# around the rainbow

## kids ~ families ~ community
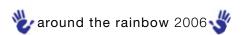
# Toolkit for GLBTTQ Parents/Guardians

## Creating GLBTTQ-friendly learning spaces for our children ages 0-6

# Acknowledgements

Around the Rainbow is a collaborative project of Family Services à la famille Ottawa and the Ottawa Community. It is funded by the Government of Canada's Social Development Partnership Program.

Thank you to community organizations and parents who work together to ensure that gay, lesbian, bisexual, trans, two spirit, queer and questioning (glbttq) parents and their children receive the support and services they need in our communities and schools.

A special thank you to all the parents and children of Rainbow Families, a support group for glbttq parents and children in Ottawa, who continue to provide the inspiration, imagination and motivation for this project.
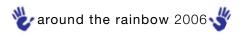
Thank you to Carol Proulx, Around the Rainbow Project Coordinator with Family Services à la famille Ottawa and main writer of this toolkit. Thanks also to all those who played a role in getting the ideas onto paper: Moe Garahan, Paul Sales, Kevin Bisback, Chitra Sekhar and Emily Troy, Around the Rainbow Community Developer. It is with much gratitude that we recognize Lee Rose for his generous spirit and design work in creating our Around the Rainbow logo.

The sections on bully prevention were adapted from the Bully Prevention Project of Pinecrest-Queensway Health and Community Services.

# Terms we use

**GLBTTQ:** The term "glbttq" refers to the gay, lesbian, bisexual, trans, two spirit, queer (and questioning) community. For more discussion on the definition of each term, please see Chapter 1. We have chosen to use lower case letters throughout the text, and use standard convention of capitalization at the beginning of sentences or in titles. We wish to represent the diverse community in this way and help change these terms from ones of "otherness" to inclusive, descriptive, everyday terms.

**Parent:** The term "parent" is defined in a broad sense, and includes anyone who fulfills the role of parent, guardian or caregiver in a child's life. For more discussion on the different forms that families can take, please see Chapter 3.

**Preschool**: Preschool may include play groups, child care, nursery schools, after-school programs, drop-ins, resource centres, well-baby clinics, pre- and post-natal care and education programs, parent education programs, and the myriad of other parent-child programs that exist in the community.

**Educators:** We refer to educators in the classic sense of teacher in school settings, and also include anyone who has a role in educating and supporting families, whether through the preschool settings described above, or in community-based organizations.

**Ally:** An ally is an individual or group that cooperates with or helps another. It can refer to someone who does not share the same identity and decides to unite and form a connection with a person or group that is discriminated against in order to bring about social change for all.

# What this Toolkit is About

The face of the family has changed and continues to evolve in today's world. The traditional definition of a family, consisting of a mother and a father married to each other with children, living together in one house, has been replaced by an array of family forms. As more and more people come together in relationships that provide nurture and mutual support, we are discovering and defining a sense of "family" that is based simply on a deep love and caring for one another and not necessarily on a biological relationship.
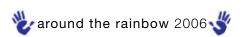
This new sense of family is the foundation of families with parents who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, trans, two spirit or queer (glbttq). It also brings with it a number of challenges for glbttq parents, their children, their schools and their communities.

The goal of this Toolkit for GLBTTQ Parents/Guardians and its companion, Toolkit for Educators and Service Providers, is to provide information and resources to help both parents and educators create safe, nurturing and inclusive learning environments for all children. An important part of this process is to share knowledge about glbttq parents, their children and their unique issues.

- *Chapter 1* – An introduction to glbttq terms, definitions and human rights.

- *Chapter 2 -* A discussion of homophobia and heterosexism, including stereotypes and myths, and a discussion of finding common ground across difference in a multicultural environment.

- *Chapter 3 –* A look at the nature of glbttq families, including research, issues, stereotypes and myths.

- *Chapter 4 –* An overview of the early development of children, their understanding of glbttq issues, and their rights.

- *Chapter 5 –* A practical discussion on how to create safe spaces for our children to learn and grow in. This chapter also includes a discussion about preventing and dealing with bullying.

- *Chapter 6 –* An overview of negotiating parent-educator relationships including how to get ready to meet with the educator and dealing with one's fears in speaking with educators.

- *Chapter 7 –* A discussion on working within the preschool and school systems, including a breakdown of who to ask and what you can ask for.

- *A Resource Kit* accompanies this toolkit and includes extra tools, handouts, resources and websites.

The companion Toolkit for Educators and Service Providers includes many of the same sections, with additional information on the educational environment, creating inclusive curriculum and encouraging change from within the school and preschool systems.

It is hoped that these toolkits will encourage and enable dialogue between parents, teachers and child care providers. Our goal is to help develop both the skills and the confidence needed to design strategies that respond to the needs and desires of glbttq families and children in the school and preschool settings.

As parents, we want what is best for our own children. Schools, preschool centres, teachers and early childhood educators all seek to balance the needs of all children and their families. This can present both opportunities and challenges, particularly as we consider the diversity in our communities. When we embrace this diversity and create inclusive environments for our children, we educate them on the essential values of acceptance, participation and respect for all, which they will need as they move into the world.

Discrimination and bias hurt all of our children by escalating risk and harm in our families, schools and communities. We need to create communities of openness and trust rather than hostility and suspicion, of collaborative efforts rather than antagonism, and of growth through knowledge rather than ignorance through closed-mindedness.

Now is the time to commit to creating and celebrating inclusive communities. Now is the time to consider the issues for children in glbttq families. The lessons we learn from working with, and being a part of, glbttq families will help us better understand and support all families.

# How to Use this Toolkit

***We recognize your expertise as glbttq parents who deal with the issues raised in this toolkit on a daily basis.*** Within this toolkit we offer some suggestions in the first chapters on how to frame issues to educators and other parents who do not have your understanding or experience when dealing with glbttq issues. The latter chapters help parents negotiate new school/preschool relationships. The companion Toolkit for Educators and Service Providers includes most of the same sections, written in a voice specifically for educators.
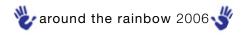
## A Resource Kit

There are many great resources to draw upon for additional information:

* Specific reference material, websites and handouts related to children's rights, bullying, and policies/procedures of the preschool and school systems. Please feel free to photocopy any handouts for teachers and day-care providers that work with your children.

*A ***directory*** of local, provincial and national resources and web links to provide additional information.

*An annotated ***bibliography*** of books for parents, children, teachers and community workers. A list of ***glbttq-friendly children's books*** is also included. Ask your child's school to buy copies for the library and use in their curriculum. These may prove useful in building a more inclusive environment.

For more resources, please see the Around the Rainbow website at:
**www.around-therainbow.com**

# Training

## Are you a glbttq parent from the Ottawa area?

Around the Rainbow project is available to provide training:

a)  Training is available on how to advocate for what you and your family need from preschool and schools.

b)  Train-the-trainer workshops are available for glbttq parents who would like to deliver training to schools, community agencies and groups.

c)  Trained facilitators can be invited to give workshops on glbttq family issues at your children's school or preschool.

If you are interested in training or in the project please contact us.

## What can I do if I am not from the Ottawa area?

Contact the Around the Rainbow project and we can discuss your resource and training needs. **_info@around-therainbow.com_**

## An invitation to Help Build Community Resources!

We are interested in what you learn and experience in working on these issues. If you find resources not listed here, or have ideas, comments or stories to share, please contact the project and we will do our best to share with others. Contact the Around the Rainbow Project at: **_info@around-therainbow.com_** or call **_613-725-3601._**

# Table of Contents

## Section Three - Working with Educators

This section provides tools to help dialogue with educators and administrators to ensure inclusive space for our children.

# An Introduction to GLBTTQ

In this chapter, we provide an introduction to key glbttq terms, definitions and symbols, and the connection between glbttq issues and human rights.

## What Does GLBTTQ Mean?

GLBTTQ is the acronym for gay, lesbian, bisexual, trans, two spirit, queer (and questioning). This collective term represents people of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities.

Who do you love?

Who do you care for?

Who are you attracted to?

How do you see and define yourself?

These are some of the questions that form the basis of glbttq identities. The definitions we use to describe glbttq are ever-changing and can never reflect the complex identities of all members of the glbttq and other communities. The following definitions offer a starting point for what each term can mean:

## Gay

• A person who is emotionally/romantically and/or sexually attracted to persons of the same sex.

• The term usually refers to men, but it may also include women.

• Although it can be used interchangeably with the word homosexual, gay is the preferred term by the glbttq community when referring to gay men.

## Lesbian

• A female who is emotionally/romantically and/or sexually attracted to other women.

• Although the words gay and homosexual are sometimes used when referring to women, lesbian is usually the term preferred by the glbttq community when referring to women.

## Bisexual

• An individual who is emotionally/romantically and/or sexually attracted to both men and women.

## Trans

- A person whose gender identity, their internal knowledge of being either male or female, does not match their physical/anatomical sex.

- Some describe it as being born into the wrong body.

- Trans is the preferred term for a range of previously used terms, including transgender, transsexual, etc. Trans can refer to a person who has undertaken, or is undertaking, the process of changing their physical sex from female to male, or from male to female. Some may view their gender as fluid and identify as trans. It can also refer to people who express their gender outside of traditional norms commonly assigned to their sex.

## Two Spirit

- A re-claimed concept from several North American Aboriginal cultures that refers to Aboriginal persons who are born one sex and fulfill roles across sex and gender lines, as well as additional roles reserved for Two Spirit people. Some say they maintain balance by housing both the male and female spirit.

- Two Spirit people were considered to be a gift to the tribe, able to cross a range of genders and hold the balance, and thus were respected and honoured as visionaries, peacemakers, healers and shamans.

- Aboriginal Peoples consider the term more relevant to their culture than gay, lesbian, bisexual or trans. Two Spirit people are striving to reclaim their traditional positions within their communities and to take their rightful place. Not all Aboriginal communities feel comfortable with this modern term and/or concept.

## Queer

- A re-claimed term used by many glbttq people to refer to themselves.

- Queer is often used to refer to fluidity in sexual orientation and gender identity and can be used to challenge the notion that gender and sexual orientation are necessarily constant.

- This term is still used by some in its historically negative way to refer to the glbttq community.

## Questioning

- A person who is unsure about their sexual orientation and/or gender identity and is in the process of exploring the issue, is referred to as questioning. This is different than 'being out' which implies that the person self-identifies as glbttq, but is not ready to be open with specific people or with anyone.

- These are dynamic, evolving terms. The addition of letters to the acronym over the years, representing emerging community identities, signifies an ongoing maturity within the community, an embracing of diversity and a respect for people's authentic definition of self and the journey that brought them to this place.

*Since these definitions are fluid, it is important to determine how each individual chooses to self-identity and to respect this choice.*

## Important Symbols in the GLBTTQ Community

Two symbols of historical and social significance to the glbttq community are the Pink Triangle and the Rainbow Flag.

### Pink Triangle

An inverted pink triangle; a symbol of solidarity and human rights adopted by the glbttq community in remembrance of gay, lesbian, bisexual and trans people who were persecuted and killed by Nazis in Europe. The Nazis compelled "undesirable" women, including lesbians, to wear the inverted black triangle. Lesbians have reclaimed the black triangle, as the glbttq community has reclaimed the pink triangle.

### Rainbow Flag

A symbol of the glbttq movement, also know as the 'freedom flag', was designed by Gilbert Baker in 1978. When flown, the flag represents glbttq Pride and diversity around the world. The International Congress of Flag Makers recognizes the familiar red-orange-yellow-green-blue-purple-banded flag. The colours of the rainbow are displayed as horizontal stripes, with red at the top and purple at the bottom. The flag should only be raised or displayed when there is an assurance that an individual, group or organization has worked on sensitivity and awareness of glbttq people and issues, including staff training, to ensure an environment that is indeed safe and inclusive.

# Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

Understanding glbttq issues requires an understanding of the relationship between the concepts of sex and gender, and sexual orientation and gender identities.

## Sex and Gender are two distinct concepts:

**Sex** refers to a biological classification that commonly assumes two sexes, male and female, based on primary and secondary sex characteristics. We suggest that **biologically**, sex is a continuum with most individuals concentrated near the ends as either male or female, and some individuals found along the continuum. In this case people are sometimes referred to as intersexed, indicating that their sexual organs do not fit neatly into male or female categories. At least one in 2,000 children is born with some degree of ambiguity regarding their primary and/or secondary sex characteristics.[1] In these cases, medical personnel cannot easily label the child 'boy' or 'girl.'

**Gender** refers to **socially determined** sets of behaviours (i.e., "masculine" or "feminine") assigned to people, often based on their biological sex (i.e., male or female).[2] Throughout much of history, it has been assumed that gender is biologically established by a person's sex: men have been expected to demonstrate a masculine gender role and women a feminine gender role. Today, gender is understood in terms of social, culture and historical influences rather than the biology of sex. It is no longer viewed as a fixed identity that is exclusively either male or female, but rather an identity that rests on a continuum between the two polarities.

Many Aboriginal communities in North America understood and accepted this gender continuum and respected two spirit individuals as a gift to the community. (See "two spirit" definition in above section)

## Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity are also two distinct concepts:

**Sexual Orientation** refers to the structure or pattern of romantic, sexual, and/or emotional attractions felt by an individual toward members of the same sex, the opposite sex or both sexes. [3] Sexual orientation includes heterosexuality, homosexuality, bisexuality, queer love, etc.

**Gender Identity** refers to an individual's innermost sense of self as "male/masculine" or "female/feminine",[4] somewhere in between, or somewhere outside of these gender boundaries. Sometimes this innermost sense does not correspond with anatomy. Although this term is often associated with trans people, it also refers to queer, two spirit, etc. Gender identity is a human rights category most often associated with gender expression.

**Gender Expression** refers to the manner in which people externally communicate their gender identity to others through behaviour, clothing, hairstyle, voice, and also includes emphasizing, de-emphasizing or changing their bodies' characteristics. Gender expression is not necessarily an indication of sexual orientation.[5]

## Are sexual orientation and gender identity stable or fluid?

Some people believe that gender is stable. They believe that being male or female does not change during human development and that you are born into your gender identity. Other people change their gender identity and define themselves as having a more fluid gender understanding.

*"I define myself as "gender-queer", as someone in the middle of genders. Gender roles create barriers; we all have little boxes about who fits in where. If we move outside these boxes, it challenges our notions of who people are and where they fit in."[6]*

Some people believe that sexual orientation remains unchanged from birth and that the only choice involved is the choice to be honest about who you are. For others, sexual orientation is more fluid throughout their lives.

What is important to remember is that people's beliefs about sexual orientation and gender identity are a reflection of the diversity of lived experience. The bottom line is that…"we need to have the right and the ability to self-identify in ways that make sense to us."[7]

# GLBTTQ and Human Rights

Over the past generation, Canadians have witnessed significant changes in the legal rights of glbttq persons. Persistent work by glbttq people, their families and allies, both separately and within other civil rights movements, has led to an increased recognition of the real need to protect glbttq people from discrimination.

- In a unanimous decision in 1995, the Supreme Court of Canada held that the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms guarantees equality to gays and lesbians.

- In 1996, the federal Canadian Human Rights Act (CHRA) was amended to explicitly prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation. Lesbian, gay, and bisexual people now enjoy protection against discrimination in human rights legislation in all of Canada's provinces and territories.

More work is required to broaden definitions of rights to include trans, queer and other minority people.

- Northwest Territories is the only jurisdiction that explicitly protects people based on gender identity. Trans people are not yet formally included in any other provincial human rights acts, nor in Section 15 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the Criminal Code of Canada.[8] Despite a recommendation by the CHRA Review Panel in June 2000, no action has been taken to include protection for trans people in the CHRA.

