Compassionate Conversations

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Do No Harm: Creating Inclusive and Welcoming Environments for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Families in Early Childhood Settings

Office of Child Development and Early Learning

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Agenda

• Introduction
• Why this Conversation?
• Research and Statistics
• Family in the Lives of Children
• NAEYC Code of Ethics / Anti-Bias Principles
• Family Throughout the Curriculum
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Why this Conversation?

“Raise Your Hand”….

a) Who is comfortable discussing LGBT families? Do you know any families in your program that are LGBT?

b) Who has had training or conversations about including LGBT people/families in early care and education?

c) Who feels like you know how to make programs welcoming for LGBT families?

Exploring Our Thoughts:

What is hard or uncomfortable about this conversation?

What gets in the way?
What the Research Tells Us

• As many as 6 million American children and adults have an LGBT parent

• Nearly half of LGBT women (48%) are raising a child under age 18 along with a fifth of LGBT men (20%)

• An estimated 16,000 same-sex couples are raising more than 22,000 adopted children in the US

• An estimated 39% of individuals in same-sex couples who have children under age 18 in the home are people of color

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Childrearing among same-sex couples is most common in Southern, Mountain West, and Midwest regions of the country

States with the highest proportions of same-sex couples raising biological, adopted or step-children include Mississippi (26%), Wyoming (25%), Alaska (23%), Idaho (22%), and Montana (22%)

(LGBT Parenting in the United States by Gary J. Gates, Williams Institute, February 2013)
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Discussion:

What surprised you about the research?

In what ways does it stimulate your thinking about the role of professionals in early care and education?

Family in the Lives of Children:
The Importance of Belonging

- Human imperative to form attachments and to belong
- Development of Concept of Family
- Expanding the circle of belonging – entry into world outside the family

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The Importance of Belonging

Reflect and Share: Consider your behavior when you enter into any meeting, group or gathering:

- Do you look for who/what is familiar?
- Do you seek others who are like yourself with whom you can identify and who make you feel safe?
- Do you observe the environment for images, symbols, communications that are familiar – where you see yourself, your ideas, your life represented?
- Any additional thoughts? What are the implications for children and families in early childhood environments?

Building a Shared Foundation

What are the key ingredients to ensure positive growth and development in children?
WE ALL WANT WHAT’S BEST FOR CHILDREN.

ALL CHILDREN.

Poll: Reflecting on Our Early Messages

What were some of the first messages – whether they were positive, negative, or neutral—you ever learned about people who are lesbian or gay?

a) Positive
b) Negative
c) Neutral

How do you think these messages impact our thinking? What is the opportunity in early care and education?
Children’s identities and sense of self are inextricably tied to their families. The experience of being welcome or unwelcome, visible or invisible begins in early childhood. The goal of early childhood professionals is to ensure that all children and their families are welcomed in early childhood settings and provided with quality care and education. (Burt, Gelnaw, Klinger Lesser 2010)

When Programs are NOT Safe, Welcoming and Inclusive in Ways that Make ALL Families Visible...

1. Children are being harmed
2. All educators have a responsibility to make things better for children
3. Educators can take steps and actions that will make a difference
4. Support is available for educators who want to take action

(Burt, Gelnaw, Klinger Lesser 2010)
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The Importance of Supporting LGBT (and all) Families

Research shows:

• Children thrive when their families are involved in their education and when a positive relationship exists between schools and families (Galinsky & Weissbord 1992; Redding et al. 2004; Caspe & Lopez 2006; Weiss, Caspe & Lopez 2006)

• When early childhood settings focus on engaging families, children perform better, both socially and academically, and they have higher self esteem

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NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct

"Above all, we shall not harm children. We shall not engage in practices that are emotionally damaging, physically harmful, disrespectful, degrading, dangerous, exploitative, or intimidating to children. This principle has precedence over all others in this Code."

(NAEYC 2005)
The Impact of Personal Assumptions, Biases and Institutionalized Silence

All too often, without even realizing it, educators harm children and families through personal assumptions or biases and institutionalized silence. When children never hear words nor see images that reflect their families or themselves in positive ways, they are being harmed.

(Burt, Gelnaw, Klinger Lesser 2010)

NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct
Core Values Regarding Respecting Children Within the Contexts of Their Families

• Appreciate and support the bond between the child and family
• Recognize that children are best understood and supported in the context of family, culture, community and society
• Respect the dignity, worth and uniqueness of each individual (child, family member, and colleague)
• Respect the diversity in children, families and colleagues
• Recognize that children and adults achieve their full potential in the context of relationships that are based on trust and respect
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The Four Core Goals of Anti-Bias Education

• Each child will demonstrate self-awareness confidence, family pride, and positive social identities.

• Each child will express comfort and joy with human diversity; accurate language for human differences; and deep, caring human connections.

• Each child will increasingly recognize unfairness, have language to describe unfairness, and understand that unfairness hurts.

• Each child will demonstrate empowerment and the skills to act, with others or alone, against prejudice and/or discriminatory actions.

(L. Derman-Sparks & J.O Edwards, Anti-bias Education for Young Children and Ourselves (Washington, DC: NAEYC, 2010)

Breaking the Silence

As educators begin to realize the impact of invisibility on children’s self concept and connection to family, they are moved and inspired to take action. Breaking the silence and talking about LGBT families in early childhood settings requires understanding, commitment and concrete tools.

