



We Are Family! How LGBTQ+ 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 LGBTQ+-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 LGBTQ+-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 LGBTQ+ 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 LGBTQ+ parents often say that they thought they were as out as they could be—

until they had children. Having children means that LGBTQ+ 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.



Continued on page 2



6737 W. Washington St., Suite 2353
West Allis, WI 53214
800-762-8063
info@coalitionforccyf.org

© 2013; updated
2018; 2022

In partnership with:



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

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



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 LGBTQ+-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 your parents are gay."

Continued on page 3

10 Things Children and Youth May Want Their LGBTQ+ 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 LGBTQ+ people. Help me to understand more about the realities and diversity of LGBTQ+ people's lives. Help me to critically reflect on media messages and representations.
3. Help me to connect with other kids who have LGBTQ+ parents (if I want to).
4. I love you and support you AND it is not my job to be an advocate for LGBTQ+ rights. Please respect my choice if I don't want to go to the Gay Pride Parade (or another LGBTQ+ 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



6737 W. Washington St., Suite 2353
West Allis, WI 53214
800-762-8063
info@coalitionforccyf.org

© 2013; updated
2018; 2022

In partnership with:



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 others in LGBTQ+-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.



Raising children in an LGBTQ+ household

Although research shows that children with LGBTQ+ parents are as well-adjusted as children with non-LGBTQ+ parents, they can face some additional challenges. Some LGBTQ+ 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, websites and movies that show children in LGBTQ+ families.
- ♦ Consider having a support network for your child (For example, having your child meet other children with LGBTQ+ 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



6737 W. Washington St., Suite 2353
West Allis, WI 53214
800-762-8063
info@coalitionforccyf.org

© 2013; updated
2018; 2022

In partnership with:



Resources

From the [Lending Library](#)

- *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

Tip Sheet

- [School Issues and Bullying: How LGBTQ+ Parents Can Support Children](#)

From [Champion Classrooms](#)

- [Introduction to Supporting LGBTQIA2S+ Foster Youth](#)

Additional Resources

- *Let's Get This Straight: The Ultimate Handbook for Youth with LGBTQ Parents*, by Tina Fakhrid-Deen
- [Talking to Children About Our Families](#)
- [COLAGE](#)
- [In My Shoes: Teens with Same-Sex Parents](#)
- [Human Rights Campaign: All Children—All Families](#)
- [10 Things Children and Youth May Want Their LGBT Parents to Know](#)
- [That's a Family](#)
- [Children with Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Transgender Parents](#)
- [What Does LGBTQ+ Mean?](#)
- [LGBTQ+ Books for Parents and Children](#)



6737 W. Washington St., Suite 2353
West Allis, WI 53214
800-762-8063
info@coalitionforcyf.org

© 2013; updated
2018; 2022

In partnership with:

