

Gay, Lesbian, or Bisexual Parents: Information for Children and Parents



Millions of children have one or more gay and/or lesbian parents. For some children, having a gay or lesbian parent is not a big deal. Others may find it hard to have a family that is different from most families. Being different in any way can be confusing, frustrating, and even scary. But what really matters is that children can talk to their parents about how they feel and that there is love and support in the family.

The following are answers to some common questions from children (first part) and parents (second part). If you know someone who has a lesbian or gay parent (or 2 parents), you might be interested in reading this too.

Questions from children

Q: Why do some people think having homosexual parents is wrong?

A: Many years ago homosexuality was considered to be an illness. Despite the fact that a lot of research shows that this isn't true, some people still think that there is something wrong with being homosexual. Because of these beliefs, gay and lesbian parents and their children often face disapproval and stress. They may have less support from family and friends than heterosexual parents do.

Q: What if other people don't understand?

A: In almost every way your family is just like your friends' families. But not everyone will accept your parents' sexual orientation. People may tease or judge you because of it. Though your parents did not choose to be gay, they did choose to have a family and love their children. Some people may not accept this, even people you expect to be tolerant and accepting. It's OK if you don't want to talk about having gay parents or answer people's questions. Remember, you don't have to accept other people's opinions about your family. Many people will respect and support you and your family.

Nevertheless, it can be hard for you when others think badly about your parents or tease you about your family. This is why it's important to talk with your parents about how you feel. You also may find it helpful to talk with other adults. Focus on the positive things people say. Spend time with friends who accept you as you are, and who respect your parents for who they are.

Q: If my parents are gay or lesbian does that mean that I will be too?

A: Many people worry that children whose parents are homosexual won't have a chance to learn about heterosexual relationships. Research has shown that although children and teens whose parents are gay or lesbian know about what it's like to be homosexual, most of them discover that they are heterosexual.

Definitions

Sexual orientation: Whether a person is attracted to a person of the same sex or a different sex. For example,

Straight (or heterosexual): People who have sexual and/or romantic feelings for people of the opposite sex. Men are attracted to women and women are attracted to men.

Gay (or homosexual): People who have sexual and/or romantic feelings for people of the same sex. Men are attracted to men and women are attracted to women.

Lesbian: Gay woman.

Bisexual (or bi): People who have sexual and/or romantic feelings for both men and women.

Q: What should I tell people if they ask me about my parents?

A: Talk with your parents about what they would like you to tell people about them. They can help you think about how to answer questions from friends, teachers, and other people in your community. Think about who you want to talk to and what you would like to tell people about your family and your parents' sexual orientation. Like any other personal topic, you can choose to discuss your family with whomever you want.

Questions from parents

Q: When and how should I "come out" to my children?

A: The "right" time depends on when you and your child are ready. Each child is different and may understand things at different times. Some children may be surprised, confused, or even angry when you tell them about your sexual orientation; others may be relieved to understand you better. Some studies have suggested that children who were told that their parents were gay, lesbian, or bisexual early in childhood found the news easier to accept than those who were first told when they were teens. More research needs to be done in this area. In general, open and honest communication is important. There are many books written to help parents teach children about sexual orientation and family diversity.

Keep in mind that children may be teased or criticized by others about your sexual orientation, and may even get critical comments from your divorced spouse or other family members. It is important to be as open as possible with your children. Let them know that even though your family is different in some ways from other families, there are many ways in which your family is just like any other family, and you love them just the same.

Q: How will my child(ren) be affected?

A: Studies have shown that children with gay and/or lesbian parents are ultimately just as happy with themselves and their own gender as are their friends with heterosexual parents. Children whose parents are homosexual show no difference in their choice of friends, activities, or interests compared to children whose parents are heterosexual. As adults, their career choices and lifestyles are similar to those of children raised by heterosexual parents.

