

We Are Family!: How LGBT Parents Can Support Children

There's so many different ways to be a family. It doesn't matter who's in the family. But it matters that you love each other and take care of each other. *That's a family.*"

— A child's comment from the Groundspark documentary film "That's a Family" (www.groundspark.org)

Families come in many shapes and sizes.

But, like the quote above says, there are so many ways to be a family, and the

primary ingredients are commitment, love, and caring for one another.

Children who grow up in an LGBT-headed family may be faced with questions about why they have two moms or two dads or what the gender identity of a parent is. Just because they're not talking about their family, doesn't mean they're not thinking about it or worrying about what to say. As a parent in an LGBT-headed household, you can empower your child to know what to say, when to disclose or not disclose, and how to deal with other people's reactions.

Talking About Our Family

To prepare your child or youth to talk to others about your family, you may want to first talk about what it means to be a family. Ask your children about the different kinds

of families they know. Do you know someone with one parent, someone with a stepparent, someone who's being raised by grandparents? Acceptance of all kinds of families begins with recognizing that there *are* all kinds of families.

Experienced LGBT parents recommend that you think about how you will talk about your family to your family, friends, neighbors, teachers, and others, and how you will answer challenging questions that may come up.

In *Families Like Mine*, Abigail Garner says,

"New LGBT parents often say that they thought they were as out as they could be—until they had children. Having children means that LGBT people are continually explaining their family to new teachers, doctors, day-care workers, religious leaders and the parents of their children's friends."

Garner says children are faced with this ongoing coming-out process as well. They need to decide how to tell people about their family and who to tell. Will they tell their friends but not their teachers? Tell their teachers but not their coaches? It's an ongoing choice.

Every time you consider coming out to someone new, you weigh the pros and cons. This might only take you a split second to decide, because

Continued on page 2



you've done it so many times. For children, though, this is tough. If they've heard even one negative comment about LGBT people, they might choose to remain silent about their family to protect themselves and to protect their parents. Many grown children say that their LGBT parents underestimated how difficult it was for them to talk about their family when they were growing up.



as a model for the words your children will use. So you choose positive adoption language and you teach your child how to talk about being in foster care. In the same way, using respectful and affirming language about LGBT-headed families will help children and youth learn

how to talk about their family. For example, "Your Mama and I love each other and we're both women. Some people refer to us as 'lesbian' or 'gay.' It's OK if you tell your friends that you have two moms, or that

Continued on page 3

As parents, you already know that the way you talk about adoption and foster care serves

10 Things Children and Youth May Want Their LGBT Foster or Adoptive Parents to Know

1. Let me tell my friends and other people in my life about our family, in my own time, and in my own way.
2. I may have heard myths and stereotypes about LGBT people. Help me to understand more about the realities and diversity of LGBT people's lives. Help me to critically reflect on media messages and representations.
3. Help me to connect with other kids who have LGBT parents (if I want to).
4. I love you and support you AND it is not my job to be an advocate for LGBT rights. Please respect my choice if I don't want to go to the Gay Pride Parade (or another LGBT event). I may want to do these things. I may not. It may depend on the opportunity or particular point in my life.
5. I might be lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, gender non-conforming, straight, or questioning, and I may identify in another way. Please be supportive of my healthy development – whatever my identity may be – and understand that it's not about you!
6. Teach me respect for diversity by modeling a response to prejudice, discrimination, and injustice. Help me to develop my own responses and help me to think about my safety.
7. Please talk to me honestly and let me ask questions whenever I have them.
8. Sometimes you (and I) may feel like the world is watching, and we have to be the perfect family.
9. Understand that sometimes it might be easier for me to talk to another supportive adult about questions I may have. I might be afraid of hurting your feelings.
10. Remember: On a day-to-day basis, it's not about having gay or transgender parents, it's about having parents!

by Gary Mallon and Tracy Serdjenian, May 2012 National Resource Center for Permanency and Family Connections
Silberman School of Social Work
at Hunter College



6682 West Greenfield, Suite 310
Milwaukee, WI 53214
800-762-8063
info@coalitionforcof.org

© 2013;
updated 2018

In partnership with:



your parents are gay.”

Many parents suggest helping your child know who to trust at school and in the community is key. These will likely be the same people that *you* trust. Older children



may want to tell people about their family in their own way. But you can guide them in deciding who to tell, how to tell them, and how much to share.

Your child interacts with teachers, coaches, faith leaders, and others. Do these adults honor and celebrate diversity? Will they advocate for your child if you're not there? Your child needs your help and support in identifying safe and trusted adults.

Family Matters

Keeping open communication with your children will encourage them to come to you with their questions and concerns.

Acknowledge their feelings if it seems difficult for them to talk about their family dynamics with others. Empower them to identify supportive adults.

Work with them to come up with affirming words to answer questions about your family. Give them the opportunity to connect with

Raising children in an LGBT household

Although research shows that children with LGBT parents are as well-adjusted as children with non-LGBT parents, they can face some additional challenges. Some LGBT families face discrimination in their communities and children may be teased or bullied by peers. Parents can help their children cope with these pressures in the following ways:

- ◆ Prepare your child to handle questions and comments about their background or family.
- ◆ Allow for open communication and discussions that are appropriate to your child's age and level of maturity.
- ◆ Help your child come up with and practice appropriate responses to teasing or mean remarks.
- ◆ Use books, Web sites and movies that show children in LGBT families.
- ◆ Consider having a support network for your child (For example, having your child meet other children with LGBT parents.)
- ◆ Consider living in a community where diversity is more accepted.

American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychology, "Children with Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Transgender Parents," August 2013

others in LGBT-headed families, understanding that their interest in such connections may change over time. And above all, remind them by your words and actions that a family means someone who will love and care for you no matter what.



6682 West Greenfield, Suite 310
Milwaukee, WI 53214
800-762-8063
info@coalitionforcyf.org

© 2013;
updated 2018

In partnership with:



Resources from the Coalition Library

Books Available to Borrow:

- *The Family Book*, by Todd Parr
- *Families Like Mine: Children of Gay Parents Tell It Like It Is*, by Abigail Garner
- *How It Feels to Have a Gay or Lesbian Parent*, by Judith E. Snow, MA

Other Resources:

- ⇒ Let's Get This Straight: The Ultimate Handbook for Youth with LGBTQ Parents
- ⇒ Talking to Children About Our Families by Margie Brickley and Aimee Gelnaw from the [Family Equality Council](#)
- ⇒ www.colage.org, a website for people with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and/or queer parents
- ⇒ "[In My Shoes: Teens with Same-Sex Parents](#)," a short documentary
- ⇒ [Human Rights Campaign All Children – All Families](#)
- ⇒ "[10 Things Children and Youth May Want their LGBT Parents to Know](#)"
- ⇒ "[That's a Family](#)" from Groundspark: Igniting Change through Film
- ⇒ <http://www.fosteryouthhelp.ca.gov/LGBTQ.html>
- ⇒ American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychology, "[Children with Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Transgender Parents.](#)" August 2013



6682 West Greenfield, Suite 310
Milwaukee, WI 53214
800-762-8063
info@coalitionforcoyf.org

© 2013;
updated 2018

In partnership with:

