



Toolkit for Educators and Service Providers

Working with LGBTTTQ parents and their children.

Creating LGBTTTQ-friendly learning spaces for children 0-12

Updated 2010

Acknowledgements

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Thank you to community organizations and parents who work together to ensure that gay, lesbian, bisexual, trans, two spirit, queer and questioning (LGBTQQ) parents and their children, receive the support and services they need in our communities and schools.

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Terms we use

LGBTQ: The term “LGBTQ” refers to the gay, lesbian, bisexual, trans, two spirit, queer and questioning community. For more discussion on the definition of each term, please see Chapter 1. We have chosen to use lower case letters throughout the text, and use standard convention of capitalization at the beginning of sentences or in titles. We wish to represent the diverse community in this way and help change these terms from ones of “otherness” to inclusive, descriptive, everyday terms.

Educators: We refer to educators in the classic sense of teacher in school settings, and also include anyone who has a role in educating and supporting families, whether through the preschool settings described above, or in community-based organizations. In this toolkit we will include service providers under the name educators.

Parent: The term “parent” is defined in a broad sense, and includes anyone who fulfills the role of parent, guardian or caregiver in a child’s life. For more discussion on the different forms that families can take, please see Chapter 3.

Preschool: Preschool may include play groups, child care, nursery schools, after-school programs, drop-ins, resource centres, well-baby clinics, pre- and post-natal care and education programs, parent education programs, and the myriad of other parent-child programs that exist in the community.

Ally: An ally is an individual or group that cooperates with or helps another. It can refer to someone who does not share the same identity and decides to unite and form a connection with a person or group that is discriminated against in order to bring about social change for all.

What this Toolkit is About

The face of the family has changed and is evolving in today's world. The traditional definition of a family, consisting of a mother and a father married to each other with children, living together in one house, has been replaced by an array of family forms. As more and more people come together in relationships that provide nurture and mutual support, they are discovering and defining a sense of "family" that is based simply on their deep love and caring for one another and not necessarily on a biological relationship.

This new sense of family is the foundation of families with parents who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, trans, two spirit or queer (LGBTQT). It also brings with it a number of challenges for LGBTQT parents, their children, their schools and their communities.

The goal of this Toolkit for Educators and Service Providers and its companion, Toolkit for LGBTQT Parents/Guardians, is to provide information and resources to help both parents and educators create safe, nurturing and inclusive learning environments for all children. An important part of this process is to share knowledge about LGBTQT parents and their children, and their unique issues.

- *Chapter 1* – An introduction to LGBTQT terms, definitions and human rights.
- *Chapter 2* - A discussion of homophobia and heterosexism, including stereotypes and myths, and a discussion on finding common ground across difference in a multicultural environment.
- *Chapter 3* – A look at the nature of LGBTQT families, including research, issues, stereotypes and myths.
- *Chapter 4* – An overview of the development of children, their understanding of LGBTQT issues, and their rights.
- *Chapter 5* – A practical discussion on how to create safe spaces for children to learn and grow in. This chapter also includes a discussion about preventing and dealing with bullying.
- *Chapter 6* – An overview of negotiating parent-educator relationships including how to get ready to meet parents and how to work with them as allies. This chapter explores how to create inclusive learning environments.
- *The Around the Rainbow Resource Kit* accompanies this toolkit and includes extra tools, handouts, resources including annotated booklists and websites.

The companion Toolkit for LGBTTTQ Parents/Guardians includes many of the same sections, with additional information on how to work within the preschool and educational environments.

It is hoped that these toolkits will encourage and enable dialogue between parents and educators. Our goal is to help develop both the skills and the confidence needed to design strategies that respond to the needs and desires of LGBTTTQ families and children in the school and preschool settings.

Parents and educators both want what is best for children. Schools, preschool centres, teachers and early childhood educators all seek to balance the needs of all children and their families. This can present both opportunities and challenges, particularly as we consider the diversity in our communities. When we embrace this diversity and create inclusive environments for children, we educate them on the essential values of acceptance, participation and respect for all, which they will need as they move into the world.

Discrimination and bias hurt all children by escalating risk and harm in our schools, families, and communities. We need to create communities of openness and trust rather than hostility and suspicion, of collaborative efforts rather than antagonism, and of growth through knowledge rather than ignorance through closed-mindedness.

Now is the time to commit to creating and celebrating inclusive communities. Now is the time to consider the issues for children in LGBTTTQ families. The lessons we learn from working with, and being a part of, LGBTTTQ families will help us better understand and support all families.

How to Use this Toolkit

It is understood that many educators are already working to provide inclusive spaces that welcome the diversity of children and their families. It is also understood that there are many LGBTTTQ educators who experience these issues first-hand. Within this toolkit, the first chapters introduce LGBTTTQ issues that are important for all educators to understand, as a basis for working with LGBTTTQ parents and their children. The latter chapters help educators to negotiate new relationships with LGBTTTQ parents and to work with children in an inclusive way. The companion Toolkit for LGBTTTQ Parents and Guardians includes most of the same sections, written in a voice specifically for parents.

The Resource Kit

The Resource Kit was updated in 20010. Within it, there are many great resources to draw upon for add additional information:

- * Specific reference material, websites and handouts related to children's rights, bullying, and policies/procedures of the preschool and school systems. Please feel free to photocopy any handouts in your work with children and their parents.
- * A *directory* of local, provincial and national resources and *web links* to provide additional information.
- * An annotated *bibliography* of books for parents, children, teachers and community workers. A list of *LGBTTTQ-friendly children's books* is also included. Ask your school to buy copies for the library and use them in your curriculum. These may prove useful in building a more inclusive environment.



For more resources, please see the Around the Rainbow website at:
www.aroundtherainbow.org

Training

Are you an educator –or a LGBTTQ parent from the Ottawa area?

Around the Rainbow project is available to provide workshops:

- a) Trained facilitators can be invited to give workshops on LGBTTQ issues for educators and staff at your school or preschool.
- b) Workshops are available to LGBTTQ parents on how to advocate for what their family need from preschool and schools.

If you are interested in any of these trainings, or if you know of LGBTTQ parents who may be interested in the project, please contact us.

What can I do if I am not from the Ottawa area?

Contact the Around the Rainbow project and we can discuss your resource and training needs.
info@aroundtherainbow.org

An invitation to help Build Community Resources!

We are interested in what you learn and experience in working on these issues. If you find resources not listed here, or have ideas, comments or stories to share, please contact the project and we will do our best to share with others. Contact the Around the Rainbow Project at:
info@aroundtherainbow.org or call 613-725-3601.



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An Introduction to LGBTTTQ

In this chapter, we present an introduction to key LGBTTTQ terms, provide preliminary definitions and make the connection between LGBTTTQ issues and human rights.

What Does LGBTTTQ Mean?

LGBTTTQ is the acronym for gay, lesbian, bisexual, trans, two spirit, queer and questioning. This collective term represents people of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities.

Who do you love?

Who do you care for?

Who are you attracted to?

How do you see and define yourself?

These are some of the questions that form the basis of LGBTTTQ identities. The definitions we use to describe LGBTTTQ are ever-changing and can never reflect the complex identities of all members of the LGBTTTQ and other communities. The following definitions offer a starting point for what each term can mean:

Gay

- A person who is emotionally/romantically and/or sexually attracted to persons of the same sex.
- The term usually refers to men, but it may also include women.
- Although it can be used interchangeably with the word homosexual, gay is the preferred term by the LGBTTTQ community when referring to gay men.

Lesbian

- A female who is emotionally/romantically and/or sexually attracted to other women.
- Although the words gay and homosexual are sometimes used when referring to women, lesbian is usually the term preferred by the LGBTTTQ community when referring to women.

Bisexual

- An individual who is emotionally/romantically and/or sexually attracted to both men and women.



Trans

- A person whose gender identity, their internal knowledge of being either male or female, does not match their physical/anatomical sex.
- Some describe it as being born into the wrong body.
- Trans is the preferred term for a range of previously used terms, including transgender, transsexual, etc. Trans can refer to a person who has undertaken, or is undertaking, the process of changing their physical sex from female to male, or from male to female. Some may view their gender as fluid and identify as trans. It can also refer to people who express their gender outside of traditional norms commonly assigned to their sex.

Two Spirit

- A re-claimed concept from several North American Aboriginal cultures that refers to Aboriginal persons who are born one sex and fulfill roles across sex and gender lines, as well as additional roles reserved for Two Spirit people. Some say they maintain balance by housing both the male and female spirit.
- Two Spirit people were considered to be a gift to the tribe, able to cross a range of genders and hold the balance, and thus were respected and honoured as visionaries, peacemakers, healers and shamans.
- Aboriginal Peoples consider the term more relevant to their culture than gay, lesbian, bisexual or trans. Two Spirit people are striving to reclaim their traditional positions within their communities and to take their rightful place. Not all Aboriginal communities feel comfortable with this modern term and/or concept.

Queer

- A re-claimed term used by many LGBTTTQ people to refer to themselves.
- Queer is often used to refer to fluidity in sexual orientation and gender identity and can be used to challenge the notion that gender and sexual orientation are necessarily constant.
- This term is still used by some in its historically negative way to refer to the LGBTTTQ community.

Questioning

- A person who is unsure about their sexual orientation and/or gender identity and is in the process of exploring the issue is referred to as questioning. This is different than 'being out' which implies that the person self-identifies as LGBTTTQ, but is not ready to be open with specific people or with anyone.

introduction to GLBttQ

- These are dynamic, evolving terms. The addition of letters to the acronym over the years, representing emerging community identities, signifies an ongoing maturity within the community, an embracing of diversity and a respect for people's authentic definition of self and the journey that brought them to this place.



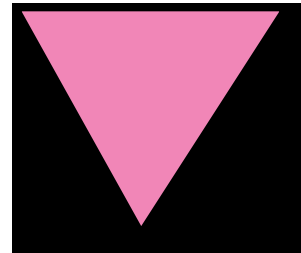
Since these definitions are fluid, it is important to determine how each individual chooses to self-identity and to respect this choice.

Important Symbols in the LGBTTTQ Community

Two symbols of historical and social significance to the LGBTTTQ community are the Pink Triangle and the Rainbow Flag.

Pink Triangle

An inverted pink triangle; a symbol of solidarity and human rights adopted by the LGBTTTQ community in remembrance of gay, lesbian, bisexual and trans people who were persecuted and killed by Nazis in Europe. The Nazis compelled “undesirable” women, including lesbians, to wear the inverted black triangle. Lesbians have reclaimed the black triangle, as the LGBTTTQ community has reclaimed the pink triangle.



Rainbow Flag

A symbol of the LGBTTTQ movement, also known as the ‘freedom flag’, was designed by Gilbert Baker in 1978. When flown, the flag represents LGBTTTQ Pride and diversity around the world. The International Congress of Flag Makers recognizes the familiar red-orange-yellow-green-blue-purple-banded flag. The colours of the rainbow are displayed as horizontal stripes, with red at the top and purple at the bottom. The flag should only be raised or displayed when there is an assurance that an individual, group or organization has worked on sensitivity and awareness of LGBTTTQ people and issues, including staff training, to ensure an environment that is indeed safe and inclusive.



Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

Understanding LGBTTQ issues requires an understanding of the relationship between the concepts of sex and gender, and sexual orientation and gender identities.

Sex and Gender are two distinct concepts:

Sex refers to a biological classification that commonly assumes two sexes, male and female, based on primary and secondary sex characteristics. We suggest that, *biologically*, sex is a continuum with most individuals concentrated near the ends as either male or female, and some individuals found along the continuum. In this case, people are sometimes referred to as intersexed, indicating that their sexual organs do not fit neatly into male or female categories. At least one in 2,000 children is born with some degree of ambiguity regarding their primary and/or secondary sex characteristics.¹ In these situations, medical personnel cannot easily label the child 'boy' or 'girl.'

Gender refers to *socially determined* sets of behaviours (i.e., "masculine" or "feminine") assigned to people, often based on their biological sex (i.e., male or female).² Throughout much of history, it has been assumed that gender is biologically established by a person's sex: men have been expected to demonstrate a masculine gender role and women a feminine gender role. Today, gender is understood in terms of social, culture and historical influences rather than the biology of sex. It is no longer viewed as a fixed identity that is exclusively either male or female, but rather an identity that rests on a continuum between the two polarities.

Many Aboriginal communities in North America understood and accepted this gender continuum and respected two spirit individuals as a gift to the community. (See "two spirit" definition in above section).

Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity are also two distinct concepts:

Sexual Orientation refers to the structure or pattern of romantic, sexual, and/or emotional attractions felt by an individual toward members of the same sex, the opposite sex or both sexes.³ Sexual orientation includes heterosexuality, homosexuality, bisexuality, queer love, etc.

Gender Identity refers to an individual's innermost sense of self as "male/masculine" or "female/feminine",⁴ somewhere in between, or somewhere outside of these gender boundaries. Sometimes this innermost sense does not correspond with anatomy. Although this term is often associated with trans people, it also refers to queer, two spirit, etc. Gender identity is a human rights category most often associated with gender expression.

Gender Expression refers to the manner in which people externally communicate their gender identity to others through behaviour, clothing, hairstyle, voice, and also includes emphasizing, de-emphasizing or changing their bodies' characteristics. Gender expression is not necessarily an indication of sexual orientation.⁵

Are sexual orientation and gender identity stable or fluid?

Some people believe that gender is stable. They believe that being male or female does not change during human development and that you are born into your gender identity. Other people change their gender identity and define themselves as having a more fluid gender understanding.



*"I define myself as "gender-queer", as someone in the middle of genders. Gender roles create barriers; we all have little boxes about who fits in where. If we move outside these boxes, it challenges our notions of who people are and where they fit in."*⁶

Some people believe that sexual orientation remains unchanged from birth and that the only choice involved is the choice to be honest about who you are. For others, sexual orientation is more fluid throughout their lives.

What is important to remember is that people's beliefs about sexual orientation and gender identity are a reflection of the diversity of lived experience. The bottom line is that..."we need to have the right and the ability to self-identify in ways that make sense to us."⁷

LGBTTQ and Human Rights

Over the past generation, Canadians have witnessed significant changes in the legal rights of LGBTTQ persons. Persistent work by LGBTTQ people, their families and allies, both separately and within other civil rights movements, has led to an increased recognition of the real need to protect LGBTTQ people from discrimination.

- In a unanimous decision in 1995, the Supreme Court of Canada held that the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms guarantees equality to gays and lesbians.
- In 1996, the federal Canadian Human Rights Act (CHRA) was amended to explicitly prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation. Lesbian, gay, and bisexual people now enjoy protection against discrimination in human rights legislation in all of Canada's provinces and territories.

More work is required to broaden definitions of rights to include trans, queer and other minority people.

- Northwest Territories is the only jurisdiction that explicitly protects people based on gender identity. Trans people are not yet formally included in any other provincial human rights acts, nor in Section 15 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the Criminal Code of Canada.⁸ Despite a recommendation by the CHRA Review Panel in June 2000, no action has been taken to include protection for trans people in the CHRA.

- The Ontario Human Rights Code Part 1 - Freedom from Discrimination, states that every person has a right to equal treatment without discrimination because of sexual orientation. It does not state that one has a right to equal treatment without discrimination because of gender identity, however. The Ontario Human Rights Commission, along with most other human rights commissions, has taken the policy decision to accept complaints respecting gender identity on the grounds of sex and disability.⁹

LGBTQQ rights are still not fully entrenched in the hearts and minds of Canadians. This becomes evident in the continued discussion around same-sex marriage within parliament, the ongoing clashes within our public institutions to incorporate inclusive structures, and the homophobic/transphobic comments that are made daily in our communities. Yet, like all civil rights movements, each new generation of children brings an openness to embrace diversity in ways that were more difficult for the generations before them.

Why are human rights important? Human rights can be seen as the consensus of ethical standards that a society requires of each of us in our behaviour towards one another. These ethical demands simply reflect the values of a society. Human rights are not limited to legal structures or constitutional language. Society's values are at the root of human rights and speak of respect and care towards our fellow human beings.

Finding Common Ground

This chapter begins with a discussion of homophobia/transphobia and heterosexism. It includes common myths and stereotypes and the impact of homophobia/transphobia on LGBTTTQ people, their children and the broader community. It ends with a brief look at finding common ground across difference within a multicultural, multi-faith environment.

