

Aversions to things

By Ruth Ostrow

I was watching a film the other night with my daughter and one of the lead characters engaged in a lesbian kiss.

"Ooooh, yuck, that's disgusting!" she said, screwing up her face and wincing. My personal alarm bells started ringing. Having worked for many years as a sex positive activist, which is nothing more nor less than advocating that people should have freedom to express themselves in a healthy, positive fashion, I felt dismayed by her reaction.

A friend saw my face and took my hand. "It's okay. It's normal for kids to have aversions to things. She is only 11, too young to understand what she is saying."

His words of reassurance were not enough to quell my sinking heart. I didn't spend years fighting for gender liberation and equality to have my own child react like this. I asked her why she said it, and the truth came out. Her peers at school had convinced her that being gay was "really off".

It's not okay in any school system to be racist. Substitute the word lesbian or gay with Muslim or Aborigine and you'd be lambasted. So it was greatly inspiring to me to see a council-run childcare centre in Sydney teaching kids that gay people are normal. The Tillman Park Children's Centre in Tempe devised a gay-friendly curriculum, using the nationally distributed Learn to Include books, which feature Jed and his dads, and The Rainbow Cubby House to reflect "diverse families".

Marrickville mayor Sam Byrne was quoted in the press as defending the centre, saying it had "successfully adopted several strategies to encompass lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and inter-sex issues". He applauded staff and families for creating "an open environment where alternative perspectives, values, beliefs, lifestyles and identities are respected ... "

Of course, all this freedom has drawn criticism from the conservative elements of society, with the National Party slamming the program on the basis that kids are too young to be exposed to sexuality.

But the issue is not about sex; it's about love, choice, and personal freedom. It's about loving whomever you do regardless of what apparatus they have – but mostly it's about self-love. To love yourself, you have to accept yourself. And to accept yourself, you have to be taught acceptance and tolerance of others – fat or thin, black or white. I don't know about you, but there's nothing more important I want my child to learn.

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