



LGBT Prospective Foster and Adoptive Families

THE HOMESTUDY ASSESSMENT PROCESS

By the National Resource Center for Permanency and Family Connections (NRCPFC)

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Introduction

The creation of families headed by LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people has not been without historical controversy and, in some cases, legal and policy-driven barriers have been established to prevent LGBT people from parenting and creating families. And yet, in many regions of the United States and in many European countries, there has been a growing acceptance of LGBT family life, as evidenced by the establishment of legal domestic partnerships, same-gender marriage, and an opening up of foster parenting and adoption to LGBT people.ⁱⁱ

For all prospective foster and adoptive parents, the homestudy assessment process bears with it great importance, regardless of the applicants' gender or sexual orientation. However, LGBT prospective foster and adoptive parents encounter unique issues during this process. Consequently, it is important for child welfare agencies to understand and establish best practice standards when managing applications from LGBT prospective parents.

While research has been conducted primarily on lesbian- and gay-headed resource families, with relatively little information exclusively regarding bisexual and transgender parents, literature has shown that parents' gender or sexual orientation has no bearing on their ability to parent children and youth. This publication has been produced with these research limitations in mind and recognizes that the research used to develop the provided practice

tips applies to all LGBT prospective foster and adoptive families.

LGBT Terminology: To prepare for affirming practice with LGBT foster and adoptive families, child welfare professionals should become familiar with LGBT terminology. To access a glossary of terms used in this practice brief, visit the NRCPFC Toolkit for Practitioners/Researchers Working with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer/Questioning Runaway and Homeless Youth (p. 4-6). http://www.nrcpfc.org/iss/downloads/LGBTQ_HRY_Toolkit.pdf

LGBT Fostering and Adopting

For decades, lesbians and gay men in the United States have been creating families through adoption, foster care, and the establishment of kinship networks.ⁱⁱⁱ There is a growing body of research showing that lesbians and gay men make good parents and raise children who show patterns of positive adjustment comparable to the children of heterosexual parents.^{iv} LGBT people represent an untapped resource of potential parents for some of the tens of thousands of children and youth in the United States who need permanent families. Although LGBT people historically may have been discouraged from fostering or adopting, changes in legislation and policy over the past 10 years in some states reflect a more open attitude toward LGBT parents.^v

Assessment of LGBT-Headed Foster and Adoptive Families

Given the history of discrimination, LGBT people may have cause for concern regarding the process of becoming foster or adoptive parents. Overall, far more lesbians and gay men have successfully fostered or adopted than is widely assumed, but there remains a widespread inaccurate perception that LGBT people are generally rejected as parental applicants.^{vi} This assumption may prevent some LGBT people from pursuing adoption or foster parenting, which makes it especially important that child welfare agencies encourage LGBT people to become resource parents through welcoming and supportive policies and practices.

Social workers in child welfare agencies play critical roles in deciding who will be licensed as a foster or adoptive parent and who will not. The range of attitudes, expectations, and beliefs, both positive and negative, held about LGBT people are critical in informing and influencing the assessment process. Before a sensitive and effective homestudy process can be initiated:

- An atmosphere of respect and openness toward LGBT people interested in becoming foster or adoptive parents must be created.
- Social workers should receive appropriate training about the life realities of these prospective parents, as well as about the need to confront and deal with their own homophobia, heterocentrism, transphobia, and expectations related to gender.

NRCPFC TITA: *The National Resource Center for Permanency and Family Connections (NRCPFC) is available to provide training and technical assistance specifically related to working with LGBT-headed resource families.*
http://www.nrcpfc.org/tta/about_tta.html

By law, States and child welfare agencies are required to carry out a full assessment of all applicants before approving them as foster or

adoptive parents. During the assessment process, the areas below should be taken into account:

- At the start of initial engagement with the agency, prospective parents should be made aware of the flow of the process. Information to be collected and required investigation are detailed in relevant state regulations and standards.
- The assessment process can be skewed if there is too much focus on prospective parents' sexuality or gender identity or if it is completely ignored.
- Gender identity or sexual orientation should not be ignored. It will have an impact on the individual's life as a parent and is an aspect of who they are as a whole person.