Homophobia, Transphobia, Biphobia

A phobia is defined as “an abnormal or morbid fear or aversion.”¹⁰ It is usually described as an irrational fear that leads to avoidance of the feared object or situation. Phobias that are based on sexual orientation and gender identity do not completely fit the definition of a phobia however, for two reasons.

- First, the fear and hatred of LGBTTTQ individuals is socially conditioned—a learned and deliberate condition—and not, therefore, irrational.
- Second, instead of leading to avoidance, homophobia and transphobia more often lead to deliberate targeting through prejudicial acts, discrimination, bullying and violence.

Indeed, any phobia aimed at other groups of human beings, including xenophobia (fear of foreigners, fear of difference), may more correctly be termed “biases” and any targeting behaviour as “hate acts”.¹¹

Keeping the above in mind, we still use the words homophobia and transphobia to describe the overarching discrimination that LGBTTTQ individuals face.

Homophobia is defined as the fear, hatred, prejudice, discrimination and hostility directed at sexual minorities. Homophobia can include overt acts of bullying or violence.

Transphobia is defined as the fear, hatred, prejudice, discrimination and hostility directed at gender minorities – those who are perceived to lack conformity with rigidly-defined gender roles. Transphobia can often include bullying or acts of violence.

A main component of homophobia and transphobia is xenophobia, fear of difference.¹²

In addition, phobias based on sexual orientation and gender identity are not solely the domain of the heterosexual world; LGBTTTQ people can turn their fears and aversions inward, as internalized homophobia, or a sense of self-loathing.

Internalized Homophobia is the negative feelings that some LGBTTTQ people experience toward themselves in response to their sexual orientation.

Internalized Transphobia is the negative feelings that some trans, two spirit, and queer people experience toward themselves from the pressure to conform to the gender role or gender expression into which they were born, despite an internal knowledge of another or more fluid gender.

The feelings that come up because of internalized homophobia/transphobia can lead to physical and emotional self-harm, and acts of discrimination and violence against other members of the LGBTTTQ community.

Some phobias may be directed at specific groups in the LGBTTTQ community. Biphobia, a key example, is the hatred for, fear of or discomfort with people who identify as bisexual.

Biphobia includes discrimination from outside the LGBTTTQ community against bisexuals, as well as strong prejudice from within the community. For the remainder of this toolkit, we will include biphobia under the term homophobia.

Transphobia is plainly evident in both the mainstream and the LGBTTTQ communities. It is directed toward people with diverse gender expressions and identities.

Heterosexism

Heterosexism is the assumption that everyone is heterosexual and that a heterosexual orientation is preferred or superior. It is the assumption that heterosexuality is the norm from which LGBTTTQ people 'deviate'.¹³ Heterosexism implies that heterosexual families and relationships are natural, normal and better than relationships within the LGBTTTQ community.

Heterosexism is different than homophobia. It is a much broader term that looks at structured social practices:

- "Heterosexism is more subtle than homophobia and permeates culture and its social institutions."¹⁴
- "Heterosexism, like racism and classism, is more insidious – not as an expression of individual hatred, but as a pervasive part of societal laws, customs and institutions."¹⁵

In a heterosexist society, power and privilege is conferred upon those who conform to the widely accepted ideas of gender and sexuality, and is limited to those who do not appear to conform. Heterosexism is seen in laws, policies and practices:

- Prior to the passing of Bill C-38 in 2005, which extended equal access to civil marriage to same-sex couples in Canada, Canada's laws limiting marriage to heterosexual couples were collectively an example of institutional heterosexism.
- School registration and other intake forms that ask for the names of "father" and "mother", on the assumption that heterosexual marriage is the norm, are heterosexist.
- Many workers within our public institutions, including social and health services, courts, police stations, and many religious faiths and denominations tend to view the world in a heterosexist way within their daily practices, publications and directives to community members.
- Parents are often spoken to in a way that assumes that the other parent is of the opposite sex.

The entrenched heterosexism that runs daily through society takes a toll on all of us, by limiting our ideas of human diversity and by allowing people and systems to get away with bigotry that hurts everyone.

Stereotypes and Myths¹⁶

A *Stereotype* is a widely held view that is a fixed and over-simplified image of a particular person or group; a limited or distorted view, which leads to pigeon-holing or false generalizations.

Phobias and discrimination related to sexual orientation and gender identity are often based on stereotypes and myths. There are many myths that exist about LGBTTTQ persons, parents and families. Many of these have developed as a result of misunderstanding and misconception. Others have long been considered fact in society where there has been a reluctance to discuss the issues in a logical and factual way. Additionally, there has been a lack of information because of an absence of research. A large part of a society's heterosexism is built on and reinforced by these stereotypes and myths. In spite of increased discussion, knowledge, research and lived experience, many stereotypes and myths still exist in Canadian society. Some common myths that persist include:

Myth: It is unnatural to be LGBTTTQ.

Fact: *It is as natural to feel attraction and to have relations with people of the same gender as it is to be attracted to people of another gender. It is equally natural to question one's gender identity, and to choose how this will be expressed. It is the quality of the relationships, to self and to others that is significant, not the gender of one's partner nor one's own gender identity or expression.*

Myth: Only LGBTTTQ people are attracted to people of their own sex.

Fact: Most adults have deep feelings, attractions and/or fantasies about both sexes. Over time, studies have consistently confirmed that all people, whether LGBTTTQ or heterosexual, have a variety of sexual experiences with people of the same gender or of another gender. Alfred Kinsey's studies described sexual feelings and behaviour on a continuum to indicate the fluidity of an individual's sexual orientation. He showed that most people move along the continuum at different times of their lives and that only a small part of the population feels they are at either end of the spectrum 100% of the time. Also, some trans and two spirit people consider themselves homosexual or bisexual and others consider themselves heterosexual.

Myth: We know what causes homosexuality and bisexuality.

Fact: It is not known what causes bisexuality, heterosexuality or homosexuality. Some believe they are predetermined genetically, and research seems to indicate that sexual orientation is determined either before birth or very early in life. Others maintain that all humans are predisposed to all variations of sexual and affectionate behaviours, and that they learn a preference or orientation.

Myth: People choose to be homosexual.

Fact: Most people who are gay, lesbian, bisexual feel that they did not choose their sexual orientation. Rather, they were aware of having same-sex feelings at an early age or these feelings evolved and solidified in their adolescent or adult years. The choice seems to be whether to live full and well-balanced lives with a same-sex partner or to suppress their feelings.

Myth: There is a distinct LGBTTTQ lifestyle.

Fact: There is as much variety in LGBTTTQ lifestyles as there is in heterosexual lifestyles. LGBTTTQ people can be single, dating, involved in long-term relationships or married. They can be promiscuous, committed or celibate. They can have children. They can live alone, with their lovers, with their parents and siblings or with friends. They live in cities and suburbs and in the country. They can be rich, middle-class, or poor. They can have a variety of occupations. Within all communities, individuals create their own lifestyles.

Myth: LGBTTTQ people are promiscuous or somehow more sexual than straight people.

Fact: This stereotype is propagated by the fact that, regardless of sexuality, individuals who are promiscuous are the most visible. As more and more LGBTTTQ people "come out", the promiscuous stereotype diminishes. Events such as Pride Day and the Stonewall Festival help LGBTTTQ people identify as a diverse community in the same way that non-LGBTTTQ persons do. Moreover, LGBTTTQ people are just as capable as heterosexuals of maintaining

stable, committed relationships.

Myth: The majority of pedophiles are gay.

Fact: *Ninety percent of all pedophiles self-identify as heterosexuals. A child is 100 times more likely to be sexually molested by a heterosexual relative than by a homosexual or trans relative. LGBTTTQ people are just as concerned as heterosexuals that children are protected from pedophiles. Sexual abuse of children occurs primarily within the family. Over 95% of abuse that is reported has been perpetrated by a male relative. Most sexual abuse of children outside the family is committed by pedophiles. Pedophiles do not distinguish between male or female victims; however girls are victimized twice as often as boys are. The perpetrators are motivated by power and control, not by sexual desire. The pedophile myth is the basis of the most damaging charges leveled against LGBTTTQ teachers, to keep them in the closet and out of the classroom.*

Myth: I don't know anyone who is LGBTTTQ.

Fact: *LGBTTTQ people are everywhere. We all know people who are LGBTTTQ. This myth perpetuates the idea that LGBTTTQ issues need not concern the heterosexual community because LGBTTTQ people are "others" or "somewhere else." In fact, oppression in any form against any minority group is everyone's business because it exacts high social costs.*

Myth: LGBTTTQ teenagers and children do not exist.

Fact: *LGBTTTQ children may not identify themselves, but many LGBTTTQ adults report having had a sense of difference from other children from as early as 5-12 years old. Both heterosexual and LGBTTTQ teens are acutely aware of their sexuality and gender during their secondary school years, but LGBTTTQ teens are more likely to feel fear and isolation.*

Myth: In a same-sex relationship, one partner usually plays the masculine role and the other one plays the feminine role.

Fact: *Within the heterosexual community, there are all types of relationships and this is true in same-sex relationships. Most same-sex couples work to develop relationships based on the principles of equity and mutuality, where they are loved and appreciated for themselves. The division of labour and the interpersonal couple dynamics do not necessarily fall into rigid stereotypes of gender roles. When we impose the template of heterosexual relationships on other kinds of relationships, we limit our understanding of how these relationships function. This is a good example of heterosexism at work. It can also help us to understand how we sometimes confuse gender, gender roles and sexual orientation – they are all different concepts.*

When we limit our understanding of gender, it constricts everyone's expression of their true nature. This restriction translates into stereotypes and myths about what it is to be a man or women. It restricts the

roles we play in our homes, at work and in the world. Parents are very often concerned about whether their child is 'normal' based on these social scripts. When a child expresses interests and behaviour different then the expectations for their biological gender, then parents may perceive this as an indication or a cause for a same-sex, sexual orientation. Same-sex orientation may also be seen as negative or wrong. (See homophobia) Consequently, children, and indeed all of us, are prevented from the natural exploration and expression of interests, curiosity, attractions and creativity. We create barriers to becoming our authentic selves, whether in our sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression. It must be remembered that most heterosexual adults have some interests and behaviours that reflect those traditionally assigned to the opposite sex, yet they are firmly rooted in their heterosexuality. Likewise, many LGBTTTQ adults live, work and play, firmly rooted in what would be considered traditional gender roles. We need to keep some things in mind:

- 1) Strict gender roles are stereotypical ideas that adults impose on each other, and on children. They do not reflect the reality of people's lived experience.
- 2) Gender roles and sexual orientation have nothing to do with one another. One does not lead to the other. They are two separate aspects that make up a whole myriad of factors creating our psychology as human beings.
- 3) When we expand our ideas about gender in all its variations, complexities and expressions, and when we understand the natural continuum of sexual orientations, then we can understand people as healthy when they are authentic and caring human beings. We begin to dismantle the oppressive stereotypes and myths.



*"We as a community have become more visible through the media, yet there is an aura of negativity. They speak to my experience without knowing me."*¹⁷

The Impact of Homophobia/Transphobia and Heterosexism

Homophobia/transphobia is directed at individual people for perceived 'homosexual' behaviour, for demonstrations of affection, for gender minority expressions, etc. Discrimination can also be directed generally to broad communities of LGBTTTQ people, and specifically to LGBTTTQ parents and their children.

LGBTTTQ-directed phobia and heterosexism can have a detrimental impact on the emotional, social, mental and physical well-being of LGBTTTQ individuals.

Such impact can be demonstrated in the following:

- Many LGBTTTQ people experience overt forms of violence including physical assault causing injury or death and verbal and emotional abuse specific to homophobia/transphobia. LGBTTTQ persons are often specifically targeted.

- It can be mentally and spiritually exhausting for people who are marginalized to continually explain and 'out' themselves, to continually educate people about their concerns and issues, and to continually challenge discrimination.
- Economic abuse may include withdrawal of a family's financial support or termination from a job, once someone comes out as LGBTTTQ.
- Emotional/verbal abuse may include ridicule of behaviour or appearance; threats to limit or prohibit access to children or services; and threats to reveal gender identity to employers, financial-aid workers, health-care workers, immigration personnel, or anyone else with possible influence or control over someone's well-being.¹⁸
- Mental health issues arise when homophobia/transphobia prevent LGBTTTQ people from developing an honest self-identity; when an internal sense of self-loathing or guilt is created (see internalized homophobia above); and when there is pressure to "be normal", to be silent and to be secret, creating unnecessary stress and ill health for the individual and their families.¹⁹

The Health Impacts of Homophobia on LGBTTTQ Persons

A Canadian review of literature on the human costs of homophobia,²⁰ specifically about lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) people, found that:

- LGB people suffer higher rates of depression than the general Canadian population.
- LGBTTTQ people are victims of physical violence at a much higher rate than heterosexuals.
- Homophobia results in substandard health care for LGBTTTQ people, and they do not properly access and use the health care system because of homophobia. This problem intensifies the problems faced by lgb people and undoubtedly adds substantially to the number of homophobia-related deaths in Canada.

The same study looked at premature deaths among lgb people in Canada. "Using the assumption that, without the existence of homophobia, gay, lesbian and bisexual population and the heterosexual population would have equivalent rates of health and social issues, estimates of the annual number of deaths caused by homophobia were developed."²¹ The estimated number of premature deaths caused by homophobia in Canada are:

- By suicide – 818 to 968 deaths per year
- By smoking – 1,232 to 2,599 deaths per year
- By alcohol abuse – 236 to 1,843 deaths per year
- By illicit drug use – 64 to 74 deaths per year

Other studies²² that have focused on gay, lesbian and bisexual youth have found that:

- 80% of lesbian and gay youth report severe feelings of isolation.
- 53% of students report hearing homophobic comments made by school staff.
- Gay, lesbian and bisexual youth are 4 times more likely than their heterosexual peers to commit suicide.

In general, there are large gaps in the research on LGBTTTQ people's health, and these gaps are greater for trans, two spirit and queer people, where health risks are anecdotally observed as greater, yet are often completely absent in research consideration.

A context for the statistics on homophobia/transphobia in our health care system is provided in the following example.

A trans person who identifies as male, with an undiagnosed heart infection, was refused care in a hospital emergency room. "After the physician who examined me discovered that I am female-bodied, he ordered me out of the emergency room despite the fact that my temperature was above 104° F (40° C). He stated I had a fever because 'you are a very troubled person'."

Three weeks later the patient was hospitalized for the same condition. "I awoke in the night to find staff standing around my bed ridiculing my body and referring to me as a 'Martian'. The next day the staff refused to work unless "it" was removed from the floor. These and other experiences of hatred forced me to leave.

Had I died from this illness, the real pathogen would have been bigotry."²³

One of the key messages that can be found in research that looks at the impact of homophobia on lgb people in Canada, is that negative costs of homophobia are in no way inherent to sexual orientation, but are the result of "chronic stress and coping with social stigmatization and societal hatred."²⁴

The Impact of Homophobia/Transphobia on Everyone

Although LGBTTTQ people and their children bear the brunt of homophobia/transphobia, it hurts all of us by:²⁵

- Locking all people into rigid gender roles that inhibit creativity and self-expression.
- Teaching heterosexuals to treat others poorly, using actions that go against our basic humanity, and pressuring peers to do the same.
- Stigmatizing, silencing and sometimes targeting people who are perceived or defined by others as LGBTTTQ, but who are in reality heterosexual.

- Limiting the ability to form close, intimate relationships with members of one's own sex for fear of people thinking one is LGBTTQ and not wanting to be stigmatized.
- Limiting communication with a significant portion of the population and, more specifically, limiting family relationships.
- Eliminating any discussion of the lives of LGBTTQ people in the curriculum, keeping important information from all students.
- Preventing heterosexuals from accepting the benefits and gifts offered by LGBTTQ people: theoretical insights, social and spiritual visions, and contributions to the arts and culture, to religion, to family life, indeed, to all parts of society.
- Obstructing a unified and effective governmental and societal response to AIDS, anti-harassment policies, inclusive family legislation, safe public spaces, etc.
- Inhibiting appreciation of other types of diversity: failing to recognize each person's unique traits because they may not fit the "norm".