- The Ontario Human Rights Code Part 1 - Freedom from Discrimination, states that every person has a right to equal treatment without discrimination because of sexual orientation. It does not state that one has a right to equal treatment without discrimination because of gender identity, however. The Ontario Human Rights Commission, along with most other human rights commissions, has taken the policy decision to accept complaints respecting gender identity on the grounds of sex and disability. [9]

GLBTTQ rights are still not fully entrenched in the hearts and minds of Canadians. This becomes evident in the continued discussion around same-sex marriage within parliament, the ongoing clashes within our public institutions to incorporate inclusive structures, and the homophobic/transphobic comments that are made daily in our communities. Yet, like all civil rights movements, each new generation of children brings an openness to embrace diversity in ways that were more difficult for the generations before them.

Why are human rights important? Human rights can be seen as the consensus of ethical standards that a society requires of each of us in our behaviour towards one another. These ethical demands simply reflect the values of a society. Human rights are not limited to legal structures or constitutional language. Society's values are at the root of human rights and speak of respect and care towards our fellow human beings.

# Finding Common Ground

This chapter begins with a discussion of homophobia/transphobia and heterosexism. It includes common myths and stereotypes and the impact of homophobia/transphobia on glbttq people, their children and the broader community. It ends with a brief look at finding common ground across difference within a multicultural, multi-faith environment.

## Homophobia, Transphobia, Biphobia

A phobia is defined as "an abnormal or morbid fear or aversion."[10] It is usually described as an irrational fear that leads to avoidance of the feared object or situation. Phobias that are based on sexual orientation and gender identity do not completely fit the definition of a phobia however, for two reasons.

- First, the fear and hatred of glbttq individuals is socially conditioned—a learned and deliberate condition—and not, therefore, irrational.

- Second, instead of leading to avoidance, homophobia and transphobia more often lead to deliberate targeting through prejudicial acts, discrimination, bullying and violence.

Indeed, any phobia aimed at other groups of human beings, including xenophobia (fear of strangers, fear of difference), may more correctly be termed "biases" and any targeting behaviour as "hate acts". [11]

Keeping the above in mind, we still use the words homophobia and transphobia to describe the overarching discrimination that glbttq individuals face.

***Homophobia*** is defined as the fear, hatred, prejudice, discrimination and hostility directed at sexual minorities. Homophobia can include overt acts of bullying or violence.

***Transphobia*** is defined as the fear, hatred, prejudice, discrimination and hostility directed at gender minorities – those who are perceived to lack conformity with rigidly-defined gender roles. Transphobia can often include bullying or acts of violence.

A main component of homophobia and transphobia is xenophobia, fear of difference.[12]

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In addition, phobias based on sexual orientation and gender identity are not solely the domain of the heterosexual world; glbttq people can turn their fears and aversions inward as internalized homophobia or a sense of self-loathing.

*Internalized Homophobia* is the negative feelings that some glbttq people experience toward themselves in response to their sexual orientation.

*Internalized Transphobia* is the negative feelings that some trans, two spirit and queer people experience toward themselves from the pressure to conform to the gender role or gender expression into which they were born, despite an internal knowledge of another or more fluid gender.

The feelings that come up because of internalized homophobia/transphobia can lead to physical and emotional self-harm, and acts of discrimination and violence against other members of the glbttq community.

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Some phobias may be directed at specific groups in the glbttq community. Biphobia, a key example, is the hatred for, fear of or discomfort with people who identify as bisexual.

*Biphobia* includes discrimination from outside the glbttq community against bisexuals, as well as strong prejudice from within the community. For the remainder of this toolkit, we will include biphobia under the term homophobia.

*Transphobia* is also plainly evident in both the mainstream and the glbttq communities, and directed toward people with diverse gender expressions and identities.

## Heterosexism

*Heterosexism* is the assumption that everyone is heterosexual and that heterosexual orientation is preferred or superior. It is the assumption that heterosexuality is the norm from which glbttq people 'deviate'.[13] Heterosexism implies that heterosexual families and relationships are natural, normal and better than relationships within the glbttq community.

Heterosexism is different than homophobia. It is a much broader term that looks at structured social practices:

- "Heterosexism is more subtle than homophobia and permeates culture and its social institutions."[14]

- "Heterosexism, like racism and classism, is more insidious, not as an expression of individual hatred, but as a pervasive part of societal laws, customs and institutions."[15]

In a heterosexist society, power and privilege is conferred upon those who conform to the widely accepted ideas of gender and sexuality, and is limited to those who do not appear to conform. Heterosexism is seen in laws, policies and practices:

- Prior to the passing of Bill C-38 in 2005, which extended equal access to civil marriage to same-sex couples in Canada, Canada's laws limiting marriage to heterosexual couples were collectively an example of institutional heterosexism.

- School registration and other intake forms that ask for the names of "father" and "mother", on the assumption that heterosexual marriage is the norm, are heterosexist.

- Many workers within our public institutions, including social and health services, courts, police stations, and many religious faiths and denominations tend to view the world in a heterosexist way within their daily practices, publications and directives to community members.

- Parents are often spoken to in a way that assumes that the other parent is of the opposite sex.

The entrenched heterosexism that runs daily through society takes a toll on all of us, by limiting our ideas of human diversity and by allowing people and systems to get away with bigotry that hurts everyone.

## Stereotypes and Myths[16]

A **Stereotype** is a widely held view that is a fixed and over-simplified image of a particular person or group; a limited or distorted view, which leads to pigeon-holing or false generalizations.

Phobias and discrimination related to sexual orientation and gender identity are often based on stereotypes and myths. There are many myths that exist about glbttq persons, parents and families. Many of these have developed as a result of misunderstanding and misconception. Others have long been considered fact in society where there has been a reluctance to discuss the issues in a logical and factual way. Additionally, there has been a lack of information because of an absence of research. A large part of a society's heterosexism is built on and reinforced by these stereotypes and myths. In spite of increased discussion, knowledge, research and lived experience, many stereotypes and myths still exist in Canadian society. Some common myths that persist include:

Myth:   It is unnatural to be glbttq.

*Fact:  It is as natural to feel attraction and to have relations with people of the same gender, as it is to be attracted to people of another gender. It is equally natural to question one's gender identity, to choose how this will be expressed.  It is the quality of the relationships, to self and to others, that is significant, not the gender of one's partner nor one's own gender identity or expression.*

Myth:  Only glbttq people are attracted to people of their own sex.

**Fact:**  **Most adults have deep feelings, attractions and/or fantasies about both sexes. Over time, studies have consistently confirmed that all people, whether glbttq or heterosexual, have a variety of sexual experiences with people of the same gender or of another gender. Alfred Kinsey's studies described sexual feelings and behaviour on a continuum to indicate the fluidity of an individual's sexual orientation. He showed that most people move along the continuum at different times in their lives and that only a small part of the population feels they are at either end of the spectrum 100% of the time. Also, some trans and two spirit people consider themselves homosexual or bisexual and others consider themselves heterosexual.**

Myth: We know what causes homosexuality and bisexuality.

**Fact:**  **It is not known what causes bisexuality, heterosexuality or homosexuality. Some believe they are predetermined genetically, and research seems to indicate that sexual orientation is determined either before birth or very early in life. Others maintain that all humans are predisposed to all variations of sexual and affectionate behaviours, and that they learn a preference or orientation.**

Myth: People choose to be homosexual.

**Fact:**  **Most people who are gay, lesbian and bisexual feel that they did not choose their sexual orientation. Rather, they were aware of having same-sex feelings at an early age or these feelings evolved and solidified in their adolescent or adult years. The choice seems to be whether to live full and well-balanced lives with a same-sex partner or to suppress their feelings.**

Myth: There is a distinct glbttq lifestyle.

**Fact:**  **There is as much variety in glbttq lifestyles as there is in heterosexual lifestyles. GLBTTQ people can be single, dating, involved in long-term relationships or married. They can be promiscuous, committed or celibate. They can have children. They can live alone, with their lovers, with their parents and siblings or with friends. They live in cities and suburbs and in the country. They can be rich, middle-class, or poor. They can have a variety of occupations. Within all communities, individuals create their own lifestyles.**

Myth:  GLBTTQ people are promiscuous or somehow more sexual than straight people.

**Fact:**  **This stereotype is propagated by the fact that, regardless of sexuality, individuals who are promiscuous are the most visible. As more and more glbttq people "come out", the promiscuous stereotype diminishes. Events such as Pride Day and the Stonewall Festival help glbttq people identify as a diverse community in the same way that non-glbttq persons do. Moreover, glbttq people are just as capable as heterosexuals of maintaining stable, committed relationships.**

Myth:   The majority of pedophiles are gay.

Fact:   *Ninety percent of all pedophiles self-identify as heterosexuals. A child is 100 times more likely to be sexually molested by a heterosexual relative than by a homosexual or trans relative. GLBTTQ people are just as concerned as heterosexuals that children are protected from pedophiles. Sexual abuse of children occurs primarily within the family. Over 95% of abuse that is reported has been perpetrated by a male relative. Most sexual abuse of children outside the family is committed by pedophiles. Pedophiles do not distinguish between male or female victims; however girls are victimized twice as often as boys are. The perpetrators are motivated by power and control, not by sexual desire. The pedophile myth is the basis of the most damaging charges levelled against glbttq teachers, to keep them in the closet and out of the classroom.*

Myth:   I don't know anyone who is glbttq.

Fact:   *GLBTTQ people are everywhere. We all know people who are glbttq. This myth perpetuates the idea that glbttq issues need not concern the heterosexual community because glbttq people are "others" or "somewhere else." In fact, oppression in any form against any minority group is everyone's business because it exacts high social costs.*

Myth:   GLBTTQ teenagers and children do not exist.

Fact:   *GLBTTQ children may not identify themselves, but many glbttq adults report having had a sense of difference from other children from as early as 5-12 years old. Both heterosexual and glbttq teens are acutely aware of their sexuality and gender during their secondary school years, but glbttq teens are more likely to feel fear and isolation.*

Myth:   In a same-sex relationship, one partner usually plays the masculine role and the other one plays the feminine role.

Fact:   *Within the heterosexual community, there are all types of relationships and this is true in same-sex relationships. Most same-sex couples work to develop relationships based on the principles of equity and mutuality, where they are loved and appreciated for themselves. The division of labour and the interpersonal couple dynamics do not necessarily fall into rigid stereotypes of gender roles.  When we impose the template of heterosexual relationships on other kinds of relationships, we limit our understanding of how these relationships function. This is a good example of heterosexism at work. It can also help us to understand how we sometimes confuse gender, gender roles and sexual orientation – they are all different concepts.*

When we limit our understanding of gender it constricts everyone's expression of their true nature. This restriction translates into stereotypes and myths about what it is to be a man or women. It restricts the roles we play in our homes, at work and in the world. Parents are very often concerned about whether their child is 'normal' based on these social scripts. When a child expresses interests and behaviour different then the expectations for their biological gender, then parents may perceive this as an indication or a cause for a same-sex, sexual orientation. Same-sex orientation may also be seen as negative or wrong. (See homophobia section) Consequently, children, and indeed all of us, are prevented from the natural exploration and expression of interests, curiosity, attractions and creativity. We create barriers to becoming our authentic selves, whether in our sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression. It must be remembered that most heterosexual adults have some interests and behaviours that reflect those traditionally assigned to the opposite sex, yet they are firmly rooted in their heterosexuality. Likewise, many glbttq adults live, work and play, firmly rooted in what would be considered traditional gender roles. We need to keep some things in mind:

1)  Strict gender roles are stereotypical ideas that adults impose on each other, and on children. They do not reflect the reality of people's lived experience.

2)  Gender roles and sexual orientation have nothing to do with one another. One does not lead to the other. They are two separate aspects that make up a whole myriad of factors creating our psychology as human beings.

3)  When we expand our ideas about gender in all its variations, complexities and expressions, and when we understand the natural continuum of sexual orientations, then we can understand people as healthy when they are authentic and caring human beings. We begin to dismantle the oppressive stereotypes and myths.

*"We as a community have become more visible through the media, yet there is an aura of negativity. They speak to my experience without knowing me."*[17]

# The Impact of Homophobia/Transphobia and Heterosexism

Homophobia/transphobia is directed at individual people for perceived 'homosexual' behaviour, for demonstrations of affection, for gender minority expressions, etc. Discrimination can also be directed generally to broad communities of glbttq people, and specifically to glbttq parents and their children.

GLBTTQ-directed phobias and heterosexism can have a detrimental impact on the emotional, social, mental and physical well-being of glbttq individuals.

Such impact can be demonstrated in the following:

•   Many glbttq people experience overt forms of violence including physical assault causing injury or death and verbal and emotional abuse specific to homophobia/transphobia. GLBTTQ persons are often specifically targeted.

- It can be mentally and spiritually exhausting for people who are marginalized to continually explain and 'out' themselves, to continually educate people about their concerns and issues, and to continually challenge discrimination.

- Economic abuse may include withdrawal of a family's financial support or termination from a job, once someone comes out as glbttq.

- Emotional/verbal abuse may include ridicule of behaviour or appearance; threats to limit or prohibit access to children or services; and threats to reveal gender identity to employers, financial-aid workers, health-care workers, immigration personnel, or anyone else with possible influence or control over someone's well-being.[18]

- Mental health issues arise when homophobia/transphobia prevent glbttq people from developing an honest self-identity; when an internal sense of self-loathing or guilt is created (see internalized homophobia above); and when there is pressure to "be normal", to be silent and to be secret, creating unnecessary stress and ill health for the individual and their family.[19]

## The Health Impacts of Homophobia on GLBTTQ Persons

A Canadian review of literature on the human costs of homophobia,[20] specifically about gay, lesbian and bisexual (glb) people, found that:

- GLB people suffer higher rates of depression than the general Canadian population.

- GLB people are victims of physical violence at a much higher rate than heterosexuals.

- Homophobia results in substandard health care for glb people, and they do not access and use the health care system because of homophobia. This issue intensifies the problems faced by glb people and undoubtedly adds substantially to the number of homophobia-related deaths in Canada.

The same study looked at premature deaths among glb people in Canada. "Using the assumption that, without the existence of homophobia, the gay, lesbian, bisexual population and the heterosexual population would have equivalent rates of health and social issues, estimates of the annual number of deaths caused by homophobia were developed."[21] The estimated number of premature deaths caused by homophobia in Canada are:

- by suicide – 818 to 968 deaths per year

- by smoking – 1,232 to 2,599 deaths per year

- by alcohol abuse – 236 to 1,843 deaths per year

- by elicit drug use – 64 to 74 deaths per year

Other studies[22] that have focused on gay, lesbian and bisexual youth have found that:

- 80% of lesbian and gay youth report severe feelings of isolation.

- 53% of students report hearing homophobic comments made by school staff.

- Gay, lesbian and bisexual youth are 4 times more likely than their heterosexual peers to commit suicide.

In general, there are large gaps in the research on glbttq people's health, and these gaps are greater for trans, two spirit and queer people, where health risks are anecdotally observed as greater, yet are often completely absent in research consideration.

A context for the statistics on homophobia/transphobia in our health care system is provided in the following example. A trans person who identifies as male, with an undiagnosed heart infection, was refused care in a hospital emergency room. "After the physician who examined me discovered that I am female-bodied, he ordered me out of the emergency room despite the fact that my temperature was above 104° F (40° C). He stated I had a fever because 'you are a very troubled person'."

Three weeks later the patient was hospitalized for the same condition. "I awoke in the night to find staff standing around my bed ridiculing my body and referring to me as a 'Martian'. The next day the staff refused to work unless "it" was removed from the floor. These and other experiences of hatred forced me to leave.

Had I died from this illness, the real pathogen would have been bigotry."[23]

One of the key messages that can be found in research that looks at the impact of homophobia on glb people in Canada, is that negative costs of homophobia are in no way inherent to sexual orientation, but are the result of "chronic stress and coping with social stigmatization and societal hatred.[24]

## The Impact of Homophobia/Transphobia on Everyone

Although glbttq people and their children bear the brunt of homophobia/transphobia, it hurts all of us by:[25]

- Locking all people into rigid gender roles that inhibit creativity and self-expression.

- Teaching heterosexuals to treat others poorly, using actions that go against our basic humanity, and pressuring peers to do the same.

- Stigmatizing, silencing and sometimes targeting people who are perceived or defined by others as glbttq, but who are in reality heterosexual.