The child welfare field has witnessed a gradual shift toward a model of child care assessment that acknowledges the different experiences that being an LGBT parent brings to fostering and adoption.^{vii} Incorporating an awareness and respect for the experiences of LGBT parents is now viewed as an increasingly accepted goal of the homestudy process.

The First Contact

In the initial assessment with the individual or couple, social workers should consider the following issues:

- The worker's language, affect, and tone must reflect clear openness and acceptance of LGBT people as parents.
- In order to determine whether they will be supported or judged negatively, LGBT applicants will assess both the social worker and agency for "safety."
- During this first contact, the applicant may not be "out."
- While some LGBT people are directly "out" during the initial interview, others who are not may share information related to their sexual orientation or gender identity over time as trust is built.

Creating a Safe and Supportive Agency Environment: *The Summer 2010 issue of Permanency Planning Today, NRCPPC's bi-annual newsletter, focuses on how agencies can create environments that are welcoming, affirming, and inclusive of LGBT-headed resource families and LGBT prospective parents.*
<http://www.nrcpfc.org/newsletter/ppt-summer-2010.pdf>

Working with LGBT Families: *This Child Welfare Information Gateway resource provides professionals with an overview of working with LGBT-headed families in adoption and contains a section on the basics of creating a welcoming agency.*
http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_profbulletin/f_profbulletin.pdf

Training Groups for Prospective Resource Families

A range of reactions may exist from participants in MAPP (Model Approaches to Positive Parenting), PRIDE (Parent Resource for Information, Development, Education), or other training groups for prospective resource parents—from shock that LGBT people are allowed to adopt or foster children to comfort with and acceptance of LGBT parents. Some sentiments expressed by lesbian and gay parents who were interviewed for previous publications regarding training group settings include: ^{viii}

- Feelings of vulnerability and isolation;
- Nervousness about dealing with other group members' homophobia;
- Feeling the onus was on them to “come out” at the start of the group;
- Assessing social worker did not prepare them for the group training—in general or specifically in relation to their needs as lesbian and gay parents; and,
- Belief that both social workers and other group facilitators “did not have a great understanding of what it meant to come out.”

TIP: *Social workers facilitating training groups are responsible for addressing homophobia and transphobia and educating group members. It is important that clear ground rules for the group are set. The rules should make reference to accepting and valuing diversity while challenging discriminatory comments.*

Should the Homestudy Be Different for LGBT Parents?

LGBT adoption and foster parenting opportunities are changing quickly and dramatically across the United States, with the expectation that the number of children being raised by LGBT parents will increase in coming years.^{ix} Due to the enormous variation in policies, expectations, practices, and cultures across the country, it may be impossible to establish one best homestudy format that will work in all locations at this time. While homestudy formats vary from state to state, the development of standardized guidelines is an important step in adoption practice. Guidelines are useful because they:

1. Give social workers a sense of the formats other states and agencies are using to write homestudies for LGBT clients; and
2. Provide general cultural competency information so that those who work with LGBT people can do so in a sensitive, respectful manner.

Currently, there are several formats being used to write homestudies for prospective LGBT adoptive and foster parents. As with heterosexual applicants, the issues can be quite different for single prospective parents than for couples.

Single LGBT People

The homestudy for single LGBT people can be written as for any other single applicant.

