



We Are Family! Tips for LGBTQIA+ Parents Caring for Children

“There are 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 many ways to be a family, and the primary ingredients are commitment, love, and caring for one another.

Children who grow up in an LGBTQIA+-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 LGBTQIA+-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 a 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 the child about the different kinds of families they know. Do they know someone with one parent, someone with a stepparent, or someone being raised by a grandparent? Acceptance of all kinds of families begins with recognizing that there *are* all kinds of families.

Experienced LGBTQIA+ parents recommend that you consider 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 also faced with this ongoing coming-out process. 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

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not their coaches? It's an ongoing choice.

Whenever you consider coming out to someone new, you weigh the pros and cons. This might only take a second to decide because you've done it often. For children, though, this can be tough. If they've heard even one negative comment about LGBTQIA+ people, they might choose to remain silent about their family to protect themselves and to protect their parents. Many grown children say that their LGBTQIA+ parents underestimated how difficult it was for them to talk about their family when they were growing up.

A 2013 article from the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychology, "Children with Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Transgender Parents," has this to say about raising children in an LGBTQIA+ 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 the child to handle questions and comments about their background or family.*
- *Allow for open communication and discussions that are appropriate to the child's age and level of maturity.*
- *Help the child come up with and practice appropriate responses to teasing or mean remarks.*
- *Use books, websites, and movies that show children in LGBTQ+ families.*

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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. Please help me to understand more about the realities and diversity of LGBTQ+ people's lives. Help me to reflect on media messages and representations critically.
3. Help me connect with other kids with 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 support 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 develop my own responses and 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 us and that 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

- *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.*

As parents, you already know that the way you talk about adoption and foster care serves as a model for the words children will use. So you choose positive adoption language, and you teach the child how to talk about being in foster care. In the same way, using respectful and affirming language about LGBTQIA+-headed families will help children and youth learn how to talk about their families. 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.”

Many parents suggest that helping children know who to trust at school and in the community is vital. 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.

Think about the people the child interacts with: teachers, coaches, faith leaders, and others. Do these adults honor and celebrate diversity? Will they advocate for the child if you’re not there? Kids need the help and support of their caregivers to identify safe and trusted adults.

Family Matters

Open communication with children will encourage them to come to you with their questions and concerns. Acknowledge their feelings if it seems difficult 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 LGBTQIA+-headed families, understanding that their interest in such connections may change over time. Above all, remind them by your words and actions that a family means someone who will love and care for you no matter what.



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Resources

From the [Resource 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: A Book by Kids for Kids of All Ages*, by Judith E. Snow, M.A.
- *The Kid: What Happened After My Boyfriend and I Decided to Go Get Pregnant*, by Dan Savage
- *The Ultimate Guide for Gay Dads: Everything You Need to Know About LGBTQ Parenting But Are (Mostly) Afraid to Ask*, by Eric Rosswood
- *Journey to Same-Sex Parenthood: Firsthand Advice, Tips and Stories from Lesbian and Gay Couples*, by Eric Rosswood
- *Adoption by Lesbians and Gay Men: A New Dimension in Family Diversity*, by David M. Brodzinsky and Adam Pertman
- *Gay Parenting: Complete Guide for Same-Sex Families*, by Shana Priwer & Cynthia Phillips

Tip Sheet

- [School Issues and Bullying: How LGBTQ+ Parents Can Support Children](#)
- [Protecting & Affirming LGBTQ+ Young People in Foster Care](#)
- [Supporting LGBTQIA+ Youth in Your Care](#)

Training From [Champion Classrooms](#)

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

Additional WiFCC Resource

- [LGBTQIA2S+ Resources](#)

Additional Resources

- *Let's Get This Straight: The Ultimate Handbook for Youth with LGBTQ Parents*, by Tina Fakhrid-Deen
- [COLAGE](#)
- [Human Rights Campaign: All Children—All Families](#)

- [That's a Family](#)
- [What Does LGBTQ+ Mean?](#)
- [LGBTQ+ Books for Parents and Children](#)