



**all children  
all families**



## ***The F Word: A Foster-to-Adopt Story Discussion Guide for Child Welfare Workers***

### **Seasons 1 & 2**

The F Word: A Foster-to-Adopt Story, a PBS web series, introduces us to Nicole and Kristan, a queer couple based in Oakland, California, who want to adopt a child from foster care. Throughout the series we join them in this journey.

The Human Rights Campaign Foundation's All Children – All Families project developed this discussion guide for child welfare workers and LGBTQ prospective parents as they watch each episode of the series. The digital series offers many opportunities to reflect on Nicole and Kristan's experiences. All Children – All Families focuses on building the capacity of child welfare systems across the country to competently serve LGBTQ families. Given this focus, many discussion questions are connected to Nicole and Kristan's status as a queer couple and some are generalizable to all families. When possible, child welfare professionals should relate answers to your own practice experiences and your current agency.

To watch the series and join in the conversation,  
visit: [www.thefwordseries.com/watch](http://www.thefwordseries.com/watch).

To learn more about HRC's All Children – All Families project,  
visit: [www.hrc.org/acaf](http://www.hrc.org/acaf).

# Season 1



## EPISODE 1: "F is for: Foster Care"

Nicole and Kristan are a queer Bay Area couple who want to adopt a child from foster care. As they prepare to have their home inspected, they child-proof their apartment and invite a couple of kids over to examine their handy work. Will they pass the safety check?

### About Nicole and Kristan


How prepared do you consider this couple to be in terms of adoption through foster care at this point in the process?

- What do you see as Kristan and Nicole's strengths – both as individuals and as a couple?
- What do Kristan and Nicole bring as a queer couple that is unique and may be beneficial to a child in foster care?
- What blind spots could Kristan & Nicole be bringing into this process?

### Navigating the System

In general, what challenges may Kristan and Nicole face related to being a queer couple? How about at your agency specifically?

- What potential biases may Kristan and Nicole face?
  - In your work with diverse families, how have you been transparent about potential biases within the child welfare system?
  - What would you like Kristan & Nicole to know about you and your role in supporting them as they navigate any potential challenges?
  - What common challenges may Kristan and Nicole face throughout the foster-to-adopt process? Could Kristan and Nicole attribute any of these challenges to biases within the system?

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- What preconceived judgments related to the LGBTQ community are Kristan and Nicole worrying about before they start their home study?
    - At one point they wonder if they'll be asked, "Who is the dad?" What do you think is meant by this?

### At Your Agency

- This digital series takes place in Oakland, CA where there have been significant gains in terms of legal and social equality for LGBTQ individuals and couples. Imagine Kristan & Nicole lived in your city/state. How might their experiences differ given your local and state laws/policies?
- What supports (both internally and externally) does your agency offer to you when working with an LGBTQ family?
- What supports does your agency have in place for Kristan and Nicole?



## EPISODE 2: "Fake It Til You Make It"

Nicole and Kristan prepare for their home study interviews and home inspection. They check requirements off a long list, including a doctor's physical and learning CPR, to become certified foster parents.

- Kristan and Nicole are nervous about the home study process. Kristan asks Nicole about her nervous feelings and Nicole explains that Sharon is "in charge of the future of our family." How can the experience of having others in control of your family's future be especially challenge for a queer couple?
- The home study process is invasive for all families. How do you prepare the families you work with for this invasiveness? Do you take particular care with LGBTQ families in any way?
- In the digital series, we do not see Sharon asking Kristan and Nicole any questions specifically related to their sexual orientation/status as a queer couple.
  - How does your agency incorporate sexual orientation into the home study conversation? What questions do you routinely ask, if any?
  - Discuss how your agency sees sexual orientation as relevant or not to the home study.
- What was your reaction (if any) to the doctor saying, "Thank you for raising Queer babies?" What do you think he meant when he said this?
- What has been your experience working with queer couples who want an open adoption?
- When Kristen and Nicole ask, "Where do we go from here?" Sharon replies, "Don't call me." How would you respond?
- What supports to Kristan and Nicole need at this stage of their process? What supports does your agency provide directly or via a staff advocate in your agency?