Homophobia and transphobia which stem from misunderstanding, discrimination and hate, harms individuals who hold and act on these views, impinging on their very understanding of what it means to be a 'good person'.

Homophobia and transphobia hurt everyone in our communities. It follows the old and true saying: When one person is oppressed, we are all oppressed.



*In the end, it is important to remember that the victims of homophobia are "real people ...someone's child, grandchild, parent, brother, sister, aunt, uncle or best friend."*²⁶

*There are many different kinds of people
and being who you are is what matters most.*

Working across difference: LGBTQT in a multicultural environment

What can celebrating diversity look like?

Individuals and families need connection and community to thrive and to live meaningful lives. Inclusive communities move away from discrimination, move beyond tolerance and arrive at places of acceptance and celebration of diversity. We can create neighbourhoods and public spaces that engage all citizens in a spirit of collectivity, accessibility and safety for everyone. Equality, equity, compassion, respect, care, authenticity/ honesty and dialogue would be the underlying values in everything we do. Intentional families can expand and integrate the needs of every generation from babies to seniors. We can begin to move away from rigid identities, to see people as unique individuals and to celebrate them for who they are.²⁷

What are our challenges now?

We face the challenge of accepting and celebrating diversity. Discussions about different perspectives on sexual orientation/gender identity within diverse cultural and religious communities can be extremely challenging to explore. People are passionate on all sides of the issue, and have strong beliefs steeped in their core values. People can feel threatened by other people's perspectives. At times, it may feel completely unsafe and unpredictable to openly communicate in public dialogue about our differences.

It is important to consider that LGBTQT people, like many others, often face the intersection of racism, sexism, classism, ableism, ageism, and other forms of oppression and discrimination that create additional barriers. We need to have a broader understanding of the ways in which racism, classism, homophobia/transphobia, ageism, ableism, and sexism intersect and overlap to create enormous challenges, not only for the people directly affected but for their families and society as a whole. These issues live together and need to continue to live together, even though it is uncomfortable at times. A greater understanding of these issues and their compounding effects will help us to provide the support that all families need. This understanding will help us to create a community that both celebrates and thrives in all of its diversity.

What are the tensions within the school and preschool systems?

Over the years, Canadian culture has become more and more ethno-culturally, spiritually, politically and socially diverse. Multiculturalism (and other terms like Diversity), a term that largely refers to the ethno-cultural diversity, has led to adjustments in all parts of society. Police forces, as one example, have become proactive in their hiring practices to encourage people from visible minorities and a variety of cultural backgrounds, to join their profession. The goal has been to ensure that their ranks reflect the face of the community that they serve.

Multiculturalism has also been embraced by schools. Children learn about a variety of cultural backgrounds, are encouraged to take pride in their own heritage and to respect that of others. Many are now able to see

their faces and cultures reflected and valued in the environment and to have their culture understood by others in the classroom. The goal has been to eliminate stereotypes and reduce and prevent prejudice, bias and xenophobia among young people.

LGBTQQ families often find themselves in the same position that many new Canadians faced several years ago, where the resources, curriculum and administrative processes in the school and preschool systems did not reflect their situation and experience. There are still many changes that need to be made to fully include and reflect ethno-cultural communities in classrooms and playrooms. At the same time, we rarely question the need and importance of this inclusion.

In the past, because LGBTQQ people tended to be invisible, their issues were neither recognized nor discussed. As the definition of family has evolved however, and as LGBTQQ parents become more open and visible, there is an increased requirement for the school and preschool settings to become open and responsive to the needs of LGBTQQ families in the same spirit as multiculturalism.

One important challenge is religious and/or cultural communities within the Canadian mosaic who do not approve of LGBTQQ people. Indeed, some religions condemn LGBTQQ in particular, do not believe in LGBTQQ rights and will often demand rigid notions about gender identity and roles. In addition, other people who do not necessarily identify with a particular religion or culture can and do hold homophobic/transphobic beliefs. LGBTQQ people often experience homophobia/transphobia within their own cultural or religious community. Some cultural and religious communities assume that no one is LGBTQQ within their community.

As a result, when LGBTQQ issues and the profile of LGBTQQ families are raised in education settings, parents from some religious and/or cultural communities may express concern that their values are being challenged. And educators, in turn, feel the tension between balancing the need to respect the values and beliefs of the parents and the need to ensure that their classrooms and curricula demonstrate the values of inclusiveness and diversity. Our mission statements, our statements of vision and values, in fact our Charter of Rights, ensure that we commit to these values and find a way to work through the tension.

What do we need to know to work across difference?

Celebrating diversity is at the core of every human rights struggle that has ever occurred. There are times in today's world when leaders apologize for hurtful words and actions that have been historically condoned, against communities of people who were at one time seen as 'less than', as having 'no value', as 'not being worthy'. We need to remember this when we work through differences. Our actions today become tomorrow's legacy and we will be held accountable. How will our children judge our legacy?

We need to remember that discrimination exists within all communities, including the LGBTQQ community. As one LGBTQQ parent said:



*"Before we start talking about diversity we need to look within our own community, the LGBTQQ community. There exists an US and THEM mentality. Even here we need to fit into the box."*²⁸



finding common Ground

As educators, we need to look as honestly at our own discrimination against other communities. We need to find our place together, expecting respect and inclusiveness by also offering respect and inclusiveness. We can step into the place of difference and find common ground. Educators and teachers could embrace multicultural competencies in order to work across difference. This includes three important aspects: 1) Awareness, 2) Skills, 3) Knowledge.

We are here reminded to never lose sight of *why* we must work across difference.

First they came for the Jews and I did not speak out because I was not a Jew.

Then they came for the Communists and I did not speak out because I was not a Communist.

Then they came for the trade unionists and I did not speak out because I was not a trade unionist. Then they came for me and there was no one left to speak out for me.

– Pastor Martin Niemöller

“If we do not stand for all rights then truly we stand for nothing.”

We can recognize the connections and relationships between different forms of discrimination and work together to put an end to oppression for everyone. It is tremendous work, and work that is often exhausting, frustrating and at times hurtful, however we need to continue to engage in open dialogue across differences. Human rights legislation and our shared values create the civic framework within which we are able to talk about our differences, seek to understand one another, and forge public policies and spaces that serve the common good.²⁹ It is complex... there are no easy answers. It will be uncomfortable and unclear. However, we need to step into these places and walk together in our differences to eventually find greater peace as we continue to live on common ground.



LGBTTQ Families

The Family—an Evolving Definition

Family Forms

Definitions of family have most often concentrated on the form that families take. Today's families come in an array of forms that differ from the “traditional” or “nuclear” family, consisting of a mother and a father married to each other with children, living together in one house.

Regardless of whether a family includes heterosexual or LGBTTQ parents:

- The family may consist of single adult, two adults or a group of adults.
- Some adults may have been married in religious or civil ceremonies, or living in a common-law relationship.
- Some adults living together or in close community may be connected as siblings or as friends.
- The family may consist of several families or family members who share care of the child(ren).

Regardless of whether a family includes heterosexual or LGBTTQ parents, children arrive into families in many different and equally valid ways:

- Children may be the biological offspring of a parent.
- Children may arrive by adoption, alternative insemination or fostering.
- The family may consist of children from previous marriages or relationships.



Adoption of Children

- *Adoption of children in Canada is governed by provincial and territorial Legislation.*
- *Same-sex couples can adopt children in all provinces and territories.*
- *Trans people may adopt, since gender is not a determining factor. They may face some discrimination, however, on the grounds of gender identity and expression, which is unprotected under current legislation.*

Preliminary research demonstrates the evolving definition of family.

According to Canada's 2001 Census:³⁰

- The proportion of "traditional" families (made up of a mother, father and children) was on the decline, while the number of common-law couples in Canada was on the rise.
- 34,200 couples identified themselves as living in a same-sex, common-law relationship. Given that gays and lesbians make up one-tenth of the population and that a social stigma still exists around homosexuality, same-sex couples were likely under-reported. No questions on the census survey asked about bisexual, Trans, two spirit or queer parents.

There is no comprehensive Canadian data specifically on LGBTTTQ parents. Using data from the 2000 Census in the U.S., which is limited in that it only looks at lesbian and gay parents, it is estimated that:³¹

- The number of lesbian or gay parents in the U.S. ranged from two to eight million.
- Of the 600,000 same-sex couples who were counted:
 - One-third (34%) of lesbian partner households had at least one child less than 18 years of age living with them. This percentage was similar to the percentage of heterosexual partner households with children, 46% and 43% respectively.
 - Just over one-fifth (22%) of gay male partner households had at least one child under 18 years of age living with them, about one-half the rate of heterosexual partner households with children (46%).



Same-Sex Marriage

On July 20, 2005, the Civil Marriage Act, or Bill C-38, received Royal Assent, extending equal access to civil marriage to same-sex couples while respecting religious freedom. Canada became the fourth country in the world to legalize same sex marriage. Bill C-38 effectively eliminated the patchwork of laws in provinces and territories across Canada with respect to civil marriage for same-sex couples, and reflects Canadian values of inclusion, diversity, mutual respect and fairness.

Traditional definitions of family based on rigid forms are entrenched in policies and laws. As a society, we are only beginning to address the historical and expanding reality of family within law and policy, so as not to leave many families, including LGBTTTQ families, without recognition or representation. The passage of Bill C-38, which gives equal marriage rights to same-sex partners, is a beginning that ensures all families enjoy family benefits and responsibilities. Without protection, families are left vulnerable in certain life situations such as separation, child custody, illness and death of a partner. These circumstances have a serious impact on LGBTTTQ parents and their children.

Family Function

It is clear that defining family in terms of form excludes large segments of our society, including both heterosexual and GLBTTQ families. For example, if we decide that a mother and a father with children is the only form that defines a family, we exclude many other family forms, for instance single-parent families, reconfigured families, extended families. When we try to put the boxes of family form around our actual families we will inevitably leave someone out. Defining family as form implies that certain people get to decide who is in and who is out, thus family form can become inclusionary. This relates to the concepts of heterosexism and homophobia as discussed in Chapter 2.

To engage in a meaningful and reflective discussion of family, we need to understand family in terms of its *function*. We need to ask questions such as: How is this family working to care for and support each other? How does it contribute to the community? If the family has children, how are the children nurtured and supported? Family is defined by each person in terms of who you love and care for, and who loves and cares for you. It is based on who you 'choose' as your family. In this way, all of our definitions of family are included.

The GLBTTQ community uses the term "family of choice" as an alternative equal to the traditional definition. The notion of choosing family based on those we love and those who love us, is life affirming and healthy as we strive to create loving and supportive families and communities.

What functions do families serve?

Our families play an important role in all of our lives: imparting societal norms, teaching family values, educating us about the world, and meeting basic physical, social, spiritual and emotional needs.

Here is what some GLBTTQ people, parents and allies have to say:³²

"Emotional connection appears to be far more important to the definition than biology and sexual relations. Such connections are seen as solid, yet dynamic – a foundation that permits fluidity, evolution and change."

"Family becomes synonymous with relationship, both good and bad."

"Family is a bond, an attachment of love and commitment."

"Family shares life goals, bonded by a history, a present and a future, all of which remains stable yet can be redefined."

"A healthy family is solid, fluid, and not static."

Ideally, all families, whether nurtured by heterosexual or GLBTTQ parents, are sources of consistent love, guidance and support. This nurturing environment provides the foundation from which children grow and learn to meet the world with confidence.

What do researchers have to say?

To date, there has been little research on Canadian LBGTQ families. Existing research has focused on health, child custody, parental fitness, the impact of same-sex marriage on society, and the implications of homophobia. There has been little or no focus on the experiences, strengths, and needs of children and parents in LBGTQ families. Existing research has also focused on gay and lesbian parent issues, however the issues for bisexual, trans, two spirit and queer parents and their children, is strikingly invisible.³³

The Canadian Psychological Association (CPA) has summarized the existing research on gay and lesbian family experience. In August 2003, the CPA found that:³⁴

- Contrary to “a popular misconception that gay and lesbian parents compromise the psychological and sexual development of their children, ...Psychological research into gay and lesbian parenting indicates that there is no basis in the scientific literature for this perception.”
- The stressors that may uniquely impact same-sex parents are due to perceptions and barriers created by our social systems, rather than any personal inadequacies as parents.
- There were no significant differences between children from gay and lesbian parents and children of heterosexual parents when considering social, emotional, and gender development and identity.

In addition, the Canadian Association of Social Workers declares that children do not need protection from same-sex parents; they need protection from discrimination, stigma, and prejudice.³⁵

The American Psychological Association (APA) has found that evidence to date suggests that home environments provided by gay and lesbian parents are as likely as those provided by heterosexual parents to support and enable children’s psycho-social growth.³⁶



While we bring research into our discussion above, we also feel it is important to recognize that there are those who attempt to hinder LBGTQ human rights by using research to back up their points. Recognizing who is conducting the research, what their interests and biases are, whose agenda will be supported, who may be harmed, and what is the methodology are a few important considerations before accepting the conclusions of any social science research.

Issues Faced by LGBTTTQ Families

Questioning from the Mainstream

LGBTTTQ parents with young children face all the challenging questions and situations that every new family faces. There are a number of additional barriers and challenges that must be confronted, however. Some of these issues include:

- The lack of legal recognition as a family and therefore greater vulnerability in family life situations such as separation, child custody, illness or death of a spouse.
- The challenges finding LGBTTTQ-friendly support and services for reproductive alternatives, prenatal and birthing needs, childrearing, playgroups, etc.
- The increased questioning and scrutiny of decision-making, parenting styles and practices based on homophobic and heterosexist views on what constitutes a family.
- The isolation from both the mainstream and the LGBTTTQ community.

Unfortunately, most of the issues facing LGBTTTQ families, parents and their children result from discrimination in the community because of widely held societal myths and stereotypes. Some myths that are commonly heard include:

Myth: LGBTTTQ people do not value family.

Fact: LGBTTTQ people value family. Within the LGBTTTQ community there is recognition and nurturing of diverse family structures, from mono-nuclear families to other families of choice. LGBTTTQ people recognize friends, lovers and those involved in long-term relationships as family. LGBTTTQ people who are fortunate enough to have been accepted by their family of origin may have strong family ties. Those who have been rejected by their family of origin often work to try to re-establish these relationships, and to guard their right to raise their own children or adopt their partner's children. Rejection often causes deep pain from which many LGBTTTQ people spend a good part of their life trying to understand and overcome.

Myth: LGBTTTQ people do not make good parents.

Fact: Research has shown that, except for the fact that the children of LGBTTTQ parents are often concerned about being stigmatized by their peers, they show no higher incidence of emotional disturbance than do children of heterosexual couples, nor are they confused about their own gender identity or sexual orientation. LGBTTTQ people come from all kinds of families, as do heterosexuals, and there is no correlation between the sexual orientation or gender identity of parents and that of their children. The chances of a child being LGBTTTQ are the same whether they are raised by LGBTTTQ parents or by heterosexual parents.

Myth: LGBTTQ people cannot or do not have children.

Fact: LGBTTQ people have children in many different ways, just like everyone else: through adoption, alternative insemination, sexual intercourse, co-parenting, step parenting, fostering, etc.

Myth: Trans, two spirit and queer parents must resolve all issues of gender identity before coming out to their children. Children cannot deal with gender transition or gender fluidity. They need to be a certain age before they are ready to learn about a trans parent or family member.

Fact: We know families that have successfully dealt with and continue to deal with the issues of gender transition and fluidity with children of every age. Each age has unique needs that must be met, and it is up to the parent to meet those needs. The information we give our children must be age appropriate, and parents must set limits and boundaries. Coming out to children can dispel feelings of secrecy and dishonesty. It can increase feelings of closeness. But the decision to come out or not is highly personal and must be respected.

Myth: LGBTTQ parents stigmatize their children.

Fact: Homophobia and transphobia stigmatize children. Being proud and honest about one's identity and orientation in a homophobic/transphobic society, while certainly not easy, makes children strong and more accepting of diversity. It is society's homophobia and transphobia that need to change; LGBTTQ people need not remain closeted about who they really are.

Myth: Any gender experimentation by children of LGBTTQ parents is a direct result of having LGBTTQ parents.

