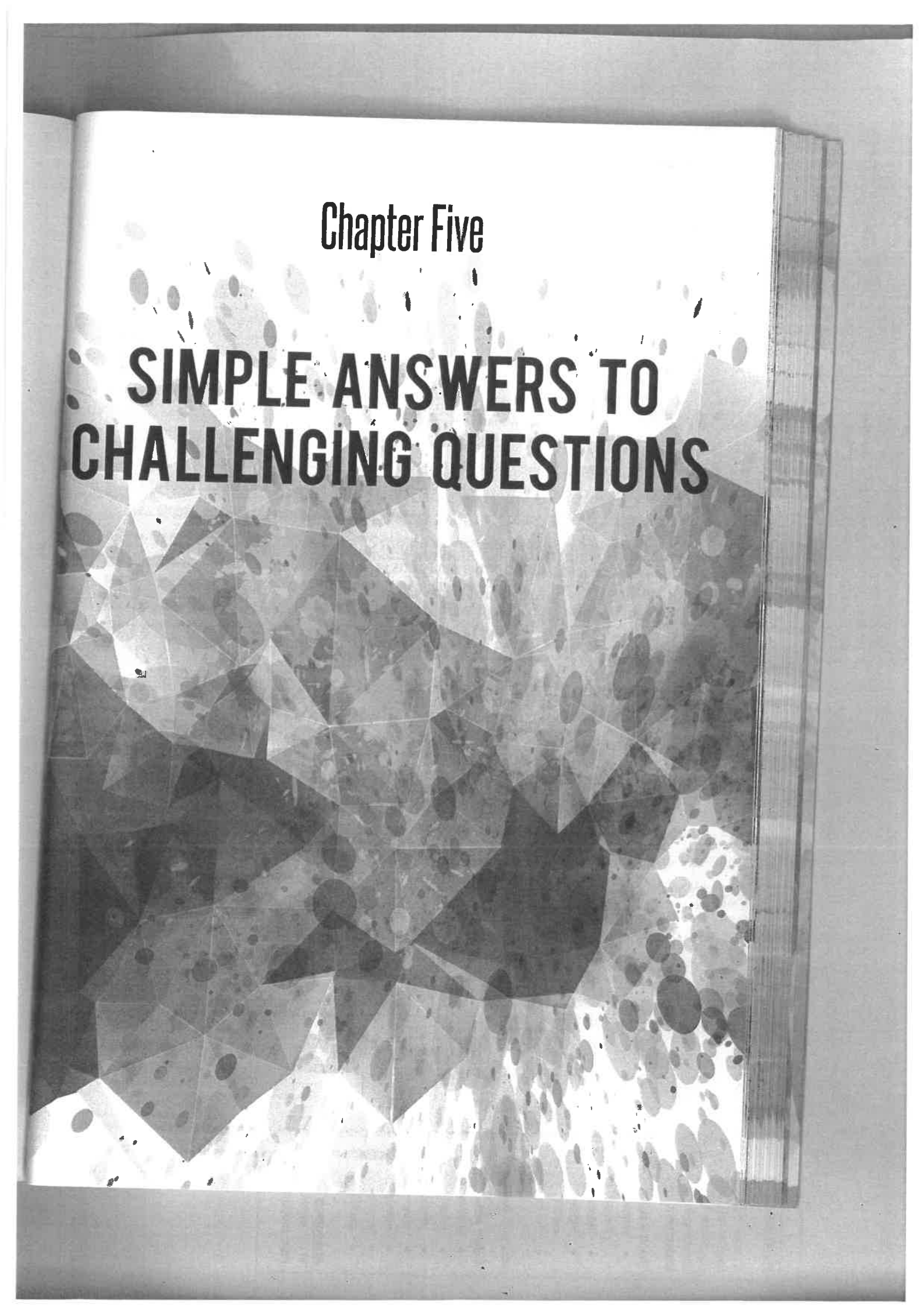


Chapter Five

**SIMPLE ANSWERS TO
CHALLENGING QUESTIONS**

The background of the page is a complex, abstract geometric pattern. It consists of numerous overlapping triangles of various sizes and orientations, creating a faceted, crystalline appearance. Interspersed among these triangles are various sized circles and dots, some solid and some with a textured, stippled effect. The overall color palette is monochromatic, ranging from light gray to dark charcoal, with some areas appearing almost black. The pattern is dense and fills the entire page, creating a sense of depth and complexity.