- Limiting the ability to form close, intimate relationships with members of one's own sex for fear of people thinking one is glbttq and not wanting to be stigmatized.

- Limiting communication with a significant portion of the population and, more specifically, limiting family relationships.

- Eliminating any discussion of the lives of glbttq people in the curriculum, keeping important information from all students.

- Preventing heterosexuals from accepting the benefits and gifts offered by glbttq people: theoretical insights, social and spiritual visions, and contributions to the arts and culture, to religion, to family life, indeed, to all parts of society.

- Obstructing a unified and effective governmental and societal response to AIDS, anti-harassment policies, inclusive family legislation, safe public spaces, etc.

- Inhibiting appreciation of other types of diversity: failing to recognize each person's unique traits because they may not fit the "norm".

Homophobia and transphobia, which stem from misunderstanding, discrimination and hate, harm individuals who hold and act on these views, impinging on their very understanding of what it means to be a 'good person'.

Homophobia and transphobia hurt everyone in our communities. It follows the old, and true saying: When one person is oppressed, we are all oppressed.

**In the end, it is important to remember that the victims of homophobia are "real people …someone's child, grandchild, parent, brother, sister, aunt, uncle or best friend."[26]**

*There are many different kinds of people and being who you are is what matters most.*

# Working across difference:
# GLBTTQ in a multicultural environment

## What can celebrating diversity look like?

Individuals and families need connection and community to thrive and to live meaningful lives. Inclusive communities move away from discrimination, move beyond tolerance and arrive at places of acceptance and celebration of diversity. We can create neighbourhoods and public spaces that engage all citizens in a spirit of collectivity, accessibility and safety for everyone. Equality, compassion, respect, care, authenticity/honesty and dialogue would be the underlying values in everything we do. Intentional families can expand and integrate the needs of every generation from babies to seniors. We can begin to move away from rigid identities, to see people as unique individuals and to celebrate them for who they are. [27]

## What are our challenges now?

We face the challenge of accepting and celebrating diversity. Discussion about different perspectives on sexual orientation/gender identity within diverse cultural and religious communities, can be extremely challenging to explore. People are passionate on all sides of the issue, and have strong beliefs steeped in their core values. People can feel threatened by other people's perspectives. At times, it may feel completely unsafe and unpredictable to openly communicate in public dialogue about our differences.

It is important to consider that glbttq people, like many others, often face the intersection of racism, sexism, classism, abilism, ageism, and other forms of oppression and discrimination that create additional barriers. We need to have a broader understanding of the ways in which racism, classism, homophobia/transphobia, ageism, abilism, and sexism intersect and overlap to create enormous challenges, not only for the people directly affected but for their families and society as a whole. These issues live together and need to continue to live together, even though it is uncomfortable at times. A greater understanding of these issues and their compounding effects will help us to provide the support that all families need. This understanding will help us to create a community that both celebrates and thrives in all of its diversity.

## What are the tensions within the school and preschool systems?

Over the years, Canadian culture has become increasingly ethno-culturally, spiritually, politically and socially diverse. Multiculturalism, a term that largely refers to the ethno-cultural diversity, has led to adjustments in all parts of society. Police forces, as one example, have become proactive in their hiring practices to encourage people from visible minorities and a variety of cultural backgrounds, to join their profession. The goal has been to ensure that their ranks reflect the face of the community that they serve.

Multiculturalism has also been embraced by schools. Children learn about a variety of cultural backgrounds, are encouraged to take pride in their own heritage, and to respect that of others. Many are now able to see their faces and cultures reflected and valued in the environment and to have their culture understood by others in the classroom. The goal has been to eliminate stereotypes and reduce and prevent prejudice, bias and xenophobia among young people.

GLBTTQ families often find themselves in the same position that many new Canadians faced several years ago, where the resources, curriculum and administrative processes in the school and preschool systems did not reflect their situation and experience. There are still many changes that need to be made to fully include and reflect ethno-cultural communities in classrooms and playrooms. At the same time, we rarely question the need and importance of this inclusion.

In the past, because glbttq people tended to be invisible, their issues were neither recognized nor discussed. As the definition of family has evolved however, and as glbttq parents become more open and visible, there is an increased requirement for the school and preschool settings to become open and responsive to the needs of glbttq families in the same spirit of multiculturalism.

One important challenge is religious and/or cultural communities within the Canadian mosaic who do not approve of glbttq people. Indeed, some religions condemn glbttq in particular, do not believe in glbttq rights and will often demand rigid notions about gender identity and roles. In addition, other people who do not necessarily identify with a particular religion or culture can and do hold homophobic/transphobic beliefs. GLBTTQ people often experience homophobia/transphobia within their own cultural or religious community. Some cultural and religious communities assume that no one is glbttq within their community.

 As a result, when glbttq issues and the profile of glbttq families are raised in education settings, parents from some religious and/or cultural communities express concern that their values are being challenged. And educators, in turn, feel the tension between balancing the need to respect the values and beliefs of the parents and the need to ensure that their classrooms and curricula demonstrate the values of inclusiveness and diversity. Our mission statements, our statements of vision and values, in fact our Charter of Rights, ensure that we commit to these values and find a way to work through the tension.

## What do we need to know to work across difference?

Celebrating diversity is at the core of every human rights struggle that has ever occurred. There are times in today's world when leaders apologize for hurtful and harmful words and actions that have been historically condoned, against communities of people who were at one time seen as 'less than', as having 'no value', as 'not being worthy'. We need to remember this when we work through differences. Our actions today become tomorrow's legacy and we will be held accountable. How will our children judge our legacy?

We must also be honest that we, in the glbttq community, need to address our own biases, prejudices, and discriminatory behaviour. We need to end the discriminative language and beliefs about others within the glbttq community who do not share our identity. As on glbttq parent said:

> "Before we start talking about diversity we need to look within our own community, the glbttq community. There exists an US and THEM mentality. Even here we need to fit into the box."[28]

We also need to look at our own discrimination against other communities. Racism, classism, ageism and abilism for example, exist within the glbttq community as they exist in the broader community. Our discriminatory behaviour and words against religious and/or cultural groups who discriminate against us also needs to change. We need to find our place together, expecting respect and inclusiveness by also offering respect and inclusiveness. We can step into the place of difference and find common ground.

We are here reminded to never lose sight of **why** we must work across difference.

*First they came for the Jews and I did not speak out because I was not a Jew.*
*Then they came for the Communists and I did not speak out because I was not a Communist.*
*Then they came for the trade unionists and I did not speak out because I was not a trade unionist.*
*Then they came for me and there was no one left to speak out for me.*
*– Pastor Martin Niemöller*

"If we do not stand for all rights then truly we stand for nothing."

We can recognize the connections and relationships between different forms of discrimination and through this understanding, work together to put an end to oppression for everyone. It is tremendous work, and work that is often exhausting, frustrating and at times hurtful, however we need to continue to engage in open dialogue across differences. Human rights legislation and our shared values create the civic framework within which we are able to talk about our differences, seek to understand one another, and forge public policies and spaces that serve the common good.[29] It is complex… there are no easy answers. It will be uncomfortable and unclear. However, we need to step into these places and walk together in our differences to eventually find greater peace as we continue to live on common ground.

# GLBTTQ Families

## The Family—An Evolving Definition

## Family Forms

Definitions of family have most often concentrated on the form that families take. Today's families come in an array of forms that differ from the "traditional" or "nuclear" family, consisting of a mother and a father married to each other with children, living together in one house.

Regardless of whether a family includes heterosexual or glbttq parents:

- The family may consist of a single adult, two adults or a group of adults.

- Some adults may have been married in religious or civil ceremonies, or living in a common-law relationship.

- Some adults living together or in close community may be connected as siblings or as friends.

- The family may consist of several families or family members who share care of the child(ren).

Regardless of whether a family includes heterosexual or glbttq parents, children arrive into families in many different, and equally valid ways:

- Children may be the biological offspring of a parent.

- Children may arrive by adoption, alternative insemination or fostering.

- The family may consist of children from previous marriages or relationships.

### Adoption of Children
- Adoption of children in Canada is governed by provincial and territorial legislation.
- Same-sex couples can adopt children in all provinces and territories.
- Trans people may adopt, since gender is not a determining factor. They may face some discrimination, however, on the grounds of gender identity and expression, which is unprotected under current legislation.

Preliminary research demonstrates the evolving definition of family.

According to Canada's 2001 Census:[30]

- The proportion of "traditional" families (made up of a mother, father and children) was on the decline, while the number of common-law couples in Canada was on the rise.

- 34,200 couples identified themselves as living in a same-sex, common-law relationship. Given that gays and lesbians make up one-tenth of the population and that a social stigma still exists around homosexuality, same-sex couples were likely under-reported. No questions on the census survey asked about bisexual, trans, two spirit or queer parents.

There is no comprehensive Canadian data specifically on glbttq parents. Using data from the 2000 Census in the U.S., which is limited in that it only looks at lesbian and gay parents, it is estimated that:[31]

- The number of lesbian or gay parents in the U.S. ranged from two to eight million.

- Of the 600,000 same-sex couples who were counted:

  - One-third (34%) of lesbian partner households had at least one child under 18 years of age living with them. This percentage was similar to the percentage of heterosexual partner households with children 46% and 43% respectively.

  - Just over one-fifth (22%) of gay male partner households had at least one child under 18 years of age living with them, about one-half the rate of heterosexual partner households with children (46%).

## Same-Sex Marriage

On July 20, 2005, the Civil Marriage Act, or Bill C-38, received Royal Assent, extending equal access to civil marriage to same-sex couples while respecting religious freedom. Canada became the fourth country in the world to legalize same-sex marriage. Bill C-38 effectively eliminated the patchwork of laws in provinces and territories across Canada with respect to civil marriage for same-sex couples, and reflects Canadian values of inclusion, diversity, mutual respect and fairness.

Traditional definitions of family based on rigid forms are entrenched in policies and laws. As a society, we are only beginning to address the historical and expanding reality of family within law and policy, so as not to leave many families, including glbttq families, without recognition or representation. The passage of Bill C-38, which gives equal marriage rights to same-sex partners, is a beginning that ensures all families enjoy family benefits and responsibilities. Without protection, families are left vulnerable in certain life situations such as separation, child custody, illness and death of a partner. These circumstances have a serious impact on glbttq parents and their children.

## Family Function

It is clear that defining family in terms of form excludes large segments of our society, including both heterosexual and glbttq families. For example, if we decide a mother and a father with children is the only form that defines a family, we exclude many other family forms, for instance single-parent families, reconfigured families, extended families. When we try to put the boxes of family form around our actual families we will inevitably leave someone out. Defining family as form implies that certain people get to decide who is in and who is out, thus family form can become exclusionary. This relates to the concepts of heterosexism and homophobia as discussed in Chapter 2.

To engage in a meaningful and reflective discussion of family, we need to understand family in terms of its function. We need to ask questions such as: How is this family working to care for and support each other? How does it contribute to the community? If the family has children, how are children nurtured and supported? Family is defined by each person in terms of who you love and care for, and who loves and cares for you. It is based on who you 'choose' as your family. In this way, all of our definitions of family are included.

The glbttq community uses the term "family of choice" as an alternative equal to the traditional definition. The notion of choosing family based on those we love and those who love us, is life affirming and healthy as we strive to create loving and supportive families and communities.

## What functions do families serve?

Our families play an important role in all of our lives: imparting societal norms, teaching family values, educating us about the world, and meeting basic physical, social, spiritual and emotional needs.

Here is what some glbttq people, parents and allies have to say:[32]

> "Emotional connection appears to be far more important to the definition than biology and sexual relations. Such connections are seen as solid, yet dynamic – a foundation that permits fluidity, evolution and change."

> "Family becomes synonymous with relationship, both good and bad."

> "Family is a bond, an attachment of love and commitment."

> "Family shares life goals, bonded by a history, a present and a future, all of which remains stable yet can be redefined."

> "A healthy family is solid, fluid, and not static."

Ideally, all families, whether nurtured by heterosexual or glbttq parents, are sources of consistent love, guidance and support. This nurturing environment provides the foundation from which children grow and learn to meet the world with confidence.

## What do researchers have to say?

To date, there has been little research on Canadian glbttq families. Existing research has focused on health, child custody, parental fitness, the impact of same-sex marriage on society, and the implications of homophobia. There has been little or no focus on the experiences, strengths, and needs of children and parents in glbttq families. Existing research has also focused on gay and lesbian parent issues, however the issues of bisexual, trans, two spirit and queer parents and their children are strikingly invisible.[33]

The Canadian Psychological Association (CPA) has summarized the existing research on gay and lesbian family experience. In August 2003, the CPA found that:[34]

- Contrary to "a popular misconception that gay and lesbian parents compromise the psychological and sexual development of their children, …Psychological research into gay and lesbian parenting indicates that there is no basis in the scientific literature for this perception."

- The stressors that may uniquely impact same-sex parents are due to perceptions and barriers created by our social systems, rather than any personal inadequacies as parents.

- There were no significant differences between children from gay and lesbian parents and children of heterosexual parents when considering social, emotional, and gender development and identity.

In addition, the Canadian Association of Social Workers declares that children do not need protection from same-sex parents; they need protection from discrimination, stigma, and prejudice.[35]

The American Psychological Association (APA) has found that evidence to date suggests that home environments provided by gay and lesbian parents are as likely as those provided by heterosexual parents to support and enable children's psycho-social growth.[36]

> While we bring research into our discussion above, we also feel it is important to recognize that there are those who attempt to hinder glbttq human rights by using research to back up their points. Recognizing who is conducting the research, what their interests and biases are, whose agenda will be supported, who may be harmed, and what is the methodology are a few important considerations before accepting the conclusions of any social science research.

# Issues Faced by GLBTTQ Families

## Questioning from the Mainstream

GLBTTQ parents with young children face all the challenging questions and situations that every new family faces. There are a number of additional barriers and challenges that must be confronted, however. Some of these issues include:

- the lack of legal recognition as a family and therefore greater vulnerability in family life situations such as separation, child custody, illness or death of a spouse.

- the challenges finding glbttq-friendly support and services for reproductive alternatives, prenatal and birthing needs, childrearing, playgroups, etc.

- the increased questioning and scrutiny of decision-making, parenting styles and practices based on homophobic and heterosexist views on what constitutes a family.

- the isolation from both the mainstream and the glbttq community.

Unfortunately, most of the issues facing glbttq families, parents and their children result from discrimination in the community based upon widely-held societal myths and stereotypes. Some myths that are commonly heard include:

Myth: GLBTTQ people do not value family.

*Fact:  GLBTTQ people value family. Within the glbttq community there is recognition and nurturing of diverse family structures, from mono-nuclear families to other families of choice. GLBTTQ people recognize friends, lovers and those involved in long-term relationships as family. GLBTTQ people who are fortunate enough to have been accepted by their family of origin may have strong family ties. Those who have been rejected by their family of origin often work to re-establish these relationships, and to guard their right to raise their own children or adopt their partner's children. Rejection often causes deep pain from which many glbttq people spend a good part of their life trying to understand and overcome.*

Myth: GLBTTQ people do not make good parents.

*Fact:   Research has shown that, except for the fact that the children of glbttq parents are often concerned about being stigmatized by their peers, they show no higher incidence of emotional disturbance than do children of heterosexual couples, nor are they confused about their own gender identity or sexual orientation. GLBTTQ people come from all kinds of families, as do heterosexuals, and there is no correlation between the sexual orientation or gender identity of parents and that of their children. The chances of a child being glbttq are the same whether they are raised by glbttq parents or by heterosexual parents.*

Myth: GLBTTQ people cannot or do not have children.

*Fact: GLBTTQ people have children in many different ways, just like everyone else: through adoption, alternative insemination, sexual intercourse, co-parenting, step parenting, fostering, etc.*

Myth: Trans, two spirit and queer parents must resolve all issues of gender identity before coming out to their children. Children cannot deal with gender transition or gender fluidity. They need to be a certain age before they are ready to learn about a trans parent or family member.

