



Tips for Child Welfare Professionals: Talking about LGBT-Headed Families

- Educate yourself! Be prepared to provide accurate information to the child/youth, birth family, and others involved, as needed. Don't wait until you are working with an LGBT couple or person to do so – start today! There are many resources available to support you in this process.
- Remember that you only know that an individual prospective resource parent is or is not LGBT if they choose to share that information with you. Avoid making assumptions about someone's gender identity or sexual orientation.
- Begin by talking to the LGBT person or couple.
 - Talk to the LGBT person or couple about how you work with birth families and children/youth when a child or youth is preparing to join a new family.
 - Keep in mind that a person's LGBT identity may not automatically be disclosed in a discussion about the family and family structure. (It may be automatically disclosed, for instance, if you are talking about a family with two dads.) It may be appropriate to discuss with the person or couple whether or not to share this information with the birth family and child/youth and the pros and cons of each option.
 - Make sure the person or couple is comfortable with any personal information that you plan to share about them and the reason that you are sharing it.
 - Be sure to follow any policies or protocols concerning sharing confidential information.

Tips for Talking to Birth Families about their Child Joining an LGBT-Headed Family

- Talk about different types of families and emphasize that you are trying to find a family that is a good fit for the child/youth. For example, you might say, "We are looking for the best family for your child, one that will be a good match. We have lots of different kinds of families. [You can give examples]. Sometimes we have lesbian and gay families. How would you feel about [child] being placed with a family with two moms?" Share some information about why you think the family is a good fit for the child/youth.
- Answer any questions they have in an open-minded manner while being affirming of the LGBT person/couple. In the absence of accurate information, people may rely on myths and stereotypes. Point out stereotypes as needed, in a non-judgmental manner. Provide accurate information.
- Let the family lead in terms of concerns they might have. Avoid assuming the family will have particular concerns, or that they will have concerns at all. They may have different concerns than you anticipate. They may be comfortable with their child being placed with an LGBT-headed family. If they have concerns about what *other people* might think, help them to process and explore these concerns and to come up with a plan that works for them as to how they could manage these potential reactions.



Tips for Talking to Children/Youth about Becoming Part of a LGBT-Headed Family

- Talk about different types of families.
 - Get an understanding of a child's comprehension of the subject of LGBT-headed families and LGBT issues early in discussions. (What do they know? What have they seen or experienced? How familiar are they with the topic and what is their perspective or understanding?) This will improve the worker's ability to carry on the rest of the discussion in a more meaningful way.
 - It may be helpful for the worker to have pictures and stories of LGBT-headed families as they explore with the child what the family could look like. For younger children, this may help gauge whether they notice any "difference" and their perspective on it.
 - Emphasize that you are trying to find a family that is a good fit for the child/youth. For example, you might say, "We have been looking for a family that will be a good match for you. There are all different kinds of families. Some families have a mom and a dad, some have a mom, some have 2 moms, some have a grandma and grandpa and a dad. The family we think would be great for you has two dads."
 - Share some information about what makes the family special and why you think they are a good fit for the child/youth.

- Ask them how they would feel about becoming a part of this family and whether they have any questions. Answer any questions they might have in an open-minded, inclusive, affirming, and developmentally-appropriate way. As with any topic that is sensitive, start with where the child/youth is in terms of their level of knowledge about LGBT people and LGBT-headed families. Let them know that it is ok to have questions (both immediately and later on).

- Let the child/youth lead in terms of concerns they might have. Avoid projecting *your* fears or addressing what *you imagine* the child or youth might fear. They may have different concerns than you anticipate, or they may not have concerns. Provide accurate information in response to any misinformation or concerns based on myths about LGBT people. If they have concerns about what *other people* might think (peers, birth family members), help them to explore and process these concerns. Assist the child/youth with coming up with a plan that works for them in terms of how they might manage these possible reactions and who will provide them with support.