

Family Fundamentals study guide

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USING THIS GUIDE

Introduction

In *Family Fundamentals*, filmmaker Arthur Dong poses a straightforward but highly charged question: “What happens when parents believe that their own kids represent the very element that will lead to the end of the human race?” In a revealing 75-minute documentary that carries the intimacies of a home movie, *Family Fundamentals* explores the complex dynamics of families where parents actively oppose homosexuality despite having gay children themselves. These families find that their private struggles place them at the vortex of the very public culture wars being waged in social, religious, and political arenas throughout America today.

By illuminating the intersection between the personal and the political, *Family Fundamentals* provides an opportunity to explore not only debates over gay issues and scriptural edicts on homosexuality, but also questions about religious pluralism, the role of religion in a secular democracy, the meaning of family values, and beliefs about parenting.

How to Use This Guide and the *Family Fundamentals* DVD

Films can be an effective tool to help present information, encourage people to take interest in an issue, provide a starting point for people to exchange views, and to create an opportunity for personal reflection. This guide is designed to facilitate these and other purposes in a variety of settings, such as classrooms, religious institutions, libraries, community dialogues, diversity training, and youth groups.

Moderators are encouraged to first take a look at the table of contents for both this booklet and the DVD. The different sections in this guide offer a range of objectives, including ideas on how to encourage discussions and dialogues, practical suggestions for organizing an event, glossaries, resources, and historical background. Moderators should watch *Family Fundamentals* and the DVD supplements along with this guide to choose areas that best suit viewers’ needs. Keep in mind that this booklet was written to serve diverse audiences and not all subject areas may apply to your specific situation.

While watching *Family Fundamentals*, you may want to pause occasionally to take notes or to refer back to this guide if necessary. You might also find it expedient to skip from one chapter to another in order to identify certain sections that may be particularly meaningful or to bypass sections that may not be applicable.

While there is no substitute for the emotional impact of watching a film uninterrupted, don’t feel that you must show the entire film to your group. Schedule permitting, you may find it more practical to break up the film and show it in two or more sessions. You might also want to show just segments, or present selections from the DVD supplements, or both. The DVD format allows you to access different sections as you see fit, and you can always replay or introduce new sequences during your group’s discussion to help illustrate particular points. Most importantly, free feel to customize a program that best serves your audience.

Finally, the producers of this guide understand that the issues they address in this project are complex. If you have any feedback and/or suggestions, please send them to:

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DISCUSSION TOPICS (cont.)

Chapter 2: Kathleen's Story

1. Consider the phrase in the title card, "children who have become homosexual."
 - How does this term differ from "children who *are* homosexual?" What assumptions are made in regard to the origins of homosexuality? For example, Kathleen Bremner believes homosexual behavior is conditional and unnatural.
2. Kathleen operates the San Diego Spatula Ministries from her home office.
 - Discuss the larger social and political effects of her work as well as other similar grass roots organizations. What role can the internet play in community organizing?
3. Kathleen recounts the story of her daughter Susan Jester's coming out as lesbian.
 - Discuss the situation from both Susan's and Kathleen's points-of-view. What difficulties did each encounter? Discuss other choices each woman could have made, both during their meeting and after, in order to understand each other better.
 - Why might parents experience their children's coming out as hurtful and blame themselves? Why does Kathleen's pain turn into anger?
4. Susan, and later in the film, Brett Mathews and Brian Bennett, grapple with different aspects of coming out or acknowledging their homosexuality.
 - Other than being gay, can you think of situations where people feel obligated to hide or reveal a part of their identity? How do you think those people feel?
 - What might be the consequences of having to hide a part of yourself because there is a risk of ridicule or discrimination?

Chapter 3: Susan's Story

1. Susan Jester says she "was always gay but tried to be straight."
 - Discuss Susan's difficulties in facing her lesbian orientation. Consider her work as a missionary, her two marriages, and the larger social and cultural pressures that might have affected her.
2. Susan is critical of certain Christian-based public protests against homosexuality; Kathleen Bremner forms a Christian ministry.
 - Compare the two women's different paths. Explore how both women transformed personal beliefs into activism. In your discussion, explore the consequences of influencing public opinion and policies to suit one's personal values.
3. To learn more about Susan's relationship with her mother, see "Additional Scenes: Susan Jester" [DVD: Additional Features].