*Fact: We know families that have successfully dealt with and continue to deal with the issues of gender transition and fluidity with children of every age. Each age has unique needs that must be met, and it is up to the parent to meet those needs. The information we give our children must be age appropriate, and parents must set limits and boundaries. Coming out to children can dispel feelings of secrecy and dishonesty. It can increase feelings of closeness. But the decision to come out or not is highly personal and must be respected.*

Myth: GLBTTQ parents stigmatize their children.

*Fact: Homophobia and transphobia stigmatize children. Being proud and honest about one's identity and orientation in a homophobic/transphobic society, while certainly not easy, makes children strong and more accepting of diversity. It is society's homophobia and transphobia that need to change; GLBTTQ people need not remain closeted about who they really are.*

Myth: Any gender experimentation by children of glbttq parents is a direct result of having glbttq parents.

*Fact: Experimentation with gender is natural and children should be allowed to do so. We know children of glbttq parents who are questioning gender and others who express no such feelings. Many children have grown up to be trans, two spirit and queer in spite of their heterosexual parents' strong discouragement of any gender experimentation, and despite the presence of more rigid gender-role models. Children with glbttq parents can grow up with the freedom to explore, to question roles, to choose their own identities and to get support for whatever they choose.*

## Lack of Community Resources

GLBTTQ families often find it difficult to find appropriate community resources. There is a major lack of resources and support for glbttq families, supports such as family life education and support, assistance to build glbttq safe spaces at work, inclusive learning and play areas, support groups for children in glbttq families, accessible counselling services and mental health crisis services.

According to "How Well Are We Doing?" a 2001 survey of the gay, lesbian, bisexual, and trans (glbt) population in Ottawa:[37]

- 71% of glbt people urgently need support with family relationships, child custody, and partner relationships;

- One-half of respondents indicated a need for glbt specific services;

- Other unmet needs reported in the survey included specific support for:
  - Pregnancy and adoption (50%)
  - Parenting and child rearing (43%)
  - Loneliness and isolation (57%)

## School Issues

Systemic homophobia and transphobia within the school and preschool systems are some of the main obstacles facing glbttq families.[38] For glbttq people, there is no easy answer to the decision of whether to come out or not. For glbttq parents, there is an additional challenge in wrestling with the difficult personal decision about whether, when and how to "come out" to the school or preschool in order to clarify their children's family status. It can also require that they become advocates to ensure that, for the sake of their children, their definition of family is accepted by and reflected in the school or preschool.

For children of glbttq families, issues and confusion arise when their play and learning environments present the traditional, heterosexual family structure as the norm. They may be teased and bullied by other children because they have a "different" kind of family.

Children also worry for their parents. Tara, age 13, expresses her worries about the reaction of others:

*"I'm not sure if the kids at school know about my moms, and I haven't directly talked about it with anyone. I don't know what their reaction would be. I mean, I've heard people at school say things in general about gays and I don't like it because they don't understand. I think the hardest part about having a gay parent is worrying that something would happen if they found out and didn't take it the right way. But I've got Anne and my mom and my godmother to talk to if I need to."[39]*

## Families and community

Communities are made up of families and individuals interacting with one another on a daily basis. For healthy communities, we must have community supports that include:

- The well-being and emotional health of children and their parents/caregivers.
- Support and resources for the education of all parents and caregivers by providing appropriate and accessible programs. We understand that parental isolation, depression and stress places children and everyone in the family at risk.
- Play and learning spaces for children including outdoor space, play groups, drop-ins and accessible early learning and child care centres. Spaces need to be safe and inclusive for all children and families regardless of their resources, culture and family form.
- A strong interaction between schools/preschool and the community.

In Canada, we live in a multicultural community of communities. GLBTTQ families and other marginalized families should not have to deal with these issues in isolation. In particular, the needs of children must be understood and addressed. We must work together to build a more inclusive community, welcoming to all families.

# Our Children

In this chapter, we give a brief overview of children's developmental milestones, and their developmental needs during each stage. As caring adults it is our responsibility to provide the necessary structure and support for a child to transition from one stage to the next in a healthy way. For parents and educators, child development is fundamental in creating programs and curriculum that will encourage children to learn and grow into thinking and caring human beings. As a community we are required to keep these milestones and needs in mind when we consider creating glbttq-friendly space. We end the chapter with a section on children's rights, in the words of children. Fundamentally, children are the very heart of the matter: the family, the community and indeed the world.

## Child Development[40]

Children's development may help us understand the world from the child's point of view. It will assist us to better inform our programs to include all children, based on their needs, their ability to comprehend at certain stages, and their unique perception and experience of their environment.

A child's development is shaped by two factors: nature (what a child is born with, including biological and genetic factors), and nurture (the environment into which a child is born). The nurture factors include interactions with adults, other children, and early childhood experiences within the family, school, and community. A child's well-being, their ability to connect with others and their ability to deal with the world around them, will be affected by a combination of these influences.

The years from 0 to 6 are a time of rapid physical, intellectual, emotional and social growth and development. Each child is unique in their strengths, talents, skills and challenges and each child will progress through their milestones at their own pace. Keeping this in mind, we now look at some common developmental patterns.

## Infancy: age 0 to 2 years[41]

### *Physical development:*

Humans go through their most rapid development during infancy. Babies gain in height, mobility, coordination and weight (doubling their birth weight in the first year). They can move large muscles in their arms and legs. Over this time children learn to support their head, roll over, sit up, crawl, then stand and walk. Small muscle coordination will move from basic grasping, to holding and dropping objects, to a more precise thumb/finger grasp.

### *Intellectual development:*

Infants discover that they have an impact on the environment, for example, they realize their cries will bring an adult and nourishment. They begin to vocalize with cooing sounds and chuckles, and move towards making sounds and words like mama, dada, eventually naming things and actions. Pointing to things and body parts becomes possible. Early curiosity about everything is apparent as the child

explores a new world around them. At first, babies do not recognize that people and objects exist when out of sight, however object permanence does emerge, that indeed objects do exist even if they are not visible. If an object is dropped, we can now find babies looking for it.

### Emotional development:

This is a time of emotional bonding between baby and caregiver, where they become emotionally attached to each other and learn to read each others' cues. Smiling and crying are some of the expressions and emotions possible for infants. Babies can comfort themselves with sucking and are primarily concerned with satisfying their own needs. Trust is established as the infant experiences that their basic needs are being met. Infants begin to distinguish between their physical self and the physical self of others. In mid-infancy they will hug others, and become distressed when separated from their caregiver.

### Social development:

We can see the recognition of caregivers, dependency on caregivers to fulfill needs, and the initiation of social contact, for example social smiles when familiar faces appear. As the infant develops, they are able to play simple games, e.g., peak-a-boo, develop some independence in meeting some of their own needs, and can extend attachment to others.

### Moral development:

Infants see themselves as the centre of the world and have no sense of right and wrong.

## Toddler: age 2 to 3 years[42]

### Physical development:

Children at this stage are developing bladder and bowel control. Walking, running and climbing, kicking and throwing with skill and coordination, are all possible. They can complete simple puzzles, hold crayons and manipulate small toys with skill.

### Intellectual development:

Toddlers are more able to focus attention and to perceive the environment with sharper discrimination. They remember with noticeable improvement and are easily motivated. We can now hear children speaking in short but full sentences, with words that are mostly comprehensible. They can also use pronouns correctly in identifying themselves and others, e.g., me, you.

### Emotional development:

Basic feelings can now be expressed verbally, sympathy for others is apparent, and toddlers can refer to themselves in the first person (I or me). They are now able to consider themselves as separate beings from their caregivers. Caregivers play important role models for children at this age, in that children develop a sense of self by imitating the behaviour of the adults around them.

### Social development:

Play is highly significant at this age. Initially children engage in parallel play with their peers, playing separately yet along side other children with occasional interactions. Children are usually toilet-trained and can take care of basic hygiene. As they explore their social relationships, they will test their boundaries, e.g., frequent use of the word 'no'. They begin to take into account the feelings of others.

### Moral development:

As children test their environment and receive feedback about their behaviour, they begin to learn about right and wrong.

## Preschool and Early School Age: age 3 to 6 years[43]

### Physical development:

At this stage the child has become quite competent physically and enjoys practicing new skills, for instance climbing, jumping on one foot, skipping, dancing, and using good balance and coordination. Their small motor skills are increasingly refined using scissors, drawing sharp corners, using a pencil to print letters and manipulating and putting together small objects with ease.

### Intellectual development:

Children speak in full sentences, express ideas and engage in discussion. Speech is completely understandable now. Familiar words can be defined. The child has a clear sense of likes and dislikes and can offer simple explanations to 'why' questions. Cause and effect relationships are discernable if they are in relation to the child's own needs, for instance when the stove is hot it will burn me. They love to gather information about why, how, when, etc., as they gain information about themselves, others and the world.

### Emotional development:

Preschoolers and early school age children identify with their caregivers and like to imitate them. They acquire an identity separate from others and can be further away (physically) from their caregivers. Feelings are becoming more fine-tuned and discernable as children experience feelings of doubt and shame, and they can become emotionally overwhelmed. Children are also able to identify the feelings of others.

### Social development:

Play continues to occupy an important developmental role as children engage in fantasy play with imaginary friends, role playing and sex/gender role identification. They can create and follow simple rules in cooperative play. Children are practicing socially-appropriate behaviour. They can share and take turns. They require choices, want more independence and are often testing authority. Differences are now identified between self and others, e.g. gender, colour of hair and eyes.

### Moral development:

Children will increasingly become more protective of self and can stand up for their rights as they see them. They distinguish between behaviours that bring about rewards and punishments. Outside control of their behaviour is still required since they have yet to develop a conscience.

### For all children to thrive and to adjust well, they need to feel safe, loved and cared for.

## All Children need:[44]

- Physical attention and affection, to be loved
- Good nutrition and access to food
- Responsiveness to their emotional, social and physical needs
- Clear, age-appropriate and reasonable limits
- Opportunities to explore and learn through play and education
- Opportunities for interaction with other children and adults
- A healthy, safe environment at home and in the community
- Relaxed, supported and informed parents and caregivers

The central concerns for the preschool child are that they are loved and that they can trust their parent(s) to meet their basic needs. Their thinking is concrete with little emotional complexity. For this reason, children do not yet attribute negative interpretations to differences, and may not yet perceive these differences. They have their own family experience and will perceive the environment through this lens. For instance, if my primary caregivers are a single gay father and a grandparent, I imagine that all families look like mine.

Children begin to experience other family forms and cultures as they interact with other children and the world. School-age children have more awareness of similarity and difference, including different kinds of families, cultures, and ways of doing things. Their world continues to be fairly concrete, yet they can discriminate between right and wrong, usually in absolute terms, so that if one choice is right then the other must be wrong. Peer group and peer perceptions begin to concern the school age child. For this reason, children may need support, reassurance and acceptance from parents and educators as they begin to navigate a more complex environment of differences and biased attitudes about what may be seen as 'normal'.

Adults may find the child's 'naïve' and 'concrete' view of the world amusing at times, yet we may have some things to learn when it comes to this open-hearted willingness to accept everyone simply because they exist.

We discover that biases and prejudice, including homophobia, transphobia and heterosexism, are learned behaviours adopted as children become aware of what is considered to be normal, acceptable societal norms. Children practice by modelling the behaviours of the important adults in their lives and soon these norms are adopted norms that may be life-affirming, or not.

## Children of glbttq families

*"I know being gay is not bad but other kids don't even know what it means. They just think it's bad"*[45]  **–** 10 year old child

Children from glbttq families become painfully aware of the differences and the possible physical, social and emotional consequences of disclosing about their family. Although young children are able to separate their physical selves from others, they are attached intellectually and emotionally to the experience of their parents and guardians. For example, children who witness a physical assault to their mothers, 'experience' this assault as if they themselves are also abused. No differently, when a child's parent is assaulted with homophobic slurs, children take this on as if they themselves are being harassed and threatened. Indeed because children are so dependant on their caregivers, any threat to the well-being of their parent is a threat to their very survival. Children may continue to have this attached experience into adolescence.

*"When people use gay as an insult, it's like they are hurting my family."*[45] **–** 10 year old child
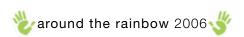
Homophobia and transphobia deeply affect children with glbttq parents. A parent's logical fear of coming out, as well as parents' internalized homophobia/transphobia, can both have a rippling effect on the child:

Nicole, age 31, reflects on her struggle with internalized homophobia as a result of her denial of her mother's homosexuality, denial that was intensified by her mother's lack of openness.

*"Yes, I imagine it would have been easier if my mother had been open with me about her homosexuality a long time ago. … But I do not blame my mother for the choices she made. No, I don't blame my mother for being the victim of a homophobic system …[people] who encourage reparative therapy and looking…for a "cure." I know that she was doing the best that she could at the time, that her intentions were to protect the family."*[46]

Children develop fear and secrecy around their perceived negative difference from their peers, resulting in social isolation and marginalization. Rather then experiencing pride in their family, they may feel shame.

"It is extremely important to recognize that the sexual orientation of the parent is not the issue. The issue is what the children have to endure because of it. What results is a host of issues that spring from bigotry and

prejudice. Some of the problems children face include:

- Dealing with their own 'coming out' process, as a child from a glbttq family.

- Contemplating their sexual orientation and identity, having already experienced discrimination glbttq people face each day.

- Hiding their authentic lives for fear of sustaining personal harm and/or harm to their parents and siblings.

- Feeling conflicted about religious and social beliefs that condemn their parents and their family.

These issues in turn create feelings of alienation and loneliness.

## Children's Rights

Like all human beings, children have universal rights and these rights apply to all, including children from glbttq families. These rights are defined by the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of the Child.[47] This is the most comprehensive and universally accepted UN document which puts the children and their needs first and foremost. The first declaration of child rights was made in 1959. The more detailed and binding UN Convention on the Rights of the Child was adopted on November 20th, 1989, by 191 countries including Canada.

### What is the Convention on the rights of the child?[48]

- The convention brings together all the existing international laws on children and establishes new standards to meet the needs not previously addressed.

- The convention addresses the needs of the children from all societies, religions and ideologies.

- The convention also encourages all countries that adopted children's rights to confirm their commitment to protect the rights of the children not only in their own country but in other countries as well.

### Why do we need a Convention on the rights of the child?[49]

The convention recognizes the status of children as special individuals. Because of their unique developmental needs and vulnerability, they require special rights to protect them.

Most often it becomes the job of the parents, the community and the governments to protect and care for the children. The convention gives us guidelines to deal with the children's economic, cultural, civil and political rights.

## How does the Convention work?[50]

There are 54 articles in the convention. The first part consists of the 41 articles dealing directly with the children's needs. They are broadly classified into three categories:

**1.** The right to protection: from abuse, neglect and exploitation including the right to special protection in times of war and conflict.

**2**. The survival and provisionary rights: by the provision of adequate food, shelter, clean water and primary health care.

**3.** The right to develop and participate in safe environments: through the participation in formal educational programs, play and opportunities to express one's self without being discriminated against.

## Who needs to be involved in implementing the convention?[51]

Governments need to realize their obligation as a signatory to the convention and implement the child rights, principles and perspectives agreed to, by incorporating them into their policies and legal procedures.

Parents and care givers, as the guardians of the children, must keep the 'best interests' of children foremost in all the decisions made on their behalf, as well as giving children opportunities to participate and express themselves.

Children can participate when they learn about the special convention available to them, when they feel empowered to voice their feelings and opinions, and when they are part of the decision-making processes in all matters concerning their welfare.

**For further information on Child Rights, including the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, please see the Resource Kit.**

# Child Rights Education

It is important that efforts are made to make the Convention on the Rights of the Child widely known by developing appropriate policies, programs and education. Children need to be taught in simple, child-friendly language and activities, their rights and their responsibilities.

An example of how to do this with children aged 5-6 years:

## Matching Card Game:[52]

Goal: **To help children learn and understand the concepts of their rights and responsibilities.**
Activity: Make 'rights cards' and 'responsibilities cards' with simple words and pictures, with the children if possible.  Have children play card game by matching a 'rights' card with the appropriate 'responsibilities' card.  Discuss what these concepts mean, using examples from a child's experience:
The right to be listened to.  The responsibility to listen to others.
The right to be protected from violence. The responsibility to use peaceful means with others.