- If the applicant does not voluntarily disclose information about their sexuality or gender identity, it is an important area for social workers to explore.
- It is usually acceptable practice to write the homestudy without reference to the subject, if the applicant's identification is still unknown following standard home visits.
- Do not assume any applicant's gender identity or sexual orientation.
- Any major past relationships or marriages can be mentioned if the applicant is described as single. The homestudy can indicate the prospective parents' thoughts on relationships in the future.
- If the applicant openly identifies as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender, the worker may discuss with the applicant how this information should be included in the homestudy (either descriptive or in more detail in the applicant's autobiography or description of past/anticipated future relationships).
- Failure to discuss gender identity or sexual orientation could prevent the applicant from receiving important preparation and support related to how this issue could have an impact on future parenting.
- Should the individual be considering adopting an older child, failure to address gender identity or sexual orientation in the homestudy also prevents appropriate preparation of the youth about being raised by an LGBT parent.

Same Gender Couples

Two Parent Families

Increasingly, the homestudy for same gender couples is being written in the same format as if the couple were heterosexual. This format is "groundbreaking" in some respects; it also is a very natural way to write this important document.

- Both people's names are listed as the adoptive or foster parents. Some forms

use the terms "parent one" and parent two," in a gender-neutral manner, with the intention that both parents receive an equal amount of attention within the homestudy.

- Information is included about:
 - the length of their relationship and its strengths and challenges; and
 - relationship status. (Some states authorize or recognize same-gender marriages or provide the equivalent of state-level spousal rights to same-gender couples.)

By producing this type of straightforward homestudy, social workers are provided with a better understanding of the type of family that may be adopting or fostering a child or youth on their caseload. Importantly, this homestudy format makes it clear that the child will be placed with an LGBT couple and paves the way for any relevant preparation and support of the clients and child that could be related to issues of gender or sexual orientation. Some states' policies or laws may not allow homestudies to be written in this way; therefore, this practice brief also presents alternative homestudy formats.

TIP: Before looking at specific homestudy policies and practices, child welfare agencies should review their state's relevant laws and understand how they will affect their LGBT clients.

Visit the Human Rights Campaign's webpage on Adoption, Foster Care Agencies & State Law to learn more.

<http://www.hrc.org/resources/entry/adoption-foster-care-agencies-state-law>

Single Parent with a Domestic Partner

This variation of the two-parent homestudy, examining a single parent with a "domestic partner," is chosen when laws or policies require one partner in a same-gender couple to foster or adopt as a single person. In this scenario, the homestudy is written primarily about one partner. The homestudy:

- focuses on the primary person's social history and interest in fostering or adopting;

- lists his or her name alone as the adoptive or foster parent; the second partner is included in the homestudy process and is described as a domestic partner or friend;
- describes the length and quality of their relationship and cohabitation; and,
- explains that both partners will consider themselves parents of the child to be fostered or adopted.

The hybrid format provides an honest picture about the situation of the couple while conforming to policies limiting fostering or adoption by same gender couples. Like the previous format, it calls attention to any necessary preparation and support of clients and children related to gender or sexual orientation. However, this homestudy format can present some challenges:

- It may be confusing to see one person listed as the foster or adoptive parent when the reality is really a two-parent family.
- The format may be misleading and suggest to those who read the document that this family consists of a “primary parent” and that parent’s partner, instead of two adults who will share parenting responsibilities.

Single Person with a Roommate

Until fairly recently, most homestudies of same-gender couples were written using this format. One partner is described as a single parent, and the entire homestudy focuses on this person alone. Because homestudies are required to list other individuals living in the home, the partner is listed as a roommate, and criminal clearances are obtained. Very little additional information about the relationship is mentioned, although a sentence is often included saying that this “roommate” is supportive of the applicant’s plans to adopt. When a worker expresses interest in placing a child with the “single parent,” he or she may be given more information about the situation verbally or in writing.

This type of homestudy can be the safest in a state that extremely limits LGBT fostering or adoptions, or it may be mandated by policy or

law. However, this format can be problematic if:

- it is not clear to a person reading the homestudy what this family’s structure really looks like;
- it is taken at face value, assuming this is truly a single-parent family;
- social workers read between the lines and wonder what the relationship is between the two “roommates” and whether important information has been excluded from the homestudy.

