



UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST
ASSOCIATION OF CONGREGATIONS

VIDEO DISCUSSION GUIDE:

NO DUMB QUESTIONS

24-Minute Color Video

Produced and Directed by Melissa Regan, 2001

Distributed by New Day Films, 190 Route 17M, PO Box 1084

Harriman, NY 10926; 888-367-9154 or 845-774-7051

Review by Pat Hoertdoerfer, UUA Children, Family and Intergenerational Programs Director

Highly Recommended

Transgender stuff is still a mystery to most of us. There are issues of gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, and sexuality. On some levels, they are the same issues. But on other levels, it is a very different experience. It is complicated for people who are not experiencing these things and are on the outside looking in. But this video shows a family's experience with parents and children struggling to understand how and why Uncle Bill is becoming a woman. This documentary profiles three sisters – Abby (6 year-old), Olivia (9 year-old), and Chelsea (11year-old) – and their reactions when their transgender Uncle Bill decides to start living as Aunt Barbara.

No Dumb Questions has been used with ***Our Whole Lives*** Children's Combination (Grades K-1/Grades 4-6) Trainings and is recommended to congregations using any age level of **OWL** to enhance their programs. I recommend using this video with the following discussion guide for UU parenting courses and/or intergenerational family life education programs. And I advocate for educational outreach to schools – elementary schools, middle schools and high schools – and parent-teacher organizations as well as community agencies and interfaith centers. This video is engaging for almost any audience because it tells a story filled with humanity that may challenge many viewer's notions about gender. It will serve as an excellent conversation-starter in college classrooms and campus groups.

It has won numerous awards from Best Short Film at Sundance Film Festival to Outstanding Documentary at the Los Angeles Gay and Lesbian Film Festival and many International Documentary Film Festival awards. For more information about the video, the filmmaker, and reviews visit their Web site <http://www.nodumbquestions.com/about.html>.

Overview and Discussion Topics

No Dumb Questions is a poignant, informal and engaging resource for opening minds and encouraging dialogue among family members, with peer groups of any age and setting (congregations, schools, colleges, workplaces, community centers) and in training programs for parenting/diversity/sexuality education. This video addresses some of the real problems someone who is transgender may face, but it also shows a family that can be warm, loving and accepting. It is an excellent primer for parents whose children are (or may be) encountering this type of situation. These parents and their new Aunt Barbara handle the situation extremely well, encouraging the children to ask questions, doing their best to respond to them, and acknowledging their own perplexity. Many scenes in this film celebrate the adage: Setting an example is the best means of educating others.

The first half of the film shows the children's confusion over a change in a family member, their Uncle Bill becoming their Aunt Barbara. They love Uncle Bill but wonder if they will feel the same way when he becomes their new Aunt Barbara. The opening scene finds Abby, Olivia and Chelsea trying to explain to each other the change that is taking place. Looking through the family photo album the older girls, Olivia and Chelsea, feel like they won't be excited to see Barbara. Abby, the youngest, wonders if Barbara will play Barbie dolls and do nails with her. The film continues with the girl's parents talking about how they tried to present this change to their children. They express their own confusion, and they also express the unconditional love that they continue to feel for Barbara.

After viewing this portion of the video, stop it and ask for initial reactions. Then pose some of the following questions. Adapt and add questions to fit your audience.

1. Which conversations made you laugh? Why?
2. Which sister did you identify with? Which questions were the most important to you?
3. How did the parents struggle with this situation? What words expressed their feelings and thoughts? How did they help one another?
4. Explain the developmentally-appropriate explanations, questions, and responses of each child.
5. How did the parents create an open and accepting environment for their children's questions about a transgender family member and gender identity issues?

The second half of the film documents the family first encountering Barbara at their grandmother's home. Olivia and Chelsea run away and are shy and withdrawn at first. Abby is immediately accepting. Barbara shows patience and wisdom by letting the girls take their own time in getting used to things. By the time they leave their grandmother's home that afternoon they all have come around to talking and accepting Barbara as one of the family. At the same time, the girls' parents acknowledge that all is not well with other members of the family, noting that another uncle is not adjusting to this news and refuses to see Barbara. The children begin to question how others will react to Barbara when they find out that she used to be a man.

At the end of the film, invite reflections on the later half of it. Then ask a few of the following questions. Again adapt and add questions to fit your audience.

1. Why were Olivia and Chelsea shy or afraid to see Barbara? What helped bring these family members together?
2. What did you learn from each of the sisters in facing this situation? What challenges lay ahead for them?
3. What did you learn from the parents in engaging their family members with these gender identity issues? What challenges lay ahead for them?
4. What did you learn from Barbara as she faced family members with her changed identity? What challenges lay ahead for her?
5. As you face the uncharted territory of gender identity in your congregation/school/workplace what advice do you take with you from this video? What advice do you have for others?

A suggested closing for a program viewing and discussing this film: Reading #576 A Litany of Restoration by Rev. Marjorie Bowens-Wheatley in *Singing the Living Tradition* hymnal.