## From the Convention of the Rights of the Child[53]

*Some examples of relevant rights for children of glbttq parents are:*

*Article 2:1*: Parties shall respect and ensure the rights set forth in the convention to each child within their jurisdiction without discrimination of any kind, irrespective of the child's or his or her parent's or the legal guardian's race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability or other status.

*Child-Friendly: You have these rights, whoever you are, whoever your parents are, whatever colour you are, whatever religion your are, whatever language you speak, whether you're a boy or a girl, whether you have a physical disability or if you are rich or poor. – **Jennifer, Age 11***

*Article 2:2:* To take all the appropriate measures to ensure that the child is protected against all forms of discrimination or punishment on the basis of the status, activities, expressed opinions or beliefs of the child's parents, legal guardians, or family members.

*Article 3:* In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by the public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration.

*Child-Friendly: All adults should do what is best for you. When adults make decisions, they should think about how their decisions will affect children.*

*Articles 12, 13, 14 and 15:* Ensures the child's right to form and express his or her views freely; to have the freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds; to respect the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion, and recognize the rights to freedom of association and peaceful assembly.

**Child-Friendly 12:** *You have the right to give your opinion and the adults to listen and take it seriously.*

**Article 30:** Protects the rights of the children of ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities and other minority groups to enjoy their own culture, language and religion.

**Child-Friendly:** *You have the right to practice your own culture, language and religion, or any you choose. Minority and indigenous groups need special protection of this right.*

**Article 42:** Makes the convention widely known, to adults and children alike.

**Child-Friendly:** *You have the right to know your rights! Adults should know about these rights and help you learn about them too.*

Children say it best, yet we need to know these rights are backed up by Canadian law. As stated by Canada's Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, we need to:

> *"...focus on children as individuals with their own set of rights.  The idea is that children are not merely objects of concern to be protected, but are also to be recognized as persons in their own right." As stated by Justice Jean-Pierre Rosenczveig, President of the Board of Directors of the International Bureau for Children's Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child 'is deliberately oriented towards the 21st century in its recognition of the child as a person endowed with a heart and feelings, possessing rights, and not just as a small, fragile being who has to be defended against others and against himself or herself."*[54]

Child's Rights highlight justice as a right for children and not a privilege. This basic concept is at the root of the work we are encouraging through this toolkit. Knowing that our children have a right to safe, discrimination-free play and learning spaces, can help to encourage us when creating such space is difficult in our communities.

# Creating Safe Space for Children

## What Is a Safe Space?

All children have the right to a safe and harassment-free child care and school environment. To be truly safe in a learning space, we need to provide more than physical safety. We must also create a place where children feel socially, intellectually and emotionally safe.

A safe child care or school environment is:

- A place that is inclusive in nature, where diversity is celebrated.

- A place where it is safe to raise questions and where open dialogue is welcome.

- A place that supports and builds skills, well-being, and resiliency.

A safe space is one that is safe for children of glbttq parents, a safe space for all children.

## The Safety of Inclusiveness

Children of glbttq families are more likely to feel a sense of belonging at their school/preschool and among their peers if:

- they sense that they have a supportive childcare provider or teacher.

- they see their family structure reflected in the centre/classroom resources.

- they feel comfortable asking questions.

- they know they are respected and visible in the celebrations for "traditional" family days, such as Mothers' Day and Fathers' Day.

## Intellectual Safety

A safe place means a child feels secure enough to ask questions and explore ideas. This happens when they feel that their questions will be treated with respect and responded to in thoughtful ways.

## Physical and Social Safety

A safe place is one that facilitates positive social interaction between children, and guarantees freedom from bullying. It provides safety from physical and social harm.

## Emotional Safety

A safe place means that children receive support for their emotions, are not teased if they cry, and are given encouragement when they are having difficulties.

## Safety Issues for Children

Safe space is challenging to find for glbttq families, who have to deal with a number of difficult issues on a day-to-day basis, within a community that is largely homophobic/transphobic. Children of glbttq families may face particular issues within preschool and school environments:

- There is a lack of understanding of the unique issues faced by children in glbttq families. This contributes to biased attitudes and words, based in homophobic/transphobic and heterosexist beliefs, that children hear throughout the day in their learning settings.[55]

- Children and young people with glbttq parents are often teased and bullied about the gender identity and sexual orientation of their parents.

- Homophobic/transphobic bullying occurs with children and youth who question or express more fluid gender identities, children and youth who feel attracted or drawn to others of the same sex, and also extends to children with glbttq parents.[56]

- They may be teased by other children who accuse them of being glbttq themselves, and who make it clear that this is seen as a negative quality.

- Children experience biased attitudes when they speak to their peers and teachers about their glbttq parents and families.[57]

- Children may experience an obvious lack of understanding on the issues that they face as children of a glbttq parents, which leaves them ill-prepared to cope and deal with negative words and actions.

- Children often find themselves in situations where they must explain their family and defend its right to exist, not only to other children but to adults.

GLBTTQ adults, with a combination of experience and perseverance, can develop a resiliency that helps them face these issues and challenges.

For children, on the other hand, being faced with these attitudes brings about an awakening from the world of innocence. "The children who live in glbttq families need support to learn how to deal with negative attitudes that they experience outside of the home."[58]

## Developing Confidence and Resiliency in Children

Developing confident children involves creating resilience within them to meet the challenges that they face in the world. Resiliency refers to a person's ability to respond well and recover quickly from change, misfortune or a difficult situation. Perhaps especially for children from glbttq families, this includes developing strategies and skills to deal with bullying when it happens. Children who aquire these skills can cope and become stronger in the face of adversity. At the same time, we need to be aware that resiliency has its limits because no one is invulnerable, adult or child. Although resiliency does not provide absolute protection, it can help children through risk situations to be protected from significant impact. Developing resiliency in children in no way precludes any responsibility that all adults have in protecting the well being of all children, and to provide safe environments for children to navigate with trust and confidence.
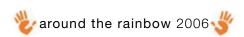
## Helpful Social Skills to Build Confidence

A confident child in early childhood and childhood:

1. Introduces themselves to new people and introduces others.
2. Initiates conversation.
3. Joins in group activities.
4. Invites others to play or work together; shares toys, materials and belongings.
5. Expresses needs and wants; asks for help.
6. Expresses feelings including when feeling wronged; smiles and laughs with peers; appreciates and shares a sense of humour.
7. Exchanges play ideas; negotiates play rules; questions unfair rules and practices; stands up for personal beliefs; shares ideas and opinions.
8. Assumes a leadership role in peer activities.
9. Offers to help others.
10. Gives and accepts compliments.
11. Resists peer pressure.
12. Chooses to walk away from aggression and asks for assistance.

## The Resilient Child

Children will more likely manage risk and bullying situations if they have:

- A good sense of themselves as competent and capable, that is, solid self esteem.

- A sense of trust in people and the world.

- A sense of hopefulness and optimism that things can and do get better over time; "life feels good" to the child.

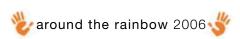- Reliance on themselves and a sense of independence.

- Positive coping skills, including the ability to cope with stress.

- The ability to predict consequences and to problem solve.

- Social skills including the ability to take responsibility; to not blame self for situations not of their making or choosing.

- An ability to experience a range of emotions.

## Family Life is where it all starts

Children will learn confidence and resiliency in their family. Family is the centre of the child's universe and family has been shown to be one of the major protective factors, particularly when it is nurturing, engaged, supportive and stable. With a supportive family, children are less likely to develop behaviour problems and feel less psychologically stressed.

Parents can help their children develop the skills and the assertiveness they need:[59]

1. *Be a good role model.* Children learn ethical standards by watching their parent's actions, seeing the choices that their parent makes, and hearing what they say.

2. *Share your beliefs.* When a parent lets children know what they think about issues as they come up—whether from television shows, news events or situations at home—the children learn to develop a sense of ethics for evaluating situations.

3. *Ask questions that encourage empathy and ethical thinking.* When children feel for others, they stand up for others. Empathy motivates that feeling, and stops cruel behaviour. When a parent asks questions, such as "How would you feel if someone did that to you?" or "What would happen if everyone acted that way?", they help the child learn to take another perspective and ask, "Is this the right thing to do?".

4. *Reinforce assertiveness, not compliance.* By encouraging children to share their opinions and stand up for what they believe is right, a parent can reinforce assertiveness. It helps to minimize the influence of peer pressure.

5. *Teach assertive skills.* In order to teach children how to go against peer pressure and stand up for their beliefs, teach them how to:

   - Establish an assertive posture standing tall, legs slightly apart, head held high, looking the other person directly in the eye.

- Say "No" firmly—stating their beliefs in a friendly, but firm voice, and sticking with it. The child's job is not to change the other person's mind, but to follow his/her own beliefs.

- Tell reasons why—giving the person the reason for the child's stand, such as "It's cruel", "It's illegal", or "It's wrong".

GLBTTQ parents can also create a sense of acceptance, pride and celebration that can only increase a child's confidence. You are giving your child(ren) the additional gift of a world view that is diverse and inclusive of many people. Our children can learn to look for those things we can enjoy in common and appreciate the richness of difference. Difference is a good thing as long as everyone is respected. All parents can provide this openness to their children - glbttq, straight or ally.

### Reassurance of your presence and love is very important.

## Creating safe communities

The goal of this toolkit is to work towards creating safe and nurturing spaces for our children in schools and preschools. As we focus on learning spaces for the remainder of the toolkit, we need to understand that children are particularly vulnerable to social, economic and emotional hardship. Growing up in difficult and hostile conditions will leave them at risk for health concerns, violence and victimization. Broader community goals including income sufficiency for all families, access to adequate food, housing and recreation, safe housing and neighbourhoods, inclusive and diverse social spaces, etc., must also be addressed to create safe communities for all of our children.

# Bullying[60]

No matter how much we build awareness, confidence and resiliency in our children, it is important for glbttq parents and their children to learn how to prevent, identify and deal with bullying, because it may arise in our children's lives more frequently than for other children. In fact, it is important to know how to identify and deal with bullying in our own lives, since adults do bully other adults using patterns learned in childhood.

## Early Years

During the early years, many young children exhibit 'bossy' behaviour. These behaviours are adapted and used by children as they become more comfortable with social roles and social interaction. Most children grow out of bossiness as they develop social skills and self-control. Just as it is difficult to determine when the bossy child is on the border of bullying, it is also challenging to differentiate between rough and tumble play, and aggressive play.

Some pointers to keep in mind:

| Bossy or Boisterous Behaviour | Bullying Behaviour |
|---|---|
| Bosses whoever is around <u>all the time</u> | Picks on smaller or <u>vulnerable children</u> |
| Disappears as the child matures | Does not disappear as the child matures |
| Uses pro-social behaviours to secure group membership | Has not learned pro-social behaviours to secure group membership |
| | Relies on threats and coercion to gain access to power |
| Play is natural and fun | Spoils playmates' activities and involvement |

It is a myth that people are born bullies. Bullying is a learned behaviour, and behaviours can be either encouraged or changed. The early years are a critical time when careful and thoughtful observation is required, to determine if children are working through their natural stages of development or, if in fact, they are beginning to establish behaviours that need to be redirected away from bullying tendencies.

# What is bullying?

When children of glbttq families are targeted by others in a hurtful and harmful way because they are children of glbttq parents, these actions constitute bullying.

## Targeting a child

Bullying occurs when a child is a target of repeated negative and/or abusive actions. A child can be targeted by another child, a group of children or an adult. Fighting or quarrelling between two children of approximately the same age, strength or developmental level, does not constitute bullying if there are not other vulnerabilities involved.

## Intent to harm

Bullying is carried out with intent to harm the targeted child.

## Imbalance of power

Bullying involves an imbalance of power so that the child being bullied has trouble defending him or herself.

## Gaining Power

Bullying is about gaining power and control, elevating the bully's feeling of self-esteem, and attempting to achieve status within the peer group, using whatever strategies are available.

## Control

Bullies create and enhance their sense of control over others through provocative language and physical violence.
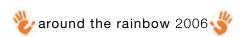
# What does bullying look like?

Bullying can occur in many forms aimed at unsettling the victim emotionally and physically. Bullies usually use a combination of different forms.

Some examples include:

## Social

- Gossiping; spreading rumours
- Setting someone up to look foolish or to take blame
- Ethnic slurs
- Exclusion from the peer group; threatening with total isolation
- Manipulating social order to achieve rejection
- Inciting others to participate in bullying
- Refusing to work with, play or cooperate with someone
- Refusing to sit next to someone

## Verbal

- Mocking, name-calling, taunts, gestures, jokes or offensive mimicry
- Teasing about language, clothing or physical appearance like colour of skin, hair, and body type
- Taunting and humiliating about gender identity and gender expression
- Making sexual innuendo
- Pretending not to understand/using gibberish
- Making fun of music, accent, or dress of anyone from a different culture, religious observance, or dietary habits

## Physical

- Pushing, shoving, spitting
- Causing bodily harm, kicking, hitting
- Physical acts that are demeaning and humiliating
- Physical violence against family, friends, pets
- Stealing
- Threatening with a weapon
- Inappropriate and uninvited touch

## By Intimidation

- Graffiti, defacing property or clothing
- Coercion, challenging to do something embarrassing or dangerous
- Extortion
- Displaying sexist or racist music, comics, books, or magazines
- Passing unwanted notes or pictures about a topic known to be sensitive to the victim
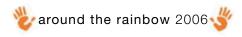- Wearing of provocative and derogatory badges or symbols

The bully creates reasons to justify their actions. These justifications are often based on myths and stereotypes about things that make people "different" and vulnerable. Social, verbal, physical and intimidation forms of bullying are used in the following types of bullying, which are related to who is targeted:

**Classist-based bullying:** Bullying based on perceived social, class and/or income level.

**Homophobic/Transphobic-based bullying:** Bullying that singles out or targets individuals for being perceived to be glbttq; often based in sexist, gender stereotyping; can be directed at any child or young person who does not conform to ways of behaving that are traditionally associated with being "masculine" or "feminine". Children may be bullied for their sexual orientation or gender identity.

**Sexist-based bullying:** Bullying based on the sex of the victim.

**Racist-based bullying:** Bullying on the basis of skin colour, cultural practices, religious background or beliefs, and/or ethnic origin.

# How common is bullying?

Research has shown that:

- Bullying occurs once every 7 minutes. On average, bullying episodes are brief, approximately 37 seconds long.

- Three out of 10 children (29.9%) say they have been involved in moderate or frequent bullying: 13% as the aggressor, 10.6% as the victim, and 6.3% as both.

- Only 25% of students report that teachers intervene in bullying situations, while 71% of teachers believe that they always intervene.

- We notice boys' bullying behaviour more often because we anticipate that it will be physical. However, both girls and boys will use physical aggression as well as social exclusion, verbal, and emotional behaviours to hurt their victims.

- Bystanders are watching in 85% of bullying incidents.

- Of bystanders, 75% support the child who is bullying.

- Of bystanders, 25% support the child who is the victim of bullying.

- In a survey of nearly 5000 Canadian children in grade one to eight, 6% said they had bullied others more than once or twice in the past 6 weeks.

- Nearly one-half (47%) of children at school have experienced harassment or physical abuse at school due to homophobia or transphobia. Eighty-three percent have experienced verbal abuse at school.

One of the most often cited causes for bullying is that: "They just don't fit in." Diversity or difference becomes the excuse children consistently use for their bullying behaviour toward peers. This is a justification, not a reason.

> *Myth:* *"If I tell someone, it will just make it worse."*
>
> *Fact:* **Research shows that bullying will stop when adults in authority and peers get involved.**
>
> *Myth:* *"Bullying is just a stage, a normal part of life. I went through it and my kids will too."*
>
> *Fact:* **Bullying is not "normal" or socially acceptable behaviour. We give bullies power by our acceptance of this behaviour.**
>
> *Myth:* *"Just stand up for yourself and hit them back."*
>
> *Fact:* **While there are some circumstances when people may be forced to defend themselves, hitting back usually makes the bullying worse and increases the risk for serious physical harm.**

# Actions and Solutions

Bullying usually goes unreported because children are afraid of reprisal, and because they do not trust that anything can change. Victims feel they can and should handle the situation themselves. Those that witness these assaults are not likely to disclose information because they feel they will be the next target or they will lose social status.