Social workers and agencies that follow this format should do so with these questions in mind:

- Does the situation best meet the child’s needs? Homestudies should always be written with the best interests of the child or youth, not of the potential parent(s), in mind.
- If the agency omits major information regarding the presence of a “roommate”, has other important information been omitted as well?
- Is appropriate preparation and support of the family related to sexual orientation and/or gender identity offered to the client and child?

Issues to Address in a Homestudy

Regardless of the gender identity or sexual orientation of prospective parents, many issues are common to all homestudies. However, for LGBT parents, the following specific areas should also be addressed.

Comfort with Gender or Sexual Orientation and the Reaction of Others

Gender identity and/or sexual orientation are issues that should be fully and openly discussed in the homestudy assessment process and the implications of sexuality should be addressed. As part of the assessment process, many prospective applicants write their autobiographies and may choose to address issues relating to their gender identity or sexual orientation as part of doing so. For many LGBT

people, realizing their gender identity or sexual orientation and coming out to friends and family constitute a significant life event, as is meeting their partners. Below are some recommendations for practice:

- The autobiography should not focus exclusively on issues relating to gender or sexual orientation, as this is only one part of a person's life experience; however applicants should not be encouraged to hide or downplay this aspect of their lives.
- Encourage prospective parents to be as honest as they can be, and to be as complete as they can be in writing their autobiographical statements.
- Have a strong understanding of the importance of the coming out process, which is central in the identity development of LGBT people.^x
- Explore LGBT potential parents' experience of coming out and the impact that the process has had on significant relationships within their families and communities.
- Assess potential parents' level of "outness" and explore with them at what point in their development they came out; however, understand the need to selectively conceal or disclose one's sexual orientation or gender identity.
- Understand the comfort level with one's "outness." Being uncomfortable about being out can complicate the parenting process, while being comfortable with being out suggests that people have integrated their sexual orientation or gender identity into their lives. This is an essential aspect of identity and emotional adjustment that must be covered in a complete and accurate homestudy.

Some LGBT people, as well as their partners, are cut off from their extended families because of families' inability or unwillingness to respect their identity. Applicants should not be penalized because of their relatives' attitudes. This information should be included in homestudies so that workers reading the assessments have a picture of the broader family system the child would join. In addition, social workers should explore what support

networks are available to the potential foster or adoptive parents. Workers can identify areas where the applicant may need support and consider how the agency could provide it.

Some questions for social workers to consider:

- At what point did you consider coming out to others? Who have you come out to?
- If applicable: What has been the attitude of your extended family towards your partner?
- Is your family supportive of you (and your partner) fostering or adopting a child?
- How would you describe your current relationships with family members and the broader community? How do you negotiate homophobia/transphobia within close relationships?
- How have the effects of homophobia/transphobia and heterocentrism affected your life? How have you dealt with/how do you presently deal with these issues?
- Have you thought about how you might relate to your child's birth parents or to the parents of your child's friends?
- How would you help a child who experiences prejudice because of your gender identity or sexual orientation?

Partnerships, Relationships, and Sexuality

There is some debate about whether social workers should ask applicants about their sexual relationships, and if they do, what should be done with this knowledge. Many social workers may be reluctant to explore issues of sexual orientation for fear it will lead to areas of discussion having to do with sexual behavior. There are distinctions between sexual orientation and sexual relationships; the first has to do with one's attraction to a romantic and sexual partner, and the second has to do with one's behavioral expression of intimacy and sexuality. (Gender identity is separate from sexual orientation. Gender identity reflects a person's understanding of their own gender. For example, one may identify as a man, woman, transgender man, transgender woman,

some other gender, or may choose not to label their gender at all.)