### Episode Three SEPTEMBER 28



A Foster-to-Adopt Story  
[www.thefwordseries.com](http://www.thefwordseries.com)

## EPISODE 3 "F is for: Friends & Finding Families Like Ours"

Nicole and Kristan are approved foster parents and await a placement. They seek advice from friends who've adopted from foster care and bust open some myths about this road to making a family. Then an email from their social worker pops up about a foster kid...“are you interested?”

- What can all families expect during this time? How can Sharon be supporting Nicole and Kristan while they wait?
- Kristan and Nicole meet with other couples and discuss transracial adoption. What, if any, unique challenges could LGBTQ families face when adoption transracially? What unique strengths may LGBTQ families bring?
- Sharon discusses concurrent planning with Nicole and Kristan after they have been waiting for a year. The couple say that this was the most transparent conversation they had with Sharon. When does your agency discuss concurrent planning? What goes into that conversation and are there any aspects of this that could be different when covering it with an LGBTQ family?
- Are Kristan and Nicole wondering if this long wait has anything to do with them being queer? If they raised this with you, how would you respond?



## EPISODE 4: "F is for: Fantasizing About the Future"

Kristan and Nicole get their first potential match, but they may be getting ahead of themselves in their excitement. While waiting, Nicole attends a Family Fair to schmooze the local social workers, but it doesn't go too well.

- During one conversation, Nicole and Kristan decide to call Sharon. Nicole says, "You call her, she likes you better." What do you make of this statement? Might Nicole be concerned about gender expression bias? If so, is that something she should raise with Sharon?
- Nicole and Kristan decide to find their own supports, including going to a Family Affair event. When Nicole attends alone, she comes away feeling awkward and that her gender expression got some "stink eye." If Nicole shared this experience with you, how would you respond?
- After one year and no placement, Nicole and Kristan note the number of children in care, and wonder why they are not yet parents. They decide to set up a meeting with Sharon, who says, "I'm keeping my eye out for you – you have to trust me on that." What is Sharon trying to communicate with that statement?



## EPISODE 5: "F Is for Falalala: Tis the Season to Feel Worried"

Another promising lead for a placement comes Nicole and Kristan's way, and this one comes fast: if it works out, they could have a four-year-old within the week. While they prepare, an unexpected development changes the plan.

- What new strengths have you noticed in Nicole and Kristan that were not as apparent at the start of their process?
- What is important for Nicole and Kristan to understand about why the adoption placement is taking so long?
- Discuss what Sharon can say / do to keep Nicole and Kristan supported and engaged?
- At the last minute, a birth relative appears for Z. This is not uncommon in foster care, but in the face of their long wait and how close this placement came, could Nicole and Kristan be wondering if this is connected to their being a queer couple? Would you wonder too? If so, how can you address this if the couple asks?





## EPISODE 6: "F is for: Fostering Hope...Finally?"

Nicole and Kristan reflect on their turbulent journey, while South Dakota passes a law which discriminates against LGBTQ people who want to adopt. In an effort to increase their chances of success, Kristan and Nicole expand their search to include siblings. Will they become parents at last?

- After Z, Kristan and Nicole needed a break and they note the political changes happening around them – the Trump administration and the anti-LGBTQ state legislation across the U.S.
  - Do you know and understand the laws and political atmosphere in your state and in your local courts re: LGBTQ adoption and foster care? How might the political environment influence your work with LGBTQ families?
- At this time of the process, Nicole and Kristan are considering options for placement they did not and were not open to in the beginning. Discuss a time when you watched a couple evolve their thinking during their adoption process and what benefits and challenges, if any, this presented for you and for them.
- This segment ends with another loss for Nicole and Kristan when the sibling placement does not work out. However, they express hope when an infant placement through a concurrent plan occurs. Discuss your plan for supporting Nicole and Kristan at this time.
- With the possibility of adopting two African American sisters, the couple is thoughtful about what it means to be white parents of Black children. What have you learned about Nicole and Kristan that would have you believe they could be a good match for this sibling group? Or, why might you think this is not a good match for them?





## Season 2

### EPISODE 1: Parents Bring a Foster Child Home for the First Time

Nicole and Kristan become the foster parents of a baby boy. To get some insight, they meet former foster youth who share their stories about being kids in the system.

Imagine Nicole and Kristan live in a small town with less open attitudes about LGBTQ adoption.