There are many things that can be done to help both the victim and the bully. For example, victims can be helped to develop strategies and skills to protect their physical and emotional safety. Children who bully can be helped to understand their motivations and to change their behaviour.
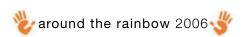
## Recognize the signs that your child may be being bullied:

*Warning signs that a child may be being bullied may include:*

1. Returning home from school with torn, damaged, or missing clothing, books, and belongings.

2. Unexplained injuries such as bruises, cuts and sprains, etc.

3. Appearing fearful about attending school, walking to and from school, or riding the bus.

4. Choosing a longer or unusual route when going to and from school.

5. Poor appetite, headaches and stomach aches, especially before school.

6. Appearing anxious, distressed, unhappy, depressed or tearful, or shows unexpected mood shifts.

7. Having problems with sleep.

8. Anxiety and poor self-esteem.

9. Shows insecurity, cries, and becomes upset easily.

10. Seems quiet, withdrawn, sensitive or passive.

11. Loss of interest in preschool and school work and play.

## Support Your Child

1. Be available to children for support, for reassure and to take action.

2. Be patient. Remember your child may be afraid or embarrassed to tell you.
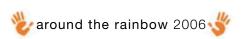
3. Assure him or her that this is not tattling.

4. Validate your child's feelings as normal.

5. Let your child know it's not his/her fault.

6. Believe your child. Make no value judgments.

7. Never blame. Bullying is never the victim's fault.

8. Do not suggest physically fighting back…ever!

9. Acknowledge that name-calling does hurt.

10. Ask how he/she has tried to stop the bullying and suggest alternatives.

## Take Action

1. Privately share your child's concern with school personnel.

2. Establish immediate rapport with his/her teacher. Let the teacher know about past experiences or concerns and that you would appreciate knowing if the teacher notices anything further.

3. Do not blame the teacher or the administration but insist that they handle the situation effectively and build safer space for your child(ren).

4. Offer to assist with anti-bullying initiatives at your school or preschool.

5. Help your child develop friendships. Stimulate your child to meet and interact with new peers. A new environment with new peers can provide a new chance for a victimized child.

6. Maintain contact with your child's school.

7. Help develop a plan of action and monitor the situation by maintaining communication with the school and your child.

8. Keep a detailed record of bullying episodes and related communication with the school.

9. Do not approach the family of the other child. It is the responsibility of the school to handle the situation with the other families involved.

## How to Report Bullying

- Arrange a meeting to seek clarification on the preschool or school's policy and to inform them of the issue. Work with the preschool/school to resolve the issues of bullying.
- Bring to the meeting the facts in writing: Date, Time, Place, Specific incidents, Impact on your child.

- Ask clear questions of the staff or principal:
  Does the school have an anti-bullying program in place?
  What are the anti-bullying policies and procedures?
  Does it address what your child needs right now in order to feel safe?
  What can your child do to avoid bullying and to stand up to any future bullying?
  What are the strategies and techniques being implemented?
  What are the rules and consequences?
  Is there a reporting mechanism in place?
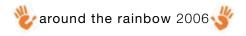  How do children report bullying situations?
  What are the procedures the bullying child will be going through?
  What kind of classroom support is in place?

## What Children Can Do

### Strategies and Tips for Your Child:

1. Suggest he/she play in a different, safer school area, closer to a supervising adult. Encourage your child not to be alone in potentially dangerous or unsafe places. Play in areas where they feel safe.

2. Teach your child to talk with you or to ask an adult at school for help; to report to an adult when they are being bullied or if they see someone being bullied.

3. Teach the difference between tattling and reporting. Reporting happens when someone is being hurt, for example if someone is being threatened, teased, hit, if kids refuse to share with someone because of who they are, etc. Tattling is trying to get someone in trouble for your own gain. For example, if a child isn't happy that another child is succeeding, he/she might want to tattletale that the other child did not put away the glue bottle properly. The child in this case, hopes that the staff will look disapprovingly on the other child. Many children do not report to anyone because they are afraid the bullying will get worse if they are seen as "tattletales."

4. Encourage your child to walk to school with someone.

5. Teach them to avoid bullies and the places where bullies are.

6. Encourage him/her to join groups and find friends who like the same things and have similar interests. One of the best preventive measures against bullying is developing good friendships.

7. Encourage your child to hang out with friends.

8. Praise and encourage your child. Help him/her take pride in his/her accomplishments and differences. A confident child is less likely to be a target.
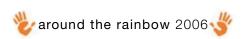
9.  Search for talents and positive attributes that can be developed in your child. This may help a child to assert him or herself.

10. Encourage your child to become involved in things they are already good at. Children who feel they excel in one or more areas of their lives feel more self-confidence all around.

11. Discourage your children from taking expensive things or a lot of money to school.

12. Brainstorm what they could do if anyone bullies them again. Role-play assertive "I" statements, and teach them to walk away and to get help from an adult or from a friend.

13. Raise your child's awareness of their body language. Communication experts tell us that 55% of our communication comes from body language. Children need to be taught what confident body language looks like.

14. Ask them to tell you about the best and worst parts of their day, everyday after school, to keep tabs on how they are doing.

15. Keep your child as informed as possible about bullying.

## Helping the Child who Bullies

***Recognize the signs that your child may be bullying.***

Typical bullying behaviours and characteristics may include:

1.  Name-calling, threatening, taunting, malicious teasing, spreading rumours, or otherwise verbally attacking other children.

2.  Frequently hit, kicks, pushes, or chokes other children.

3.  Intentionally excludes other children or manipulates friendships.

4.  Hot-tempered, easily angered, impulsive, and a low frustration tolerance.

5.  A positive attitude toward the use of violence.

6.  Refuses to take responsibility for his/her behaviour.

7.  Skilled at talking his/her way out of situations and blaming others.

8.  May have average or better than average self-esteem. Bullies learn to build power and self-esteem through the support they gain from peers for their bullying.

9.  Lack of empathy.

10. May be highly competitive.

11. Defiant and aggressive toward adults and authority figures.

12. Difficultly conforming to rules. Breaks rules at home and at school.

## What to Do if Your Child Is Bullying?

1. Make it clear to your child that you take bullying seriously and will not tolerate such behaviour.

2. Develop a consistent family rules system. When they follow the rules use praise, encouragement, and reinforcement. When they break the rules use consistent, non-hostile, and logical consequence.

3. Children are always observing. Set a good example for your child. If your child observes aggressive behaviour by you, they are more likely to act aggressively toward other children.

4. Spend more time with your child. Monitor and supervise your child's activities. Know your child's friends, where they spend their free time, and what they do with that free time.

5. Help your child develop less aggressive and more appropriate behaviour.

6. Maintain contact with your child's school. Support the school's efforts to modify your child's behaviour. Frequent communication with teachers and administrators is important to find out how your child is doing in changing their behaviour.

7. Seek help from a mental health professional. Take bullying seriously. Children who bully increase their risk for engaging in other forms of antisocial behaviour, such as juvenile delinquency, criminality, and substance abuse.

## What to do if you see someone else's child bullying?

Bullying is a broader social problem that often happens outside of schools, on the street, at shopping centres, the local pools, summer camp, and in fact, even among adults in the workplace or at social gatherings. When bullying happens on the school ground or in the classroom, teachers are ultimately responsible for dealing with it and ensuring safe space for all children and parents. However, all adults interacting with children need to observe behaviour and intervene at the first signs of bullying. It is important to extinguish behaviours in young children that could lead to bullying in later years. It is important to be aware of the roots of bullying and support children who are being bullied, as well as those children who are bullying. People generally treat the bully as a perpetrator, and not necessarily as a victim themselves. Where are they learning this behaviour? How is it serving them? What insecurities do they have that they are coping in this fashion? Are they witnessing or experiencing bullying or violence at home?

We can only ensure safe spaces for all our children when we, as adults, build our skills and commitment to prevent, identify and deal with bullying within school and preschool settings and indeed, whenever we encounter it out in the community.

*"If we are to reach real peace in this world... we shall have to begin with children"*
*– Mahatma Gandhi*

# Negotiating Parent-Educator Relationships*

This chapter focuses on the roles, issues and concerns of glbttq parents as they seek to ensure that learning spaces are safe and inclusive for their children in preschool and schools. We propose rights and responsibilities for everyone involved in the parent-educator relationship and give an overview of points to consider when communicating with educators.

## Parents Leading the Way

Beyond the hospital, adoption or foster systems, preschool and school environments are the first significant institutions that most parents have a large stake in successfully negotiating for their family and their children. Of necessity, school and home are cut from different cloth, yet there must be common threads connecting them for children and families to grow and flourish. It is a real and constant challenge to negotiate school and preschool entry in a manner that serves the child's needs and helps parents and educators work through their own feelings and perceptions.[61] This toolkit focuses on children ages 0-6. When considering children of this age, the parent-educator relationship may be closer and more intimate, and as such, can become more complex.

"When parents send their young children to school, they entrust the children to the educator's care. Trust between parents and educators, as with any human relationship, takes time and commitment to cultivate, a truism that is underscored for children and adults alike, especially in the first few weeks of school or preschool."[62]
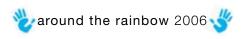
In building the relationships and ensuring quality care for children, most parents begin with individual meetings with their child's educators. Often times, parents will be required to interact with school administration, for instance the school secretary, director or principal. We will touch on both of these levels of interactions in the last two chapters because each requires different information and approaches. Regardless of the level of interaction, there are some basic principles that relate to both.

## What are the Rights and Responsibilities of Children, Parents and Educators?

### Rights
Everyone in the education system has rights:

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*\* Much of this work was adapted from Opening Doors: Lesbian and Gay Parents and Schools, a project of the Family Pride Coalition (FPC) in Washington DC. Although an American source, the work they have completed is certainly applicable to all GLBTTQ parents and allies.  FPC also embarked on a second project, Opening More Doors: Creating Policy Change to Include Our Families. This work was used as an outline in the section on creating and advocating for policy changes in our schools, and adapted to the Ontario school system. This will hopefully provide a philosophical approach to, and the groundwork for future development.*

### Children's Rights

- Children have the right to a safe and harassment-free school environment.

- Children have the right to have their family reflected in the school curriculum.

- Children have the right to reach their full academic, social and emotional potential.

### Parents' Rights

- Parents have the right to know that their child will be safe at school, both physically and emotionally.[63]

- Parents have the right to know that all children and adults will be treated fairly regardless of their race, ability, religion, national origin, economic status, age, gender, sexual orientation or gender identity/expression, and that each child will be treated as an individual.[63]

- Parents have the right to know that any negative or cruel behaviour among children or between children, staff and other adults will not be tolerated.[63]

- Parents have the right to have their family recognized, acknowledged and included in the school or preschool community.

- Parents have the right to have open and honest communication with educators and to know that they can approach a staff member with concerns, and the staff member will listen carefully and do everything possible to address the issues.[63]

- Parents have the right to advocate for their children.

- Parents have a right to privacy. It is understood that educators benefit from awareness of children's lives outside of school that may affect their lives at school, however it is important that you decide on relevant information to share with the school.

### Educators' Rights

- Educators have the right to have a personal view about glbttq issues outside of their professional responsibility to create safe and inclusive space for all children and their parents.

- Educators have the right to feel safe talking about glbttq issues and families in an age-appropriate, inclusive way in their classrooms, and with other educators and parents.

- Educators have the right to training and resources to create inclusive space.

It is important to realize that these rights are clearly written into policy at many levels within the education system. Some of the basic human rights were listed in Chapter 2, and here we include specific positions and
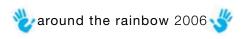
polices related to learning space:

- The Canadian Teachers' Federation states that it is opposed to stereotyping and discrimination against students or teachers on the grounds of sex, creed, national or ethnic origin, colour, language, geographic location, social or economic status, political affiliation, marital status, sexual orientation, age or disability.[64]

- The Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario recommends to its membership to develop strategies and resources that address homophobia, transphobia and heterosexism in schools and to liaise with other elementary teachers' federations and outside organizations to further lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans issues.[65]

- The Ottawa-Carleton District School Board, in their Safe Schools Policy, states that "the Board does not tolerate physical, verbal (oral or written), sexual or psychological abuse; bullying; or discrimination on the basis of race, culture, religion, gender, language, disability, sexual orientation or other attribute."[66]

### *Responsibilities*

To ensure that these rights are practiced within school and preschool spaces, it is important that we understand the other side of rights: parents and educators each have responsibilities, not only to the children, but to each other.

- Parents and educators have the responsibility to nurture their partnership.

- Educators have the responsibility to consider parental concerns as essential to children's education.

- Educators have the responsibility to provide opportunities for parents to communicate with them.

- Parents have the responsibility to take opportunities to speak to educators to ensure they have relevant information to care for your child(ren).

- Educators have the responsibility to use language that is inclusive on forms, newsletters, and other school communications.

- Educators have the responsibility to seek out the tools that will afford all children and families the same degree of respect.

- Educators have the responsibility to create safe space and to stop name-calling, discrimination, bullying and emotional and physical abuse.

- Educators have the responsibility to include pictures, books, and conversations about glbttq parents and their children, in the school and preschool.

- Schools have the responsibility to institute a written anti-discrimination policy that includes sexual orientation and gender identity/expression.

There are many remarkable educators in the school and preschool systems who acknowledge diverse communities; they use inclusive curriculum and language, and they strive to create positive and nurturing spaces for all children and their unique needs. There are some glbttq educators who personally understand the issues and needs of glbttq families and who face their own challenges in trying to work within a system that often is unreceptive to their needs, ideas or expertise. And there are some educators who are more than willing to learn with openness, even if they have not been previously exposed to creating inclusive glbttq space. And there are some educators who may first need to deal with their own heterosexism, homophobia and transphobia before taking on the challenge of diversity in the classroom.

**No matter our perspective or experience, dialogue between parents and educators is key.**

## Parents' Concerns and Fears when Speaking with Educators

As glbttq parents, we may find ourselves facing particular challenges. We may be fortunate enough to find that other glbttq families have already paved the way, and that there has been significant progress made on the visibility, safety and inclusion of glbttq families in the school. On the other hand, we may discover that we are the first open, glbttq family that the school or preschool has encountered.

Although educators may not have addressed glbttq issues or glbttq family concerns in the past, this does not mean that they will not address these issues now. Neither does it necessarily mean that they are homophobic or transphobic. They may not realize how their program and curriculum exclude glbttq families.

At the same time, there are genuine fears and concerns that need to be addressed, regardless of how supportive an educator may be.
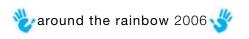
## Being "Out" as a Family – Concerns and Fears of GLBTTQ Parents[67]

As glbttq parents, coming out to the educator, the school and to society, can be a complex and difficult decision. We know that in a heterosexist society our decision may have a profound impact not only on our own lives, but especially on the lives of our children.

It is complex to decide how "out" to be. Some may wish to be out only to their child's teacher, or to the school administration. Some may struggle to be open at all. This decision may depend on fears and concerns for your personal well-being.

- The school will "out" me and I will risk losing my job.

- The school will "out" me and I will risk losing custody of my children.

GLBTTQ parents also express fears and concerns for their children.

- My child will be discriminated against.

- My child will not be invited to friends' homes.

- Friends will not accept my child's invitations to come to our home.

- The school won't provide opportunities for my child to see his or her family reflected in the curriculum.

- My child will be harassed by others.

These fears are legitimate. We must decide how open to be with educators, realizing that we may need to be candid to ensure that our children's needs are met in the classroom.

