

A Step-By-Step Toolkit

Creating Safe & Inclusive Schools for LGBTQ Families



Introduction

Safe and inclusive schools are a top priority for LGBTQ parents. While many families have positive experiences in schools, far too often children and their LGBTQ parents experience bullying and marginalization. This toolkit addresses how LGBTQ parents and guardians can play a key role in creating safe and inclusive spaces in their school environments.

Many LGBTQ family organizations prioritize improving the climate of schools in their communities. Traditionally, the LGBTQ safe schools movement has focused on school safety for LGBTQ youth in high school and, more recently, middle school. Very little attention has been given to the school experiences of children with LGBTQ parents. Even less attention has been given to the school climate at the preschool or elementary level where these children often first experience a negative reaction when they “come out” as having LGBTQ parents. LGBTQ families have a unique perspective to bring to the work of making schools safe and welcoming for all students.

How to Create Safe, Inclusive Schools



There are various ways in which parents and families can work towards creating safe, welcoming, and inclusive schools.

- 1 Bring the LGBTQ family and elementary school perspective to an existing group or coalition that is already doing safe schools work.
- 2 Provide training on the unique experiences of children with LGBTQ parents in schools.
 - ▶ Educators and other personnel need training that will give them the knowledge and skills to respond to homophobic language and behavior, and address LGBTQ topics in an age-appropriate way. Trainings should specifically address the unique needs of children with LGBTQ parents.
 - ▶ Opportunities for training can be found in:
 - Individual schools
 - District-wide staff development days
 - Educator conferences
 - College and university teacher education programs

- 3 Organize LGBTQ families, guardians, and allies to get engaged in school change.

▶ Mobilizing the power and passion of parents can be very effective in creating change in schools.

LGBTQ family groups can play an important role in helping LGBTQ parents engage in school advocacy by:

- 1 Helping parents in a school, district or region connect with one another and with potential allies
- 2 Organizing and/or publicizing school advocacy meetings
- 3 Training parents on the strategies and available resources for creating school change
- 4 Training parents to conduct school trainings

How to Create Safe, Inclusive Schools



Schools can fall anywhere along a continuum of LGBTQ-inclusivity, from having a strong anti-LGBTQ climate to being very inclusive and welcoming. Regardless of where schools are along this continuum, there is often still work to be done to ensure that LGBTQ families, as well as LGBTQ youth and staff, feel completely safe, welcome, and included. Parents and LGBTQ family groups can help their school create:

1 *Inclusive policies*

- ▶ School policies should explicitly protect students from discrimination, bullying, and harassment based on actual or perceived association with sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression.
- ▶ Any anti-LGBTQ policies should be rescinded.
- ▶ Some family organizations get involved in efforts to pass LGBTQ-inclusive safe schools laws in their home states.

2 *Inclusive curriculum*

- ▶ All children deserve to see their family reflected and valued at school. Children with LGBTQ parents often feel invisible in their schools when they do not see their family reflected in the classroom. Age-appropriate curriculum that includes LGBTQ families or other LGBTQ topics helps students with LGBTQ parents feel included and valued, and teaches all students the value of diversity and inclusion.

3 *Inclusive Forms*

- ▶ Forms should allow for family diversity. Language such as “Parent/Guardian” is more inclusive of various family structures than “Mother” and “Father”.

Additional Ways to Create a Climate of Safety and Inclusion:

- ▶ Encourage the school or district to assess school climate by administering a school climate survey that includes questions about anti-LGBTQ bullying.
- ▶ Ensure that efforts to address diversity and multiculturalism in the school or district are LGBTQ-inclusive.
- ▶ Recommend a “safe zone” or “safe staff”. This is an individual who has received LGBTQ competency training and will be an ally and advocate for the child and/or family.
- ▶ Provide guest speakers on LGBTQ families for students.

On the next page, you will find a handout that can be easily printed for your group members. We strongly encourage school advocacy, and Family Equality Council is here every step of the way to help support you and your community!

Parents can engage with their children's schools in a variety of ways to help ensure a safe, supportive learning environment for their children. The list below offers some specific suggestions. Do those which feel most comfortable to you.

1 *Ask Questions*

Ask the principal and your child's teacher if they are aware of other LGBTQ families at the school currently or in the past. Ask how school staff deal with comments like "that's so gay" or other anti-LGBTQ slurs. Ask whether the staff has received training on how to support students with LGBTQ families. Ask the school librarian if the library contains books that include LGBTQ families. Consider sharing Family Equality Council's Book Nook lists with them. Find out who is on the school board, PTA, and other influential groups at school and research their records regarding inclusiveness.

2 *Be Out*

Be as out as you feel you safely can be in your community. Meet with your principal and teacher to introduce your family. Introduce yourselves to other families at school. Let your child's teacher know what language you use to describe your family relationships (e.g. Daddy/Papa, Eva has two moms). Be a guest speaker in your child's class, at a staff meeting, or PTA meeting.

3 *Get Involved*

Parents can have a huge influence in their school communities when they get involved. Volunteer in your child's classroom or help out in the school. Take on a leadership role— join the PTA, diversity committee, or curriculum review committee. Make your voice heard. Express your thanks when the school or district takes steps to be LGBTQ inclusive, and vocally oppose any anti-LGBTQ policies or actions. Speak up at a school board meeting or email board members and district administrators about issues that impact your family.

4 *Check Policies*

Take a look at your school or district's policies addressing discrimination, harassment, and bullying to see if they include sexual orientation and gender identity/expression. If they don't, work with administrators, teachers, and other parents to change them.

5 *Fix Forms*

If your school forms say "mother/father" rather than "parent/guardian," ask if they could be updated to include all families.

6 *Provide Resources*

Suggest specific, concrete ways the school could change to be more supportive of your family. Offer suggestions for age-appropriate books, videos, curriculum, and other materials that include LGBTQ families. Donate some of these resources if you can. Offer suggestions for how to deal with potentially sticky situations like Father's Day, Mother's Day, family-tree assignments, or how to respond when other parents have questions about your family. Let your principal and teacher know about LGBTQ-related staff development opportunities, such as local trainers or conferences.

7 *Build Community*

Organize a get-together with the parents/guardians of other children in your child's classroom. If there are other LGBTQ families at your school, organize an LGBTQ and Ally potluck at school. Start an LGBTQ school advocacy group in your district or region. There is great strength in numbers and in diverse voices advocating for fairness.

8 *Expect More!*

Whether your school is just beginning the process of becoming a welcoming environment for LGBTQ families or has already taken great strides to do so, continue to raise your expectations. Nearly every school could take further steps to become even more welcoming and inclusive of LGBTQ families. Help your school move to the next level.

This Resource was prepared and distributed
by *Family Equality Council*

Learn more at www.familyequality.org