Simple answers to challenging questions

The following are all questions I have been asked by parents over the last five years. As I have never been asked about challenging racism or disability awareness or gender equality, all of these questions relate to challenging homophobia.

How do I explain what 'gay' means to my child?

'Gay' is when a man loves a man. 'Lesbian' is when two women love each other. 'Bi-sexual' is when a person can love both men and women. 'Transgender' is when a person feels different from the body they were born into; we were all assigned a gender at birth and sometimes when we get a bit older we may feel differently about that. Some people say there are 'boy things' and some say there are 'girl things', but we say that this is not the case and boys and girls can do the same sorts of things if they want. Some of us will live as a different gender from the one other people chose for us; others may like to do things that some people think are 'just for boys' or 'just for girls'.

But brothers love brothers and sisters love sisters and fathers love sons – does that make them gay?

Where two brothers love each other, it does not mean that they are gay. This is a different kind of love. We may love our mum but we don't want to marry our mum! Some people grow up and fall in love with a person of a different gender and some people grow up and fall in love with a person of the same gender, and sometimes these people may want to get married.

What do I say when my son comes home and asks, 'How can two men love each other?'

You say people are all different. Some men do love other men, and in the UK two men can get married in the same way that a man and a woman can get married or two women can get married.

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What do I say when my son comes home and asks, 'How can two men have a baby?'

Lots of people have children in lots of different ways, like fostering, adoption or step-families. Some people change when they get older and families can change, too. These are all families; they look after one another and love one another so they are the same in many ways, regardless of how the children arrived.

Some families have a mum and a dad. Some families have a mum and a mum. Some families have two daddies. Some families have one mum or one dad or one gran or one grandad. Some children have two mums because one is a step-mum. All families are different and that's OK. The important thing to remember is that all families are welcome in our school:

Are primary children too young to be taught about gay or lesbian people?

Some children grow up in families with gay or lesbian people. We can't be saying to a child who has two dads, 'You can't talk about your family!' We want all of our children to know that their family is normal and accepted in school.

Are you teaching gay lessons?

We are teaching about equality. Our school ethos says that everyone is welcome and there are no outsiders. This means that if someone is black, they are welcome in school; if someone uses a wheelchair, they are welcome in school; and if someone is gay, they are welcome in school.

But no children are gay here, why does it need to be mentioned?

Some of our children may turn out to be gay or know gay people and they need to know that it's OK. We don't want any child in our school – gay or straight – to grow up thinking that there is something wrong with them. Also, some of our families may have gay people in them. All of our families are welcome here.

Can I remove my child from these lessons?

No. The law says you can remove your child from RE or sex education lessons but this is a lesson celebrating diversity. The lessons are not one-off sessions; the ethos is all around the school. It is not possible to shield children from our school ethos.

But my religion says that gay is wrong

We understand that and we respect all faiths here. We understand that this presents a tension for you. We are teaching children about the world around them and that there are gay and lesbian people in the world. We are preparing children for life in Britain where society is diverse and they are going to meet different people as they grow up. As they grow up, they can make up their own minds about what they believe to be right and wrong; we are simply giving them a rounded view of life.

You are going to make my child gay!

No, we are teaching your child not to be afraid of difference, and to celebrate difference.

- Reading a book cannot make a child gay. Visiting a farm does not make a child into a farmer.
- Visiting a different place of worship does not convert the child. Reading a book with gay characters in it does not make your child gay.

Do you have gay teachers on the staff?

I have no idea! We could have gay members on the staff and if we do they are very welcome at our school. Of course, someone's sexual orientation has nothing to do with their job.

Or:

Yes, we do! But that's irrelevant. Some of our teachers wear glasses and some of our teachers have brown eyes. One of our staff can wiggle his ears and I do believe one is left-handed ... shall I go on?

You are confusing my child because at home they are learning that being gay is wrong but at school you are telling them that being gay is OK.

UK law says that gay people can get married and bring up children. We are teaching children that all families are different and your child is going to meet other children as they grow up who live in different families. It's important that children hear about people who are different. When they grow up, they can make up their own minds about what is right and wrong.