Fact: Experimentation with gender is natural and children should be allowed to do so. We know children of LGBTTQ parents who are questioning gender and others who express no such feelings. Many children have grown up to be trans, two spirit or queer in spite of their heterosexual parents' strong discouragement of any gender experimentation, and despite the presence of more rigid gender role-models. Children with LGBTTQ parents can grow up with the freedom to explore, to question roles and to choose their own identities and to get support for whatever they choose.

Lack of Community Resources

LGBTTQ families often find it difficult to find appropriate community resources. There is a major lack of resources and support for LGBTTQ families, supports such as family life education and support, assistance to build LGBTTQ safe spaces at work, inclusive learning and play areas, support groups for children in LGBTTQ families, accessible counselling services and mental health crisis services.

According to “How Well Are We Doing?” a 2001 survey of the gay, lesbian and trans (LGBTTQ) population in Ottawa:³⁷

- 71% of LGBTTQ people urgently need support with family relationships, child custody, and partner
- One-half of respondents indicated a need for LGBTTQ specific services.
- Other unmet needs reported in the survey included specific support for:
 - ⇒ – Pregnancy and adoption (50%)
 - ⇒ – Parenting and child rearing (43%)
 - ⇒ – Loneliness and isolation (57%)

School Issues

Systemic homophobia and transphobia within the school and preschool systems are some of the main obstacles facing LGBTTQ families.³⁸ For LGBTTQ people, there is no easy answer to the decision of whether to come out or not. For LGBTTQ parents, there is an additional challenge in wrestling with the difficult personal decision about whether, when and how to “come out” to the school or preschool in order to clarify their children’s family status. It can also require that they become advocates to ensure that, for the sake of their children; their definition of family is accepted by and reflected in the school or preschool.

For children of LGBTTQ families, issues and confusion arise when their play and learning environments present the traditional, heterosexual family structure as the norm. They may be teased and bullied by other children because they have a “different” kind of family.

Children also worry for their parents. Tara, age 13, expresses her worries about the reaction of others:

“I’m not sure if the kids at school know about my moms, and I haven’t directly talked about it with anyone. I don’t know what their reaction would be. I mean, I’ve heard people at school say things in general about gays and I don’t like it because they don’t understand. I think the hardest part about having a gay parent is worrying that something would happen—if they found out and didn’t take it the right way. But I’ve got Anne and my mom and my godmother to talk to if I need to.”³⁹

Families and community

Communities are made up of families and individuals interacting with one another on a daily basis. For health communities, we must have community supports that include:

- The well-being and emotional health of children and their parents/caregivers.
- Support and resources for the education of all parents and caregivers by providing appropriate and accessible programs. We understand that parental isolation, depression and stress places children and everyone in the family at risk.
- Play and learning spaces for children including outdoor space, play groups, drop-ins and accessible early learning and child care centres. Spaces need to be safe and inclusive for all children and families regardless of their resources, culture and family form.
- A strong interaction between schools/preschool and the community.

In Canada, we live in a multicultural community of communities. LGBTTQ families and other marginalized families should not have to deal with these issues in isolation. In particular, the needs of children must be understood and addressed. We must work together to build a more inclusive community, welcoming to all families.

Our Children

In this chapter, we give a brief overview of children's developmental milestones, and their developmental needs during each stage. As caring adults it is our responsibility to provide the necessary structure and support for a child to transition from one stage to the next in a healthy way. For parents and educators, child development is fundamental in creating programs and curriculum that will encourage children to learn and grow into thinking and caring human beings. As a community we are required to keep these milestones and needs in mind when we consider creating LGBTTTQ-friendly space. We end the chapter with a section on children's rights, in the words of children. Fundamentally, children are the very heart of the matter: the family, the community and indeed the world.

Child Development⁴⁰

Children's development may help us understand the world from the child's point of view. It will assist us to better inform our programs to include all children, based on their needs, their ability to comprehend at certain stages, and their unique perceptions and experience of their environment.

A child's development is shaped by two factors: nature (what a child is born with, including biological and genetic factors), and nurture (the environment into which a child is born). The nurture factors include interactions with adults, other children, and early childhood experiences within the family, school, and community. A child's well-being, their ability to connect with others and their ability to deal with the world around them, will be affected by a combination of these influences.

The years from 0 to 6 are a time of rapid physical, intellectual, emotional and social growth and development. Each child is unique in her and his strengths, talents, skills and challenges and each child will progress through their milestones at their own pace. Keeping this in mind, we now look at some common developmental patterns.

Infancy: age 0 to 2 years⁴¹

Physical development:

Humans go through their most rapid development during infancy. Babies gain in height, mobility, coordination and weight (doubling their birth weight in the first year). They can move large muscles in their arms and legs. Over this time children learn to support their head, roll over, sit up, crawl, then stand and walk. Small muscle coordination will move from basic grasping, to holding and dropping objects, to a more precise thumb/finger grasp.

Intellectual development:

Infants discover that they have an impact on the environment, for example, they realize their cries will bring an adult and nourishment. They begin to vocalize with cooing sounds and chuckles, and move towards making sounds and words like mama, dada, eventually naming things and actions. Pointing

to things and body parts becomes possible. Early curiosity about everything is apparent as the child explores a new world around them. At first, babies do not recognize that people and objects exist when out of sight, however object permanence does emerge, that indeed objects do exist even if they are not visible. If an object is dropped, we can now find babies looking for it.

Emotional development:

This is a time of emotional bonding between baby and caregiver, where they become emotionally attached to each other and learn to read each others' cues. Smiling and crying are some of the expressions and emotions possible for infants. Babies can comfort themselves with sucking and are primarily concerned with satisfying their own needs. Trust is established as the infant experiences that their basic needs are being met. Infants begin to distinguish between their physical self and the physical self of others. In mid-infancy they will hug others, and become distressed when separated from their caregiver.

Social development:

We can see the recognition of caregivers, dependency on caregivers to fulfill needs, and the initiation of social contact, for example social smiles when familiar faces appear. As the infant develops, they are able to play simple games, e.g., peak-a-boo, develop some independence in meeting some of their own needs, and can extend attachment to others.

Moral development:

Infants see themselves as the centre of the world and have no sense of right and wrong.

Toddler: age 2 to 3 years⁴²

Physical development:

Children at this stage are developing bladder and bowel control. Walking, running and climbing, kicking and throwing with skill and coordination, are all possible. They can complete simple puzzles, hold crayons and manipulate small toys with skill.

Intellectual development:

Toddlers are more able to focus attention and to perceive the environment with sharper discrimination. They remember with noticeable improvement and are easily motivated. We can now hear children speaking in short but full sentences, with words that are mostly comprehensible. They can also use pronouns correctly in identifying themselves and others, e.g., me, you.

Emotional development:

Basic feelings can now be expressed verbally, sympathy for others is apparent, and toddlers can refer to themselves in the first person (I or me). They are now able to consider themselves as separate beings from their caregivers. Caregivers play important role models for children at this age, in that children develop a sense of self by imitating the behaviour of the adults around them.

Social development:

Play is highly significant at this age. Initially children engage in parallel play with their peers, playing separately yet alongside other children with occasional interactions. Children are usually toilet-trained and can take care of basic hygiene. As they explore their social relationships, they will test their boundaries, e.g., frequent use of the word 'no'. They begin to take into account the feelings of others.

Moral development:

As children test their environment and receive feedback about their behaviour, they begin to learn about right and wrong.

Preschool and Early School Age: age 3 to 6 years⁴³

Physical development:

At this stage the child has become quite competent physically and enjoys practicing new skills, for instance climbing, jumping on one foot, skipping, dancing, and using good balance and coordination. Their small motor skills are increasingly refined using scissors, drawing sharp corners, using a pencil to print letters and manipulating and putting together small objects with ease.

Intellectual development:

Children speak in full sentences, express ideas and engage in discussion. Speech is completely understandable now. Familiar words can be defined. The child has a clear sense of likes and dislikes and can offer simple explanations to 'why' questions. Cause and effect relationships are discernable if they are in relation to the child's own needs, for instance when the stove is hot it will burn me. They love to gather information about why, how, when, etc., as they gain information about themselves, others and the world.

Emotional development:

Preschoolers and early school age children identify with their caregivers and like to imitate them. They acquire an identity separate from others and can be further away (physically) from their caregivers. Feelings are becoming more fine-tuned and discernable as children experience feelings of doubt and shame, and they can become emotionally overwhelmed. Children are also able to identify the feelings of others.

Social development:

Play continues to occupy an important developmental role as children engage in fantasy play with imaginary friends, role playing and sex/gender role identification. They can create and follow simple rules in cooperative play. Children are practicing socially-appropriate behaviour. They can share and take turns. They require choices, want more independence and are often testing authority. Differences are now identified between self and others, e.g. gender, colour of hair and eyes.

Moral development:

Children will increasingly become more protective of self and can stand up for their rights as they see them. They distinguish between behaviours that bring about rewards and punishments. Outside control of their behaviour is still required since they have yet to develop a conscience.

School Age: age 6 to 12 years

(Taken from Nelson Text Book of Pediatrics, 2007.
<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/article/002017.htm>)

Physical Development

School-age children typically have fairly smooth and strong motor skills. However, their coordination (especially eye-hand), endurance, balance, and physical tolerance vary.

Fine motor skills may also vary widely and influence a child's ability to write neatly, dress appropriately, and perform certain chores, such as making beds or doing dishes.

There will be significant differences in height, weight, and build among children of this age range. It is important to remember that genetic background, as well as nutrition and exercise, may influence a child's growth.

There can also be a big difference in the age at which children begin to develop secondary sexual characteristics. For girls, secondary sex characteristics include:

- Breast development
- Underarm and pubic hair growth

For boys, they include:

- Growth of underarm, chest, and pubic hair
- Growth of testicles and penis

Language Development

Early school-age children should be able to consistently use simple, but complete sentences that average five to seven words. As the child progresses through the elementary years, grammar and pronunciation become normal. Children use more complex sentences as they grow.

Language delays may be due to hearing or intelligence problems. In addition, children who are unable to express themselves well may be more likely to have aggressive behavior or temper tantrums.

A 6-year-old child normally can follow a series of three commands in a row. By age 10, most children can follow five commands in a row. Children with a problem in this area may try to cover it up with backtalk or clowning around. They will rarely ask for help because they are afraid of being teased.

Social/Emotional Development

Frequent physical complaints (such as sore throats, tummy aches, arm or leg pain) may simply be due to a child's increased body awareness. Although there is often no physical evidence for such complaints, the complaints should be investigated to rule out possible health conditions, and to assure the child that the parent is concerned about his or her well-being.

Peer acceptance becomes increasingly important during the school-age years. Children may engage in certain behaviors to be part of "the group." Talking about these behaviors with your child will allow the child to feel accepted in the group, without crossing the boundaries of the family's behavior standards.

Friendships at this age tend to be mainly with members of the same sex. In fact, younger school-age children typically talk about members of the opposite sex as being "strange" or "awful." Children become less negative about the opposite sex as they get closer to adolescence.

Lying, cheating, and stealing are all examples of behaviors that school-age children may "try on" as they learn how to negotiate the expectations and rules placed on them by family, friends, school, and society. Parents should deal with these behaviors privately (so that the child's friends don't tease them), apply a punishment that is related to the behavior, and show forgiveness.

It is important for the child to learn how to deal with failure or frustration without losing self-esteem or developing a sense of inferiority.

Cognitive Development

An ability to pay attention is important for success both at school and at home. A 6-year-old should be able to focus on an appropriate task for at least 15 minutes. By age 9, a child should be able to focus attention for about an hour.

Safety

Safety is important for school-age children.

- School-age children are highly active and need strenuous physical activity, peer approval, and more daring and adventurous behaviors.
- Children should be taught to play sports in appropriate, safe, supervised areas, with proper equipment and rules. Bicycles, skateboards, in-line skates, and other types of recreational sports equipment should fit the child. They should be used only while following traffic and pedestrian rules, and while using safety equipment such as knee, elbow, wrist pads/braces, and helmets. Sports equipment should not be used in darkness or extreme weather conditions.
- Swimming and water safety lessons may help prevent drowning.

- Safety instruction regarding matches, lighters, barbecues, stoves, and open fires can prevent major burns.
- Wearing seat belts remains the most important way to prevent major injury or death from a motor vehicle accident.

For all children to thrive and to adjust well, they need to feel safe, loved and cared for.

All Children need:⁴⁴

- Physical attention and affection, to be loved
- Good nutrition and access to food
- Responsiveness to their emotional, social and physical needs
- Clear, age-appropriate and reasonable limits
- Opportunities to explore and learn through play and education
- Opportunities for interaction with other children and adults
- A healthy, safe environment at home and in the community
- Relaxed, supported and informed parents and caregivers

The central concerns for the preschool child are that they are loved and that they can trust their parent(s) to meet their basic needs. Their thinking is concrete with little emotional complexity. For this reason, children do not yet attribute negative interpretations to differences, and may not yet perceive these differences. They have their own family experience and will perceive the environment through this lens. For instance, if my primary caregivers are a single gay father and a grandparent, I imagine that all families look like mine.

Children begin to experience other family forms and cultures as they interact with other children and the world. School-age children have more awareness of similarity and difference, including different kinds of families, cultures, and ways of doing things. Their world continues to be fairly concrete, yet they can discriminate between right and wrong, usually in absolute term, so that if one choice is right then the other must be wrong. Peer group and peer perceptions begin to concern the school age child. For this reason, children may need support, reassurance and acceptance from parents and educators as they begin to navigate a more complex environment of differences and biased attitudes about what may be seen as 'normal'.

Adults may find the child's 'naïve' and 'concrete' view of the world amusing at times, yet we may have some things to learn when it comes to this open-hearted willingness to accept everyone simply because they exist.

We discover that biases and prejudice, including homophobia, transphobia and heterosexism, are learned behaviours adopted as children become aware of what is considered to be normal, acceptable, societal norms. Children practice by modeling the behaviours of the important adults in their lives and soon these norms are adopted – norms that may be life-affirming, or not.

Children of LGBTTTQ families

“I know being gay are not bad but other kids don’t even know what it means. They just think it’s bad”⁴⁵ – 10 year old child

Children from LGBTTTQ families become painfully aware of the differences and the possible physical, social and emotional consequences of disclosing about their family. Although young children are able to separate their physical selves from others, they are attached intellectually and emotionally to the experience of their parents and guardians. For example, children who witness a physical assault to their mothers, ‘experience’ this assault as if they themselves are also abused. No differently, when a child’s parent is assaulted with homophobic slurs, children take this on as if they themselves are being harassed and threatened. Indeed because children are so dependent on their caregivers, any threat to the well-being of their parent is a threat to their very survival. Children may continue to have this attached experience into adolescence.

“When people use gay as an insult, it’s like they are hurting my family.”⁴⁵ – 10 year old child

Homophobia and transphobia deeply affect children with LGBTTTQ parents. A parent’s logical fear of coming out, as well as parents’ internalized homophobia/transphobia, can both have a rippling effect on the child:

Nicole, age 31, reflects on her struggle with internalized homophobia as a result of her denial of her mother’s homosexuality, denial that was intensified by her mother’s lack of openness.

“Yes, I imagine it would have been easier if my mother had been open with me about her homosexuality a long time ago. ... But I do not blame my mother for the choices she made. No, I don’t blame my mother for being the victim of a homophobic system ... [people] who encourage reparative therapy and looking...for a “cure.” I know that she was doing the best that she could at the time, that her intentions were to protect the family.”⁴⁶

Children develop fear and secrecy around their perceived negative difference from their peers, resulting in social isolation and marginalization. Rather than experiencing pride in their family, they may feel shame.

“It is extremely important to recognize that the sexual orientation of the parent is not the issue. The issue is what the children have to endure because of it. What results is a host of issues that spring from bigotry and

prejudice. Some of the problems children face

- Dealing with their own ‘coming out’ process, as a child from a LGBTTQ family.
- Contemplating their sexual orientation and identity, having already experienced discrimination LGBTTQ people face each day.
- Hiding their authentic lives for fear of sustaining personal harm and/or harm to their parents and siblings.
- Feeling conflicted about religious and social beliefs that condemn their parents and their family.

