

# The Buzz on the Birds & Bees

## *Great Sexuality Books for Parents and Kids, Part 1*

This column was first published on [www.mommasaid.net](http://www.mommasaid.net)

### **By Melanie J. Davis**

I keep a copy of “Your Wonderful Body” on my bookshelf to remind me how easy it is for good kids’ reference books to go wrong. This book, published in 1961, gives a general introduction to human anatomy, but it lacks essential information. The illustrations show kidneys, but no bladder. The large intestine simply ends at the border of the page. There’s mention of an egg growing into a human being, but no hint of where the egg comes from, how it is fertilized, or even that the process occurs within a woman’s body. Of course, breasts and internal/external reproductive organs are completely ignored.

Fortunately, an enormous number of books now cover every aspect of sexuality and are suited to every type of family. Read the books with younger children, and give elementary- and middle school-age kids the option of reading alone. If that’s their choice, make sure you read the book separately so you answer questions your child may have after reading.

Teens may act too cool to need a reference book, but they definitely need information in addition to what they learn in school health classes. Kids who have the facts tend to put off sexual behavior longer, and if they do become sexually active, they tend to protect themselves better from pregnancy and infections.

Books about sexuality can be great door openers to conversations about values, health and relationships. The simple act of making resources available to your kids can give them permission to confide in you. Here are some of my recommendations:

### **BODIES AND THEIR FUNCTIONS**

#### **Everyone Poops**

by Taro Gomi, Amanda Mayer Stinchecum (Translator)

This is a cute book to read with kids ready for potty training. The illustrations show that defecation is a natural process for animals, birds and, yes, people.

#### **Amazing You! Getting Smart About Your Private Parts**

Dr. Gail Saltz & Lynne Cravath (Illustrator)

Written for pre-schoolers who are becoming sexually aware, this is an adorable book. Illustrations show diversity and the difference between infant, pre-school and adult bodies. The book explains anatomy, conception and delivery. Kids may be confused by the happy faces on the sperm and eggs, but I think the drawings make the book really fun for little ones. A nice note is the addition of one small fact missing from most books: a mother’s vagina stretches when the baby comes out, and then it returns to its original shape.

#### **Lintball Leo’s Not–So–Stupid Questions About Your Body**

Walt Larimore M.D., John Riddle & Mike Phillips (Illustrator)

This cleverly illustrated book gives factual information with a Christian orientation. It answers real questions from boys about everything from steroid use to anatomy. Emphasis is placed on the concept of purity of mind and body. Written for boys 8-12.

### **The Gas We Pass: The Story of Farts**

by Shinta Cho, Amanda Mayer Stinchecum (Translator)

The cute illustrations take the mystery out of passing gas while allowing kids a chance to giggle while you read.

### **CONCEPTION**

#### **Beginning Life**

Geraldine Lux Flanagan

I loved reading this with my 5-year-old when while we anticipated the birth of her twin sisters, and they enjoyed it when they were toddlers. The astounding photos explore the beautiful journey from conception through birth, using microscopic images of eggs and sperm, embryos, fetuses, and tasteful photos of childbirth.

#### **How You Were Born**

Joanna Cole

Ms. Cole speaks directly to kids in a warm, respectful manner. This is a Reading Rainbow selection, and Parents magazine called it the “best book we’ve seen on the subject.” The photos are friendly, showing diversity. Line drawings replace photos to show childbirth.

### **It’s So Amazing! A Book About Eggs, Sperm, Birth, Babies and Families**

Robie H. Harris

Very cute, and the cartoon-style illustrations by Michael Emberley show a range of races and body shapes. The storyline is provided by a comical bird and bee. The silliness can seem a bit overdone, but it keeps kids entertained.

### **DIVERSITY**

#### **Always My Child: A Parent’s Guide to Understanding Your Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgendered or Questioning Son or Daughter**

Kevin Jennings with Pat Shapiro, MSW

The title sums up the book’s content. I will add that the text addresses issues ranging from communicating with your child to answering questions, recognizing signs of harassment, and being an advocate for your child.

#### **Families Like Mine: Children of Gay Parents Tell It Like It Is**

Abigail Garner

The author was five when her parents divorced and her dad came out as gay. As an adult, she turned to other children of gay parents for help explaining how to deal with issues ranging from homophobia at school and in society, to co-parents, and to the readers’ sexuality.

#### **Heather Has Two Mommies**

by Leslea Newman, Diana Souza (Illustrator)

Heather is a preschooler with two moms, and she learns that hers is just one of many different types of families. The overriding lesson is that each family is special, and “the most important thing about a family is that all the people in it love each other.” The book is great for kids from ages 2-6, with or without gay parents or family members.

## **GENDER**

### **She's Not There**

Jennifer Finney Boylan

This one's for parents of transgender children, or for teens who identify themselves as transgender and need a boost of courage. It's the autobiography of Jennifer, who was anatomically male but identified as female. Jennifer was past 40 before she had surgery to make her body match her self image, and she's now a beautiful female college professor (she retained her job after her physical transformation). The book includes a chapter by her male best friend, who gives an honest account of how difficult it was for him to understand and accept the author's transition.

### **What's the Big Secret?**

Laurie Krasny Brown & Marc Brown

The moment I saw that this book referred to a girls' vulva rather than simply to the vagina, I was hooked—many books forget to mention external female genitalia. The storyline explores how boys and girls are alike and different. It encourages kids to use proper anatomical terms, to respect others' privacy, and to appreciate safe touch. Reproduction, conception and delivery are handled tastefully and comfortably.

## **PARENT RESOURCES**

### **Breaking the Code**

Lara Fox and Hilary Frankel

This book got a lot of attention because two high school girls wrote it for parents seeking to communicate with their kids. It explains the vast difference between what parents say and what teens hear. It doesn't address sexuality, but then, you can't talk about sex if you can't talk about general topics, too.

### **From Diapers to Dating: A Parent's Guide to Raising Sexually Healthy Children from Infancy to Middle School**

Debra W. Haffner, M.Div., MPH

Haffner is a minister and is the former president and CEO of the Sexuality Information and Education Council of the US. More importantly to *Buzz* readers, she's the mother of a son and daughter. This book is chock-full of tips for helping parents communicate their values about sexuality.

### **Beyond the Big Talk: Every Parent's Guide to Raising Sexually Healthy Teens—From Middle School to High School and Beyond**

Debra W. Haffner, M.Div., MPH

This book picks up where *From Diapers to Dating* leaves off, covering children from age 12 to 21.

### **How Can We Talk About That?: Overcoming Personal Hangups So We Can Teach Kids The Right Stuff About Sex and Morality**

Jane DiVita Woody

As a marriage counselor and sex therapist, Woody explains how parents' sexual history, fears, and hang-ups can interfere with their ability to teach kids about sex. Her series of brief quizzes help parents evaluate their sexual past and present to identify their own fears, insecurities, and strengths. She offers tips for using that self-knowledge to talk to one's spouse and kids. The book has separate chapters for moms and dads.

*Melanie Davis is a communications professional and sexuality educator. She teaches sex ed classes for a Unitarian Universalist congregation in New Jersey. Her independent workshops help parents speak comfortably with their children about sexuality, and they help teens distinguish between risky and safer behavior. She also speaks on sexual harassment, relaxation techniques and Reiki. For more information, visit [www.melaniejdavis.com](http://www.melaniejdavis.com).*

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