Chapter 4: San Diego Spatula Ministries

1. Compare the work of the San Diego Spatula Ministries with the work of PFLAG (Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays). Both groups offer comfort to families and friends of gay children but in different ways. What are the motivations and intended outcomes of each group?
2. Nancy Toboada declares: there are "no such things as homosexuals, there're just heterosexuals with homosexual issues or identity problems."
 - What assumptions does Nancy imply with her statement? If you were gay, how would you feel if you heard such a statement? How would you reply to Nancy?



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DISCUSSION TOPICS (cont.)

3. William Koenig says many churches tell gay people, “We don’t want you here.”
 - Why do you think William feels this way? Examine different policies on homosexuality created by various organized religions. Explore the consequences of such policies.
4. This chapter illustrates how some people consider homosexuality in a religious context.
 - Explore the role of religion in regards to homosexuality, both in personal and societal terms.
 - Research biblical passages that Kathleen and members of her group might have based their beliefs upon. Refer to **Resources** for more information about Kathleen’s church, the Assemblies of God, as well as other denominations mentioned in *Family Fundamentals*.
 - Is it possible to define homosexuality as a sin without being labeled “homophobic?” Refer to the definition of “homophobia” in this guide’s glossary of gay terms.
 - Investigate beliefs of Christians who might disagree with Kathleen’s interpretations. How do you account for the differences between their interpretations? Refer to **Resources** and **Reading List** for more information about groups supporting gay Christians.
5. To learn more about the San Diego Spatula Ministries, see “Additional Scenes: San Diego Spatula Ministries” [DVD: Additional Features]. The following topics pertain to this additional segment:
 - Discuss the parents’ disappointment over having gay offspring. Conversely, explore their children’s possible disappointment with their parents. Think of ways these families can reconcile their disappointments.
 - Phil Alardo discusses the principle of “love the person, hate the sin;” Cynthia Alardo wants her gay son to know that his parents will “always love him.”
 - Is it possible to “hate the sin and love the sinner?” Why or why not? What do the stories in the film suggest?
 - Ruby Barcus says her son changed to live as a heterosexual.
 - Study other such stories of change from homosexual to heterosexual; refer to **Resources** and **Reading List**. Share your findings and discuss the various outcomes. Compare your case studies with other kinds of situations where people attempt to change a core identity trait.
 - Paul Bremner discusses the origins of homosexuality.
 - Conduct your own research on this topic from different points-of-view. Consider the political and cultural ramifications of why this issue is important to many sectors of our society.
 - As an exercise, reverse your research to examine the origins of heterosexuality; how does this perspective compare with your investigation of homosexuality?
 - Homosexual physical sex is described as an addictive and destructive behavior that is stimulated by drugs, pornography, and other elements.
 - Research and discuss the origins and ramifications of these beliefs. What purposes do the dissemination of these ideas serve?
 - Cynthia Alardo is concerned with the proliferation of positive gay representations and fears these depictions mislead younger people to accept homosexuality. Kathleen Bremner believes it’s a “terrible deception.”
 - How do you feel about their concerns? What role does the media play in affecting a person’s sexual orientation?



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DIALOGUES AND DISCUSSIONS

Introduction

The national PBS broadcast of *Family Fundamentals* on *P.O.V.* was presented in conjunction with a series of community dialogues held nationwide. Many of the suggestions in this section were developed by *P.O.V.* and offer ideas on organizing such an event. Some of these suggestions may also be applicable in the classroom, small focus groups, or even one-on-one encounters.

Why Dialogue?

Most people care about their communities and would like to make a difference, and many would like the chance to work with others in productive ways. Yet, it can be difficult to know where to begin and how to make progress. Sometimes, when divergent communities try to work together, communication and trust break down between people from dissimilar backgrounds. People have varied perspectives and experiences, and so they may see issues differently. The solutions that make sense for one person or group may not meet the needs of others.

Dialogues hope to provide a process for meaningful, face-to-face give-and-take between people from differing backgrounds and views. They endeavor to embody democratic values of equality, inclusiveness, and collaboration.