These issues in turn create feelings of alienation and loneliness. Children in “traditional” families do not usually have to experience this particular kind of alienation and loneliness.”⁴⁷

Children’s Rights

Like all human beings, children have universal rights and these rights apply to all, including children from LGBTTQ families. These rights are defined by the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of the Child.⁴⁸

This is the most comprehensive and universally accepted UN document which puts the children and their needs first and foremost. The first declaration of child rights was made in 1959. The more detailed and binding UN Convention on the Rights of the Child was adopted on November 20th, 1989, by 191 countries including Canada.

What is the Convention on the rights of the child?⁴⁹

- The convention brings together all the existing international laws on children and establishes new standards to meet the needs not previously addressed.
- The convention addresses the needs of the children from all societies, religions and ideologies.
- The convention also encourages all countries that adopted children’s rights to confirm their commitment to protect the rights of the children not only in their own country but in other countries as well.

Why do we need a Convention on the rights of the child?⁵⁰

The convention recognizes the status of children as special individuals. Because of their unique developmental needs and vulnerability, they require special rights to protect them.

Most often it becomes the job of the parents, educators, the community and the governments to protect and care for the children. The convention gives us guidelines to deal with the children’s economic, cultural, civil and political rights.

How does the Convention work?⁵¹

There are 54 articles in the convention. The first part consists of the 41 articles dealing directly with the children's needs. They are broadly classified into three categories:

1. *The right to protection:* from abuse, neglect and exploitation including the right to special protection in times of war and conflict.
2. *The survival and provisionary rights:* by the provision of adequate food, shelter, clean water and primary health care.
3. *The right to develop and participate in safe environments:* through the participation in formal educational programs, play and opportunities to express one's self without being discriminated against.

Who needs to be involved in implementing the convention?⁵²

Governments need to realize their obligation as a signatory to the convention and implement the child rights, principles and perspectives agreed to, by incorporating them into their policies and legal procedures.

Educators need to be involved in finding ways to integrate the rights of the child into our daily interactions and curriculum.

Parents and care givers, as the guardians of the children, must keep the 'best interests' of children foremost in all the decisions made on their behalf, as well as giving children opportunities to participate and express themselves.

Children can participate when they learn about the special convention available to them, when they feel empowered to voice their feelings and opinions, and when they are part of the decision-making processes in all matters concerning their welfare.



For further information on Child Rights, including the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, please see the Resource Kit.

Child Rights Education

It is important that efforts are made to make the Convention on the Rights of the Child widely-known by developing appropriate policies, programs and education. Children need to be taught in simple, child-friendly language and activities, their rights, and their responsibilities.

Matching Card Game:⁵³

Goal: To help children learn and understand the concepts of their rights and responsibilities.

Activity: Make 'rights cards' and 'responsibilities cards' with simple words and pictures, with the children if possible. Have children play card game by matching a 'rights' card with the appropriate 'responsibilities' card. Discuss what these concepts mean, using examples from a child's experience.

The right to be listened to. The responsibility to listen to others.

The right to be protected from violence. The responsibility to use peaceful means with others.

From the Convention on the Rights of the Child⁵⁴

Some examples of relevant rights for children of LGBTIQ parents are:

Article 2:1: Parties shall respect and ensure the rights set forth in the convention to each child within their jurisdiction without discrimination of any kind, irrespective of the child's or his or her parent's or the legal guardian's race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability or other status.

Child-Friendly: You have these rights, whoever you are, whoever your parents are, whatever colour you are, whatever religion you are, whatever language you speak, whether you're a boy or a girl, whether you have a physical disability or if you are rich or poor. – Jennifer, Age 11

Article 2:2: To take all the appropriate measures to ensure that the child is protected against all forms of discrimination or punishment on the basis of the status, activities, expressed opinions or beliefs of the child's parents, legal guardians, or family members.

Article 3: In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by the public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration.

Child-Friendly: All adults should do what is best for you. When adults make decisions, they should think about how their decisions will affect children.

Articles 12, 13, 14 and 15: Ensures the child's right to form and express his or her views freely; to have the freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds; to respect the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion, and recognize the rights to freedom of association and peaceful assembly.

Child-Friendly 12: You have the right to give your opinion and the adults to listen and take it seriously.-
Simon, Age 12

Article 30: Protects the rights of the children of ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities and other minority groups to enjoy their own culture, language and religion.

Child-Friendly: You have the right to practice your own culture, language and religion, or any you choose. Minority and indigenous groups need special protection of this right. Sherry, Age 10

Article 42: Makes the convention widely known, to adults and children alike.

Child-Friendly: You have the right to know your rights! Adults should know about these rights and help you learn about them too. Effie, Age 8

Children say it best, yet we need to know these rights are backed up by Canadian law. As stated by Canada's Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, we need to:

*"...focus on children as individuals with their own set of rights. The idea is that children are not merely objects of concern to be protected, but are also to be recognized as persons in their own right." As stated by Justice Jean-Pierre Rosenczveig, President of the Board of Directors of the International Bureau for Children's Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child 'is deliberately oriented towards the 21st century in its recognition of the child as a person endowed with a heart and feelings, possessing rights, and not just as a small, fragile being who has to be defended against others and against himself or herself.'"*⁵⁵

Child's Rights highlight justice as a right for children and not a privilege. This basic concept is at the root of the work we are encouraging through this toolkit. Knowing that children have a right to safe, discrimination-free play and learning spaces, can help to encourage us when creating this space in our communities.

Creating Safe Space for Children

The chapter looks first at Ontario's school system, specifically the legislation, policies and procedures that guarantee all children will be safe from discrimination, harassment and bullying. This is followed by a description of safe space, an approach to developing resiliency in children, and an overview of bully prevention and intervention principles.

Legal Framework for Safe Space

We focus in this section on the legislative framework that mandates educators and administration to provide safe and inclusive space for all children in the school system. It is also important for educators to be aware of the safe school legislation that governs Ontario elementary and secondary schools. Preschool systems do not fall under this legislation, however must still abide by the obligations and responsibilities outlined in the Human Rights Code, as well as the mission, objectives and policies of the centre. This is, of course, in addition to the social responsibility we all share to live together peacefully in a shared community. As educators, we are looked upon to provide leadership in building and bridging relations in our community.

Specific principles and legislation that are relevant to Ontario schools include:

Equity, Inclusion, Diversity

The school environment is to be based on the principles of equity, inclusion and diversity.

- *Equity* - in that all students, educators, teachers and support staff are treated fairly, with impartiality and even-handedness.
- *Inclusion* – in that all students, educators, teachers and support staff, regardless of race, culture, religion, gender, language, disability, sexual orientation, or any other attribute, are included as part of the whole.
- *Diversity* – in the differences among students, educators, teachers and support staff are accepted and celebrated rather than viewed as sources of separation.

Anti-Harassment, Anti-Bullying

The school environment is to be a setting that is free of the oppression of any person or group of individuals through harassment or bullying.

Safe Schools: The Safe Schools Act

The school environment is to be a setting of physical, social, intellectual and emotional safety. In 2000, the Government of Ontario passed the Safe Schools Act, which was to be put into action through local school boards.

The Act outlines a provincial code of conduct for all persons in schools:

1. To ensure that all members of the school community, especially people in positions of authority, are treated with respect and dignity.
2. To promote responsible citizenship by encouraging appropriate participation, in the civic life of the school community.
3. To maintain an environment where conflict and difference can be addressed, in a manner characterized by respect and civility.
4. To encourage the use of non-violent means to resolve conflict.
5. To promote the safety of people in the schools.
6. To discourage the use of alcohol and illegal drugs.

The Safe Schools Act is available at:

www.e-laws.gov.on.ca/DBLaws/Source/Statutes/English/2000/S00012_e.htm

Safe Schools Policy and Practice: An Agenda for Action

In 2004, the Ontario government established the Safe Schools Action Team to review the Safe Schools Act. It consulted with parents, teachers, students and other community leaders across the province. The team's report, *Safe Schools Policy and Practice: An Agenda for Action*, was released in June, 2006. It cites areas for taking action, including prevention, progressive or graduated discipline, parent and community involvement, and developing programs for students who have been suspended or expelled.

Safe Schools Policy and Practice further states that safety is a precondition for learning. Students learn and teachers teach more successfully, when schools are safe. The Ministry of Education, parents, students, teachers, support workers, principals and vice-principals, board staff, community partners and residents of communities across Ontario share this common belief.

The report *Safe Schools Policy and Practice: An Agenda for Action* is available at:

www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/ssareview/report0626.html

What Is a Safe Space?

To be truly safe in a learning space, we need to provide more than physical safety. We must also create a place where children feel socially, intellectually and emotionally safe. We often refer to this as a SAFER space as no space is 100% safe for everyone.

A safe child care or school environment is:

- A place that is inclusive in nature, where diversity is celebrated.
- A place where it is safe to raise questions and where open dialogue is welcome.
- A place that supports and builds skills, well-being, and resiliency.

A safe space is one that is safe for children of LGBTTQ parents, a safe space for all children.

The Safety of Inclusiveness

Children of LGBTTQ families are more likely to feel a sense of belonging at their school/preschool and among their peers if:

- They sense that they have a supportive child care provider or teacher.
- They see their family structure reflected in the centre/classroom resources.
- They feel comfortable asking questions.
- They know they are respected and visible in the celebrations of “traditional” family days (such as Mothers’ Day and Fathers’ Day).

Intellectual Safety

A safe place means a child feels secure enough to ask questions and explore ideas. This happens when they feel that their questions will be treated with respect and responded to in thoughtful ways.

Physical and Social Safety

A safe place is one that facilitates positive social interaction between children, and guarantees freedom from bullying. It provides safety from physical and social harm.

Emotional Safety

A safe place means that children receive support for their emotions, are not teased if they cry, and are given encouragement when they are having difficulties.

Safety Issues for Children

Safe space is challenging to find for LGBTTTQ families who have to deal with a number of difficult issues on a day-to-day basis, within a community that is largely homophobic/transphobic. Children of LGBTTTQ families may face particular issues within preschool and school environments:

- There is a lack of understanding of the unique issues faced by children and LGBTTTQ families. This contributes to biased attitudes and words, based in homophobic/transphobic and heterosexist beliefs, that children hear throughout the day in their learning settings.⁵⁶
- Children and young people with LGBTTTQ parents are often teased and bullied about the gender identity and sexual orientation of their parents.
- Homophobic/transphobic bullying occurs with children and youth who question or express more fluid gender identities, children and youth who feel attracted or drawn to others of the same sex, and also extends to children with LGBTTTQ parents.⁵⁷
- They may be teased by other children who accuse them of being LGBTTTQ themselves, and who make it clear that this is seen as a negative quality.
- Children experience biased attitudes when they speak to their peers and educators about their LGBTTTQ parents and families.⁵⁸
- Children may experience an obvious lack of understanding on the issues that they face as children of LGBTTTQ parents, which leaves them ill-prepared to cope and deal with negative words and actions towards them.
- Children often find themselves in situations where they must explain their family and defend its right to exist, not only to other children but to adults.

LGBTTTQ adults and educators, with a combination of experience and perseverance, can develop a resiliency that helps them face issues and challenges particular to being LGBTTTQ, in a homophobic/transphobic society.

For children, on the other hand, being faced with these attitudes brings about an awakening from the world of innocence. "The children who live in LGBTTTQ families need support to learn how to deal with negative attitudes that they experience outside of the home."⁵⁹

Developing Confidence and Resiliency in Children

Developing confident children involves creating resilience within them to meet the challenges that they face in the world. Resiliency refers to a person's ability to respond well and recover quickly from change, misfortune or a difficult situation. Perhaps especially for children from LGBTTTQ families, this includes developing strategies and skills to deal with bullying when it happens. Children who acquire these skills can cope and become stronger in the face of adversity. At the same time, we need to be aware that resiliency has its limits because no one is invulnerable, adult or child. Although resiliency does not provide absolute protection, it can help children through risk situations to be protected from significant impact. Developing resiliency in children in no way precludes any responsibility that all adults have in protecting the well-being of all children, and to provide safe environments for children to navigate with trust and confidence.

Helpful Social Skills to Build Confidence

A confident child in early childhood and childhood:

1. Introduces themselves to new people and introduces others.
2. Initiates conversation.
3. Joins in group activities.
4. Invites others to play or work together; shares toys, materials and belongings.
5. Expresses needs and wants; asks for help.
6. Expresses feelings including when feeling wronged; smiles and laughs with peers; appreciates and shares a sense of humour.
7. Exchanges play ideas; negotiates play rules; questions unfair rules and practices; stands up for personal beliefs; shares ideas and opinions.
8. Assumes a leadership role in peer activities.
9. Offers to help others.
10. Gives and accepts compliments.
11. Resists peer pressure.
12. Chooses to walk away from aggression and asks for assistance.

The Resilient Child

Children will more likely manage risk and bullying situations if they have:

- A good sense of themselves as competent and capable, that is, solid self esteem.
- A sense of trust in people and the world.
- A sense of hopefulness and optimism that things can and do get better over time; "life feels good" to the child.
- Reliance on themselves and a sense of independence.

- Positive coping skills, including the ability to cope with stress.
- The ability to predict consequences and to problem solve.
- Social skills including the ability to take responsibility; to not blame self for situations not of their making or choosing.
- An ability to experience a range of emotions.

What adults can do to increase a child's resiliency:

Children will learn confidence and resiliency first in their families, however when they arrive at our preschool or school, it is our job as educators to help children further develop the skills they need.⁶⁰

1. *Be a good role model.* Children learn ethical standards by watching the actions of adults, seeing the choices that their educator makes, and hearing what they say.
2. *Share your beliefs.* When educators let children know what they think about issues as they come up—whether in the classroom or out in the play-yard—the children learn to develop a sense of ethics for evaluating situations.
3. *Ask questions that encourage empathy and ethical thinking.* When children feel for others, they stand up for others. Empathy motivates that feeling, and stops cruel behaviour. When an educator asks questions, such as “How would you feel if someone did that to you?” or “What would happen if everyone acted that way?”, they help the child learn to take another perspective and ask, “Is this the right thing to do?”
4. *Reinforce assertiveness, not compliance.* By encouraging children to share their opinions and stand up for what they believe is right, an educator can reinforce assertiveness. It helps to minimize the influence of peer pressure.
5. *Teach assertive skills.* In order to teach children how to go against peer pressure and stand up for their beliefs, teach them how to:
 - Establish an assertive posture—standing tall, legs slightly apart, head held high, looking the other person directly in the eye.
 - Say “No” firmly—stating their beliefs in a friendly, but firm voice, and sticking with it. The child’s job is not to change the other person’s mind, but to follow his/her own beliefs.
 - Tell reasons why—giving the person the reason for the child’s stand, such as “It’s cruel”, “It’s illegal”, or “It’s wrong”.

Educators can also create a sense of acceptance, pride and celebration that can only increase a child's confidence. We can give children the additional gift of a world view that is diverse and inclusive of many people. Children can learn to look for those things we can enjoy in common and appreciate the richness of difference. Difference is a good thing as long as everyone is respected. All educators can provide this openness to children – whether we are LGBTTTQ, straight or an ally.

Creating safe communities

The goal of this toolkit is to work towards creating safe and nurturing spaces for our children in schools and preschools. As we focus on learning spaces for the remainder of the toolkit, we need to understand that children are particularly vulnerable to social, economic and emotional hardship. Growing up in difficult and hostile conditions will leave them at risk for health concerns, violence and victimization. Broader community goals including income sufficiency for all families, access to adequate food, housing and recreation, safe housing and neighbourhoods, inclusive and diverse social spaces, etc., must also be addressed to create safe communities for all of our children.

Bullying⁶¹

No matter how much we build awareness, confidence and resiliency in children, it is important for LGBTTTQ parents, their children and educators to learn how to prevent identify and deal with bullying, because it may arise more frequently for children from LGBTTTQ families than for other children. As educators, we also need to identify patterns of bullying that we may engage in with children and with other adults, since adults often continue bullying patterns learned in childhood.

Early Years

During the early years, many young children exhibit 'bossy' behaviour. These behaviours are adapted and used by children as they become more comfortable with social roles and social interaction. Most children grow out of bossiness as they develop social skills and self-control. Just as it is difficult to determine when the bossy child is on the border of bullying, it is also challenging to differentiate between rough and tumble play, and aggressive play.

