

BOOK REVIEW

Matt Whyman, *XY 100: one hundred strategies for life* Hodder 2004, paperback, 147 + xi pp., £5.99.

What things bother a growing boy that he can't easily get answers to – at least without embarrassment? Quite a few actually. The law, shaving, bad breath, acne – and of course sex. This useful manual, for lads aged 11-16, is by a medical consultant who is to be found on the web at www.netdoctor.co.uk.

I'll come to the sex in a moment. Other things the little book deals with include: stolen mobile, a cold or flu?, earwax, bingeing, black eye, warming up for exercise, being mugged, anger management, cracked lips, renouncing cigarettes, problems with poo, self-harming, finger nails, toenails, skateboarding, snowboarding, low self-esteem, arguing, stomach-crunching and six-packs, divorcing parents, depressive moods, drug tugs, beating stress, happy hair, squat-thrusting, working at friendship, working out, first aid, how to revise, being punctual, stopping a punch-up, difficult friends . . .

There is a lot here I wish I had known about at that age. It includes of course many tips about sex. These form thirty-one out of the one hundred. Here are some of the questions (mostly abbreviated by me). The answers I'll leave you to find out if so inclined.

- If I look in the mirror naked, my knob seems to hang to one side. Is it supposed to do that?
- Am I doing snogging properly? The last thing I want is a reputation for kissing like a goldfish.
- How do I fit a condom in the dark?
- I think my best mate is about to confess that he's gay. How should I handle this (I'm not too sure about my own feelings)?
- My mum walked into my bedroom and found me wanking. As she stared, I shot off. How do I face her after that?
- I really fancy someone in my class, but I'm scared to make a move in case they laugh at me.

There are plenty more like that. Sexwise the book is mostly directed at straight youths, but there's no trace of homophobia and the undecided are fully catered for. The law is adequately covered, but there's a careless statement in the early introductory part: 'Remember, sex is illegal below the age of 16'.

It isn't. Sex is an element in our lives from birth. It is always present in our bodies and our minds. It is never illegal, though some forms of sexual expression of course are. That does not include solitary masturbation for example. Isn't that 'sex'? So how can Dr Whyman blithely say 'sex is illegal below the age of 16'. I call that careless.

You can't really expect it in a small manual like this, but I wish the author had included a word or two about the iniquity of the recent reforming comprehensive Sexual Offences Act in making criminal any consensual sexual contact between age mates who are aged between ten and sixteen. Wicked I call that, and cruel. I spent much effort fighting it when the Bill was passing through Parliament (details on www.francisbennion.com).

Still, don't let me end on that note. This book is a genuine attempt to be helpful, and it largely succeeds. It even tells a lad how to win popularity by teaching himself to juggle.

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