- What challenges might arise when they attempt to begin an attachment with Baby J at the hospital of his birth?
- What are the benefits for Baby J being able to bond with Nicole and Kristan during his stay at the hospital?
- What do Nicole and Kristan gain from being able to care for and attach to Baby J during his hospital stay?

Now thinking about your experiences –

- As a social worker, are you concerned that, since Baby J may return to his family, his early attachment with Nicole and Kristan and subsequent loss may negatively impact him? What would the impact be on Nicole and Kristan?
- As a social worker, what concerns do you have that, if the extended birth family learns that Baby J's new parents are LGBTQ, they may sabotage this placement even if they are not able to be a resource to J? What preliminary intervention is needed to address this?
- Nicole and Kristan sought to learn more about a child's experience in foster care and adoption from foster care alumni youth.
  - Do you think hearing from these youth provides more benefits or burdens to perspective foster and adoptive parents? What are the potential benefits and / or burdens?



## EPISODE 2: What Adoptive Parents Need to Know About Raising Kids of a Different Race

Nicole and Kristan meet Angela Tucker, who explains her issue with the title “foster-to-adopt.” They talk about transracial adoption and what it’s like to grow up as a Black woman in a white community. Nicole and Kristan take a road trip to introduce Baby J to Nicole’s charming grandparents. Nicole has a dance-off with DJ, an adopted kid with two moms.

- Does being LGBTQ present another obstacle when you add that with transracial adoption?
- From those looking for an excuse to discriminate against LGBTQ parents, do you hear the argument that *adding “gay” parents to the mix is just one more hurdle children of color will face in a “white/gay family?”*
- What are the benefits for Baby J of Nicole and Kristan addressing and researching the perspectives of those who grew up in transracial adoption?
- This episode focuses on learning the perspective of children and youth in transracial families. Do you think it’s important to ask these young people about the intersection of their transracial and LGBTQ placement?
- What is the strength-based perspective of this intersection?

## EPISODE 3: The Major Flaw in the Foster Care System

The foster care system is full of contradictions. As foster parents, Nicole and Kristan receive a lot of support from the foster care system, which contrasts with what we hear from parents whose kids were removed and placed in the system. Nicole and Kristan explore with birth parents why kids are removed from their homes in the first place.

Nicole and Kristan hear the painful reality about how money flows into foster care and about all the support going towards foster parents. Older foster care alumni and adult adoptees from child welfare tell Nicole and Kristan how they see this as out of proportion to what is offered to birth parents.

- As a social worker who may see supports given to birth families, do you think this is an accurate and fair representation of what is or is not provided to keep children and birth parents together? What is your experience of how the child welfare system works on behalf of keeping families together?



## EPISODE 4: J's Foster Parents Go to Court

We see Nicole and Kristan go through the .26 hearing, and hear about that experience from the birth parent's perspective too. Nicole and Kristan adopt a puppy, explore open adoption, and make contact with J's birth family.

- When bias is present in the courts or community, how can a social worker support LGBTQ parents when planning for the decision to place a child with an LGBTQ family?
- How would you have supported Nicole and Kristan if the parental rights were not terminated and they learned at the hearing that Baby J was being reunited?
- How would you have prepared Baby J for this separation?
- Child welfare does a good job of keeping birth and foster parents separated; sometimes for legal reasons, sometimes for safety, but, for whatever reason, this practice can breed misunderstanding, jealousy and judgment.
  - How can the social worker act as a bridge between Nicole and Kristan and J's birth family?
- Would you be worried that if J's birth family knew of Nicole and Kristan and did not approve of placing their son with a LGBTQ family it may jeopardize his placement?
- One of the birth parents shares that it took him three tries to be ready to have his children returned to him. As social workers, your commitment is to the best interest of the child, yet sometimes this is not always clear and it can seem to be about which parents deserve the child more, the birth or foster/adopt.
  - Can the system be improved through more contact between birth and foster/adoptive families?



## EPISODE 5: Officially Adopting Our Son and What the Court Process Is Like

Nicole and Kristan adopt J. Noel tells his story, which didn't end in adoption. They visit another adoptive family, and reach out to J's biological grandmother.