Some basic principles in the dialogue process are:

- People care about the communities they live in and want to make them better.
- Complex problems call for many kinds of solutions.
- People from all backgrounds and all segments of society have something to contribute.
- When all kinds of people develop trust and relationships through face-to-face dialogue, new ideas and approaches might emerge.
- When people consider different points-of-view on a complex issue, they may uncover common ground and find better solutions.

How the dialogue concept works:

- A dialogue is led by a moderator who is impartial, who helps manage the deliberation process but is not an “expert” or “teacher” in the traditional sense;
- it considers many perspectives, rather than advocating a particular point-of-view;
- it uses ground rules to set the tone for a respectful, productive discussion;
- it is rooted in civil discussion and deliberation, not debate;
- it does not require consensus, but uncovers areas of agreement and common concern;
- it progresses from a session on personal experiences with an issue, to a session that examines many points-of-view on an issue, to a session that considers common concerns and workable solutions.



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RESOURCES

Note: This list includes online resources that cover a wide range of viewpoints regarding homosexuality, certain Christian beliefs, and other topics suggested by the film, *Family Fundamentals*. It is provided for informational purposes only and by no means addresses every issue posed by the film.

Affirmations

www.affirmations.org

Affirmations supports gay and lesbian Mormons, members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Americans United

www.au.org

Americans United tracks the activities of both conservative and liberal religious-based movements and their effects on the separation of church and state.

American Psychological Association

www.apa.org

The following two APA papers regarding homosexuality are available online: *Resolution on Appropriate Therapeutic Responses to Sexual Orientation* (www.apa.org/pi/lgbcc/policy/statements.html#10); and *Just the Facts About Sexual Orientation and Youth: A Primer for Principals, Educators and School Personnel* (www.apa.org/pi/lgbcc/publications/justthefacts.html).

Assemblies of God Church

<http://ag.org>

Learn more about Kathleen Bremner's church, the Assemblies of God. Their views regarding homosexuality can be found at http://ag.org/top/beliefs/position_papers/4181_homosexuality.cfm.

Bob Dornan

www.bobdornan.com

This is former California Congressman Bob Dornan's official site and includes his biography, position statements, and a gallery.

Catholic Church

www.catholic.com

Learn more about Brian Bennett and Bob Dornan's church, the Catholic Church. Their views regarding homosexuality can be found at <http://www.catholic.com/library/homosexuality.asp>.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

www.lds.org

www.mormon.org

These are sites for Brett Mathew's church, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, also known as the Mormon Church. Their views about homosexuality can be found at www.mormons.org/question/faq/category/answer/0,9777,1601-1-60-1,00.html.

Dignity, USA

www.dignityusa.org

Dignity, USA supports gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender Catholics. Their position on Catholicism and homosexuality can be found at www.dignityusa.org/faq.html.



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READING LIST

Note: This list includes publications that cover a wide range of viewpoints regarding homosexuality, certain Christian beliefs, and other topics suggested by the film, *Family Fundamentals*. It is provided for informational purposes only and by no means addresses every issue posed by the film. Publications are listed alphabetically by title first.

A Journey To Moriah, by Rhea Murray. Bloomington, IN: Banta and Pool, LLC. 1998.

The AntiGay Agenda: Orthodox Vision and the Christian Right, by Didi Herman. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press. 1997.

Anything But Straight: Unmasking the Scandals and Lies Behind the Ex-Gay Myth, by Wayne R. Besen. Binghamton, NY: Haworth Press. 2003.

The Battle for Normality: A Guide for (Self-) Therapy for Homosexuality, by G.J. M. Van Den Aardweg. San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press. 1997.

The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics, by Robert Gagnon. South Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press. 2002.

The Book of Jerry Falwell: Fundamentalist Language and Politics, by Susan Friend Harding. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. 2000.

Calculated Compassion: How the Ex-Gay Movement Serves the Right's Attack on Democracy, by Surina Khan. Somerville, MA: Political Research Associates, The Policy Institute of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, Equal Partners in Faith. 1998.

Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century, by John Boswell. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press. 1981.

Coming Out Straight: Understanding and Healing Homosexuality, by Richard A. Cohen. Winchester, VA: Oakhill Press. 2001.

Congregations Talking About Homosexuality: Dialogue on a Difficult Issue, by Beth Ann Gaede. Washington, D.C.: Alban Institute. 1999.

