

## Home Study/Family Assessments and Child Matching with LGBT Families

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**all children  
all families**

Finding permanent families for children by promoting fairness for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender foster and adoptive parents.

## Goals of Workshop

- Explore personal attitudes and beliefs about LGBT adoptive parents
- Assess your current level of knowledge and skills for effectively working with LGBT adoptive parents
- Identify best practices for conducting home studies and placement with LGBTT families

## What are the Unique Issues?

- Due to a variety of social, legal and cultural issues, LGBT prospective adoptive parents may face additional barriers and challenges in their pursuit of building a family.
- Balance tension between “being out and open” and fear of facing discrimination
- Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell Approach

## Key Points in Assessment of Prospective LGBT Foster/Adoptive Parents

- Applicants need information about the process, including help with identifying any potential areas of difficulty.
- When undertaking the assessment, it is important that social workers address specific issues related to sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression.
- Social workers doing home study and placement should have access to appropriate training and advice.

## continued...

- Children/youth need to be prepared for placement with families who are ‘different’.
- View LGBT prospective foster/adoptive families through a strengths-perspective lens
- Practitioners must be confident and prepared to challenge homophobic assumptions and comments from colleagues when considering placements with LGBT headed families.
- Practitioners must be able to present balanced information to birth families/foster families.

## Professional Opinion

**The prevailing professional opinion is that a parent's sexual orientation has nothing to do with his or her ability to be a good parent.** These organizations have favorable positions on gay and lesbian parenting:

- American Academy of Family Physicians (2002)
- American Academy of Pediatrics (2002)
- American Bar Association (1995, 1999 and 2003)
- American Medical Association (2004)
- American Psychiatric Association (1997 and 2002)
- American Psychoanalytic Association (2002)
- American Psychological Association (1976 and 2004)
- Child Welfare League of America (1988)
- National Adoption Center (1998)
- National Association of Social Workers (2002)
- North American Council on Adoptable Children (1998)
- Voice for Adoption (2006)
- Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute

**Elements of Practice**

- The initial contact
- The motivation to parent
- The training – MAPP/PRIDE
- The development of the worker/prospective parent relationship
- The home study process\*
- Matching and Placement\*
- Post-Permanency Support

**Specific Areas to Address in Assessment of Prospective LGBT Foster/ Adoptive Parents**

- The individual's experience of their sexual orientation or gender identity, their own and their family's response
- How confident do they feel in relation to their sexual orientation? How comfortable are they with their lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender identity?

**continued...**

- How have homophobia, transphobia, and heterosexism impinged on their lives, how do they feel they have dealt with this, and what present coping devices they use?
- What are their present relationships – sexual, emotional, supportive, family, etc. How do they negotiate homophobia within close relationships, e.g. with their siblings?

**continued...**

- With reference to the future, have they thought about relating to birth parents, relationships with other adoptive and foster parents – e.g. at school, playgroup, etc. How much research have they done in relation to attitudes of local institutions, e.g. schools? How would they help a child who experiences prejudice because of their (the foster parent's) sexual orientation?

**continued...**

- At what point did you consider coming out to others?
- Are you out in the community? At work? With your family? With friends?
- Are you out to your partner's parents and extended family?

**continued...**

- What has been the attitude of your extended family to your partner? Have they been inclusive and welcoming?
- Is your family supportive of you (and your partner) fostering/adopting a child?

## Social Issues

- Invisibility
- Fear for one's safety
- Stigma
- Prejudice
- Discrimination
- Oppression

## Cultural Issues

- Debate continues over whether LGBT men and women "should be able to parent."
- LGBT-headed families are not necessarily integrated into major institutions, e.g. schools, neighborhoods, health and social service agencies

## Attitudes and Beliefs about LGBT Parents

- Explore the stereotypes, myths, and prejudices that influence attitudes towards LGBT families.
  - The only acceptable home for a child is one with a mother and father who are married to each other.
  - Children need a mother and a father to have proper male and female role models.

## continued...

- Gays don't have stable relationships and wouldn't know how to be good parents.
- Children raised by gay parents are more likely to grow up gay themselves.
- Children who are raised by gay parents will be subjected to harassment and will be rejected by their peers.
- *To what extent, if any, do prospective LGBT parents internalize these ideas?*

## Addressing Relationships in the Assessment Process

- What qualities does each partner bring to the relationship?
- What makes the relationship positive for each partner? How do they support each other? How do they cope with stress and difficulties?
- How will a new child affect this relationship – for example, how will they cope with a child who becomes attached readily to one partner and much more slowly to the other?

## continued...

- Have other options been considered and explored as pathways to parenthood?
- How are decisions made? Is there wider family involvement in the decision-making process?
- What are the strengths and vulnerabilities of the partnership?

### continued...

- Have there been previous significant relationships, and if so what has been learned from these?
- Do they affect the present partnership?
- Are there children from any previous relationships, and if so, how will those children be affected by the decision to become foster parents?
- If single, what is your vision for having a partner in the future?

### Be informed about Legal Issues

- State laws vary re: adoption, workplace protection, civil unions, etc.
- Judges can be biased or uninformed
- Lack of full recognition for both parents
- Lack of security for children who have only one legally recognized parent

### Next Steps

- Assess need for staff training
- Review current approach to home study and family assessment
- Collaborate with placing agencies/ colleagues to eliminate bias

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