to speak for her. She is certainly capable of doing that herself. I have, therefore, asked her to respond to a few questions.

Briefly, what has it been like being raised by a gay father?

Being raised by a gay father has probably been different, but how different I cannot say as I have not experienced any other kind of lifestyle and thus can only go by what I've seen. I've grown up faster than most of my peers and I've seen and done a lot more, but I'm not sure if this is the result of my father's homosexuality or if it's just the way my father would have raised me anyway.

What kinds of problems has it created for you?

It would not have created many problems had my father and I lived by ourselves, unless, of course, he had had "friends" for short periods of time which would have created some difficulties. In this regard his having a live-in lover has made things a little easier.

What are some of the disadvantages and some of the advantages?

Some of the disadvantages in having gay parents are trying to keep my mouth shut when some prejudiced person mouths off about homosexuals or, if they suspect there is a homosexual relationship at home, they crack a joke to see what kind of effect it has on me. Another problem is trying not to give "it" away, because if I did it could put us all through some torture. So one has to stay in the closet.

If you had the power to do anything, what aspect of your life to date would you change?

If I had the power to change any aspect I would alter the public's opinion. It is extremely hard to stay in the closet about homosexuality, whether it is one's parents, oneself, or one's friends.

Having a gay father is one thing, but having a gay stepfather is another. How has this gay coupling affected you? Specifically, what kinds of problems has it created for you?

It has affected me to the extent that I've had to share my father with someone other than my mother. Specifically, one of the problems that has arisen between us is that invariably one of us, at sometime or another, feels left out, particularly the lover who often feels that he does not belong or that we shun him for one reason or another.

Whether it is heterosexual or homosexual, step-parenting is never easy. The child is fighting to maintain her natural territory, the territory she previously never had to share, and the lover is seeking to establish his position in the family, while still maintaining his own identity. Invariably, while jockeying for position, the players collide. Most of the arguments which have erupted from time to time and which have almost been instrumental in the dissolution of our relationship were because of my protectiveness towards Zoe. During these moments of conflict, doubt would creep in to the picture and I would wonder whether Joel was, in fact, the right person to be sharing these critical years with us. This doubt does not surface as much these days, but in retrospect I marvel at our tenacity and perseverance. Many people would surely have said to hell with the situation and walked away. That neither one of us did (although it was a constantly-articulated threat) shows a level of commitment that few seem to be able to summon. I know why, too. It's damned hard work.

As for Zoe", I must let Joel describe his interpretation of the situation. Here are the answers to some questions that I asked him to consider.

How has the role of step-father affected you?

My immediate response is that the experience of being a parent, something I never expected would be an integral part of my life, is more challenging and fraught with anxiety and frustration than I thought it would be.

Previous to meeting Derek I had lived alone for thirteen years. The habits I acquired and the style of life to which I had grown accustomed were very different from sharing one's day-to-day existence with someone else. Add to that the fact that the man I decided to share my life with had a daughter and you have another change I was not prepared for. I'm sure that this situation is common to all those who marry someone with a ready-made family. Being gay seems easy compared to the problem of bringing two people into your life whom you don't know fully yet — with all their needs, their fears, and their expectations. These have to be accommodated within one's own experience. In many ways I have great difficulty putting aside my own personal needs when, in fact, the needs of the two people in my life should take priority. Sometimes this builds up to an uncontrollable level of frustration and resentment. The result is a noisy conflict.

Shortly after having become a family unit, Zoe was told that her parents were gay. It was due to an answer to her question, the natural curiosity of a child, that gave us the opportunity to tell her at the beginning of the relationship. I'm sure that this helped to establish a confidence and trust in her parents. The result of this honesty and straightforward approach has led to a very strong supportive attitude towards us. A recent event is a perfect example.

I volunteered not to attend her grade-eight graduation ceremony and reception afterwards so that she would not be put into a difficult situation with her peer group. She insisted that both of us be there. After the ceremony, she brought a friend over and we started the dancing. We each danced with her before we went home to let her enjoy the party without the inhibiting influence of parental eyes.

Specifically, what kinds of problems has your role as a step-father caused you?

Specific problems (frustrations) sounds so very clinical. As a step-parent I'm sure they are the same ones common to most people in a step-parenting role. First and foremost is the question of acceptance. I think we have solved that problem reasonably successfully, although admittedly there is still room for improvement. We have a deep and caring love for each other that binds us through all the arguments and disappointments. If that wasn't there we wouldn't be together today. In the situation between child and step-parent there is no natural tie. Therefore I often feel that any frustration or rejection of the natural parent is actually aimed at the step-parent — me. This hurts; it places me in a position that is secondary in our own home.