Questions for *all* parental applicants in significant relationships:

- What qualities do you and your partner bring to the relationship?
- What makes the relationship positive for each of you? How do you support each other? How do you cope with stress and difficulties?
- How do each of you address issues of sexuality and intimacy in your relationship?
- How will a new child affect your relationship—for example, how will you cope with a child who becomes attached more readily to one of you than the other?
- Have you considered other options and explored other pathways to parenthood?
- How are decisions made in your relationship? Is there wider family involvement in the decision-making process?
- What are the strengths and vulnerabilities of your partnership? What areas of the relationship create the most conflict?
- Have there been previous significant relationships for either partner, and if so, what has been learned from these? Do these previous relationships affect the present partnership? Are there children from any previous relationships, and if so, how will those children be affected by your decision to foster or adopt a child?
- How comfortable are you and your partner likely to be in discussing issues related to intimacy and sexuality with your children, including same-gendered sexual attraction and behavior?
- When do you believe it is appropriate to begin discussing relationship issues and sexuality with children?

Questions about sexual relationships should be part of the assessment for *all* couples. This is essential because:

- Sexual expression is a form of communication and intimacy.

- How people feel about themselves, physically and sexually, is likely to have profound implications for the development of children in their care.
- How children feel about themselves, physically and sexually, will also have implications for how they relate to others and to society. This is all part of developing an acceptable sense of self, and helping with this development is a major task for any mother or father.
- Parents face challenges in dealing with their adolescents' sexuality, and have a responsibility to provide information and help young people think about the nature of their sexuality and relationships.
- The ability to talk openly and honestly about relationship issues, including sexuality, in age-appropriate ways with their children, is an important aspect of parenting that needs to be considered in making placements with all families. This is especially true when the placements involve older children, who will soon be exploring these issues in their lives—or who already are.

Other Adults in the Household or in the Applicant's Life

The reality of single, prospective parents' lives, including those who are LGBT, includes significant adults who reside within the same household, as well as those who do not but are nevertheless an important and regular part of the applicant's life. For example, a single applicant may not be in a current relationship, but may date occasionally or wish to date at some future time. Although no assessment can predict the future, social workers must be aware of the roles that other people in an applicant's life may play (including a person the applicant is dating or might one day date) and should consider the following questions:

- Although you are single now, how frequently do you date? Do your dates ever stay overnight? How would adopting a child impact your dating plans?
- If you are dating someone in particular, is the relationship likely to become more serious? What would this mean?

- If you are dating someone in particular, have you discussed with that person your intention to adopt a child? What was his/her/their reaction to your plan? How important is that attitude to you?
- How do you plan to discuss your romantic relationships with a child you are raising?

Motivation for Fostering or Adopting

For most LGBT families, parenting is a choice—which is not always the case for heterosexuals, for whom the ability to become parents is perceived as a given. This may mean that LGBT people who choose to create their families by fostering or adopting may be more motivated and deliberate as they embark on the decision-making process. For them, questions relating to motivation are very relevant for discussion, since creating families by birth may not have been an option, and so fostering or adopting is often their first choice.

Integrating the Child into the Family

In reality, most LGBT applicants have an LGBT “life,” not an LGBT “lifestyle.” Being LGBT has become a part of who they are as people, but does not entirely define them.

- Inquire about the prospective parents’ life, but do not overemphasize LGBT issues.
- Evaluate the ways in which individuals or couples spend their recreation and leisure time. How will these be impacted by raising a child and/or how the child will be impacted by these aspects of his or her parents’ lives?
- Keep in mind that in most ways, integrating the newly placed child into their lives mirrors the same joys (e.g., feelings of nurturance and tenderness, positive attention from others) and stresses (e.g., increased fatigue, reduced intimacy in the couple relationship) as would be found for most straight or cis-gender¹ parents.