Some pointers to keep in mind:

<i>Bossy or Boisterous Behaviour</i>	<i>Bullying Behaviour</i>
Bosses whoever is around <u>all the time</u>	Picks on smaller or <u>vulnerable children</u>
Disappears as the child matures	Does not disappear as the child matures
Uses pro-social behaviours to secure group membership	Has not learned pro-social behaviours to secure group membership
	Relies on threats and coercion to gain access to power
Play is natural and fun	Spoils playmates' activities and involvement

It is a myth that people are born bullies. Bullying is a learned behaviour, and behaviours can be either encouraged or changed. The early years are a critical time when careful and thoughtful observation is required, to determine if children are working through their natural stages of development or, if, they are beginning to establish behaviours that need to be redirected away from bullying tendencies.

What is bullying?

When children of LGBTTQ families are targeted by others in a hurtful and harmful way because they are children of LGBTTQ parents, these actions constitute bullying.

Targeting a child

Bullying occurs when a child is a target of repeated negative and/or abusive actions. A child can be targeted by another child, a group of children or an adult. Fighting or quarrelling between two children of approximately the same age, strength or developmental level, does not constitute bullying if there are not other vulnerabilities involved.

Intent to harm

Bullying is carried out with intent to harm the targeted child.

Imbalance of power

Bullying involves an imbalance of power so that the child being bullied has trouble defending him or herself.

Gaining Power

Bullying is about gaining power and control, elevating the bully's feeling of self-esteem, and attempting to achieve status within the peer group, using whatever strategies are available.

Control

Bullies create and enhance their sense of control over others through provocative language and physical violence.

What does bullying look like?

Bullying can occur in many forms aimed at unsettling the victim emotionally and physically. Bullies usually use a combination of different forms.

Some examples include:

Social

- Gossiping; spreading rumours
- Setting someone up to look foolish or to take blame
- Ethnic slurs
- ~~Exclusion~~ Exclusion from the peer group; threatening with total isolation
- ~~Manipulating~~ Manipulating social order to achieve rejection
- Inciting others to participate in bullying
- Refusing to work with, play or cooperate with someone
- Refusing to sit next to someone

Verbal

- Mocking, name-calling, taunts, gestures, jokes or offensive mimicry
- Teasing about language, clothing or physical appearance like colour of skin, hair, and body type
- Taunting and humiliating about gender identity and gender expression
- Making sexual innuendo
- Pretending not to understand/using gibberish
- Making fun of music, accent, or dress of anyone from a different culture, religious observance, or dietary habits

Physical

- Pushing, shoving, spitting
- Causing bodily harm, kicking, hitting

- Physical acts that are demeaning and humiliating
- Physical violence against family, friends, pets
- Stealing
- Threatening with a weapon
- Inappropriate and uninvited touch

By Intimidation

- Graffiti, defacing property or clothing
- Coercion, challenging to do something embarrassing or dangerous
- Extortion
- Displaying sexist or racist music, comics, books, or magazines
- Passing unwanted notes or pictures about a topic known to be sensitive to the victim
- Wearing of provocative and derogatory badges or symbols

The bully creates reasons to justify their actions. These justifications are often based on myths and stereotypes about things that make people “different” and vulnerable. Social, verbal, physical and intimidation forms of bullying are used in the following types of bullying, which are related to who is targeted:

Classist-based bullying: Bullying based on perceived social, class and/or income level.

Homophobic/Transphobic-based bullying: Bullying that singles out or targets individuals for being perceived to be LGBTTQ; often based in sexist, gender stereotyping; can be directed at any child or young person who does not conform to ways of behaving that are traditionally associated with being “masculine” or “feminine”. Children may be bullied for their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Sexist-based bullying: Bullying based on the sex of the victim.

Racist-based bullying: Bullying on the basis of skin colour, cultural practices, religious background or beliefs, and/or ethnic origin.

How common is bullying?

Research has shown that:

- “Bullying occurs once every 7 minutes. On average, bullying episodes are brief, approximately 37 seconds long.”
- Three out of 10 children (29.9%) say they have been involved in moderate or frequent bullying: 13% as the aggressor, 10.6% as the victim, and 6.3% as both.
- Only 25% of students report that teachers intervene in bullying situations, while 71% of teachers believe that they always intervene.

- We notice boys' bullying behaviour more often because we anticipate that it will be more physical. However, both girls and boys will use physical aggression as well as social exclusion, verbal, and emotional behaviours to hurt their victims.
- Bystanders are watching in 85% of bullying incidents.
- Of bystanders, 75% support the child who is bullying.
- Of bystanders, 25% support the child who is the victim of bullying.
- In a survey of nearly 5000 Canadian children in grade one to eight, 6% said they had bullied others more than once or twice in the past 6 weeks.
- Nearly one-half (47%) of children at school have experienced harassment or physical abuse at school due to homophobia or transphobia. Eighty-three percent have experienced verbal abuse at school.

One of the most often cited causes for bullying is that: "They just don't fit in." Diversity or difference becomes the excuse children consistently use for their bullying behaviour toward peers. This is a justification, not a reason.



Myth: "If I tell someone, it will just make it worse."

Fact: Research shows that bullying will stop when adults in authority and peers get involved.

Myth: "Bullying is just a stage, a normal part of life. I went through it and my kids will too."

Fact: Bullying is not "normal" or socially acceptable behaviour. We give bullies power by our acceptance of this behaviour.

Myth: "Just stand up for yourself and hit them back."

Fact: While there are some circumstances when people may be forced to defend themselves, hitting back usually makes the bullying worse and increases the risk for serious physical harm.

Actions and Solutions

Bullying usually goes unreported because children are afraid of reprisal, and because they do not trust that anything can change. Victims feel they can and should handle the situation themselves. Those that witness these assaults are not likely to disclose information because they feel they will be the next target or they will lose social status.

There are many things that can be done to help both the victim and the bully. For example, victims can be helped to develop strategies and skills to protect their physical and emotional safety. Children who bully can be helped to understand their motivations and to change their behaviour.

Recognize the signs that your child may be being bullied

Warning signs that a child may be being bullied may include:

1. Coming to school or returning from the playground with torn, damaged, or missing clothing, books, and belongings.
2. Unexplained injuries such as bruises, cuts and sprains, etc.
3. Appearing fearful about attending school, walking to and from school, or riding the bus.
4. Choosing a longer or unusual route when going to and from school.
5. Poor appetite, headaches and stomach aches, especially before school.
6. Appearing anxious, distressed, unhappy, depressed or tearful or shows unexpected mood shifts.
7. Having problems with sleep.
8. Anxiety and poor self-esteem.
9. Shows insecurity, cries, and becomes upset easily.
10. Seems quiet, withdrawn, sensitive or passive.
11. Loss of interest in preschool and school work and play.

It is important to communicate with parents about any signs you observe so that everyone can be more aware.

Support the Children

1. Be available to children for support, for reassurance and to take action.
2. Be patient. Remember children may be afraid or embarrassed to tell you.
3. Assure him or her that this is not tattling.
4. Validate children's feelings as normal.
5. Let children know it's not his/her fault.
6. Believe children. Make no value judgments.
7. Never blame. Bullying is never the victim's fault.
8. Do not suggest physically fighting back...ever!
9. Acknowledge that name-calling does hurt.
10. Ask how he/she has tried to stop the bullying and suggest alternatives.

Take Action

1. Privately share your concern with other school personnel and the parents. Let everyone know that you would appreciate knowing if anyone notices any further bullying behaviour.
2. Recognize that it is your responsibility as the educator to handle the situation effectively and build safer space for the children you work with.
3. Offer to assist with anti-bullying initiatives at your school or preschool.
4. Help children develop friendships. Stimulate children to meet and interact with new peers. An environment with new peers can provide a new chance for a victimized child.
5. Help develop a plan of action and monitor the situation by maintaining communication with the parent(s) and your administration.
6. Keep a detailed record of bullying episodes and related communication with the parent(s) and your administration.
7. Make sure that parents know not to approach the family of the other child. Assure them that it is your responsibility and the responsibility of the school to handle the situation with the other families involved.

Discuss the issue with other educators

- Do we need an anti-bullying program in place?
- What are the anti-bullying policies and procedures?
- Do they address what all children, including children of LGBTTTQ families, need in order to feel safe?
- What can children do to avoid bullying and to stand up to any future bullying? How do we teach this overall in our preschool or school?
- What are the strategies and techniques being implemented?
- What are the rules and consequences?
- Is there a reporting mechanism in place?
- How do children report bullying situations?
- What are the procedures the bullying child will be going through?
- What kind of classroom support is in place?

What Children Can Do

Strategies and tips for children:

1. Suggest that children play in a different, safer school area, closer to a supervising adult. Encourage children not to be alone in potentially dangerous or unsafe places. Play in areas where they feel safe.
2. Teach children to talk with you or to ask another adult at school for help; to report to an adult when they are being bullied or if they see someone being bullied.
3. Teach the difference between tattling and reporting. Reporting happens when someone is being hurt, for example if someone is being threatened, teased, hit, if kids refuse to share with someone because of who they are, etc. Tattling is trying to get someone in trouble for your own gain. For example, if a child isn't happy that another child is succeeding, he/she might want to tattletale that the other child did not put away the glue bottle properly. The child in this case, hopes that the staff will look disapprovingly on the other child. Many children do not report to anyone because they are afraid the bullying will get worse if they are seen as "tattletales."
4. Encourage children to walk to school with someone.
5. Teach children to avoid bullies and the places where bullies are.
6. Encourage children to join groups and find friends who like the same things and have similar interests. One of the best preventive measures against bullying is developing good friendships.
7. Encourage children to hang out with friends.
8. Praise and encourage children. Help children take pride in their accomplishments and differences. A confident child is less likely to be a target.

9. Search for talents and positive attributes that can be developed in children. This may help children to assert themselves.
10. Encourage children to become involved in things they are already good at. Children who feel they excel in one or more areas of their lives, feel more self-confidence all around.
11. Discourage children from taking expensive things or a lot of money to school.
12. Brainstorm with children their plan of action should anyone bully them again. Role-play assertive “I” statements, and teach them to walk away and get help from an adult or from a friend.
13. Raise children’s awareness of their body language. Communication experts tell us that 55% of our communication comes from body language. Children need to be taught what confident body language looks like.
14. Ask children to tell you about the best and worst part of their day to keep tabs on how they are doing.
15. Keep children as informed as possible about bullying. Please refer to the resources listed in the resource kit.

Helping the Child who Bullies

Recognize the signs that a child may be bullying.

Typical bullying behaviours and characteristics may include:

1. Name-calling, threatening, taunting, malicious teasing, spreading rumours, or otherwise verbally attacking other children.
2. Frequently hit, kicks, pushes, or chokes other children.
3. Intentionally excludes other children or manipulates friendships.
4. Hot-tempered, easily angered, impulsive, and a low frustration tolerance.
5. A positive attitude toward the use of violence.
6. Refuses to take responsibility for his/her behaviour.
7. Skilled at talking his/her way out of situations and blaming others.
8. May have average or better than average self-esteem. Bullies learn to build power and self-esteem through the support they gain from peers for their bullying.
9. Lack of empathy.

10. May be highly competitive.
11. Defiant and aggressive toward adults and authority figures.
12. Difficulty conforming to rules. Breaks rules at home and at school.

What to Do if a Child Is Bullying?

1. Make it clear to the child that you take bullying seriously and will not tolerate such behaviour.
2. Develop a consistent rules system. When they follow the rules use praise, encouragement, and reinforcement. When they break the rules use consistent, non-hostile, and logical consequence.
3. Children are always observing. Set a good example for children. If a child observes aggressive behaviour by you, they are more likely to act aggressively toward other children.
4. Help children develop less aggressive and more appropriate behaviour. Provide safe space for children to cry if they are feeling troubled, as an option to letting it out through aggression.
5. Maintain contact with the child's parent(s). Educate parents on how they can help their child deal with bullying behaviours.
6. Seek help from a mental health professional such as the school social worker or psychologist. Take bullying seriously. Children who bully increase their risk for engaging in other forms of antisocial behaviour, such as juvenile delinquency, criminality, and substance abuse.

Bullying is a broader social problem that often happens outside of schools, on the street, at shopping centres, the local pools, summer camp, and in fact, even among adults in the workplace or at social gatherings. When bullying happens on the playground or in the classroom, educators are ultimately responsible for dealing with it and ensuring safe space for all children and parents. However, all adults interacting with children need to observe behaviour and intervene at the first signs of bullying. It is important to extinguish behaviours in young children that could lead to bullying in later years. It is important to be aware of the roots of bullying and support children who are being bullied, as well as those children who are bullying. People generally treat the bully as a perpetrator, and not necessarily as a victim themselves. Where are they learning this behaviour? How is it serving them? What insecurities do they have that they are coping in this fashion? Are they witnessing or experiencing bullying or violence at home? These are issues that educators must assess when dealing with a child that is bullying. Do not be hesitant to seek additional supports from your administration, school resources and community agencies.

We can only ensure safe spaces for all children when we build our skills and commitment to prevent, identify and deal with bullying within school and preschool settings and indeed, whenever we encounter it out in the community.

"If we are to reach real peace in this world... we shall have to begin with children"

– Mahatma Gandhi

Creating Inclusive Space

This chapter focuses on the roles, issues and concerns of educators and parents as we seek to ensure that learning spaces are safe and inclusive for children in preschool, childcare and schools. We propose rights and responsibilities for everyone involved in the parent-educator relationship, and give an overview of points to consider when creating more inclusive learning environments.

Negotiating Parent-Educator Relationships*

Beyond the hospital, adoption or foster systems, preschool and school environments are the first significant institutions that most parents will negotiate for their children and their family. Of necessity, school and home are cut from different cloth, yet there must be common threads connecting them for children and families to grow and flourish. It is a real and constant challenge to negotiate school and preschool entry in a manner that serves the child's needs and helps parents and educators work through their own feelings and perceptions.⁶² This toolkit focuses on children ages 0 to 6. When considering children of this age, the parent-educator relationship may be closer and more intimate, and as such, can become more complex. Parents and educators work together to build this relationship and the strength of this relationship will ultimately ensure that children receive quality care and education

"When parents send their young children to school, they entrust the children to the educator's care. Trust between parents and educators, as with any human relationship, takes time and commitment to cultivate, a truism that is underscored for children and adults alike, especially in the first few weeks of school or preschool."⁶³

* Much of this work was adapted from *Opening Doors: Lesbian and Gay Parents and Schools*, a project of the Family Pride Coalition (FPC) in Washington DC. Although an American source, the work they have completed is certainly applicable to all LGBTTQ parents and allies. FPC also embarked on a second project, *Opening More Doors: Creating Policy Change to Include Our Families*. This work was used as an outline in the section on creating and advocating for policy changes in our schools, and adapted to the Ontario school system. This will hopefully provide a philosophical approach to, and the groundwork for future development.

What are the Rights and Responsibilities of Children, Parents and Educators?

Rights

Everyone in the education and childcare systems has rights:

Children's Rights

- Children have the right to a safe and harassment-free school environment.
- Children have the right to see their family reflected in the school curriculum.
- Children have the right to reach their full academic, social and emotional potential.

Parents' Rights

- Parents have the right to know that their child will be safe at school, both physically and emotionally.⁶⁴
- Parents have the right to know that all children and adults will be treated fairly regardless of their race, ability, religion, national origin, economic status, age, gender, sexual orientation or gender identity/ expression, and that each child will be treated as an individual.⁶⁴
- Parents have the right to know that any negative or cruel behaviour among children or between children, staff and other adults will not be tolerated.⁶⁴
- Parents have the right to have their family recognized, acknowledged and included in the school or preschool community.
- Parents have the right to open and honest communication with educators. Parents have the right to approach staff with their concerns, and to be assured that their issues will be taken seriously and addressed where possible.⁶⁴
- Parents have the right to advocate for their children.
- Parents have a right to privacy. It is understood that educators benefit from awareness of children's lives outside of school that may affect their lives at school. However, it is important that parents decide on the relevant information to share with the school.

Educators' Rights

- Educators have the right to hold a personal view about LGBTIQ issues outside of their professional responsibility to create safe and inclusive space for all children and their parents.