- Episode 5 opens with a young person who grew up in foster care and was never adopted. In his case, a family like Nicole and Kristan's would have been a welcomed permanency plan for him.
  - Is there an opportunity to avoid children slipping through the cracks by making a serious effort to reach out to the untapped resource that is the LGBTQ community? Why or why not?
- The judge in the finalization hearing was very welcoming and gracious toward Nicole and Kristan. Imagine this process in a less open court environment.
  - What do you do to ensure your LGBTQ clients are welcomed in court and are prepared when the court is less welcoming?
- Nicole and Kristan do so much to imagine and celebrate J's dual loyalty of race, adoption, religion etc. Most couples will not enter adoption with this type of sensitivity for the child's and the birth parent's perspective.
  - As social workers, what can you learn from Nicole and Kristan and take into your education of perspective families? What in their naming ceremony stood out for you?
- If being LGBTQ becomes a barrier for a family to pursue openness with a birth family, how, as their worker, can you help them and the birth family work towards this in the best interest of the child or youth?

## EPISODE 6: Life After an Open Adoption

Baby J turns one year old. Nicole and Kristan meet a family who has an open adoption. They get a text back from J's biological grandma, and meet with J's godmother, Avery. The series ends with Nicole and Kristan taking Baby J to meet his biological family.

- As social workers, what role do you have in assisting families who adopt and want openness and connection with the birth parents?
- At the end of Season 2, Nicole says that they are venturing into a new space to "create a new family that truly reflects our son." What will you do to educate families like Nicole and Kristan about the value and benefits of open adoption?
- Baby J's godmother Avery tells Nicole and Kristan that even good parenting cannot protect a child from facing some things on their own. In addition, Nicole and Kristan's experience will have a uniquely intersectional component arising from the combination of transracial adoption and LGBTQ parenting.
  - What support can you provide to a families like Nicole and Kristan's who may need community as a transracial and LGBTQ family.



## Questions for LGBTQ Prospective Foster & Adoptive Parents

The following questions are meant for LGBTQ prospective parents and grouped by stage of the adoption/foster care process. These questions are by no means exhaustive and can help begin conversations. They assume that listeners have watched the entire first two seasons of The F Word.

### SEASON 1

#### Considering Foster Care/ Adoption and/or at Earliest Stages of Process

Nicole and Kristan considered a few ways to build their family.

- How did you decide to foster/adopt through the child welfare system? What about this seems like a good fit for your family?
- Did you choose our agency specifically, and if so, what about our agency seems to be a good fit for your family?
- Has anyone you know adopted/fostered through our agency and, if so, did they recommend our agency to you?

Nicole and Kristan live in Oakland, CA, which is considered a more LGBTQ-friendly community.

- Has anyone shared our policies/practices related to working with all kinds of families, including LGBTQ families?
- We do our best to consider the unique questions and needs of all the families we work with. As an LGBTQ [person/couple], can we answer any concerns or questions you have about working with our agency?
- How important is it for your family to have other LGBTQ families to connect with as you go through this process?



Nicole and Kristan are exploring their fears about adoption.

- This process is scary for all families. As an LGBTQ parent, are you worried about matters that are unique to your family?
- If you are new to adoption or this is the first time you are considering parenting, have you shared this with your family? If yes, how did it go? And if no, what is holding you back?

### Application Completed / Going Through Assessment

As the home study approaches, Nicole is nervous and states, “Sharon is in charge of the future of our family.”

- How can we make the home study process a safe and affirming process for your family?
- As an LGBTQ family, there may be questions that are unique to your experience. How can we support you when this is the case?

On one level Nicole and Kristan are feeling confident about who they will be as parents. As the home study interview continues, this confidence lessens some.

- What about your experience as an LGBTQ person or couple highlights your strengths and better prepares you to parent a child from foster care?
- Now that you are going through the home study process, are there worries or concerns related to being LGBTQ about which our agency needs to know? If so, what do you need from us to encourage you to raise these matters now and going forward?

### Awaiting Placement

Nicole and Kristan are approved foster parents and awaiting a placement. They seek advice from friends who have adopted from foster care.

- What type of support can we provide for you as you wait for placement?
- Are there people in your life who are a resource to you during this time?
- Do you understand all the different types of children awaiting placements? Have you considered the wait and challenges each present?
- How would you like us to present your family to an older child/adolescent? Is there a specific way you want us to share/frame your LGBTQ identity?



