FOR K-8 TEACHERS
CREATING AN INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENT FOR CHILDREN WITH LGBTQ+ PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS

What you do in the lives of children and families makes a difference. Children who feel seen and valued by teachers have the opportunity to thrive and shine. From preschool to high school, you have the ability to help children with LGBTQ+ parents feel safe, secure, and included.

The 3 million+ LGBTQ+ parent families in the United States are characterized by significant diversity. They are formed in many different ways, including via reproductive technologies such as donor insemination and surrogacy, adoption, and foster care. They are more likely to be multiracial, adoptive, and/or low-income than heterosexual parent families. In turn, when considering how to create an inclusive environment for families, it is important to consider their unique set of identities.

WHY DOES INCLUSION MATTER?

- Parents who feel more connected to their children's schools are more engaged in their children's experience at school, which enhances children's academic performance, social-emotional skills, and social integration

- Parents who feel more accepted by their children's schools are more likely to be involved (e.g., volunteer) which benefits their children and the school

- Children who feel accepted at school feel a greater sense of belonging, greater well-being, and higher self-esteem

WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT LGBTQ+ PARENT FAMILIES AND SCHOOLS?

- LGBTQ+ parents who feel more accepted and perceive less stigma at their children's schools tend to be more satisfied with the school, be more involved at school, and report better relationships with teachers.

- LGBTQ+ parents who are more involved at school and those who report greater acceptance by other parents report fewer child emotional and behavior problems at a later time point.

- LGBTQ+ adoptive parents who reported teacher validation of their status as an adoptive family reported fewer child emotional problems at a later time point.

- Research with LGBTQ+ parent families, including those formed by adoption and multiracial families, has identified a number of key ways that teachers can create an inclusive classroom and school environment for children with LGBTQ+ parents.

HOW CAN YOU CREATE A WELCOMING AND INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENT AND CURRICULUM?
CLASSROOMS AND CURRICULUM

- Ensure that the classroom (including images, art, toys, music lyrics, and books) encompass diverse kinds of families, including multiracial families and two-mom and two-dad families

LGBTQ+-INCLUSIVE CHILDREN'S BOOKS

We Belong Together: A Book About Families
BY TODD PARR (PREK)

The Family Book
BY TODD PARR (PREK-K)

A Tale of Two Daddies
BY VANITA OELSCHLAGER (PREK-K)

And Tango Makes Three
BY JUSTIN RICHARDSON & PETER PARNELL (PREK-2)

Pride: The Story of Harvey Milk & The Rainbow Flag
BY ROB SANDERS (1-3)

Princess Princess Ever After
BY KATIE O'NEILL (2-5)

The Misadventures of the Family Fletcher
BY DANA ALISON (3-5)

Gay & Lesbian History for Kids: The Century Long Struggle for LGBT Rights
BY JEROME POHLEN (5-9)

The Stars Beneath Our Feet
BY DAVID BARCLAY MOORE (5-9)

FOR MORE IDEAS FOR CHILDREN'S BOOKS WITH LGBTQ+ CHARACTERS, SEE:
https://www.welcomingschools.org/pages/books-inclusive-of-LGBTQ-family-members-and-characters/

FOR BOOKS ON LGBTQ+ HISTORY, SEE:
https://assets2.hrc.org/welcoming-schools/documents/WS_Childrens_Books_about_LGBTQ_History.pdf

FOR BIOGRAPHIES ABOUT LGBTQ+ PEOPLE, SEE:
https://assets2.hrc.org/welcoming-schools/documents/WS_Books_Biographies_LGBTQ_People.pdf

- Consider how toys, dolls, and dress-up clothes are arranged: do they promote certain types of families or relationships (e.g., male/female) over others?

- Group children in ways other than by gender (e.g., letters in their names; colors in their clothing), look for opportunities to break down and critique gender stereotypes (e.g., in advertising), and provide books that challenge gender stereotyping

ENSURE THAT THE CURRICULUM IS INCLUSIVE OF CHILDREN WITH LGBTQ+ PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS, SUCH AS BY:

- Acknowledging diverse family building routes (e.g., adoption)

- Communicating that there are many ways to form a family and that people do not need to be biologically related to form a family

- Not assuming that children have been with their parent or parents since birth

LOOKING FOR WAYS TO INCORPORATE REPRESENTATION INTO CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES AND MATERIALS, SUCH AS:

- During Pride month, coloring rainbow flags while talking about the importance and history of the rainbow flag

- Discussing key LGBTQ+ historical figures during civil rights/history lessons

- Creating book groups to read/discuss books on diverse families

- Conducting media analysis of how families are depicted in pop culture

- Ensure that holidays and celebrations are inclusive of a diverse range of families and family-building routes