The Constitutional Underclass: Gays, Lesbians, and the Failure of Class-Based Equal Protection, by Evan Gerstmann. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press. 1999.

Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America, by James Davison Hunter. New York, NY: Basic Books. 1990.

Equality Practice: Civil Unions and the Future of Gay Rights, by William N. Eskridge. New York, NY: Routledge Press. 2001.

Evolution's Rainbow: Diversity, Gender and Sexuality in Nature and People, by Joan Roughgarden. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press. 2004.

Family Outing, by Chastity Bono. Boston, MA: Little, Brown and Company. 1998.

From Wounded Hearts: Faith Stories of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered People and Those Who Love Them, by Roberta Showalter Kreider. Gaithersburg, MD: Chi Rho Press. 1998.

Gay Marriage: Why Is It Good for Gays, Good for Straights, and Good for America, by Jonathan Rauch. New York, NY: Times Books, 2004.

Appendix 1: Glossary - Gay Terms

If you are dealing with the gay community in the U.S. today, you are likely to encounter the terms in this section.

Problematic Terms and Phrases

This glossary also includes terms and phrases that may be problematic when used in certain contexts and are noted with an asterisk (*). Different communities do not necessarily agree on what constitutes a slur or insult, and religious conservatives and the gay community sometimes differ in their use of terminology when addressing gay issues. Labels mean different things to different people, and a discussion about the implications regarding the usage of particular terms might be helpful to establish mutual respect and thus encourage dialogue.

- * **Admitted Homosexual or Avowed Homosexual:** These two phrases are sometimes used to describe those who are openly lesbian or gay, or those who have recently come out of the closet. Some members of the gay community find these phrases unacceptable since “admitted” or “avowed” suggests that being a lesbian or gay man is somehow shameful. The terms “openly lesbian” or “openly gay” are considered more acceptable.

Bisexual: An individual who is romantically and physically attracted to both men and women.

- * **Gay vs. Homosexual:** “Gay” describes people who are physically and/or romantically attracted to members of the same sex. Though the term is sometimes used to refer to both men and women, some feel that the term renders women’s unique experience as invisible, and prefer to use the term “gay” to refer to men and “lesbian” to refer to women. “Gay” is preferred by many in the gay and lesbian community instead of the term “homosexual,” a label that implies a clinical history diagnosing lesbians and gay men as somehow diseased or psychologically disordered – notions discredited by both the American Psychological Association and the American Psychiatric Association in the 1970s.

- * **Gay Lifestyle:** This phrase is sometimes used to describe the lives of lesbians and gay men, and is considered unsuitable by many in the gay community because it suggests that sexual orientation is a choice, as in choosing a bachelor’s lifestyle or urban lifestyle. In the same way that there is not one definitive heterosexual lifestyle, there is not one definitive lesbian or gay lifestyle.

Gender: The linking of certain behaviors and characteristics to a particular biological sex (e.g., “being a man” as opposed to being male). External representation of one’s gender identity, usually expressed through “masculine” or “feminine” behavior, clothing, haircut, voice, or body characteristics.

Heterosexism: The attitude that heterosexuality is the only valid sexual orientation.

- * **Homophobia (Homophobe, Homophobic):** Fear or hatred of lesbians and gay men. According to www.religioustolerance.org: “Many conservative Christians see themselves as loving the homosexual while hating homosexual behavior (and rarely hating homosexual orientation). They interpret the half-dozen or so biblical passages which involve same-sex sexual behavior as condemning all homosexual behavior. They feel that their beliefs and practices are biblically based and thus not only acceptable but compulsory to all Christians who believe in the inerrancy of the Bible. They deeply resent being called homophobes, which they consider a swear word, for simply carrying out what they believe is the Word of God. The English language obviously lacks precision. What is badly needed is a group of words to describe each of the forms that negative reaction to homosexuality takes: one word to describe feelings of fear and loathing; another to describe action to oppress gays and lesbian; another to describe moral and religious disapproval, etc. Unfortunately, such words do not yet exist. Until they do, dialog will continue to be difficult and many hard feelings will propagate.”

Lesbian: A woman whose primary physical and romantic attraction is to other women.