

Surround the family with Supportive people

Find someone you can talk to about emotions and avoid isolation.

Focus on the kids

Be mindful of a child's presence, and remind others to be mindful as well, pointing out that such challenges could hurt the kids. Following challenging interactions that children do overhear, debrief children, helping them devise coping strategies for similar interactions.



Resources

Family Equality Council

<http://www.familyequality.org/>

Family Equality Council is changing attitudes and policies to ensure all families are respected, loved, and celebrated - especially families with parents who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender.

Ground Spark

<http://groundspark.org/>

GroundSpark creates visionary films and dynamic educational campaigns that move individuals and communities to take action for a more just world.

Good As You

www.goodasyou.org

Good As You represents a new generation of GLBT activism.

Mombian

<http://www.mombian.com/>

Sustenance for lesbian moms

This website has a great resource page for ally parents.

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This research was conducted by Dr. Jody Koenig Kellas, University of Nebraska-Lincoln and Dr. Elizabeth Suter, University of Denver. Both Drs. Suter and Kellas are associate professors who do research on how people communicate about their identity. Both are interested in ways in which communication, including the ways in which communication within and about diverse families, can improve the quality of people's lives. Please feel free to contact us: Dr. Koenig Kellas (jkellas2@unl.edu); Dr. Suter (esuter@du.edu).

Please distribute this brochure to individuals or organizations you feel might benefit from this information.

Honoring Family Diversity



Challenges and Lessons from Lesbian Mothers

Purpose

Many families have two mothers. It is important to understand how female parents communicate about their families in order to help other lesbian mothers and to foster community acceptance about familial differences.

The goal of this brochure is to decrease discrimination against lesbian-headed families. We worked with lesbian mothers from Colorado and Nebraska to identify the challenges they face and the words they use in response to the challenges.

First, this brochure defines a challenge. Next, it outlines the kinds of challenges lesbian mothers face. Finally, it provides some examples that can be implemented to help lesbian mothers feel less discrimination, as well as some resources for more information.

What is a challenge?

Challenges come from specific negative encounters with others and negative community environments. For lesbian mothers, many of these challenges come from individuals who ask questions that imply their family is not a family.

These are challenges that parents in heterosexual families never face. For instance, if you are a heterosexual parent, consider the following questions:

Has anyone ever asked you if your child is actually your child?

Has anyone ever asked you why you would want to have children?

Have you ever been unable to visit your child in the hospital because your status as a parent is in question?

Has anyone, including extended family, ever ignored that you have a child?

Have any of your friends, family members, or neighbors ever cut off contact with you because you had a child?

For the lesbian mothers in our study, these represent some of the challenges they experienced from members of their community, extended family, and strangers. They also receive questions and comments, such as:

“Who had her?”

“You’re not her mom, I met her mom already.”

“Why would you want to have kids in a lesbian family?”

“What about a male influence in the child’s life?”

“Your child is not really my grandchild because you didn’t have her.”

Advice to a Mom from a Mom

Be yourself: Be a model for others or lead by example

“Our driving value for us in how we approach the communication is about integrity on our end, and what they will do with it is up to them...[we use] truth telling in a real straightforward, but non-hostile way.” (Olivia, mom)

“We find that living our lives is proving to everyone else who we are...and how incredibly normal our life is. We pay our bills, we pay our taxes, we change dirty diapers, we buy the food. We do all the things normal people do.” (Josie, mom)

Manage your emotions

Strike a balance between finding peace (removing anger, hurt, defensiveness, and hostility from challenging interactions; being matter-of-fact, nonchalant, and keeping things calm to neutralize the challenge and be a model), and using confrontation (anger and negative emotions to illustrate justice).