

July 3, 2015

Dear RE Families,

These are exciting and difficult times as we celebrate the Supreme Court's decision for marriage equality nation-wide and hear reports about violence against people of color and southern churches. We have a lot to talk about with our children.

Last November, I shared resources for talking with your children about Ferguson and Racism, which you will find on the [virtual family/parent bookshelf](#) on the RE webpage. I will add to these resources soon.

Recently, I was approached by a friend who asked for resources to help shape a conversation with her children about marriage equality. They are seeing extended family and friends this summer who do not share their values so this parent wants to have conversations with her children to be clear about the values and views their family holds before others try to impose their values. Some of you may be interested in a similar conversation.

Why talk with your child/youth about sexual orientation and marriage equality? As the parent guide for the elementary *Our Whole Lives* (OWL) suggests, it's not a question of whether your child/youth needs to know about sexual orientation or marriage equality. It's a question of whether you want to have an influence on this knowledge. Silence can leave unchallenged or even reinforce negative and destructive stereotypes our children encounter.

If you would like to have a conversation with your children, these resources might be helpful:

- [Teachingtolerance.org](#), a project of the Southern Poverty Law Center, resources such as [Teaching Social Justice to Confront Unjust Laws](#) and [Different Strategies for Attaining Equal Rights](#).
- [Talking with Kids about LGBT Issues](#), Human Rights Campaign.
- [Tips for Talking with Children about Marriage Equality](#) and [Who Can Marry Whom? Inclusive Conversations about Marriage](#) by WelcomingSchools.org, a project of the Human Rights Campaign Foundation.
- [Talking with Kids about Same-Sex Marriage](#), CNN.

I copied pages from the parent guide to elementary *Our Whole Lives* (OWL) but am reluctant to send them. They offer specific ways to answer questions and make the most of teachable moments, which is valuable information. However, the material is dated. Our understanding about sexual orientation and gender identity has grown significantly and continues to grow. The Junior High *Our Whole Lives* curriculum just published a revised edition to bring the materials up to date. The elementary OWL curriculum still uses some outdated language and ideas. Still, I am happy to send you excerpts from the elementary OWL parent guide if you would like to have that resource with an understanding about its limitation.

Language is important. The language we use conveys our worldview. Sexual orientation or sexual preference? Homosexual or gay and lesbian? Sometimes, we use language we don't fully understand. The UUA offers [this resource](#) about finding the right words and this resource about [basic definitions](#). GLAAD also offers a helpful [list of terms](#) that are offensive and acceptable. Additional helpful GLAAD resources are [found here](#).

Finally, some materials you read will confuse sexual orientation with gender identity. In very simple terms, sexual orientation is about relationships between romantic partners, whether someone feels attracted to men, women or both. Terms like gay, lesbian, straight, bisexual, asexual and polyamory refer to sexual orientation. Gender identity addresses how an individual identifies or expresses their gender, one's internal sense of self and identity. Terms like transgender, cisgender and androgyny refer to gender identity. [Read more here](#).

It seems like a lot to know. It's important to educate yourself and talk with your children. Most important, though, is to open your heart to your children and affirm our first and second [Principles](#): We believe in the inherent worth and dignity of every person, and we believe in justice, equity and compassion in human relations.

Fortunately, you have another resource. UUFNW is currently offering opportunities for discussion and learning as we refresh our status as a Welcoming Congregation. I encourage you to participate in the events planned by the Welcoming Congregation Team. Their resources and archived updates are [found here](#).

In fellowship,
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Director of Religious Exploration