

☆ Gay and Lesbian Parents: The Realities ☆

1. Fact: There is no one "gay lifestyle" which accurately reflects the daily lives of all lesbian, gay, and bisexual people, no one set of values or behaviors to which they all ascribe. This includes parenting strategies and methods.
2. Fact: Gay men and lesbians do have stable relationships and do know how to be good parents.

Like other adults in this country, the majority of lesbians and gay men are in stable committed relationships. All of the evidence shows that lesbians and gay men can and do make good parents. In a review of the research, the American Psychological Association observed that "not a single study has found children of gay or lesbian parents to be disadvantaged in any significant respect relative to children of heterosexual parents." The Association concluded that "home environments provided by gay and lesbian parents are as likely as those provided by heterosexual parents to support and enable children's psychosocial growth."

3. Fact: Children raised by gay or lesbian parents are not more likely to grow up gay or lesbian themselves.

All of the available evidence demonstrates that sexual orientation of parents has no impact on the sexual orientation of their children and that children of lesbian and gay parents are no more likely than any other child to grow up to be gay or lesbian.

4. Fact: Like their peers, children of gay and lesbian parents tend to have same-sex friends during their grade school years.

In studies assessing peer relations, no significant differences between children of lesbian and heterosexual mothers were found. Children make fun of other children for all kinds of reasons: for being too short or too tall, for being too thin or too fat, for being of a different race or religion or speaking a different language. Children show remarkable resiliency, especially if they are provided with a stable and loving home environment. Having the emotional support of a loving permanent family to help them through all types of difficult times is essential.

5. Fact: Lesbians and gay men are not more likely to molest children.

There is no connection between homosexuality and pedophilia. Ninety percent of sexual abuse is committed by heterosexual men. The misconception that lesbians and gay men are more likely to molest children stems from the fear of difference

that leads to the over-sexualization of lesbian, gay, and bisexual identity. By fostering the impression that the lives of lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals revolve around sexual activity, these beliefs effectively obscure all other aspects of their lives. In comparison, the extent of sexual abuse in heterosexual families and the damage it causes to children of these families, does not lead society to make the assumption that heterosexuals are bad risks as parents.

6. Fact: Children raised by lesbians and gay men are not brought up in immoral environments.

There are all kinds of disagreements in the United States about what is moral and what is immoral (e.g. raising children without religion, use of alcohol, gambling, etc.) however none of these things disqualify someone from being a parent. Many gay and lesbian individuals desire and are able to care for children and provide them with safe and loving homes.

7. Fact: Child welfare professionals can help gay and lesbian families by providing sensitive interventions, by offering guidance or support, and by advocating social change.

Social workers traditionally see their role as improving the transactions between people and their environments, helping people adapt more successfully to their surroundings, and also changing environments to make them more compatible with the needs of individuals and families. This perspective is particularly useful in considering the social worker's role with lesbian and gay families. Among the ways in which social workers can intervene effectively with lesbian and gay families are: (1) Examine one's biases and attitudes toward lesbians and gay men in general and lesbian and gay families in particular. If one is not comfortable working with gay and lesbian families, one should make use of supervision to resolve the discomfort. (2) Forming or locating support groups for lesbian and gay parents can provide a way of building self-esteem and of creating mutual-aid networks. (3) Support groups for the children, particularly as they reach adolescence and face issues of self-identity, can be helpful, as many children report that they do not know any other children of lesbian or gay parents. (4) Advocacy for all family members may be necessary with schools, the legal system, and other service systems.