

Supporting LGBTQ+ Families in Early Childhood Settings

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What does LGBTQ+ stand for?

- Lesbian
- Gay
- Bisexual
- Transgender
- Queer / Questioning if 2 Q's
- + may include: Intersex, Pansexual, Asexual, Two-Spirit, Genderqueer, Bigender, Pangender, non-binary, etc.



How do you make a family?

All families are different and may have come together in various ways no matter the sexual orientation or gender identity of parent(s) including:

Adoption, fostering, kinship care, child from previous relationship(s), biological child through (known/unknown) sperm donor and/or surrogate, etc.

For children, families are their world.

*What you say or imply about my family you are saying or implying about **ME**.*



What messages do you communicate about how you expect families to look?

- On forms and paperwork
- Through pictures you have on marketing materials or in the building
- In both formal and casual communication?



Gender & Sexuality Myths and Facts

Myth: Gender and Sex are the same thing

Fact: Sex is your biology - your chromosomes, your anatomy. Gender is how you feel about yourself.

Myth: There are only two genders: male and female.

Fact: Since gender is how a person feels about themselves, there are as many genders as there people.

The Genderbread Person v4 by its pronounced METROsexual

Identity

Attraction

Expression

Sex

⊗ reverses a lot of what's on the right side

Gender Identity

- Woman-ness
- Man-ness

Gender Expression

- Femininity
- Masculinity

Anatomical Sex

- Female-ness
- Male-ness

Sex Assigned At Birth

- Female
- Intersex
- Male

Identity ≠ Expression ≠ Sex

Gender ≠ Sexual Orientation

Sexually Attracted to... and/or to/of

- Women a/o Feminine a/o Female People
- Men a/o Masculine a/o Male People

Romantically Attracted to...

- Women a/o Feminine a/o Female People
- Men a/o Masculine a/o Male People

Genderbread Person Version 4 created and uncopyrighted 2017 by Sam Kilenam. For a bigger bit, read more at www.genderbread.org

How do you respond to gender non-conforming play, comments, and/or presentations?



What makes non-binary gender identities so challenging for folks??

We often quickly sort things into categories. This can be harmful in a lot of different bias ways. We aren't used to **slowing down**, *but it's incredibly important and incredibly simple.*

But..**grammar**... *They* is actually used more commonly than you think as a singular pronoun & accepted as proper grammar...

"Oh, your friend is moving? Do you know when they're leaving?"

*use the pronoun they use: it may be They, or Ze or something else

Is that person a boy or a girl?

Well, we don't know just by looking at someone what their gender is. If we want to know, we would need to ask them. Is there a reason you're interested, or just curious?

I don't know - some people feel like they are either a boy, or a girl, and there are also kids who feel like they're both a boy and a girl, or they don't really feel like either one. Have you ever met anyone who feels that way? If someone asked you what your gender is, what would you say?

What are some real things you can start doing today?

Learn what families call each parent/caregiver; use that language when referring to families

Check your auto-assumptions

Listen first for pronouns, list yours.

Learn how families talk about their family structure; including how it was formed.

From www.ourfamily.org

In everyday activities...

Create activities such as “family day” instead of Mothers/Fathers Day that are more inclusive for children with LGBTQ parents, single parents, guardians, etc.

Include LGBTQ+ families in storytelling, imaginary play, etc.

Group children in ways other than gender

Have representational materials in classroom, common areas, marketing: posters, books, etc.

From www.ourfamily.org

Around communication...

Make forms inclusive with gender neutral language: “parent/guardian” instead of mother/father and option for “non-binary” if asking for sex/gender.

Send letters home to “families” instead of “mother/father”

“Ask your grown-up/tell your grown-up” instead of “ask your/tell your mom and dad”

From www.ourfamily.org



Use language that challenges binary notions of gender:

-There are lots of ways to be a boy or a girl, or even something else, isn't that great?

-Toys are toys, hair is hair, colors are colors, and clothes are clothes.

-Is there only one way to be a boy or a girl?

-Rather than “boys and girls”, “ladies and gentlemen”, etc. refer to them as “students”, “children”, or another non-gendered term for a group.

*From: Gender Inclusive School Toolkit
www.genderspectrum.org*

Help them understand the difference between patterns and rules:

-Who says only girls wear dresses? Do all-girls wear them? Do all boys wear dresses? Do some?

-Sure, boys might do certain activities more than girls or vice versa, but that doesn't mean all boys do those things or are supposed to wear that or that girls don't or shouldn't do that!

*From: Gender Inclusive School Toolkit
www.genderspectrum.org*



Question limited portrayals of gender:

-Who decides what things are for boys and what things are for girls?

-Sometimes this stuff is confusing. We get messages that some things are for boys and some things are for girls. These messages are just some people's ideas. They may not be right for you.

Recognize that gender is more about our identity than anything else:

-No one gets to tell another person how to feel on the inside.

-How someone feels about their gender comes from their hearts and their minds (not their pants!)

*From: Gender Inclusive School Toolkit
www.genderspectrum.org*



What else came up in Carla's research?

Felt most welcomed when treated like any other family

Ask open, respectful questions if unsure of something or how to answer questions children were asking.

Forms not specific to mother/father
Pictures of families up in classroom
More time to make two Mother's Day cards

What made them feel unwelcomed

Biased comments were made when people didn't know they identified as LGBTQ+

There was an opening on the phone and then we showed up, and suddenly they were full.

Some families reported others were more uncomfortable around adoption and alternate family structures then specifically around being an LGBTQ+ headed family.