Research comparing children raised by homosexual parents to children raised by heterosexual parents has found no developmental differences in intelligence, psychological adjustment, social adjustment, or peer popularity between them. Children raised by homosexual parents can and do have fulfilling relationships with their friends as well as romantic relationships later on.

Q: What questions and concerns should I expect?

A: Your children will probably have different concerns and questions depending on their age, personality, and your family's decisions. For example, all children whose parents have separated or divorced need to know that the separation was not their fault, and that both parents will continue to love and care for them. Children and teens may be interested in the implications for them of whether their same-sex parents are married or united in a civil union.

Children are interested in and affected by their parents' thoughts, feelings, and decisions. It's important that you answer your children's questions as honestly as you can, being sensitive to their developmental needs at the different stages in their lives.

- **Preschool-aged children** often are very curious about their family background, so they may ask many questions about a mother or a father whom they don't know or who isn't always around. It's best to answer their questions simply and honestly. Expect more questions as new ideas occur to your child.
- **School-aged children** will become more aware that their family is different and may want to know about their family background. They may think of new questions as they meet other children from different family backgrounds.
- **Young and older teens** are aware that they are different. Some teens who didn't care before may become self-conscious and even embarrassed about their parents. Some teens may become concerned about their own sexual orientation but may be reluctant to talk with others for fear of being teased or criticized. This may be a good time to talk more about your sexual orientation and life choices.

Q: What can I do to support my children?

A: The following are ways all parents can support their children:

- **Show unconditional love.** Reassure your children that no matter what, you will always love them.
- **Have fun together.** Find activities that you all enjoy, and be sure to save time for your children.
- **Talk with your children.** Be open and honest with your children. This is the most important thing. Let them know that even though your family might be different from other families in some ways, there are many ways your family is similar to others. Remind them that all families have problems and disagreements. One way to strengthen your family bond

is to find positive ways to talk to each other and to work together to deal with problems.

- **Teach your children.** Use books, Web sites, and other materials to help your children learn that there are other families like your family. Encourage your children to tell you if they are teased or left out because of your homosexuality. Use such experiences to teach your children about understanding and valuing differences among people, and about how to cope with people who may not approve.
- **Teach the schools.** Work with your children's schools to make sure that family diversity is talked about and valued. Suggest books that should be available in the library that describe families like yours.
- **Find other families like yours.** Your children may benefit from meeting other children who have gay or lesbian parents. You might find a local group of families, or your children might be interested in joining an e-mail list or finding a pen pal.

Resources

You may wish to contact the following organizations for more information:

Children of Lesbians and Gays Everywhere (COLAGE)
415/861-KIDS (415/861-5437)
www.colage.org

Family Pride Coalition (formerly Gay and Lesbian Parents Coalition)
202/331-5015
www.familypride.org

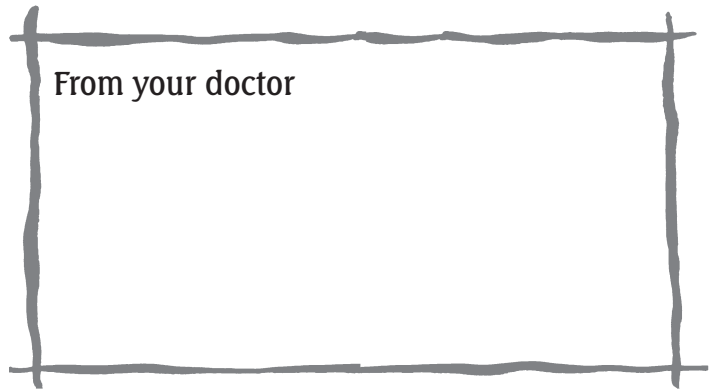
Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN)
212/727-0135
www.glsen.org

Parents, Families & Friends of Lesbians & Gays (PFLAG)
202/467-8180
www.pflag.org

Rainbow Families
612/827-7731
www.rainbowfamilies.org

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From your doctor