## Define your personal boundaries

It is important to determine our level of comfort and safety before meeting with your child's educator and the school's administration for the first time. At the same time, educators cannot be supportive of our family if they are unaware about our family's situation. If we choose to label another adult in our glbttq relationship as an "aunt" or "roommate," for instance, the school or preschool may not recognize that there are glbttq families in the school or community. They may see no reason to incorporate any information about diverse families into the curriculum. In an ideal educational setting, inclusive space would always be a priority, and not created only if there are glbttq families enrolled. However, given that many glbttq issues are still new for many educators, we are often the first to bring up the subject.
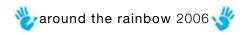
Parents need to move at their own pace. We need to individually think about how open to be about who we are, and then determine how we can work with the educator at that level.

*We can find encouragement from the experience of other glbttq parents.*

*A glbttq parent in Ottawa: "After we adopted our son I was more committed to speaking out and naming being gay. I am still afraid sometimes to say the things I say, but for him I have to do it. The more contact I have with the community and the school, the better it will be for my child."[68]*

*"No one can come to appreciate different kinds of families just by being told to do so. What is possible is for educators and parents to tell each other who they are, enlarging the possibilities for how each group considers the other."[69]*

## First Steps

### 1) Start from the assumption that a cooperative solution is possible.

The most important step you can take to build a positive relationship with your child's educator is to start from the assumption that a cooperative solution can be found that will benefit all people involved. It is important to realize that educators may also have fears to work through, including the fear that other parents might not be supportive of glbttq inclusive learning spaces. When people come together to make changes, their different goals, thoughts and needs can not be reduced to simple either/or choices. If we expect differences will lead to conflict, then we enter into situations defensively, ready to protect our own interests. When we enter into a conversation assuming that a cooperative solution can be found that will benefit everyone, the door is left wide open for exactly that to happen.[70]

### 2) Define your issues/concerns

As glbttq parents, it is up to you, in partnership with professional staff, to ensure the school and preschool program is a safe and supportive place for your children.

Take some time to think about your ideal situation and to prepare questions for your child's educator(s).
- Identify your issues and concerns.
- Define your ideal situation.
- Determine changes that are needed to meet this ideal.
- Imagine what may need to be in place to bring about these changes.
- Write out questions for your child's educator(s), in each area of change:
    a) Questions to first determine the educator's level of openness to change.
    b) Questions and suggestions about the type of learning setting they may provide.

**Some examples:**

| What would the ideal situation be? | What do I want to see changed? |
|---|---|
| Children would see their families portrayed in the course of their everyday life throughout the school year. | That glbttq-headed families are included along with the spectrum of families in pictures on the wall and in books in the classroom and school libraries. |
| Children's teachers use language that is inclusive of all families, including glbttq families. | That the school would know in advance how you would like them to handle potentially awkward situations such as Mothers' Day or Fathers' Day card making, father-daughter dances, or brunches. That the first and last names of all the members of your family are reflected accurately in school communications. |
| All children feel safe at school. | School-wide education for adults and children is in place to prevent and to end teasing and bullying. |

## 3) Decide how you will answer questions from the educators:

Many educators are genuinely positive and ready to ask you respectful, pertinent questions to help them serve you better. You need to determine how you would like to answer such questions, as:

- Tell me about your family. Who would you like us to include in discussions about your family?

- What are the names your child uses to refer to your family members? (Daddy/Papa, Mama Jane/Mama Sally, first names, etc.)

- How open are you about your relationship with the rest of the community?

- Do you have resources and materials that might help me learn about this issue and help me cover it in class?

- How does your family explain how your children came to be with you?

Sometimes questions will be asked that are intrusive, irrelevant and demonstrate a lack of awareness about glbttq issues. You must also be ready to answer these types of questions. For example, people will occasionally ask about the 'real' mother when speaking to lesbian mothers. State with confidence and patience, that both parents are the real mothers. Be clear when particular information asked of you is not relevant or intrusive. A good way to measure this is: "Would this educator ask the same question of all parents? If not, why not? Is it truly relevant?"

## 4) Approach your child's educator

Once you have prepared yourself, set up a meeting with your child's educator. It is never too late to do so. Even if your child has been in the classroom or preschool setting for awhile, it is always okay to ask to meet with the educator to discuss your ideas and issues. You might want to make sure that someone else is present with you to act as support, if needed. When you approach the educator with patience, confidence and information, they will probably listen. Their personal views about glbttq issues may not be compatible with yours, but it is their job above all to provide your child with a caring and welcoming environment for learning. When communicating, remember that courtesy, kindness and openness play an important role in determining how successful you will be. It is often helpful to start by assuming that everyone wants what is best for children.

Here are several question that you may wish to ask in order to explore how ready the school is to recognize and include your family:

## Sample Questions for Parents to Ask Educators and Child Care Providers[71]

- Have you ever had 'out' glbttq parents or teachers at your school? If you have, how did your school address their needs?

- Has the school provided training and/or workshops about issues of bias or discrimination, including families with one or more glbttq parents?

- If not, would you be willing to take training on these issues to better serve my child? (If so, you can give them the educators' toolkit and encourage them to contact Family Services à la famille Ottawa for more training information.)

- Does your school have books or other resource materials that reflect glbttq families and explore the issues related to them? (If not, then you can offer them the resource list found in the Resource Kit.)

- How is your school inclusive around holiday celebrations such as Mothers' Day, Fathers' Day, birthdays, Pride, as well as religious and cultural celebrations? (Be ready to give them ideas about how to be inclusive with your child.)

- How do you and the school, or preschool, deal with issues of teasing, name-calling, and all forms of harassment?

- Do you have an anti-discrimination policy in your school/preschool that includes sexual orientation and gender identity? How is this policy communicated to staff, parents and students?

It is important to listen openly and to watch people's body language to determine their comfort with the questions and the issues. It is also important to take notes to remember decisions that you have agreed upon, as well as to remember any points of disagreement.

It is hoped that through open and honest dialogue between parents and educators, the needs of children will be met. When dialogue does not result in an inclusive, nurturing environment for your child, you may need to move beyond the individual educator to others in positions of authority and responsibility. This is covered in the next chapter.

## Dealing with the Issues and Challenges from Children and Other Parents

As glbttq families become more visible in the school environment, all children become more aware of the variety of family structures among their classmates. Along with this visibility comes an awareness of sexual orientation and gender identity that may also be outside of their personal experience. One of the concerns educators or heterosexual parents might raise, is how to answer questions that children may ask as a result of this awareness. It is sometimes felt that young children will be confused by information about glbttq families and issues. Clear, accurate, age-appropriate information should not be confusing to anyone. Some adults underestimate the ability of children to understand unfamiliar concepts. Teaching is about helping children to understand the diversity of the world around them. Access to information about families with two moms or two dads can only help to promote appreciation and support for all children and their families. In fact, it is often much easier for children to understand these concepts and to be open to diversity then for many adults.

### A real life example:

Two 6 year olds were playing in the playground. An educator overheard the following conversation:

"I have two dads."
"You can't have two dads."
"Yes you can."
"Oh, okay", and they went off to play.

As parents and educators we need to give time and space for our children to ponder and resolve these questions in ways that work for them, and at the same time, be prepared to support or intervene if necessary.
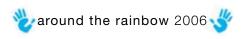
## Answering Children's Questions:[72]

The following are sample answers to some of the questions that may come up.

*Answers can be adjusted to accommodate your family's values and/or the developmental level and personal experiences of your children.*

### What does "gay" or lesbian" mean?

Being gay means that a person loves, in a very special way, someone who is the same sex. Gay men love men. Gay women, or lesbians, love women. Gay people might choose to have a special relationship with someone, share their home, and have a family together.

### What does "trans" mean?

Being trans means looking like one gender on the outside and knowing that you are another gender on the inside. Some people say it is like being born into the wrong body.

### How can John have two dads?

Families are made up in many different ways. John lives in a family where there are two dads because his parents love each other very much and wanted to bring a child into their family to be part of their lives.

### Where is John's mom?

His family is made up of two dads, John, and any siblings. A woman gave birth to John but she does not look after him. His dads are the ones who make a home for him and take care of him.

### Can girls marry girls or boys marry boys?

Yes. People who love each other can live together, marry, take care of one another and be a family, with or without children.

### Is Caitlin going to be lesbian because her moms are lesbian?

No. Caitlin will grow up to be who she was born to be. Having lesbian parents does not make a child become a lesbian.

### Will I be gay if I play with Caitlin?

No. You are always going to be who you are, no matter whom you play with. Being gay or straight is something that's inside a person; no one else can put it there.
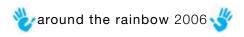
## Answering Adults' Concerns[73]

Adults within the larger heterosexual school community will have their own concerns and fears, such as:

### My child will be influenced to be gay or trans.

Your child will become who they are "hard-wired" to be. Recognizing glbttq families, and playing with my children will not change your child's sexuality or gender identity in any way.

### My child will be taught values with which I disagree.

Your child will learn our common values of care and respect of others, as well as safety and peace for everyone, all values that are compatible with your core values.

***My son will become a "sissy."/My daughter will become a "tomboy."***

Your children will become who they are intended to be, regardless of their exposure to friends whose parents may be glbttq. Indeed, the exposure may help them to grow into adulthood as open-minded human beings with a broader, more inclusive view of the world.

***The "traditional" family will be devalued.***

The "traditional" family is only one of a variety of family structures. Families are created in loving relationships. Many families are supported by single parents who are alone through divorce, death of a spouse, or by choice; other families consist of grandparents, aunts and uncles, or foster parents. Still others are blended families created by bringing children from other relationships. There are families with glbttq parents. In essence, all kinds of families can be valued, supported and respected without threatening one particular form of family.

## Working with children:

Answering children's and adult's questions candidly is one approach to education and increasing awareness. Educators and glbttq parents can also become role models for respect and inclusion of diverse families. Some ideas on how to do this may include:

***If you are glbttq parent:***

- Be proud of yourself and comfortable with your sexual orientation and gender identity.

- Sympathize with what our children are going through. We cannot change who we are to make a child's social life better. Strength and self-esteem come from experiences that challenge us to stand up for ourselves. Children benefit from parents who are honest and true to themselves. Be proud of the lessons you are teaching your child.

- Make sure that children know other children of glbttq parents where possible. Create a circle of support for your children and for yourself.

***For educators and parents alike:***

- Talk to our children about glbttq issues and most importantly, listen actively. Children need an ally and a good ear as they work things out for themselves and with their peers.

- Integrate diversity into daily life. Introduce children to issues and stories about glbttq lives, and also issues and stories about people from diverse ethnic, cultural backgrounds, faiths, people who hold various philosophies, etc.

- Challenge sexism, racism, classism, harassment and violence, and talk to children in an age-appropriate way, why it is important to challenge these ideas and behaviours. Use inclusive language.

- Correct all myths, stereotypes and insinuations clearly. Open up conversation with children about how these comments hurt people and the world we live in.

- Teach children that people who discriminate are the ones who need help. At the same time there is never a reason good enough for hurting people or treating anyone unfairly or unkindly, and people have a responsibility to change themselves. We can teach children compassion all while they learn to stand up for themselves.

*"If we give children the power they will surprise you.*
*They have an intuitive sense of justice. Trust them to do what is right for them."*[74]

# Working with schools and preschools

What do you do if your educator, school or preschool is not meeting their responsibilities to create safe and nurturing space for your child and others? What do you do if your child's educator does not understand the needs of your family?

## You become an advocate.

### What is an Advocate?

Advocates speak out and act when they see a need or an injustice. Many people are self-advocates and find it natural to speak out and act on their own behalf. Many do not necessarily feel comfortable doing so. Quite often it is also necessary to speak out and act for others who are unable to speak for themselves. Such is the case with parents, who may find that they need to become advocates for their children in their interaction with the school or preschool. We advocate for changes that are important to us and our children. Many times parents, educators and other adults may not intend to cause harm and do not realize that certain words and actions are hurtful. In these situations, advocacy simply requires us to provide information and resources, to bring about change. Many times, additional work is required to change behaviour that has homophobic/transphobic thinking and behaviour at its roots. An openness to change can also prove difficult when people already think that they are inclusive, feel they know what glbttq families need, and are defensive about your request to work together to increase the accessibility in the learning environment.

### What is Advocacy?

Advocacy ensures that common values held by a society, such as care, respect, safety, peace as well as legislated rights, including glbttq rights, are put into practice. Advocacy assumes that people have rights, and that those rights are enforceable. Advocacy comes into play any time someone identifies an unfair or harmful situation or practice affecting her/himself or someone else, and decides to help correct that situation. As such, advocacy is the process of influencing people who have the authority to make decisions and to create positive change. In a nutshell, advocacy requires you to:

- Develop your awareness about an issue of concern and sort out who has power to change the situation.

- Determine and state what you would like to see changed. Advocacy works best when focused on something specific.

- Approach the person/people in a position of power (by yourself or with others who act as allies) to discuss the issue and work with them to bring about change. This does not mean that you become equally responsible for these changes. Schools and preschools staff carry the greatest responsibility for ensuring safe, inclusive space for our children. However, it is important that we do not focus on blame or criticism. Advocacy is about action to bring about change.

- Provide tools and resources to help bring about change.

Initially, your advocacy may focus on your own family's concerns in your immediate situation. In this case,

*individual advocacy* is needed, as you attempt to improve things for your child. Your main contacts are likely to be the childcare provider, play-group leader or teacher, and may include the principal or director.

You may have to do more, however, either because of resistance to your efforts or because you find that changes need to be made on a broader scale, on behalf of all glbttq families. In this case, you may need to advocate for change within the system.

*Systemic Advocacy* is advocacy that is aimed at the systems within society on behalf of a number or group of people to achieve an outcome that is in the best interest of all. It ensures that systems or institutions, like the education system or district school board, are working the way they were intended, meaning the way they are legislated to work, providing nurturing, safe learning spaces for all children.

## Why is Advocacy Important?[75]

- No one knows as much as you do about your children and what they need to be healthy and happy. If you don't speak out for them, who will?

- The only way that others are going to know that you disagree with them, or that you or your family's rights or dignity have been violated, is for you to make them aware.

- People in authority and in decision-making positions need to know that there are problems, otherwise they will assume that everything is all right.

- By speaking out, you may find that you are not alone. By refusing to be silent, you may lead the way to changes that affect a lot of people for the better.

- You will know that you are protecting yourself and your children, even if you do not fully get what you want, right away.

- You have the right to expect a positive learning environment for your child. You have the right to be active to ensure that it happens.

"Silence kills. You are modelling for your children by getting involved and being a strong and healthy leader. If you want change then advocate for it." p13

# Becoming An Advocate

Parents are natural advocates, fuelled by their love for their children and family. Indeed, many glbttq people engage in their first advocacy experiences as a result of their commitment to making the world a better place for their children. Others describe their first steps into advocacy within preschools and schools, as their most courageous step.

## Define your personal strengths and weaknesses

Full self-knowledge will make you a more effective advocate. Conduct an inventory or assessment of your personal strengths and weaknesses. Your strengths are the array of gifts and skills that you bring to the role of advocate. They need to be weighed along with those traits that may limit your insight into a situation and your ability to act effectively. For example, if writing isn't your strong point, perhaps you could have someone read over a letter before you would send it. If you are shy, perhaps you could ask another person to come with you and speak together on the issues you would like discussed. If you are musical, perhaps you could offer to work with children in the classroom once a week, as a way of building a relationship with the educator and children, and then introduce the concept of diverse families.

> *"Look well into thyself; there is a source of strength which will always spring up if thou wilt always look there."* – Marcus Aurelius

## Make a commitment

Change at systemic levels can take a lot of time and require much patience. We need to make commitments to stay involved over time. Such a commitment will also require us to understand other people's perspectives. It involves making a commitment to find ways of turning negatives into positives, and to work toward common goals.

## Gather facts and resources

- We must make sure that we have accurate facts and useful resources on hand, to share with others as needed. Use the resources listed in the resource kit.

- Take notes when speaking with different educators.

- Learn about the educator's track record in dealing with past glbttq issues.

- Learn from other parents who have tried to create change in their children's preschool or school.