Valuing Difference and Preparing Children for Prejudice

Although research and clinical experience suggest that growing up with LGBT parents sometimes results in children being teased, this experience need not necessarily lead to adjustment difficulties. When parents are attuned to their children’s experiences and assertively prepare them for the possibility of homophobic/transphobic comments from others, children typically develop appropriate coping strategies and learn to manage these difficult moments. Because most LGBT people have experienced prejudice themselves, they are likely to be particularly sensitive to the impact of discrimination on their children and to their feelings of being different. In fact, LGBT parents, like racial minority parents, may be in a unique position to foster positive attitudes about diversity issues and to support their children’s ability to cope with prejudice. During the homestudy, social workers should help LGBT prospective foster and adoptive parents explore their own experiences with discrimination. It should be made explicit to prospective parents that the purpose of these conversations is to assist them in helping their children value diversity and cope with the prejudice and homophobic/transphobic reactions of others.

Anticipating Concerns

Some social workers have successfully helped LGBT families adopt by using a strategy in which they attempt to anticipate and address concerns a child’s placement social worker or the child’s birth parents might have. When using this approach, first discuss these potential concerns openly with the prospective adoptive or foster parent(s), then address each concern openly in the homestudy. This approach allows the family’s worker to use the homestudy to educate the placement worker and/or the birth family and also allows the family to address potential concerns before they become major barriers. Any worker using this approach must explain the practical theory behind it and decide with the prospective parent(s) whether it is a method they feel would be helpful.

¹ Those who experience congruity between their sex and gender are identified as cisgender. They may also be known as gender normative or gender straight.

Mistakes to Avoid

- **Making gender and/or sexual orientation the major focus of a homestudy or of a child placement decision;** they are only two aspects of who someone is.^{xi}
- **Addressing who will parent the child if a same-gender couple splits up, unless this is a standard part of the agency's homestudy for a married male–female couple.** If the professional assessment is that any couple's relationship—regardless of gender or sexual orientation—is not strong enough to survive the challenges of parenting a child, it is questionable whether that couple should be approved to adopt. If the relationship is strong and stable, writing about a potential breakup for a same-gender couple is inappropriate, unless that is standard practice for all couples. (However, it may be helpful to the couple to consider ways to protect their family in instances where there is a legal and non-legal parent. See p. 10.)
- **Addressing prospective parents' sex lives, unless this is a standard part of the agency's homestudy for all applicants, regardless of their gender and whether they are single, married, cohabiting, straight, bisexual, lesbian or gay.** At the same time, questions about applicants' significant relationships, including their strengths and vulnerabilities, should *always* be included in the homestudy. At times, this may well include information about issues related to sexuality. The important point, however, is that caseworkers should not assume that an exploration of sexual issues is any more important or necessary among LGBT clients than among heterosexual and cis-gender clients.
- **Assuming that same-gender couples take on roles in their relationships wherein one plays the “man” and the other the “woman.”** Although this is a popular misconception, it is not the

commonplace reality. (In fact, research suggests that there is greater sharing of everyday household and parenting responsibilities in lesbian and gay households than in straight households).^{xii} It is appropriate to explore with *all* couples (regardless of gender identity or sexual orientation) how they plan to distribute housework and parenting responsibilities.

- **Assuming that children or adolescents whose words or behavior indicate they are questioning their gender identity or sexual orientation should be placed with families who can “cure” them, make them heterosexual, or change their gender expression.** It might, however, be helpful for a youth who has self-identified as LGBT to be placed with LGBT parents, as such a placement could provide an affirming environment of respect and support. Not all self-identified LGBT youth in foster care need to be placed in LGBT-headed foster or adoptive homes. It is most important that they are placed with a parent/parents (of any gender or sexual orientation) who can provide an affirming and supportive home. Such a decision should be made in response to the child or adolescent's needs, as well as preference, not as a result of the beliefs or stereotypes of the caseworker.

It is appropriate to discuss with all families—those headed by LGBT people, as well as heterosexual and cis-gender people:

- The applicants' personal experiences with sexual abuse and how they have coped with it (if applicable);
- How well they are prepared to parent a child with a history of sexual abuse or sexual acting out behaviors; and
- How they expect to deal with issues of sexuality with their child.

