

Commentary

I'm Your Dad--And I'm Gay: Coming Out to the Children

By K.K. Wilder

(Eds. Note: This is the sixth in a series of articles about issues between gay men and the women who love them.)

So she knows the man she loves is gay. And you've worked together to find a way to remain loving toward each other while still allowing yourselves to grow in your own directions. If necessary, you've sought counseling; perhaps you've found a support group or even started one of your own.

It isn't that the pain is gone--it'll be there for some time to come--but you've both started coming to terms with the changes in your lives and what they will mean in your relationship. If there are children, though, there's still the difficult task of telling them.

"I'll never, ever tell them," many wives say. "I don't want to risk turning them against their own father."

"But I can't face them, either," counter gay husbands. "There's no way I'll risk losing the love of my kids."

So what's to be done then? Will you become one of the thousands of American families who live out a charade in front of the children, telling yourselves it's in their best interests? If you and your wife separate or divorce, will you continue the lie when you start your new lifestyle--a lifestyle that may include a live-in male lover? What's he supposed to do when your children are around--disappear?

It's tempting to let things slide, to tell "white lies" about why you and mom have been crying lately, often talking together in hushed voices. But kids can't be fooled for long and this method keeps all of you apart at a time when each of you needs the support of the others.

Instead, it's now time to come together in strength as a couple and to tell your children what is happening. You need not wait until you both have everything worked out in your changing relationship before beginning a dialogue with your children; they don't need pat answers. They just need to be informed as to what's happening to their home life as they knew it. The good news is this: even the youngest of children show acceptance when told the truth. Although they may not completely understand what being gay means, they will comprehend that you love them and are trying to be honest with them. As for telling the older children, gay fathers have told me of their surprise when the young man or woman responds with, "Yeah, dad, it's okay. I kind of suspected that."

But sometimes the discussion is tougher. The child who will have the most difficult time hearing your truth will be the adolescent boy, especially one just reaching puberty and dealing with his own emerging sexuality. He's liable to want to shut his ears in spite of the fact that he'll have concerns and fears about how your

sexuality affects his own. Remember, his only knowledge about homosexuality may be the crude remarks his pals have made at school; he may even believe it's contagious.

Patiently telling the truth while making no apologies for being who you are will work best in this instance, just as it did when you came out to your wife. The more accepting you are of yourself, the more your teenage boy will accept you. The more you admit your own confusion and concerns, the more he will feel understood when he asks you to hear his own.

The same applies for all your children. Regardless of their ages, when you and your wife approach them together, they will realize that, while their parents' relationship may be changing, it's still a partnership where they are concerned. In that knowledge, the stability of their lives remains. And you may be surprised at their loving support in return.

Next time: Series conclusion

K.K. Wilder is writing a book tentatively titled *NOT SO GAY: Women Who Love Gay Men*. Contact her at 17 N. Champlain St #3, Burlington, VT 05401, Tel. (802) 658-0448.

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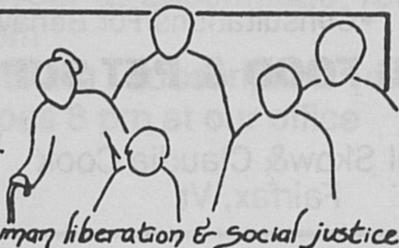
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