Books about families

- ★ *Everywhere Babies* by Susan Meyers
- ★ *One Family* by George Shannon
- ★ *The Family Book* by Todd Parr
- ★ *ABC: A Family Alphabet Book* by Bobbie Combs
- ★ *And Tango Makes Three* by Justin Richardson and Peter Parnell
- ★ *Stella Brings the Family* by Miriam B. Schiffer
- ★ *Mommy, Mama, and Me* by Lesléa Newman
- ★ *Daddy, Papa, and Me* by Lesléa Newman
- ★ *Emma and Meesha My Boy* by Kaitlyn Considine
- ★ *Donovan's Big Day* by Lesléa Newman

Adoption themed:

- ★ *A Mother for Choco* by Keiko Kasza
- ★ *We Belong Together* by Todd Parr
- ★ *Tell Me Again About The Night I Was Born* by Jamie Lee Curtis
- ★ *Molly's Family* by Nancy Garden (two moms but also talks about one being "birth mom" and one adopting)

- ★ *The Paperbag Princess* by Robert Munsch
- ★ *Amazing Grace* by Mary Hoffman
- ★ *Sparkle Boy* by Lesléa Newman
- ★ *Henry Holton Takes the Ice* by Sandra Bradley
- ★ *My Princess Boy* by Cheryl Kilodavis
- ★ *Worm loves Worm* by J.J. Austrian
- ★ *I am Jazz* by Jessica Herthel and Jazz Jennings
- ★ *Call Me Tree* by Maya Christina Gonzales (includes no gendered pronouns)

Books that challenge gender limits



Adoption/Alternate family structure “taboos”

- “Do you think you’ll have any children of your own or just keep adopting?”
- “But which one of you is the real mom/dad?”
- “Which ones are your real kids?”
- They are going to miss having a mom/dad

Isn’t my child too young to be learning about LGBTQ+ headed families?

-We aren’t really talking about sexuality, we’re talking about family structures. Kids are already talking about their families and noticing that all families have things that are the same and different from each other. When we talk about, for example, that some families have two moms the conversation usually starts and stops with: “some families have two moms, other families have a mom and a dad, and some have just a dad. Families look lots of different ways.”

-Young kids often don’t know about sex and aren’t asking about sexuality. Further questions can you usually be answered with, “their moms love each other and wanted to have a family together.” This often makes sense instantly to kids and they tend not to ask any further questions.

-We want all of our children and families to be treated with respect and kindness. We believe that **everyone** deserves respect and kindness, whether we think similarly or differently from them, and we want to instill that in children.

Isn't my child too young to be learning about gender?

-Children are already learning about it. Messages about gender are everywhere, and children receive very clear messages about the “rules” for boys and girls, as well as the consequences for a greater range of interests, ideas, and activities. For all children, the pressure of “doing gender correctly,” is greatly reduced, creating more space for them to discover new talents and ideas.

-Whether in or out of school, children will encounter other children exhibiting wide ranges of gender expression. This is normal and, with a little reflection, we can all recognize it as something we encountered during our own childhoods. Tomboys or shy, sensitive boys were commonly recognized as children who buck societal expectations of gender expression. These children, and all children, deserve a safe, supportive learning environment in which they can thrive and empower themselves.

From: Gender Inclusive School Toolkit www.genderspectrum.org

If you are talking about gender, aren't you discussing reproduction and sexuality?

-The simple answer is “no.” When we discuss gender, we talk about what people like to wear, the activities they engage in, and how they feel about themselves. This is not sexuality. Sexuality involves physical intimacy and attraction. Gender is about self-identity. Gender identity is a person's internal sense of where they fit on the gender spectrum. This includes all kids “typically” gendered or not.

-If responding to questions that arise around physical sex, the discussion uses phrases such as “private parts” and even if anatomical terms come up, nothing specific to human reproduction or sexuality is taught. For the most part, children are simply not raising these questions. While as adults, we struggle to separate the ideas of gender and sexuality (primarily because many were taught that they are one and the same), children have an ability to grasp the complexity of gender diversity because sexuality doesn't factor in to complicate their understanding.

From: Gender Inclusive School Toolkit www.genderspectrum.org

Ideas about gender diversity & people who identify as LGBTQ+ go against my values/the values that we are instilling in my child at home. Are you trying to teach my child to reject these values?

-Absolutely not. Our children encounter people with different beliefs when they join any community. While one aim for learning about diversity is to become more accepting of those around us, not everyone is going to be best friends. That does not mean that they can't get along and learn together. The purpose of learning about gender diversity is to demonstrate that children are unique and that there is no single way to be a boy or a girl. If a child does not agree with or understand another student's gender identity or expression or family structure, they do not have to change how they feel inside about it. However, they also do not get to make fun of, harass, or harm other students whose gender identity or family they don't understand or support. Diversity education is about teaching students to live and work with others. It comes down to the simple agreement that all children must be treated with kindness and respect.

Adapted from: Gender Inclusive School Toolkit www.genderspectrum.org

Won't discussing people who identify as LGBTQ+ encourage my child identify as LGBTQ+?

-Being LGBTQ+ is not something that a person chooses. Studies show that although parents cannot make their child gay or transgender, they can deeply influence how their children feel about themselves. Parental pressure to enforce gender conformity can damage a child's self-esteem and is a higher predictor of negative health outcomes and risk-taking behaviors for youth. Transgender youth currently have an extremely high attempted suicide rate: some estimate it being as high as 50 percent. Discussing gender will have the effect of removing much of the pressure students face to fit into narrowly defined expectation that few if any can actually meet.

From: Gender Inclusive School Toolkit www.genderspectrum.org