We may often be called upon often to educate others about glbttq issues. This is not to say that it is always our job. At times, the stated need for more education on an issue can be a way of stalling actual change. In these situations, it can be helpful to offer resources and information. At the same time, we can ask for clear timelines and commitments from educators and administration, for specific changes to be implemented.

## Working with the Community

To be effective with advocacy, particularly systemic advocacy, it is important to look for others who may be able to support us, people such as:

- *Allies –* An ally is an individual or group that cooperates with or helps others. Often they are facing or have already faced similar issues, for example issues of social exclusion and harassment based on stereotypes and myths. Besides other glbttq parents and anti-bias committees in the school, the list of possible allies may surprise you. You will probably find heterosexual allies, people in the heterosexual community who are willing to work on injustices that are exclusionary on any front, and are thus harmful to all children. Even though some people may not be particularly sympathetic to glbttq issues per se, they may support your "global" issues of acceptance, inclusiveness and justice in the school system.

- *Champions –* A champion is an individual who has an established public profile and who will take on a very public role in supporting your cause. This could be a trustee on the school board, a local politician or a local celebrity.

- *Networks –* A network is a group of people or organizations that exchange information, experience and resources about a common interest. The School Advisory Council could be a part of a network, along with glbttq groups in the community, local religious groups, community and social service agencies, community-based committees—any person or group with a passion for social justice.

## Some pointers for developing contacts and support:

By becoming involved with activities at our child's school or preschool, we can create a network of friends and acquaintances who share common goals. We can also eliminate the mystique that often surrounds glbttq individuals and families. These friends are likely to become natural allies in our advocacy efforts.

## Be a presence

The single best way to become accepted in a school or preschool community, is to be a presence. You can demonstrate that you want the best educational experience for all of the children. By working at a bake sale, attending meetings, volunteering in the classroom, on the playground or in the lunchroom, attending events, or chaperoning field trips, you can gradually educate the whole school or preschool community about glbttq families and diversity.

## Build relationships

The best way to advocate is to build relationships over time. Once you have established trust, it is much easier to negotiate and to have your concerns heard. Your child's teacher may become your strongest ally. It can also be helpful to become acquainted with other parents at your child's school. Children create a natural connection between parents. Other parents will be committed to social justice and the well-being of their children. They may be willing to share the work of looking into existing policies, connecting with staff and working towards improving the learning environment. Choose the best place for you to be involved based on your skills and interests, and approach this work in a way that is comfortable for you and your family.

## Seek support from other glbttq parents and/or organizations

You may find that there are other glbttq parents in the preschool and school, or in the neighbourhood and the community. You may believe that you are alone, but as you become more open, you may find that there are more glbttq parents who have been waiting for a leader to come onto the scene.

## Provide your children's prescool and school with appropriate language and resources

Tell the teachers who is in your family and the names that your children use to identify them. Provide a glossary of correct terms for glbttq families. Give the library a list of books, videos and other resource materials and encourage them to purchase or borrow these resources. ( See resource kit)

## Work with your advisory school council

In Ottawa, both the school's advisory school council and the Ottawa-Carleton Assembly of School Councils (OCASC) could be good places for your voice, as a glbttq parent, to be heard. Become involved with these groups. All parents/guardians and interested members of the community are encouraged to attend the meetings and express their views.

## Work with like-minded preschool, school and community members

There is strength in numbers, so use your contacts in the school and the community to amplify your voice and increase your power. Show your commitment to the overall goals of education, and to the support of all children, ensuring you do not limit yourself to your personal concerns and issues.

If the school or preschool has a diversity or anti-bias committee, try to take an active role. It can be an excellent place to find allies. Also, do not overlook individuals that you meet at your place of worship, child care centre or playgroups. They can be natural allies.

"I get involved in education, after-school activities, on parent council, taking on leadership roles so they know where I stand. Advocate for children and try to make changes to the curriculum. Then when hard stuff comes in, they already know me and somewhat trust me."[76]

## Be sensitive to the ever-changing needs of your child.

At some point children need some control over what is said, when it is said, and to whom. Pay attention to their signals. Consult with your children about these issues and about your involvement in their preschool or school.

## How do the preschool and school systems work?

In order to be effective as an advocate, it helps to understand the basic structures of the preschool and school systems in Ontario. It helps to know everyone's position and role, so that we can pinpoint who we need to approach to get the results we want and our children need.

# Preschool

## Child Care

Child care in the preschool years (ages 0–6 years) is administered by the Ministry of Children and Youth Services. Ontario's child care system consists of both informal and licensed child care.

## Licensed Child Care

Licensed child care is provided by either private-home daycare agencies or day nurseries. Facilities are inspected by program advisors in the Ministry of Children and Youth Services in order to have their licences renewed. The provincial government does not provide a curriculum for these programs.

## Informal Child Care

Informal child care may be provided by relatives, friends, neighbours or nannies. The province does not set or monitor standards, other than to investigate complaints.

## Unions

Some child care programs are unionized. If this is the case, it is possible that the union that works with the child care program may be able to offer training to staff, resources for policy development, etc.

## Play groups, day programs, resource centres, etc.

Most of these preschool programs are run by staff, a director/executive director and a Board of Directors. Some programs may be run through the City of Ottawa or another institutional level. Others work together with parents as a cooperative. Be sure to ask an educator, another parent or the director about the specific structure of your preschool or day care, who makes decisions, and if there are any other institutional bodies that make policy relevant to the particular preschool program. You want to put energy into advocating for changes with someone who has the power to grant what you need.

## Tools for working with preschools:

There are many tools that can help us open dialogue with preschool staff about glbttq family issues. In preschool and child care programs:

- Ask for and review the mission statement, objectives, policies and procedures of your children's centre. The mission statement and objectives will give you a good idea of how strongly the centre values the principles of diversity, inclusiveness and safety.

- Ask for and review the policies and procedures on harassment, bullying and violence. This will tell you how the centre plans to make their principles a reality.

If you identify gaps in the wording, or if you idenfity instances where the wording may be strengthened, you can start the conversation with staff and begin to network with the program's director and Board of Directors to advocate for changes. You can use the information in the following "School" section to assist you in asking specific questions. You can also find other examples of policies in the Resource Kit that may be helpful in your discussions.
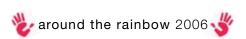
## School[77]

Ontario's Ministry of Education administers the system of publicly-funded elementary and secondary school education in Ontario (Kindergarten/Junior Kindergarten to Grade 12). The Ministry outlines what is to be taught in schools, sets requirements for graduation and provides funding to the district school boards.

### Levels of Influence

*When you have a concern, it is always best to go through the levels of influence in a specific order, that is, start with the teacher, then go to your principal if the issue is not resolved, and so on.[78]*

There are several reasons for this.

- School districts are hierarchical organizations and they have procedures to follow that determine who can address specific problems.

- It is in everyone's best interest to keep open communication with the people who are in closest contact with your child, the teacher and the principal. These are the people who are the most interested in seeing that your child's concerns are being taken care of, and in maintaining a relationship with you.

- Even though you may not be satisfied immediately with people along the way, it is best to try to work with them, at least the first time around. It will show them that you are trying to work within the system. By jumping to someone "higher up" too early, you might alienate the people you have passed over. You might be labelled as a troublemaker, creating an awkward situation if you need to talk with them in the future on another issue.

- Keep notes on all your efforts, meetings and conversations as you go along, to refer back to when details are required. Over time, it is difficult to remember small details that may prove significant later on.
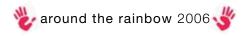
# The School System[79]

## The School includes:

- the **teacher**, who is in charge of the classroom. He/she plans both the day-to-day activities and the resources needed for the program. The teacher is your child's closest contact in the school system.

- the **office administrator**, who is in charge of the day-to-day operations of the school.

- the **principal**, who is in charge of leading the daily operation of a school. He/she is the person most responsible for setting its mood and tone amongst the teachers and staff. The principal works under the direction of the school board.

- the **Advisory School Council**, whose role is to help the school and parents communicate with each other. The goal of the council is to serve the needs of the students. It will undertake fund-raising efforts as well. School councils usually meet every month at the school. All parents are encouraged to attend and express their concerns and views.

- the **Ottawa-Carleton Assembly of School Councils (**OCASC) is an umbrella organization for school councils in Ottawa. Each advisory school council can elect a delegate to the OCASC. The assembly's goal is to get parents involved in schools and in the decision-making process.

## The District School Board includes:[80]

- the district **superintendent,** who supports principals and vice-principals in the operation of their schools. For example, in 1998, seven superintendencies or school groupings were established in the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board. Each district superintendent has many schools within the district to support.

- the ***Director of Education***, who is the chief executive officer (CEO) of the district school board. He/she is responsible for developing and maintaining an effective organization and programs across the entire board district. The Director of Education is accountable to the Board of Trustees.

- the ***Board of Trustees***, is an elected body whose primary role is to represent the community's needs while participating in developing policy and setting budgets for their school district. They are also responsible for providing equity of programming for all students throughout the Board.

To find out who works on your district school board, including the name of your school's trustee, please see the Resource Kit for links to each district school board in Ottawa.
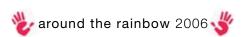
Both legally and ethically, the visibility, safety and inclusion of your child and your family is a fundamental part of the teacher's, the principal's, the superintendent's and the entire school board's responsibilities.

## What to ask for?[81]

Now that you have resources and information, a network of allies who support glbttq issues and social inclusion in general, and you know who to talk to, what should you ask for? Here are some examples of positive changes that you can ask for when in discussion with individual educators, principals and the Board:

### Policy and Procedures

- Adopt a school core values statement based on Board policy that makes clear both the values being promoted and those things that will not be tolerated. Ensure that it explicitly protects the rights of all students, teachers and families regardless of race, ethnicity, faith, ability, nationality, gender, gender identity or sexual orientation.

-  Make sure your school board reaches out to all minorities including glbttq people when it fills teaching, coaching, administrative, clerical, custodial and all other positions within the school system.

- If your school board doesn't have an anti-harassment policy, you can ask them to adopt an anti-harassment policy that specifically names and defines those behaviours that are considered harassment. If the board has established these policies you can ask your school to implement clear administrative procedures for anti-harassment and non-discrimination.

- Establish and enforce clear behavioural guidelines in a handbook that spells out problem-behaviour and consequences, thereby ensuring consistent action from teacher to teacher, student to student, and behaviour to behaviour.

- Post the core values statement and anti-harassment policy in a prominent place in the school's student handbook, parent's handbook, disciplinary guidelines, cafeteria and hallways.

- Ensure that official school forms/paperwork do not assume heterosexuality, and create spaces for all family members.
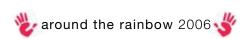
## Staff Development

- Provide mandatory, professional development for all staff and teachers on diversity and social inclusion. Ensure that these opportunities include specialized training on glbttq issues including discrimination, homophobia, transphobia, heterosexism and glbttq family needs.

- Provide training to all staff on how to recognize and intervene if harassment occurs.

- Provide appropriate training for non-instructional staff. For example, bus drivers and crossing guards should receive training on addressing harassment that occurs in transit to and from school or other locations.

## Curriculum

- Encourage schools and teachers to use a "family curriculum", which can come alive by leaving many things open-ended. For example, drawing their family trees can encourage children to talk about their families with one another, and compare differences in a non-judgmental way. Inviting parents into the classroom to talk about their work or their culture can be appropriate. If a child is from a two-parent glbttq family, inviting both parents in can reinforce the school's acceptance of diversity.

- Ensure that materials in the classrooms and playrooms (reading materials, posters, etc.) refer to and have pictures of diverse families, including images of glbttq families, for example, two mothers or two fathers.

- Ensure that young children have the opportunity for dramatic play, with a wide array of materials that encourages children to act out various family forms and relationships, and various family roles.

- Integrate diversity into curriculum, training, books, materials, examples including story-time, history, social studies, family life, sexuality, science, math and health, in ways that are inclusive of sexual orientation and gender identity/expression, and in age-appropriate ways. There are many anti-bias curriculum guides to help do this. Please see the Resource Kit for an example of multiculturalism that may be used as a template. Check for other online resources.

## Children

- Ensure that the rights of all children are respected in the classroom.

- Teach by example. Children readily learn behaviour that is modelled for them.

- Introduce young children to the principles of respect and acceptance. This introduction should include appropriate education about glbttq people and glbttq families.

## Parents

- Host an evening community awareness program for parents that addresses bullying, discrimination and harassment, and includes glbttq issues.

- Talk openly to staff, parents and children about protecting all people, including glbttq people, from bullying, discrimination and harassment.

## Resources and Library

- Make literature and information about families, glbttq parents and general glbttq issues available in school libraries. These media should include videos, pamphlets and books for the use of students, teachers and parents. Children's books depicting glbttq people in a variety of everyday roles, including as parents, should be readily available in classroom reading areas whether children of glbttq parents are in the classroom or not.

- Ensure that library holdings are catalogued and shelved so that students can access the materials easily. For example, cataloguing systems should use updated subject headings such as "lesbian", "gay" and "trans", rather than outdated and potentially derogatory terminology such as "homosexual", "transvestite" or "homophile." Books on glbttq issues should be kept in the same manner as other holdings, preferably on open shelves, rather than being kept in the librarian's office and made available only on request.

- Integrate glbttq issues and literature into reading lists to ensure comfortable and universal access. In addition, develop specific reading lists of books on glbttq issues, periodically displaying these materials in a visible way. Please see Resource Kit for relevant book lists.

- Provide local guides and resources to organizations for glbttq parents and glbttq youth.

- Evaluate materials currently in use to ensure that they do not present outdated information or stereotypical messages.

- Develop an awareness of heterosexism and the ways in which it infiltrates literature, curriculum and general media.

These are just some ideas of ways to work towards an inclusive, safe and nurturing space for your children in the preschool and school systems. There are many other things that you will know that your child and your family require. Being involved in the preschool or school to improve these systems for our children, will have long-lasting positive effects for all children.

# Conclusion

When it comes to issues that affect our children, all parents are very natural advocates. In spite of this natural affinity for speaking up for our children, glbttq parents may find that raising issues that challenge society's current notions of sexual orientation, gender identity and family, is a daunting task. Even the initial decision to advocate on behalf of our families is weighed down with many personal considerations, for example employment and potential harassment.

GLBTTQ parents should never underestimate the influence that they may have over the long run. Throughout history, much has been achieved by thinking globally, and acting locally.

By taking the process one step at a time, beginning in your child's preschool and school, building on your own strengths, equipping yourself with helpful resources, and building a system of like-minded people, glbttq parents can help to make a positive difference in creating and maintaining learning environments that are safe and inclusive for all children.

> *"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed people can change the world. Indeed it is the only thing that ever has." –Margaret Mead*
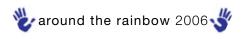
# Future Learning

This document is a small step in the ongoing process of discovery about glbttq family issues. While it summarizes much of the current research and understanding of glbttq issues and concerns, it also serves to point out what we do not know: those areas that require further research.

We have made efforts to use language that is as inclusive as possible. We recognize, however, that there is much more research needed to understand the general and specific issues faced by glbttq parents and their children. Much of the existing research does not make clear distinctions between different members of the glbttq community, and how factors can impact members quite differently. For example, much of the research we found focused only on the gay, lesbian and bisexual communities, and ignored the trans, two spirit and queer communities almost entirely. We have only briefly, named the compounding impact of classism, racism, and homophobia/transphobia on multicultural and two spirit parents and their children. Future, in-depth work is greatly needed if we are to be truly inclusive and accessible to all families.

We seek to learn more throughout this project by connecting with others who are working on similar issues. We encourage students, community members and researchers to conduct research into glbttq lives to fill in some of these identified gaps. We also encourage dialogue across communities and within communities as the basis for moving forward and learning together.
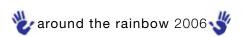
*"I have learned over the years that when one's mind is made up, this diminishes fear; knowing what must be done does away with fear." - Rosa Parks*
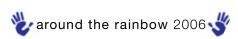
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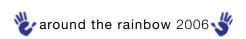All website references were accessed in 2006.

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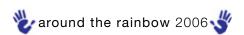
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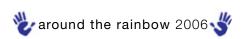
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