



Welcoming Schools

HUMAN RIGHTS CAMPAIGN FOUNDATION

Actions LGBTQ Families Can Take to Support Their Students in Elementary School

When students with LGBTQ caregivers enter school, families often wonder if their students will be safe, respected, and embraced by the school. Some schools are welcoming and very familiar with LGBTQ families while others are not. LGBTQ caregivers can help the school to better understand their LGBTQ family as a part of the diversity that makes the school community strong.

With Your Student

- + **Build resilience.** Help your student to feel proud of who they are and where they come from. Share stories and [read books](#) that reflect your family in a positive light.
- + **Talk with your student about all kinds of families**—How families are alike and how they are different.
- + **Talk with and model for your student** simple ways to answer questions about your family. In early elementary school, most [children's questions](#) about LGBTQ families come from curiosity rather than prejudice.
- + **Connect your student to other kids** who have LGBTQ families. Knowing that they are not alone and are, in fact, a part of a community of kids who have LGBTQ families will help your student gain pride and confidence in talking about their family.
- + **Discuss with your student what, if any, support they want in school.** Do they want you to have a conversation with their teacher at the beginning of the school year about your family? If you volunteer in the school, discuss how your student will feel if you are out.

- + **Talk with your student and listen carefully** to see if other students are teasing them about your family. Talk through steps you or your student could take. Ask if they want your help in talking with a teacher or the principal if an incident arises (unless health and safety are at stake).

With Your Student's Teacher

- + **Help your student's teacher understand your family** and that, like every other student, they need acceptance, respect and understanding. Let them know how you talk about your family and what words your student calls you and other family members, such as "Daddy and Papa."
- + **Ask your student's teacher:** Do they talk about [family diversity](#)? Are they inclusive of LGBTQ people? Can they change language to "family" or "caregiver" from "mom and dad" in letters home, when asking students to show their homework to someone at home, and when talking about families in general?
- + **What do they do if they hear mean teasing or bullying** about [families, gender put-downs or LGBTQ slurs](#)?
- + **If your student's teacher feels unprepared** to answer other students' questions about your family or LGBTQ people, help them out with handouts from Welcoming Schools [Responding to Questions About LGBTQ Topics](#).
- + **Show your student's teacher and media specialist** lists with [up-to-date, recommended books](#) on family diversity, including LGBTQ families, gender expansive children and bullying and bias.

With Your Student's School

- + **Determine your and your student's level of comfort in your family being out** as your student enters school. School personnel cannot be supportive of family situations if they don't know about them.
- + **Provide the school with LGBTQ inclusive school resources, such as books and lesson plans.** A school may not have previously addressed family diversity, but that doesn't mean it won't, if asked.
- + **Find and review your school's anti-bullying policies.** Do they name the groups that are frequent targets of harassment, including actual or perceived gender identity, gender expression and sexual orientation?
- + **Talk with the principal about ways to support diverse families.** Are there visual signs that the school welcomes all students and their families? Are school forms family friendly for diverse families?
- + **Ask the principal about professional development.** Has the staff had training on supporting students from diverse families including LGBTQ families? Have they had training on preventing gender or bias-based bullying?
- + **Discuss a more inclusive approach to Mother's and Father's Day.** If your school celebrates these holidays, ask them to broaden them to be inclusive of all kinds of family structures and honor all of the important caregivers in students' lives.

With Your Student's School Community

- + **Be prepared to come out** again and again to teachers, students, administrators and other caregivers. Children may ask questions about your family out of curiosity. Administrators or other caregivers may make assumptions that your family is heterosexual.
- + **Get involved.** One of the best ways to become accepted in a school community is to get involved. Let people get to know you and your student as individuals.
- + **Find support in community.** Work with other caregivers and educators to help develop a more welcoming school.
- + **Organize an event** that will help your school community understand the diversity of families in students' lives.
- + **Celebrate love and all kinds of families** by helping to create hallway displays with photos or students' artwork.