- Consider Parents Day instead of Mother's Day/Father's Day; or if you do the latter, signal that celebrations and gift-giving apply to a range of adults in children's lives (e.g., grandparents)

- Consider how adopted children's unique circumstances are accounted for in birthday celebrations (e.g., ask children to bring in an early photo of their choosing, rather than a photo of the day they were born) *Note: these types of photo assignments are also tough on trans and gender diverse students*

- Consider modifying traditional classroom activities to ensure that all children and families can participate and feel accepted

"THEY'RE NOT DOING A FAMILY TREE PROJECT, WHICH IS COOL; THEY'RE DOING A "ME BAG," WHERE [THEY GET A BAG] AND FILL IT WITH THINGS THAT REPRESENT THEM, AND THEY TELL THEIR STORY BY PULLING OUT THE OBJECTS FROM THE BAG AND TALKING ABOUT IT. SO THE KID IS ENCOURAGED TO PUT THINGS IN, AND THE PARENTS ARE ENCOURAGED TOO, SO IT'S A COLLABORATIVE PROJECT."

-GAY FATHER OF A 5-YEAR-OLD

LANGUAGE

• Ask families what language they use to refer to themselves (e.g., what does the child call each parent?)

• Do not assume the gender of family members by their gender expression

• Avoid unnecessarily gendered and heteronormative language (e.g., moms and dads); refer to parents and guardians ("the people who love you and care for you"), and acknowledge the potential for caregiving situations that go beyond heterosexual two-parent families

• Use language and examples that reflect all kinds of families; look for natural openings to talk about and normalize the idea of "all types of families"

• Address hurtful and/or insensitive language choices or name-calling by children (e.g. "You don't have two dads; I don't believe you"; "That's so gay") [see sidebar for details]

INCLUSION OF PARENTS

• Ensure that the paperwork that parents complete in the beginning of the year allows them to represent their families accurately. Specifically, ensure that paperwork:

- Provides options for Parent 1/Parent 2/Parent 3, rather than mother/father
- Inquires about pronouns (she/her, he/him, they/them) of parents and children
- Does not assume that children are biologically related to their parents or have been with them since birth
- Does not assume that all family members are the same race, and that there are just two genders (e.g., for parents or children)

• Work to create an inclusive and collaborative parent community

- Consider how parents are approached and selected for positions like classroom parent, volunteer opportunities, and PTA
- Consider how you can engage diverse families without tokenizing them
- Seek to create opportunities for families with similar characteristics (e.g., multiracial, adoptive, LGBTQ+) to connect with each other
- Encourage collaborative and community building activities so that diverse families can get to know each other
- Convey a welcoming and inclusive tone, to ensure that parents feel comfortable sharing details about their families, conveying concerns, and/or offering suggestions or resources
- When possible, do the work to ensure that parents do not have to be the ones to point out issues of exclusion or donate materials to ensure representation of their families
- When appropriate, express sincere appreciation to parents for their efforts (e.g., pointing out exclusion in paperwork; suggesting or donating books) and, when possible, push for school-wide changes that do not rely on parent advocacy

HOW TO RESPOND TO ANTI-LGBTQ+ COMMENTS IN THE CLASSROOM

You play an important role in setting the tone for the school and classroom, and creating a safe environment for children with LGBTQ+ parents. If you hear or hear of such comments, you need to respond.

Ignoring such comments sends the message that such behavior is acceptable and will be tolerated, and harms children from other types of diverse backgrounds and LGBTQ+ students themselves.

Here are some examples of how you might respond:

• "It is not okay in this school to use the term gay disrespectfully or as a putdown."

• "That kind of language (dyke, fag) is unacceptable here."

When possible and appropriate, use the situation as a teachable moment. For example:

• Ask: "Do you know why using the term 'that's so gay' is disrespectful to students who may have friends/family members are LGBTQ+?"

• Incorporate information about discrimination against LGBTQ+ people and LGBTQ+ civil rights in lessons on prejudice, families, history, etc.)

FOR MORE DETAILS AND EXAMPLES, SEE
https://www.welcomingschools.org/pages/stop-thats-so-gay-anti-lgbtq-comments/

"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." -LESBIAN MOTHER OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN

"WE HELPED OUR PRE-SCHOOL UNDERSTAND WHAT MADDIE CALLS US (DADDY AND DADA) AND HOW TO RESPOND WHEN THE CLASSMATES ASK WHERE MADDIE'S MOM IS (MADDIE DOESN'T HAVE A MOM. SHE HAS TWO DADS). WE ALSO GAVE THEM MORE LGBTQ+ BOOKS TO READ IN CLASS." -GAY DAD OF PRESCHOOL-AGE CHILD

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