## SEASON 2

### Season 2 Episode 1

- As someone who may consider fostering or adopting, do you think that going “all-in” as Nicole and Kristan did with the early bonding with Baby J would be something you would consider? If not, what would hold you back?
- What would be your take-away after meeting the youth in this episode?
- Does being LGBTQ effect the way Nicole and Kristan approach their parenting with Baby J or their decisions to stay open to fostering him? After all this time, would you feel that having a child regardless of the risk of losing him was worth taking this chance? Would your decision have anything to do with being LGBTQ?

### Season 2 Episode 2

Nicole and Kristan are excited to share Baby J with Nicole’s grandparents but don’t share the possibility that he may return to his birth family.

- Do you think they are worried their family may not fully embrace Baby J if they fear he may not stay in the family?
- Are there any potential challenges posed by not being open with family about their status as foster parents, whose custody may be temporary?

Nicole and Kristan never mention any concern that being LGBTQ will become an obstacle to becoming J’s forever family.

- Would you worry that being LGBTQ would be an obstacle for becoming the permanent parent, even if a child’s birth parents rights are terminated?

### Season 2 Episode 3

- In this episode, Nicole and Kristan listen to the stories of birth parents who lost their children and were later reunited with them. As perspective parents how important is it for you to know that efforts were made for the children and birth parents to stay together?
- Does knowing that some birth parents may think they did not have a fair chance to keep their children, impact how you think about fostering with the hope of adoption?

### Season 2 Episode 4

- If you know your courts are not friendly towards LGBTQ foster/adopting parents, what should you expect from and require of your social workers to gain a better opportunity to move through the legal process of fostering or adopting?



- Nicole shares with Kristan as they drive to the hearing that she feels dirty as she thinks of what the termination means to the birth mother, even while she imagines a possible relationship with them in an open adoption.
  - As your child develops, how do you communicate your empathy for their birth family and his connection to them while still honoring your right to be a “real family?”
- Nicole and Kristan are aware of the bittersweet aspect should J’s birthparents’ rights become terminated and they are able to adopt him.
  - Do you think that open adoption is the best way to address a child’s split loyalty?
  - Is it realistic to bond to the child, knowing a birth parent may also see this child as theirs?
- Nicole and Kristan make the determination after talking to birth parents that open adoption with J’s birth family feels like the right thing for their family and especially for J.
  - What would you be concerned about in moving forward at J’s age with an open adoption?
  - Would you have any worries that being LGBTQ would impact this type of relationship?


## Season 2 Episode 5

In Nicole and Kristan’s visit with a mom who adopted a sibling group of two girls, we hear about her reason for her choice for siblings who were mixed race. The practice in child welfare to embrace the LGBTQ community as a viable option for fostering or adoption is recent. Some parents therefore may be timid about being direct about the child they feel prepared to foster or adopt.

- As LGBTQ parents, how confident are you about sharing with your social worker the specifics about your preferred type of child and adoption?
- Do you approach your adoption through the child welfare system with a specific plan, or are you just so happy to be considered that you don’t feel entitled to identify the child/ren you feel you are best to parent?
- What were the lessons learned in Episode 5 as you watched J’s Naming Ceremony and all the ways Nicole and Kristan validate the connection of all those touched by his adoption?
- Nicole and Kristan are committed to the idea that openness is best for J.
  - What else is possible to promote this openness if J’s family is not willing to connect with them?
  - What will you do to promote openness in your family if an actual relationship with the birth family is not available?

## Season 2 Episode 6

- When Nicole and Kristan visit a family of two dads and their teen daughter who are living an open adoption, it is clear that the daughter is connected to her birth mom. With two



dads there seems to be plenty of room for the daughter to forge a relationship with a birth mom.

- Could this be different if the family had two moms?
  - As a two-mom household, how would you help your child work through these loyalties with three moms?
- Avery, J's godmother, tells Nicole and Kristan that built into the mix of transracial adoption are issues for children of color that even good parenting cannot protect a child from facing. In addition, Nicole and Kristan's journey will include experiences unique to LGBTQ parents who have adopted transracially.
  - If, as a LGBTQ family pursuing transracial adoption, you experience bias because some see this as introducing more challenges to a child's life, what are the tools, resources and information you need to advocate for you, and your child?
  - What resources do you need to support your family and for your child to feel connected to his racial roots and his place within the LGBTQ community?