- Educators have the right to feel safe to talk about LGBTTTQ issues and families in an age-appropriate, inclusive way in their classrooms, and with other educators and parents.
- Educators have the right to supports, training and resources to create inclusive space.

It is important to realize that these rights are clearly written into policy at many levels within the education system. Some of the basic human rights were listed in Chapter 2, and here we include some positions and policies related to the school system:

- The Canadian Teachers' Federation states that it is opposed to stereotyping and discrimination against students or teachers on the grounds of sex, creed, national or ethnic origin, colour, language, geographic location, social or economic status, political affiliation, marital status, sexual orientation, age or disability.⁶⁵
- The Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario recommends to its membership to develop strategies and resources that address homophobia, transphobia and heterosexism in schools and to liaise with other elementary teachers' federations and outside organizations to further lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans issues.⁶⁶
- The Ottawa–Carleton District School Board, in their Safe Schools Policy, states that “the Board does not tolerate physical, verbal (oral or written), sexual or psychological abuse; bullying; or discrimination on the basis of race, culture, religion, gender, language, disability, sexual orientation or other attribute.”⁶⁷

Responsibilities

To ensure that these rights are practiced within school and preschool spaces, it is important that we understand the other side of rights: parents and educators each have responsibilities, not only to the children, but to each other.

- Parents and educators have the responsibility to nurture their partnership.
- Educators have the responsibility to consider parental concerns as essential to children's education.
- Educators have the responsibility to provide opportunities for parents to speak with them.
- Parents have the responsibility to take opportunities to communicate with educators.

- Educators have the responsibility to use language that is inclusive on forms, newsletters, and other school communications.
- Educators have the responsibility to seek out the tools that will afford all children and families the same degree of respect.
- Educators have the responsibility to create safe space and to stop name-calling, discrimination, bullying and emotional and physical abuse.
- Educators have the responsibility to include pictures, books, and conversations about LGBTTTQ parents and their children in the school and preschool.
- Schools and preschools have the responsibility to institute a written, anti-discrimination policy that includes sexual orientation and gender identity/expression.

There are many remarkable educators in the school and preschool systems who acknowledge diverse communities, who use inclusive curriculum and language, and who strive to create positive and nurturing spaces for all children and their unique needs. There are some LGBTTTQ educators who personally understand the issues and needs of LGBTTTQ families and who face their own challenges in trying to work within a system that is often unreceptive to their needs, ideas or expertise. There are some educators who are more than willing to learn with openness, even if they have not been previously exposed to creating LGBTTTQ inclusive space before. And, there are some educators who may first need to deal with their own heterosexism, homophobia and transphobia before taking on the challenge of diversity in the classroom. For everyone, no matter our perspective or experience, dialogue between parents and educators is key.

Dialogue between parents and educators is key.

LGBTTTQ Parents' Concerns and Fears

For all parents, the first day of school or day care is a major milestone in “letting go”. It can create anxiety for parent and child alike. Parents realize that a great deal of their children’s learning is now taking place outside of the home.

For LGBTTTQ parents, their child’s first day may hold additional concerns. This apprehension will centre around worries for their child’s and their family’s safety.

- Should I let the school or daycare and/or teacher know about my sexual orientation or gender identity? What are the problems that might come up if I do? When should I bring it up? How should I bring it up?
- How much about should I let the teacher know about our family?
- Will the school or daycare be a warm, welcoming place for my child once sexual orientation/gender identity is known?

- What if the teacher is uncomfortable with or dislikes glbtq people?
- What if the teacher or principal does not like the idea of LGBTTQ people raising families?
- Will the education lessons and the activities in the classroom/playroom make my child feel welcome and part of the community? Will my child see our family reality represented or will my child feel excluded?
- Will my child be accepted by the teacher, or will they suffer from innuendo and careless comments?
- Will my child be accepted by the other children? Will they be teased by others because we are LGBTTQ parents? Will they be bullied?

LGBTTQ Parents Coming Out to the School⁶⁸

For LGBTTQ parents, coming out to the educator, the school, daycare and to society at large, can be a complex and difficult decision. As discussed in Chapter 2, heterosexism, homophobia and transphobia exist in our community. A parent's decision to be out may have a negative impact on their child's life and on their family.

In addition parents may need to determine with whom to be candid. Some parents, for instance, may wish to have their family status known only to their child's teacher, or to the school administration. Some parents may struggle to be open at all. The fear of consequences is frequently present.

- The school or daycare will "out" me and I will risk losing my job.
- The school or daycare will "out" me and I will risk losing custody of my children.

Other fears of LGBTTQ parents reflect their concern for their children:

- My child will be discriminated against.
- My child will not be invited to friends' homes.
- Friends will not accept my child's invitations to come to our home.
- The school or day care will not provide opportunities for my child to see his or her family reflected in the curriculum.
- My child will be harassed by others.

These fears are legitimate. When we recognize parents' legitimate fears, we can find ways to demonstrate openness and understanding. We can use language and behaviours that tell parents it is safe to approach us to discuss LGBTTQ and other issues.

Respecting personal boundaries of LGBTTTQ parents and families

Parents and children need to move at their own pace, taking into account their comfort level and sense of personal safety. We may feel that we cannot be supportive to children's family situations if we have no knowledge of them. And this is true to some extent, however, in an ideal educational setting inclusive space is always a priority. We create an environment where children learn constantly about the diverse world we live in, whether or not there is a LGBTTTQ family, or an Aboriginal family, a New Canadian family or a child or parent with a disability, participating in our classroom or playroom.

Even if parents have said nothing, there are often indicators that children are part of a diverse or LGBTTTQ family. For example, a child may say something about having two moms and then become silent, or correct themselves and become self-conscious. A parent may label another adult in their LGBTTTQ relationship as an "aunt" or "roommate". Or, both mothers/fathers may participate together at parent-teacher interviews, or at school functions. Given that LGBTTTQ issues are still new for many educators and that many families have experienced discrimination, parents and children may feel quite anxious about bringing up LGBTTTQ issues if they are uncertain about the reception they may receive.

Parents may choose to work with educators on other school or preschool activities for a period of time, allowing them to know us better before coming out about LGBTTTQ issues. When they do choose to come out, a parent may want someone else present. It is never too late in the relationship to broach the issue or to provide open-ended questions that may allow a parent to discuss their family. It is important for us to remember that, even if our personal views about LGBTTTQ issues are not compatible with those of the parents, it is our job above all to provide children with a caring and welcoming environment for learning.



*"No one can come to appreciate different kinds of families just by being told to do so. What is possible is for educators and parents to tell each other who they are, enlarging the possibilities for how each group considers the other."*⁶⁹

To support LGBTTTQ parents who come out:

- Be a role model of acceptance.
- Ask questions that show compassion. "Has it been difficult for you to tell me this?" If you have worked with this parent before, you could ask: "Have I ever offended you unknowingly, or made you feel invisible?"
- Appreciate the person's courage and trust. Thank them for sharing and follow up later to see how they are doing.
- Have a sense of humour. Take the disclosure seriously, however gentle, appropriate humour can help ease the tension.

- Ask “What can I do to be
- Listen, listen, listen. Coming out as a LGBTTTQ family can be part of a long process. You may be approached again to discuss this process and its challenges.
- Assure confidentiality. Some parents may decide to be out only to the child’s educator or may have their own plans for coming out to others, so it is important to respect their decision. Be sure to ask what you may or may not say to others.

Self-Assessment: Coming to Terms with Your Own Biases

As an educator, we face the challenge of coming to terms with both our personal stereotypes about LGBTTTQ individuals and our assumptions about the definition of family. We may also face the need to review new resources and curriculum to ensure that we understand how to be open and inclusive.

An honest personal assessment of our views regarding LGBTTTQ issues and LGBTTTQ parents may be our best first step. The following will help identify some of the subtle ways in which we may unintentionally express anti- LGBTTTQ bias:⁷⁰

1. Do I believe that LGBTTTQ people (parents) can influence others to change their sexual orientation or gender identity? Do I think someone could influence me to change my sexual and affection preference?
2. As a parent, how would I feel about having a LGBTTTQ child?
3. How do I think I would feel if I discovered that one of my parents, or a brother or sister, were LGBTTTQ?
4. How would I feel if they chose to create and/or raise a family?
5. What are my stereotypes about LGBTTTQ people? Where did these come from?
6. Are there any jobs, positions or professions that I think should be barred to LGBTTTQ people? If yes, why?
7. Would I go to a physician whom I knew or believed to be LGBTTTQ? What if they were of the same gender as me? Would that bother me? Why or why not?
8. If someone I care about were to say, “I think I am gay,” would I suggest that the person see a therapist? What if they said, “I think I’m trans?”
9. Have I ever been to a LGBTTTQ-organized social event, march, or worship service? If not, why?
10. Can I think of three positive aspects about being LGBTTTQ?
11. Have I ever laughed at a “queer” joke? Have I ever said “That’s so gay!”

12. Have I ever changed my own behaviour out of fear that someone might think or comment that I am LGBTTTQ?
13. Have I ever discouraged a particular behaviour in a child by saying “That’s not ladylike” or “Boys don’t wear that” or something similar?
14. Would I ever consider wearing a button that says, “How dare you presume I’m heterosexual”? Why or why not?

It is essential for us to examine our own thoughts about LGBTTTQ issues. It is through this reflection that we often uncover our biases, and also renew our commitment to create respectful and inclusive learning spaces for all children. Even if we experience personal resistance to working with LGBTTTQ families, it is important to remember that we are required by professional code and by legislation to provide the best education, service and care to all families.

Parent-Teacher Interviews

Begin with Positive and Open Communication

As in all communication, we encourage everyone to begin with openness, respect and kindness because it will determine the level of success we have in establishing and navigating our relationships. We already start with common ground in our communication; we all want what is best for the children.

An important step we can take to develop a positive relationship with LGBTTTQ parents, and in fact all parents, is to begin with the assumption that a cooperative solution to varying interests can be found, and everyone can benefit. It is important to acknowledge that LGBTTTQ parents will have fears and concerns. We also need to acknowledge our own concerns as educators, concerns that may include a fear that other parents may not be supportive of a LGBTTTQ-inclusive learning space. When people come together to create change, their different goals, thoughts and needs do not necessarily require an either/or choice, leading to a ‘win-lose’ outcome.

If we expect that differences will lead to conflict then we tend to approach or to react defensively, ready to protect our own interests. When we enter into these interactions assuming that a cooperative solution is possible where everyone benefits, then the door is left wide open for exactly that to happen, a cooperative solution.⁷¹

Framing the questions

Parent-teacher interviews provide a great opportunity for building trust and openness with LGBTTTQ parents. If they sense our genuine acceptance, parents may become more comfortable and open with us about their lives.

“While the flow of information may need to start with the family, the school can set the stage. ... If educators genuinely welcome the possibility of a variety of family structures into the classroom, it can encourage parents to take the next step, perhaps to hint about their family makeup.”⁷²

Asking open-ended questions invites parents to speak freely and openly:

- Tell me about your family.
- Who would you like us to include in discussions about your family?

Requesting the names that the child uses for their parent(s) can help us comprehend the child's understanding of their family, and we can help him/her explain their family to other children.

- What are the names your child uses to refer to your family members? (Daddy/Papa, Mama Jane/Mama Sally, first names, etc.)

For some LGBTTTQ parents, public disclosure may result in discrimination, harassment, and danger of losing custody and/or jobs, as discussed earlier.

- How open are you about your relationship with the rest of the community?

It can help if we admit our limitations with regard to LGBTTTQ family issues. Asking the LGBTTTQ parents for help tells them that we accept them, and sets the stage for more open discussion.

- Do you have resources, materials and sources that may help me learn more about these issues?

As interviews become more relaxed, it becomes easier to ask more specific questions about the LGBTTTQ family, such as:

- How does your family explain how your children came to be with you? (We understand that children can come into families in many different ways.)

We need to be careful about asking questions that are intrusive or irrelevant. For example, people will often ask a family of two moms: “Who is the real mother?” or, of two fathers: “Who is or where is the mother?” These questions are not respectful of LGBTTTQ relationships. A good way to decide if a question is irrelevant

or intrusive, is to ask our self: “Would I ask the same question to all parents? If not, why not? Is it truly relevant?”.

Sample Questions that Parents May ask Educators and Child Care Providers

It can be helpful, before meeting with parents, to think over the following questions and to examine our own knowledge on the subjects presented here. We can also demonstrate our understanding of LGBTTTQ issues by bringing up these matters with parents rather than waiting to be prompted by their questions.

- Have we ever had 'out' LGBTTTQ parents or educators at our school or preschool? If we have, how did our school or preschool address their needs?
- Has our school or preschool provided training and/or workshops about issues of bias or discrimination that also included families with LGBTTTQ parents?
- If not, would I be willing to take training on these issues to better serve LGBTTTQ families? (For training, contact the Around the Rainbow Project.)
- Does our school have books or other resource materials that reflect LGBTTTQ families and explore the issues related to them? (If not, then you can encourage your school to purchase useful resources found in the Resource Kit.)
- How is our school inclusive around holiday celebrations such as Mothers' Day, Fathers' Day, Birthdays, Pride celebrations, and religious and cultural celebrations?
- How do I, and my school or preschool, deal with issues of teasing, name-calling and all forms of harassment?
- Do we have an anti-discrimination policy in our school/preschool that includes sexual orientation and gender identity? How is this policy communicated to staff, parents and students? Do we provide training?

The Education Environment

Both legally and ethically, the visibility, safety and inclusion of LGBTTTQ families and their children is a fundamental part of the educators' and the administration's responsibilities. Many schools and preschools attempt to incorporate multiculturalism into their programs, to provide educational activities available to all children from a range of economic conditions, and to take into account gender-role stereotyping found in resources and curriculum. We may feel that all children and families are welcome no matter who they are or where they come from. At the same time, one of the barriers to creating inclusive space occurs when we feel that we are already inclusive 'enough'. In many ways inclusion is a process not a destination. It will require ongoing evaluation of all possible kinds of diversity.

Creating an environment that is inclusive and safe for glbtq families requires at a minimum:

- That, as educators, we commit to increasing our understanding about LGBTTQ people and LGBTTQ families, to work through discriminatory biases, and to learn from working with LGBTTQ communities.
- That we review the welcoming and intake/registration process used when children first arrive at the centre or school.
- That we assess the extent to which diversity of all families is represented in the classroom and playroom settings.
- That we work with our schools and preschools to assess the library, books and other school resources.

Welcoming and Intake

Our initial communication with LGBTTQ parents will set the stage for our future work together. It will also set the tone for what happens in our learning environment. The intake or registration form may be the first instrument of communication between LGBTTQ families and educators. As parents complete the intake forms, outlining names, addresses and other pertinent information, they participate in the first occasion for us to learn about their family.

A well-designed intake form can make the discussion easier by conveying openness and inclusion. Questions to ask about intake forms include:

1. Are the forms inclusive? When we ask for the parents' or guardians' names, do we refer to "Father" and "Mother" or do we ask for "Parent/guardian 1", "Parent/guardian 2", etc.
2. Do the forms ask for the parent/guardian to describe their relationship with the child?
3. Do the forms allow for more than one address, for cases where there may be shared custody?
4. How do the forms respect privacy? For example, do they ask whether it would be appropriate to leave a message at a work phone number?
5. Does the form provide parents with the opportunity to tell us more about themselves and their families, perhaps information that is descriptive or that may express concerns?

Becoming familiar with what each LGBTTQ parent has said to his/her child about their family structure can help us deal with questions and situations that arise over the year. As children become aware of each other's families over the course of the year, questions usually come up, "Why does Sarah have two fathers?", "Who is Billy's real mom?", "If the man who came yesterday to pick Sarah up is her dad, who is this man? Is he her uncle?". To help us respond to these questions, the intake forms would include questions such as: "How do your children refer to you and to the other parent(s)/guardians and caring adults in their lives?"

Representing All Children's Family Norms

Knowing the family status of all children gives us important information to make our classroom or playroom an inclusive space. We can include images and posters that illustrate different families to reinforce the message that all children are welcome. Other materials make statements against homophobia and other types of discrimination. There are many images on the web that can be used to help create resources, and as we work with children, we can create our own diverse family posters and images. (See the Resource Kit for websites.)

