

ABSOLUTE BEGINNERS Crib Sheet



WHAT TO KNOW: TIPS FOR FIRST-TIME LGBT PARENTS

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HOW DO I FIND OTHER FAMILIES LIKE MINE?

Look for LGBT parent groups in your area through the Family Equality Council (familyequality.org), the nearest LGBT center (centerlink.org), or Meetup (meetup.com). If you started your family through a clinic or agency, see if they can put you in touch with other LGBT families. Search online for blogs by LGBT parents. You may also find allies in non-LGBT families, especially ones that are adoptive, multiracial, created through assisted reproduction, or in other ways “non-traditional.” They are often sensitive to similar issues of explaining our families to a baffled world, and wanting to find books and media that represent us. Use the commonalities of parenting—diapers, strollers, feeding—to start a conversation. You may be surprised at how babies build bridges.

PROTECT YOUR FAMILY LEGALLY

Even in states where same-sex parents may both go on the birth certificate, legal experts recommend getting a second-parent adoption or court order, because they are more widely recognized in other states and countries. In states where joint and/or second-parent adoptions are not permitted, an attorney versed in LGBT legal matters can advise you about how to obtain the most legal protections possible. You may also want to create or update your wills and beneficiary forms. Lambda Legal (lambdalegal.org), the National Center for Lesbian Rights (nclrights.org), and Gay and Lesbian Advocates and Defenders (glad.org) each have legal hotlines to point you in the right direction.

WILL MY PARTNER AND/OR I GET FAMILY LEAVE AND BENEFITS?

The federal Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) allows qualified employees to take time off to care for a newly born or adopted child, including children of your same-sex partner or spouse—even if you are not the legal parent, according to the Family Equality Council. More and more employers, too, provide medical benefits to same-sex partners and children, even if the state doesn’t recognize your relationship. If in doubt, ask.

TALKING ABOUT YOUR FAMILY WITH ADULTS

Think through (and discuss with a partner, if relevant) how much you are comfortable revealing about your family to the wider world. Don't be afraid to give a firm "That doesn't concern you" to nosy strangers, but realize that sometimes sharing a bit about your family can help develop understanding and reveal points of commonality. There's no one answer for everyone or every situation, but a little preparation can help you sound comfortable with yourself. That's key to promoting acceptance by others—and setting a good example for your child.

TALKING ABOUT YOUR FAMILY WITH CHILDREN

Children start to develop their sense of self in large part through an understanding of family relationships. Make sure you, your extended families, and other caregivers use consistent names and pronouns to refer to you (and your partner, donor, birth parent, or surrogate, as applicable). Point out to your child similarities and differences with other families. Tell them the simplified story of how they came to be in your family, emphasizing how much they are loved.

HOW DO I FIND LGBT-FRIENDLY DAYCARE?

The key here is to ask lots of questions: Has the sitter (or daycare center) ever had other LGBT clients, and may you contact them for a reference? How would the caregiver(s) respond if another child or parent asked why your child has two dads, or why their mom looks like a boy? Are they open to suggestions from you on those situations? Daycare centers run by welcoming religious congregations may be options for some people, as are employer-sponsored childcare organizations like Bright Horizons, which has a stated commitment to LGBT-inclusive diversity. (It's still a good idea to meet local staff beforehand, though.)

HOW WILL MY BEING LGBT AFFECT MY CHILD?

Numerous legitimate academic studies over the last several decades have shown that children of LGBT parents show no differences in adjustment or well-being compared to children of non-LGBT parents. They may even exhibit certain strengths, such as more flexible thinking about traditional gender roles. Yes, our children may sometimes experience harassment or bullying because they have LGBT parents, but we can also give them the self-confidence, skills, and support to withstand them. Just don't try to create a perfect family in order to prove that LGBT parents are worthy—you'll simply stress yourself and your child. We're as good—and as imperfect—as any others.

FINDING INCLUSIVE BOOKS

For the very youngest children, Lesléa Newman's *Mommy, Mama, and Me* and *Daddy, Papa, and Me* are two charming board books showing same-sex parents and their children. Many of Todd Parr's colorful books on families include same-sex parents and parents doing gender-atypical activities. Susan Meyer's gentle *Everywhere Babies* also includes same-sex parents. There are unfortunately no books for this age that show clearly transgender parents.

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