



FOR LGBTQ+ PARENTS

Parents whose children attend LGBTQ+-friendly day cares and schools report less discrimination and less stress. Not all parents, however, walk into an environment where teachers, staff, and other families are entirely affirming and inclusive. Some LGBTQ+ parents find that they need to “step up” and be more involved than they would prefer in order to ensure a more positive environment for their children. Although it demands time and energy, involvement has a lot of benefits, including creating change (for one’s own family and future families) as well as potentially positive connections with other parents and teachers.

FINDING AN LGBTQ FRIENDLY DAY CARE OR PRESCHOOL

If you are an LGBTQ+ parent seeking a daycare or early childhood educational environment for your children, you should evaluate programs with the following questions in mind. Of note is that some of this information can be gleaned from online materials, whereas in some cases it can be obtained through speaking with a school or program administrator, or visiting the site itself.

- Paperwork: is it inclusive of different family forms, family building routes, gender identities, and relationship configurations?
- Do teachers, materials, web-based content, etc. refer to parents and guardians (versus mothers and fathers), and/or acknowledge the potential for caregiving situations that go beyond the heterosexual two-parent family form?
- Do photos, images, children’s books, art, toys, dolls, and music lyrics depict and promote inclusion of diverse family forms, in terms of number of parents, parent gender/gender expression, family building route, and racial makeup?
- Are holidays, celebrations, and assignments inclusive of a diverse range of families and family-building routes? (e.g., How are Mother’s Day and Father’s Day handled? Alternatively, is there a “Parents’ Day”? How are adopted children’s unique circumstances accounted for in birthday celebrations, if at all?)
- Do teachers make an effort to use language and examples that reflect all kinds of families? Do they address hurtful and/or insensitive language choices or name-calling by children?
- Are there affinity groups or support groups for LGBTQ+ parent families, adoptive families, multiracial families, or other types of diverse families?
- Are there other LGBTQ+ parent families at the school/day care? Is the school willing to allow you to connect with them to ask questions about their experiences with the school/day care?

You can also use these questions to evaluate secondary schools.

Most people, though, do not have much choice about where their children attend school (e.g., unless they are also able to afford private school options). Therefore, the following ideas and tips may be more useful, as they pertain to ways that you can advocate for your child within the school to create a more inclusive atmosphere.

OTHER SCHOOL CONSIDERATIONS

Research on LGBTQ+ parents suggests that they often consider and weigh a variety of factors when evaluating potential day cares and preschools. In addition to evaluating whether a setting is LGBTQ+ friendly, they consider:

- **Racial/ethnic makeup and diversity among staff and families**
- **Teacher-child ratio**
- **Reputation in the community**
- **Physical location and safety**
- **Artistic, linguistic, and educational resources**
- **Specialized accommodations or resources (e.g., for special needs or disabilities)**
- **Cost**





FOR LGBTQ+ PARENTS CONTINUED

ADVOCATING FOR YOUR LGBTQ+ FAMILY IN DAY CARES/SCHOOLS

As parents, you can do a number of things to minimize discrimination against your child and family, or to effectively respond to it if it occurs.

- **Talk to the school preemptively.** Engage the school in a conversation about your family prior to the start of the school year. Explain the basic details of your family, including what your child calls each parent, and other important adults in your child's life (e.g., the donor, the birth parents). Ask them if they have any questions. See if they would like you to suggest some resources.

"[We have] always been very upfront that we are a family with two moms. If the entity (pediatrician, daycare, after-school program, etc.) was going to have an issue, we wanted to get the vibe early so we could find an alternative so our child didn't have to suffer due to their closed-mindedness."

"I always tell the teachers in advance that I am a transgender gestational parent so they don't think my kids are lying when they say their father gave birth to them."

- **Get involved.** Join the PTA or Diversity Committee, or attend their meetings and gradually seek out leadership positions. Volunteer in the classroom or at school events. Donate inclusive materials (e.g., books).

"We bought books for the class library about different kinds of families, and arranged for PFLAG and local LGBTQ groups to present to staff at our kids' schools."

"My presence in these spaces is a constant reminder to the staff that there is a gay parent in the room. I am always mentioning my spouse as my husband."

"I mostly just try and be really present and involved. I figure if I chaperone and bring enough cupcakes, everyone knows me and that helps."

- **Provide input and suggestions.** Highlight for schools where paperwork is less than inclusive (mother, father) and provide suggestions for alternatives (parent 1, parent 2). Likewise, provide input about how celebrations, curricula, and classroom visuals could be more inclusive of LGBTQ+ parent families.
- **Investigate policies.** Establish whether the school has policies and procedures in place for dealing with heterosexist, homophobic, and transphobic behavior at school. What are their bullying policies, for example? If sexual and gender identity and expression are not covered in such policies, advocate for including them.
- **Talk to your children.** Check in with your children about what they are experiencing at school. Use general questions, rather than asking directly if they are being targeted with comments or questions about their family. Convey that you are there to help them, and you will listen to them if and when something is going on at school and you'll talk together about how to handle it.

- **Empower your children.** Build your child's confidence and sense of pride. If possible, connect them to other children with LGBTQ+ parents to help them to develop a sense of community. Help them to develop a repertoire of potential responses to teasing—such as telling a teacher, ignoring it (brushing it off, walking away), and responding with a straightforward set of facts (e.g., to an insensitive question). Consider role playing various scenarios.
- **Get support.** Find a community of other LGBTQ+ parents at school, in your community, or online with whom to share experiences and ideas for advocacy.



BEYOND LGBTQ+ INCLUSION

Concerns about accommodations, including medication and therapies, for your children's special needs or mental health issues may demand far more of your energy and time than LGBTQ+ inclusive paperwork.

"Both of our sons are diagnosed with ADHD and the oldest has severe anxiety, [which] has been difficult managing in the school environment. It was really, really hard when he first went to school, but with meds he's gotten a lot better."

Race may be more of an issue than LGBTQ+ family related issues, in terms of addressing systemic bias within the school environment, and empowering your child to understand and address racism by peers and teachers.

"Our child is mixed race, Black, indigenous, and white. And in daycare specifically, and in other settings as well, people have said or done things that we have had to correct, [like] descriptions that are outdated or racist terms when talking about him or other people . . . and people making comments about hair."