



Tips for Making Classrooms Safer for Students with a LGBTQIA+ Parent or Caregiver

"In middle school when I made my family tree, my teacher told me it couldn't have two women. I was told it could either have one of my moms' sides, or I could 'make up a father.' The teacher chose to pass on ignorance and intolerance, instead of using the opportunity to teach my classmates about diversity."

- 14 year old daughter of a lesbian mom

"I wrote a report for school about my friend Stefan who has a lesbian mom and a gay dad. While presenting my report to the class I mentioned his parents' sexuality and everyone went into an uproar. I slunk ashamedly back to my seat without finishing my report."

- 16 year old daughter of lesbian moms

"When I was in 3rd grade, I was absent one day and my teacher decided to out me to the class. I came to school the next day and was horrified. I was teased for the next 4 years until I moved to a different district."

- 15 year old daughter of a lesbian mom

"One time, some seniors who had seen the rainbow sticker on my mom's car threw me into a garbage can and called me homophobic names."

- 17 year old son of lesbian moms and a gay dad

According to the 2013 Williams Institute report on *LGBT Parenting in the United States*, there is an estimated 6 million people in the United States with one or more lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and/or queer (LGBTQIA+) parent(s). While research shows that there are no significant developmental differences or negative affects on children of LGBTQIA+ parents, these youth do report facing significantly more prejudice and discrimination because of societal homophobia and transphobia. According to COLAGE's evaluations of youth for the past 5 years, 71% of youth in LGBTQ+ families have experienced teasing and 61% of youth have self-reported feeling unsafe telling people about their LGBTQ+ family. Youth report that schools are a key place where they face intolerance—from peers, teachers, school administration, and school systems that are affected by the homophobia in our society. The following tips attempt to introduce teachers to the topic of safety and respect for youth with LGBTQIA+ parents in schools. Developed by a group of youth with LGBTQIA+ parents in the San Francisco Bay Area, these suggestions are first steps in making your classrooms and schools more affirming and safe for students from LGBTQIA+ families, as well as all students affected by homophobia and oppression.

1. **Always intervene** whenever you hear or see anti-gay or transphobic language or actions. At the beginning of the year, set classroom rules that include making it clear that racist,

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homophobic, sexist, and other discriminatory comments are not welcome in your classroom. Send a clear message that homophobia and transphobia will never be tolerated. In addition, work with your classroom to learn more about systems of oppression—teach students that hate and discrimination in all of its forms is wrong.

2. **Do not make assumptions** about any student’s background. Create a classroom where each student is able to share freely about their identity and families.

3. **Visually show your support.** On your walls include a poster about diverse and intersectional families (perhaps the COLAGE poster) or other images that show you are an ally to LGBTQIA+ people and issues.

4. **Challenge heterosexism in your assignments.** Some examples: In language classes asking youth to describe their families, often youth with LGBTQIA+ parents or caregivers have been reprimanded for using the wrong gender pronouns or placing an apostrophe in “the wrong place”. However, often the fact that they are using he and he to describe two dads is correct. If you assign family origin or family tree projects, allow youth from different types of families to make their own decisions about how they portray their families, whether it is two parents of the same gender, or multiple parents who co-parent them, etc.

5. **Include topics about diversity in your curriculum.** Study different kinds of families and famous LGBTQIA+ people (and mention when someone you are already studying in your general curriculum is LGBTQIA+, have speakers, and use videos and books to show students that difference is something to be celebrated. Perhaps use events such as National Coming Out Day, Pride Day, or a Unity Week as reasons to incorporate LGBTQIA+ issues positively into your classroom.

6. **Never out a student with LGBTQIA+ parents.** The only person who should make the decision to share about their family is the student when they feel safe and ready to do so.

7. **Do not make assumptions about youth with LGBTQIA+ parents or caregivers.** Youth from LGBTQIA+ families report that people often assume certain traits will apply to all youth with LGBTQIA+ parents. For example, do not expect that a student who has LGBTQIA+ parents/caregivers will also identify as LGBTQIA+. Not all youth in LGBTQIA+ families identify as LGBTQIA+.

8. **Make your classroom accessible.** Do not rely on forms that ask for signatures from mother and father. Instead use the terms Parent/Guardian. On Back to School night, or during parent teacher conferences, expect and welcome LGBTQIA+ parents and caregivers.

9. **Work with your administration to make sure your school is safe for students with LGBTQIA+ families.** Suggest that the faculty at your school complete an LGBTQIA+ inclusivity and transgender 101 training, or an in-service about LGBTQIA+ and diverse families. Discuss

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protocols for dealing with anti-gay, anti-trans, and anti-LGBTQIA+ family harassment on school wide or department levels so that all teachers are equipped to address homophobia and transphobia.

10. **Educate yourself.** Learn more about LGBTQIA+ families and issues. Not only will this allow you to be informed when students raise questions or need resources, but it will help you be better equipped to address incidents of homophobia and transphobia in your school and to include LGBTQIA+ content in your curriculum. As a starting point, use the resources listed on www.familyequality.org/resources/ and queerspawresource.org website for suggestions of books, movies, websites and more.

11. **Be involved.** If your school has a Gay Straight Alliance or other type of club, attend meetings when possible to show your support. You can also offer to be the faculty advisor for such a club if students are trying to start one in your school. If you are involved in your school's GSA, Rainbow Club, or other LGBTQIA+ club, ensure that LGBTQIA+ family issues are included and that youth from LGBTQIA+ families are welcomed as participants. This can be as simple as including inclusive language in the description of the club. For example, you can list that your school's GSA is for LGBTQIA+ youth and youth in LGBTQIA+ families.

COLAGE unites people with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and/or queer parents into a network of peers and supports them as they nurture and empower each other to be skilled, self-confident, and just leaders in our collective communities. Living in a world that treats our families differently can be isolating or challenging. By connecting us with peers who share our experiences, COLAGE helps us become strong advocates for ourselves and our families. Learn more at www.familyequality.org/colage.

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