How can the role of a step-father be made easier?

I don't know if the role of step-parent can be made easier. To follow all advice about how to be an acceptable parent leaves me repressing so much of what I feel and need that I withdraw. I feel that conquering guilt and the complications about being gay would make it easier for everyone. This burden no matter how small, builds walls between the people involved.

Generally speaking, the step-parenting role has been very satisfying. I know our daughter does not feel the need to make the same commitment to me as to her natural father, but there is an

honesty about this that makes it relatively easy to understand, although I often feel hurt and disappointed when it does occur.

The thrill and love that I feel for her and about her accomplishments and successes all make my life so much more complete. I am living a life that is full of experiences that I never, ever expected; it is a life in which I get to share love, laughter, and yes, sadness. We are a family.

The preceding description of our situation makes it very clear that our life today is not one smooth, effortless, euphoric experience. Periodically, there are still tense, unpleasant moments; but I suggest that any relationship has these kinds of moments. Trying to cope with another's idiosyncrasies, whether they be those of your own child or those of your lover, is not always easy. Familiarity tends to breed contempt. We see each other's best features and qualities, and, of course, we see the worst. The mystique, like a thin veneer, begins to wear. If it wears through in too many places, the relationship, in all likelihood, is doomed; if, on the other hand, those recurring holes can be patched and kept to a minimum, then there's hope for the relationship. It all comes down to a basic, rather fundamental component in the fragile fabric of interpersonal relationships — work! If the relationship is important to you, you exhaust all avenues before leaving the ship. Our ship, thankfully, is still afloat; we've not abandoned it and we don't intend to — the Fates so willing.

— 1980, 1981

Aspects Of Gay Parenting Within Marriage

As the courts are slowly recognizing by awarding child custody to openly gay men and women, many homosexuals make excellent parents.

As a glance at the Children's Aid Society statistics will show, many straight people make very bad parents. Sexuality is not a criterion for quality in parenting. Any person, man or woman, straight or gay, who sincerely desires children and who welcomes them and is positive towards them will likely be a good parent.

This person may not be within a marriage. It is only grudgingly recognized by society — if it is recognized at all — that single parenting is an acceptable alternative to the nuclear family.

But what of gay people who are married and who want to stay married? While they may see marriage as something positive, as something worth retaining, the Gay Fact will continue to cause stress for the father, stress that he often transmits throughout the family.

There are four states of gay parenting for anyone trying to remain in a marriage, each one depending on the "outness" of the gay person. They are:

- in the closet (out only to yourself)
- out to your wife
- out to your children
- out to everyone

Each of these stages is a progression, one usually follows the others. It is possible to change the order, but if you are out beyond the family it won't be long before your wife and kids learn of it from other sources, at serious consequences to you.

Each state comes with its own set of problems, all of which are familiar, all of which are dealt with elsewhere in separate sections of this book, yet all of which must be faced by a gay person trying to stay in a marriage where there are children. Some of these problems have no obvious solution.

In the Closet

The closet is still the most common state for married gays. The consequences and costs of coming out are greatly magnified within a marriage and the attending stresses are correspondingly greater. For the gay father the prospect of coming out within a marriage is often terrifying. Only the pressure to be himself and to have others recognize this reality makes him do it. Some never make the step and remain within unhappy, emotionally-crippling relationships. Only through feelings does awareness come to the gay parent. The condemnations of himself that he feels from society are that much more painful because they are accepted by the victim. He accepts the message that he is depraved, unnatural, sick. Tensions build within the father, leading to depression, possible breakdowns, psychiatrists, and drugs. How can he ever find release? How could he come out? How would that affect the children?

The gay person becomes self-absorbed; his problem occupies more and more of his thoughts; his marriage and his children become millstones dragging him down, keeping him from the gay life — he hates them. Guilt follows. It's not the others' fault, after all, it's his own. Guilt grows like a cancer. Then one day his wife says, innocently, "How come you never smile at the kids any more?" and he goes off the rails: "She looked at me sideways, so I stabbed her." Twenty times. Or the leap from the twelfth floor ends his fear of flying. The mental straight jacket he's been wearing all these years becomes a physical reality.

Whatever happens, this anguish is not conducive to the happy home he wanted so badly — how can the children feel secure in such a den of misery?

The only way to stop the cancer from growing, to stop these destructive fantasies from becoming a reality is to move onward — to come out a little further.