Celebrations

As teachers and educators we can reframe “traditional” family celebrations, such as Fathers’ Day and Mothers’ Day. For example, Mother’s Day may become “Day to honour the women who care for me”, to incorporate the possibility of many family forms where a ‘mother’ per se does not exist or, more than one mother is present. This would be the case for many other families as well, including single-parent families, reconfigured families after separation and divorce, extended-family parenting, as well as LGBTTTQ families. Or, Pride Day may be recognized by asking children, “What celebrations does your family enjoy together?”

Library, Books and Preschool/School Resources

As teachers and educators we can review the school and preschool resources to see if they contain resources that promote other concepts of inclusion. Some questions we can ask include:

- Do our resources include literature and information about LGBTTTQ families, LGBTTTQ parents, and general LGBTTTQ issues? These media can include videos, pamphlets and books for children, teachers and parents. Children’s books depicting LGBTTTQ people in a variety of everyday roles should also be available and clearly visible.
- Are our library holdings catalogued and shelved so that students can access the materials easily? For example, cataloguing systems should use updated subject headings such as “lesbian”, “gay” and “trans”, rather than outdated and potentially derogatory terminology such as “homosexual”, “transvestite” or “homophile.” Books on LGBTTTQ issues should be kept in the same manner as other holdings, preferably on open shelves, rather than being kept in the librarian’s office and made available only on request.
- Are LGBTTTQ issues and literature integrated into reading lists to ensure comfortable and universal access? Are there specific reading lists of books on LGBTTTQ issues? Are they periodically displayed in a visible way?
- Does the internet-filtering allow for educational and appropriate access to information about LGBTTTQ issues commonly censored by filters?
- Do we provide local guides and resources to organizations for LGBTTTQ parents, LGBTTTQ youth and the LGBTTTQ community? (see Resource Kit)

- Have we evaluated the materials we use to ensure that information is current?

There are other areas where we can work to create greater inclusion in classrooms/playrooms and to integrate LGBTTQ family issues in everyday interactions, from curriculum to overall practices within schools/preschools.

To implement these changes, we may want to share the responsibility with others. A good way to do this is to develop an Anti-Bias Committee.

Start an Anti-Bias Committee

There is strength in numbers to bring about changes in the school or preschool environment. We can use our contacts in the school and the community to bring together fellow educators, administrators and parents to address the issues. Some things to look at:

Policy and Procedures

- Adopt a core values statement based on school board policy or the policies of our centre. Ensure that it explicitly protects the rights of all students, teachers and families regardless of race, ethnicity, faith, ability, nationality, gender, gender identity or sexual orientation (real or perceived), and that the values of diversity, inclusiveness and safety are included. (Some examples of existing policy are given in Chapter 5 and in the Resource Kit.)
- Make sure our school board or the board for our centre reaches out to all minorities, including LGBTTQ people, when we fill teaching, coaching, administrative, clerical, custodial and other positions within the school or preschool system.
- If our school or centre doesn't have anti-harassment, policy, ask to have one adopted. If such policies exist, then ensure that the school implements clear procedures for these policies.
- Establish and enforce clear behavioral guidelines in a handbook that spells out problem-behaviour and consequences, thereby ensuring consistent action from teacher to teacher, student to student, and behaviour to behaviour.
- Post the core values statement and anti-harassment policy in a prominent place, for example, in the parents' handbook, in hallways, or on bulletin boards.
- Ensure that official school and centre forms/paperwork create spaces for all kinds of families and for all family members to be included.

Staff Development

- Provide mandatory professional development for all staff and educators on diversity and social inclusion, and ensure that these opportunities include specialized training on LGBTTTQ issues including discrimination, homophobia, transphobia, heterosexism and LGBTTTQ family needs.
- Provide training to all staff on how to recognize and intervene if harassment occurs.
- Provide training for non-instructional staff. For example, bus drivers and crossing guards should receive training on addressing harassment that occurs in transit to and from school or other locations.

Curriculum

- Encourage our school or centre to use a “family curriculum”, which can come alive by leaving many things open-ended. For example, drawing family trees can encourage children to talk about their families with one another, to compare differences in a non-judgmental way, and to find the things they have in common. Inviting parents into the classroom to talk about their work or their culture can be appropriate. If a child is from a two-parent, LGBTTTQ family, inviting both parents can also reinforce the school's acceptance of diversity.
- Ensure that materials in the classrooms and playrooms (reading materials, posters, etc.) refer to and have pictures of diverse types of families, including images of LGBTTTQ families.
- Ensure that young children have the opportunity for dramatic play, with a wide array of materials that encourages children to act out various families and relationships.
- Integrate diversity into the general curriculum, for example history, mathematics, health and family studies, in age-appropriate ways. (There are anti-bias curriculum guides that may provide examples from working with cultural diversity that we can draw upon. Please see the Resource Kit for more information.)

Children

- Ensure that the rights of all children are respected in the classroom.
- Teach by example. Children readily learn behaviour that is modeled for them.
- Introduce young children to the principles of respect and acceptance. This introduction should include appropriate education about LGBTTTQ people and LGBTTTQ families.

Parents

- Host an evening community awareness program for parents that addresses bullying, discrimination and harassment, and includes LGBTTTQ issues.
- Talk openly to fellow staff, parents and children about protecting all people, including LGBTTTQ people, from bullying, discrimination and harassment.

These are some ideas of ways we can work towards an inclusive, safe and nurturing space for children in the preschool and school systems. By using our own creativity and imagination and by working together with colleagues and parents, we will continue to provide many opportunities for children to experience a sense of belonging. The gift for all of us is a space where the richness of diversity is celebrated.

Parents advocating for their children

Advocacy ensures that common values held by a society, values such as care, respect, safety, peace, and legislated rights, including LGBTTTQ rights, are put into practice. Advocacy assumes that people have rights, and that those rights are enforceable. Advocacy comes into play any time we identify an unfair or harmful situation that affects us or someone else, and we decide to help correct that situation.

Parents may first address their concerns to us, as their child's educator. Later, they may take further steps because more help is needed from the school or centre, or because change is needed at a systemic level.

Systemic advocacy is advocacy that is aimed at the systems within society on behalf of a number or group of people to achieve an outcome that is in the best interests of all. It ensures that systems or institutions, like the education system or district school boards, are working as intended and according to legislation, to provide safe and accessible learning spaces for all children.

Why is advocacy important for both educators and parents?⁷³

Parents understand their children and the conditions they need to be healthy and happy. If parents do not speak out for their children, who will? Similarly, as educators, we come know the children we work with each day. We also recognize how to navigate within the school/preschool systems. It is when we communicate with each other, about our needs concerns, and solutions, that we create the opportunity to work together to improve the conditions for children, parents and educators. We can make certain that people with the authority to make decision hear our concerns so that action can be taken to end discrimination and injustice. If we are not speaking up then no one is aware, and nothing changes.

Advocacy is important because as educators and as parents, we need to know that we are providing children with the best possible care and education, and that we have allies to bring this about. We have the responsibility for creating a safe and inclusive learning environment for children and thus, we are asserting our right to speak up and to take action on their behalf.

Working with Community

To create change, we can look for others who may be able to help us advocate for inclusive space in our learning environments.

Allies - An ally is an individual or group that cooperates with or helps another. Often they are facing or have already faced similar issues. The list of possible allies may surprise us. We will probably find educators, administrators and parents in the straight community who are willing to work on injustices that are exclusionary on any front. Even though some people may not be particularly sympathetic to LGBTTTQ issues per se, they may support “global” issues of acceptance, inclusiveness and justice in the school system.

Champions – A champion is an individual who has an established public profile who will take on a very public role in supporting your goals for change. This could be a trustee on the school board, a local politician or a local celebrity. A champion can help parents link to administrators to ensure that their concerns are heard and acted upon.

Networks – A network is a group of people or organizations that exchange information, experience and resources about a common interest. There are many networks that we can connect to, including LGBTTTQ groups in the community, local religious groups, community and social service agencies, and community-based committees. Please see the Resource Kit for more information.

Working with Parents through the Levels of Influence

When parents have concerns, we can encourage them to deal with people in the education system in the following manner:⁷⁴

- We encourage parents to begin with us, as their child’s educator; if we are unwilling or unable to bring about solutions or changes, or if broader change is required then,...
- We encourage parents to move on to the school principal or preschool director; again if change cannot be brought about, or if systemic change is needed then,...
- We encourage parents to move on to the parent advisory committee, or the board of directors/trustees.

There are several reasons for this.

- Most organizations are hierarchical and have procedures that determine who can address specific problems.
- It is in everyone's best interest to keep communication open at all levels of the hierarchy.
- Even though parents may not be satisfied with the initial response from the school or centre, it is best to encourage them to continue to work, in a positive way, with the people within the education system. Jumping ahead too quickly along the 'line of authority' may alienate some potential allies. Parents can be labeled as difficult people or trouble makers. Challenging situations may be created in the future, if issues arise and these same people need to be called upon for support. Maintaining relationship is critical.

It can be awkward for educators to help parents advocate within the school and preschool systems since it involves the people who have power over us in our careers. The more that people work together, the less risk is involved to any one person. Keep issues focused on the children, and framed within the legislated rights of children and LGBTTQ persons, the legislated responsibilities of the school or preschool, and the policies of the preschool or school.

Working with Challenges

As LGBTTQ families become more visible in the school environment, all children become more aware of the variety of families among their classmates. Along with this visibility comes an awareness of sexual orientation and gender identity. Educators and some parents may wonder how to answer questions that children may ask as a result of this awareness. Sometimes people believe that young children will be confused by access to information about LGBTTQ families and issues. However, clear, accurate, age-appropriate information should not be confusing to anyone. Some adults underestimate the ability of children to understand unfamiliar concepts. In fact, it is often much easier for children to understand these concepts and to be open to diversity than for adults.

A real life example:

Two 6 year olds were playing in the playground. An educator overheard the following conversation:

"I have two dads."

"You can't have two dads."

"Yes you can."

"Oh, okay", and they went off to play.

As educators we need to give time and space for our children to ponder and to resolve these questions in ways that work for them, and at the same time, be prepared to support or intervene if necessary.

Answering Children's Questions:

The following are sample answers to some of the questions that may come up. As educators, it is important to be prepared to reflect on some of the questions children may ask. It allows us to prepare answers that are authentic and comfortable for us. We can then speak naturally and positively about diverse families, according to the developmental level and the experience of children.

What does "gay" or lesbian" mean?

Being gay means that a person loves, in a very special way, someone who is the same sex. Gay men love men. Gay women, or lesbians, love women. Gay people might choose to have a special relationship with someone, share their home, and have a family together.

What does "trans" mean?

Being trans means looking like one gender on the outside and knowing that you are another gender on the inside. Some people say it is like being born into the wrong body.

How can John have two dads?

Families are made up in many different ways. John lives in a family where there are two dads because his parents love each other very much and wanted to bring a child into their family to be part of their lives.

Where is John's mom?

His family is made up of two dads, John, and any siblings. A woman gave birth to John but she does not look after him. His dads are the ones who make a home for him and take care of him.

Can girls marry girls or boys marry boys?

Yes. People who love each other can live together, marry, take care of one another and be a family, with or without children.

Is Caitlin going to be lesbian because her moms are lesbians?

No. Caitlin will grow up to be who she was born to be. Having lesbian parents does not make a child become a lesbian.

Will I be gay if I play with Caitlin?

No. You are always going to be who you are, no matter whom you play with. Being gay or straight is something that's inside a person; no one else can put it there.

Answering Adults' Concerns

Adults within the larger heterosexual school community may have concerns and fears of their own. It is important to think through how to answer these questions in ways that are respectful of the diversity of opinions and values that adults share, that speak positively about LGBTTTQ families and that reflect our role in providing safe, nurturing space for all children.

My child will be influenced to be gay or trans.

Your child will become who they are “hard-wired” to be. Recognizing LGBTTTQ families and playing with children from LGBTTTQ families will not change your child’s sexuality or gender identity in any way.

My child will be taught values with which I disagree.

Your child will learn the values of care and respect of others, as well as safety and peace for everyone, all values that are compatible with your core values.

My son will become a “sissy.”/My daughter will become a “tomboy.”

Your children will become who they are intended to be, regardless of their exposure to friends whose parents may be LGBTTTQ. Indeed, the exposure may help them to grow into adulthood as open-minded human beings with a broader, more inclusive view of the world.

The “traditional” family will be devalued.

The “traditional” family is only one of a variety of family structures. Families are created in loving relationships. Many families are made up of single parents who are alone through divorce, death of a spouse, or by choice; other families are supported by grandparents, aunts and uncles, or foster parents. Still others are blended families created by bringing children from other relationships. There are families with LGBTTTQ parents. In essence, all kinds of families can be valued, supported and respected without threatening one particular form of family.

Role Models for children:⁷⁵

Answering direct questions from children and adults is helpful however, for children to integrate important learning about norms and values, role modeling by important adults in their lives, educators and parents, is key. Some ideas on how to do this:

For LGBTTTQ educators and LGBTTTQ parents:

- Be proud of who you are and be comfortable with your sexual orientation and gender identity. Children benefit from adults who are honest and true to themselves. Be proud of the lessons you are teaching the children.
- Be sympathetic of children's experiences. Make sure that children know other children of LGBTTTQ parents where possible. Create a circle of support for children and for yourselves.

For all educators and parents:

- Talk to children about LGBTTTQ issues in age-appropriate ways and most importantly, listen actively. Children need an ally and a good ear as they work things out for themselves and with their peers.
- Integrate diversity into daily life. Introduce children to issues and stories not only about LGBTTTQ lives, but also issues and stories about people from diverse ethnic, cultural backgrounds and faiths, and about people who hold various philosophies, people who have different abilities, etc.
- Challenge sexism, racism, classism, harassment, violence, and talk to children in an age-appropriate way, about why it is important to challenge these ideas and behaviours. Use inclusive language.
- Correct all myths, stereotypes and insinuations clearly. Open up conversation with children about how these comments hurt people and the world we live in.
- Teach children that people who discriminate are the ones who need help. At the same time there is never a reason good enough for hurting people, treating anyone unfairly or unkindly, and that people have a responsibility to change. We can teach children compassion all while they learn to stand up for themselves.

"If we give children the power they will surprise you. They have an intuitive sense of justice. Trust them to do what is right for them." ⁷⁶

Conclusion

The broadening recognition of LGBTTTQ rights over the past generation has led to many changes in Canadian society. Discussing LGBTTTQ-related issues is no longer taboo; attitudes toward LGBTTTQ people have been changing; LGBTTTQ family members and friends have become more widely recognized and welcomed. Along with these changes has come the need to recognize diverse families, including LGBTTTQ parents and their children.

By taking the process one step at a time, beginning in our classroom/playroom and then into the school/preschool, building on our strengths, equipping ourselves with helpful resources, and building a system of like-minded people and groups, we can help bring about a positive difference. We are creating and maintaining learning environments that are safe and inclusive for all children. We should never underestimate the influence that we may have over the long run. Throughout history, much has been achieved by thinking globally and acting locally.

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed people can change the world. Indeed it is the only thing that ever has.” –Margaret Mead

Future Learning

This document is a small step in the ongoing process of building relationships between LGBTTTQ families and educators. While it summarizes much of the current research and understanding of LGBTTTQ families and concerns, it also serves to point out what we do not know: those areas that require further research.

We have made every effort to use language that is as inclusive as possible. We recognize however that there is much more research needed to understand the general and specific issues faced by LGBTTTQ parents and their children. Much of the existing research does not make clear distinctions between different members of the LGBTTTQ community, and how various factors can impact different people in quite different ways. We have only briefly named the compounding impact of classism, racism, and homophobia/transphobia on multicultural and two spirit parents and their children. Future, in-depth work in these areas is greatly needed if we are to be truly inclusive and accessible to all families.

We seek to learn more through this project, and through linking with others who are working on similar issues. We encourage students, community members and researchers to conduct research into LGBTTTQ lives to fill in some of these identified gaps. We also encourage dialogue across communities and within communities as the basis for moving forward and learning together.

“I have learned over the years that when one’s mind is made up, this diminishes fear; knowing what must be done does away with fear.” - Rosa Parks

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