(Burt, Gelnaw, Klinger Lesser, 2010)
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Tools for Action: Family Throughout the Curriculum

In countless ways, how families are welcomed and integrated into the life of the center has lasting effects on children, including:

- center and classroom family communications
- environmental design and family visibility
- curriculum
- day-to-day conversations and storytelling

(Gelnaw, Welcoming Schools and Early Childhood Education, 2012)

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Center and Classroom Family Communications

Forms

- Are forms that families complete for application as well as other center record-keeping family-friendly to diverse families?
- Do they use language such as parent/parent or parent/guardian rather than the more traditional mother/father language?
- Is it possible to include all family members in ways that are respectful and visible?
- Do they allow parents/guardians to define their family relationships in ways that feel true and authentic to them?

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Center and Classroom Family Communications

Letters and Announcements

✓ Is the language of the preschool and all of the staff inclusive and respectful?

✓ Are you sure that every child and family hears and sees themselves represented and does not feel excluded?

✓ Is care taken to be sure that no child or family has to adjust the language – both written and spoken – to be included? Examples of this include:
  ➢ “Please bring this letter home to your family” (rather than “to your mommy and daddy”)
  ➢ “Dear Families, welcome to our new program year…”

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Environmental Design and Family Visibility

✓ Does your center – in common areas and in classrooms – represent all kinds of families?

✓ Are there photos of families at work and at play that depict many ways that children and families interact and engage in the world?

✓ Do these images depict gender in open and affirming ways?

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Environmental Design and Family Visibility

- What do your posters, children’s art, children’s literature displays, photos of your real center families (including staff) depict about the many ways that people work, play and live in families?

- Is there a place to house a “Families Gallery” that includes every family (including staff) in your center? Are these photos eye-level to children for ongoing day-to-day conversation?

- Are staff members mindful of maximizing opportunities to communicate with children about commonalities and differences?

Curriculum

In addition to incorporating visual images of family as noted above, classroom activity can daily reflect families in all of their configurations and people in diverse roles and activities. Select classroom materials that represent all kinds of families.
Curriculum as Window and Mirror

“...Education needs to enable the student to look through window frames in order to see the realities of others and into mirrors to see her/his own reality reflected.”

(Emily Style, Wellesley College Center for Research on Women, 1996)

Curriculum...In the Block Area

- Do family and people figures represent different cultures, families, and gender roles and activities?
- Are there multiple sets of “family” figures so that children can select the grouping that best represents their own families?
- Are they stored in ways that welcome each child’s individual selection rather than on a shelf and in a way that represents one kind of (traditional) family or narrow definitions of gender?
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Curriculum...In the Dramatic Play Area

Are there props that encourage multiple ways of playing family or any other imaginative play?

Are boys/girls, men/women depicted playing, working, dressing and engaging in activity unconstrained by traditional gender roles?

Do you invite children to engage in imaginative play that explores diverse families, occupations, and relationships?

Curriculum...In Circle or Group Times

Do you explore differences?

Do you talk about and recognize the many choices people have and make in things such as relationships, families, occupations, recreation?

Do you talk about these in matter-of-fact ways?

Do you address name-calling and hurtful behaviors and teach pro-social interactions?

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Curriculum...In the Writing Area

- Are there photos and prompts that encourage children to write (or dictate) stories about all kinds of people and families?
- Are children’s stories shared with other children in ways that encourage respectful exploration of each other’s experiences and ideas?

Curriculum...In the Art Area

- Are there materials and opportunities for children to express their ideas about themselves, their families and experiences?
- Are children encouraged to share their work and ideas with others in ways that invite conversation and exploration?
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Curriculum...In Music Activities

- Do children experience the world around them through songs that represent diversity?
- Can they identify with the children, people, families and experiences that they sing about?
- Is there thoughtful selection of songs that broaden their experiences?
- Can lyrics to common children’s songs be adjusted to be more inclusive?

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Curriculum...In the Library

- Does the children’s literature that you display and read represent all different kinds of families?
- Do your books represent children and grown-ups in ways that expand traditional notions of gender?
- Do you discuss these ideas with children and prompt them to share their own experiences, ask questions and explore the many ways of being?
- Are children engaged in making their own books, especially “My Family” books and are these displayed with the other literature in the library and sturdy enough to be handled regularly by children?
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Curriculum...

Day-to-Day Conversations and Storytelling

In all that we do with young children, every day and every way, in every area of the classroom and every part of the curriculum, we have opportunities to explore ideas and ask questions. Children have stories to tell every day. Seeing the world from their own lens and through the experiences of others prepares them to comfortably live in a diverse world and see themselves – and everyone else – as belonging. This is the gift of creating Welcoming Early Care and Education Programs where everyone feels they are valued and where everyone belongs.

Resources

"Do No Harm: Creating Welcoming and Inclusive Environments for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Families in Early Childhood Settings" (Burt, Gelnaw, Klinger Lesser, Young Children, 2010)


Welcoming Schools and Early Childhood Education (Gelnaw, Welcoming Schools, 2012)

Books for Students Highlighting All Kinds of Families (www.welcomingschools.org)

Definitions of Key Words for Educators and Parents/Guardians (www.welcomingschools.org)

A Guide to Age-Appropriate Definitions for Students (www.welcomingschools.org)