Out To Your Wife

Presumably the gay father wants to keep the family intact. Otherwise at this point he come; out and leaves the family entirely and does so in short order. Such precipitate action creates a completely different set of problems for all concerned.

Both parents want to keep the marriage going, but they don't want the kids to know. So now the gay parent has someone else to share the burden, someone to help deal with all the problems that the wife who had been kept in the dark was trying with little success to adjust to. Now she knows something of what was going on, but now she has to try also to understand and accept her husband's homosexuality. None of these are minor problems. So what the gay father ha; really done in coming out to his wife is to get someone else to share his closet.

Tensions build within the marriage — the gay man now expects some freedom to follow a gay life, at least from time to time. The way is now open for anger, hurting, arguments (which seem to be about trivial matters but are really about one thing). Possibly, although *not* inevitably separation and divorce follow. The children become unhappy, bewildered, resentful, rebellious: they start acting out in response to feelings they can't explain in self-destructive ways.

If only they could understand...

Out To Your Children

Children usually take the news better than the unsuspecting wife (or husband). It explains a lot about what has been going on in the family; they can accept the idea, at least in many cases, and more so with younger children. But new problems arise as they become involved. Things may ease inside the family but now we have three, or four, or more people in the same closet. The children get conflicting ideas about gay from the media, from their friends and their friends' parents, from their teachers, and from the Church. They know their father is a good, loving person, yet everyone else portrays him as a monster or a criminal, or at least as a weirdo.

The child now has to cope with a secret - dad is still a neat guy and mom loves him but we can't let anybody know he's gay (even though it's okay to be gay) because it could ruin his reputation in the community and even lose him his job. *Why?* How does a child even (or especially) a teenager, deal with anti-gay sentiment among friends and the world in general? It's hard enough for an adult; it's quite a trip to lay on a kid.

The next step, while logical, is not inevitable and is not usually taken-

Out To Everyone

Very few married gays are in the position to be openly gay, given the prejudice against them. Friends drop them like septic bandages, their wives suffer by becoming neighbourhood oddities, and the entire family becomes tainted. The thinking, if that is what it can be called, goes like this: "How can she possibly put up with him; she must be queer as well; how can we possibly talk to her if she's like that; those people should be run from the neighbourhood."

Very soon the family does depart, defeated. The children suffer, the same line of thinking being present with their friends: "Like father, like son; you must be a fag, too. Hey, fag! Watch out for Jerry, boys; don't get too close!" The laughter takes on a cruel edge, and it becomes, to them, true. For a boy or girl trying to get a hold on their own developing sexuality, whatever it is, this can have a damaging and very retrograde effect. Children might then turn on their parent, resentful of the position they have been put into, and could easily turn anti-gay.

It is clearly too much to ask of our children that they bear the burdens of anti-gay prejudice which are too much for many gay adults to handle.

The problem is that all of these states of coming out have a bearing on the children of the marriage. Children are always caught in the fall-out from a nuclear family melt-down, whether they know the causes or not. They are easily confused as they go about trying to sort order from the chaos all around them, and they are very susceptible to peer group pressure and approval. To prevent harm being done to your children requires a great effort on your part, and your wife's, if you are in the first two states. You will have to be visibly a good parent while coping with the tremendous stresses of leading the double life.

Being out to your children, while it loads them with problems they don't want or need, can be more readily handled, and can result in better parenting.

With the current hostile social climate towards homosexuality, it is almost imperative that children who are told of their parent's homosexuality be warned that it is strictly a family matter and nobody else's business. Any questions have to be dealt with honestly and without alarming the child: "Other people don't understand, don't approve; it isn't wrong but some people will say it is; they are misguided, but we know better."

How well this will be accepted depends on how well the child has been brought up to respect the rights of others and not to have prejudices, on the relationship that exists between parent and child, and on the open and loving relationship between husband and wife.

As a gay parent you can help set a counter-example to the socially available one; you can answer questions that the child might have with a greater insight than most parents; (Parents not out to their children can do this too, of course.) The child could meet your gay friends to see that they, too, are okay people, not monsters, could meet other children of gay parents so that they might see that they are not alone, one of the greatest fears and misconceptions in the whole gay world.

This does not mean that because you are gay you will be a good parent, but it does mean that the two can go together. If you sincerely love your child and wish to live in a family situation without locking yourself entirely in the closet, then the family must be a part of your whole *lift* gay though it may be. Remember, love is a very positive force.

All gay parents, in whatever marital status, must be conscious of the need for positive examples of gay people, and gay parents in particular, of the need for reform in education on every level, from kindergarten to the National Research Council. As long as society is anti-gay, these problems will exist. But if we can bring up our own children to be free of these prejudices, we will have helped gay parents, and gay people, everywhere.

