

## E

### “The Parent Interview”<sup>1</sup>

This exercise is for those adolescents who have parents with whom they can talk openly about their disability.

At some point, the child or adolescent may hear of the parent’s reactions to, and feelings and thoughts about their disability. Rarely does the adolescent get a comprehensive perspective on how their parents feel about them having a disability. This occurs for a variety of reasons including, the parents emphasis on wanting to support the child, or tension regarding hearing what they have to say. Also, many parents may not know how they feel about the disability for quite some time.

This exercise entails the adolescent interviewing their parents (either individually or with both parents together) about the adolescents presence in their lives. Rather than just being a chance to discuss their feelings about the child having a disability, this exercise affords the child the chance to understand more about who their parents are and about how they have affected them over their life span. Some of the questions suggested below may be on topics that have already been discussed with the parents. Alternately, the adolescent may want to omit some of the questions, perhaps choosing to substitute questions of their own.

The adolescent should tell the parent(s) that they would like to spend some time talking with them about their life as a child, and the parent’s feelings about the disability. They should try to cover as many of these questions as they can. It could be done as an interview or in a more conversational manner. This exercise is best done well after diagnosis, as the parents will have a clearer perspective on their feelings about the disability. Since this exercise is more about encouraging a dialogue between adolescents and parents, the adolescent may not want to take notes per se.

*Some sample questions:*

- A. Talk with me about the thoughts you had about what your lives would be like after my birth.
- B. What were your hopes and fantasies of what my life would be like?
- C. If my getting married and having grandchildren were part of that scenario, how important was this to you, and do you still see this as a possibility?
- D. What had been your experiences with people with a disability prior to my diagnosis?
- E. If I did not a disability, but a friend of yours had told you their child did, what advice would you have given?
- F. How does this coincide with how you would or would not have judged or blamed them as parents?

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted and modified from “The Parent Interview” p. 38-39 in *Growth and Intimacy for Gay Men: A Workbook* by Christopher J. Alexander (1997) The Harrington Park Press, Binghamton: NY.

- G. What has been the biggest sense of loss in knowing that I have a disability?
- H. What is or has been your biggest hope and your biggest fear?
- I. What has been the biggest embarrassment?
- J. How often do you find yourself asking if there was not something you could have done to prevent my Disability?
- K. How often do you find yourself wondering or hoping that a miracle cure may be found for my disability?
- L. For which of you has my having a disability been harder?
- M. How much did the two of you talk about my having a disability with one another after you found out?
- N. Did you feel you blamed each other?
- O. How much went unspoken between the two of you about the subject?
- P. Have you since discussed it together in any depth?

*Add your own questions below:*