Gay Parents And The Law

If a separation and divorce result after a gay parent comes out to the non-gay spouse, the ugly spectre of court battles over child custody or visitation rights looms over the horizon. If the two parents can come to a mutually agreed upon custody arrangement, so much the better. It will be better for the parents and better, of course, for the children. However, if a custody fight appears, to be likely then the following ideas, culled from gay and gay-supportive lawyers and from case law concerning gay parents and child custody, may be enlightening. *Do not use this legally-oriented section as an absolute guide or substitute for sound legal advice.* When a gay parent is in a custody battle with a heterosexual parent, that gay parent has already one strike against him or her in the view of the courts. The gay parent must seem to be an even better parent than a non-gay parent. There are several factors that will be looked at before awarding custody to a gay parent.

1. How much involvement did the parent have with the children before the separation?
2. What is the parent's relationship with the children? (A judge is probably going to want to hear this answered by a psychiatrist or other expert.)
3. Stability. Did the gay parent provide a good home over a long period? Does he/she have a good job and good job record? If the answers are in the negative, the fact that it may be due to circumstances beyond the parent's control may not carry much weight.
4. Who have the children been with after the initial separation?

Of the five or six reported cases in Canada of child custody being awarded to a gay parent, only one gay parent was a man. Gay parents are often afraid of the legal process and do not assert their claim because of the distress the court case may cause him/her and the children.

In these reported cases and in those not reported, repeatedly judges awarded custody to a gay parent because the gay parent:

1. was "discreet," did not "flaunt" his sexuality, was not militant nor in any activist group, and did not frequent gay bars (all of this really means: the more closeted the better);
2. had a "balanced attitude" toward sexuality, i.e., "I want my child to be straight even though I am gay;" even if you feel good about being gay, show a preference for your child being heterosexual, is what the court is saying.
3. had many friends of the opposite sex;
4. would provide the child frequent contact with members of the opposite sex; this would be stressed, it seems, more than in awarding custody to a heterosexual parent.

If we look at the aspect of the gay parent providing stability, judges more often than not will begin by assuming that the gay parent is less stable because of their own biases. In almost all Canadian and American cases, judges asked whether the children would more likely be gay living with a gay parent. Most judges make the error of thinking they will be. How will the children feel having a gay parent? Will they be ostracized by schoolmates? Are not gay parents less adequate as parents and role models than heterosexuals? Often experts are necessary to remove the court's doubts on these questions. Judges ask these questions because they, along with many others, often hold the mistaken belief that homosexuality is a disease and a sign of emotional instability. Studies disproving these beliefs need to be presented and such evidence will influence the court more strongly if it can be presented through the voice of a psychiatrist or psychologist (See the studies listed in the "Selected Readings" section, located at the end of this book) Be prepared before the case to spend time and money to keep your children.

Here are some dos and don'ts for gay parents who feel they are the better parent and want custody following the separation or divorce.

1. If your spouse will not agree to your wish for shared custody or you cannot accept unreasonably restrictive access arrangements, take the children with you if you are going to leave. Strangely, such an action may be seen as evidence that you really care for the children and want them with you.
2. If you are going to leave with the children, set up the most stable home you can under the circumstances. Get a place that is large enough, near the children's school, and a babysitter.
3. If you are not an activist already, do not be a militant during or just prior to the case. This may seem politically unacceptable, but such behaviour can go in your favour to get custody.
4. If you are going to live with someone, the judge's view of the lover as a parenting figure may be as decisive as his view of the natural parents' skills.
5. Judges may be uncomfortable about gay people being affectionate in front of children.
6. If your former spouse knows you are gay and you know that she will bring it up in court, then you should admit it and try to move the case to other issues.

Again let us repeat that the above advice is very general and must be adapted to the specifics of the circumstances of the gay and non-gay parent. How the advice is used will also depend, of course, on how the gay parent feels about his or her own sexuality.

This advice may have to be revised as time goes on and as family laws change and will vary in usefulness with each individual. If at all possible, Gay Fathers of Toronto would welcome gay parents writing to us and describing the outcome of their case to us. Details that you might feel would identify you need not be reported, i.e., names of persons, locations, professions, etc. Our address appears on the opening pages of the book.

Finally, seek expert legal advice. Your nearest gay organization may be able to suggest gay or gay-positive lawyers to help you. Ask your local gay organization to suggest books and studies that deal with gays as parents to assist you and your lawyer in being as articulate as possible in court.