Final Decision Making

It is the responsibility of the social worker, his or her supervisor, and in some cases, a treatment team to ensure that the assessor's recommendation is based on information that provides relevant and sufficient evidence of the applicant's ability to meet the requirements for being an adoptive or foster parent. The team must then decide whether to endorse the recommendation. The values and attitudes of team members are often an issue in this process. Homophobic/transphobic responses from untrained team members should not be permitted to influence decisions about LGBT applicants.

Implications for Competent Practice and Assessment

The following are considerations for professionals developing policy around foster and adoptive parenting by LGBT people, adapted from Sullivan's (1995) work: ^{xiii}

1. The primary client is the child or youth in need of a family. All families are potential resources for the child or youth. The issue is not, "Do LGBT people have the right to adopt?" No family *ipso facto* has the *right* to adopt or to be a foster parent; rather, this is a *privilege* afforded to those families who meet set-out standards. However, all individuals, including LGBT people, should be given equal consideration when applying to become foster or adoptive parents. All placement considerations should focus on the best interests of the child or youth. Child welfare professionals should ask, "What is the best family resource for this young person at this time?" Each placement decision should be based on the strengths and needs of the child or youth and the perceived ability of the prospective adoptive or foster family to meet those needs and develop those strengths.
2. No single factor, including gender or sexual orientation, should be determinative in assessing the suitability

for adoption or foster parenting.^{xiv} The capacity to nurture a child or youth and a person's gender or sexual orientation are separate issues. These must not be confused in decision making.

3. LGBT applicants should be assessed using the same criteria as all other foster and adoptive parents. Although LGBT applicants may present unique situations, they should not have to pass extraordinary tests to prove their worthiness as parents. Those working to certify LGBT parents should ask themselves the following in making such an assessment: "What are the prospective parent's individual strengths or weaknesses, and what is their capacity to nurture a child or children who were not born to them?"

There are unique considerations with respect to some aspects of foster parenting or adoption by LGBT people. Child welfare organizations should evaluate the following issues:

1. In many states, only one person in a same-gender partnership can be legally recognized as the parent of a child.^{xv} Although this is changing in some states, child welfare professionals should be aware of the consequences of having a legal and non-legal parent and must also assist potential foster and adoptive parents in negotiating a careful discussion about this issue, including how to safeguard the child's relationship with the non-legal parent in the event of potential future occurrences such as the couple's separation or the death or disability of the legal parent.

Legal Documents to Protect Your Family:

This webpage from the Human Rights Campaign provides information on a number of essential documents that same-sex couples can use to protect their important relationships, along with sample documents.

<http://www.hrc.org/resources/entry/legal-documents-to-protect-your-family>

2. How willing are the parents to be open about their gender or sexual orientation within their community? Having a child who attends school, makes use of healthcare services, and attends other child-oriented recreational events causes parents to make decisions about their own comfort level with being out in the community.^{xvi}
3. How willing are the parents to deal with and openly address the multiple levels of “differentness” that they and their child will experience? All foster and adopted children face issues related to their sense of differentness about being in foster care or being adopted. Some differences are easier to deal with than others. Being raised by LGBT parents adds another layer of complexity and difference for the child, as does being placed with parents of a different race or ethnicity.
4. As in all placements, children should be involved in the decision-making process whenever possible. For example, in placing a 12-year-old child with an LGBT couple, it would be important to determine what the child knows about LGBT people, and gauge his or her understanding of the benefits and challenges evident in placement with a specific family.
5. It is important to note that LGBT people are resilient individuals and, as such, bring many strengths to a family. They know first-hand, for example, how important it is to allow children to develop naturally without having preconceived notions about who they should be. Child welfare professionals should be aware of the multiple strengths of an LGBT-headed family.

Conclusion

As is true for straight individuals, not all LGBT people should be foster or adoptive parents. The question is not whether LGBT applicants should be approved, but whether they will be offered the same fair process and open opportunity as heterosexual and cis-gender people who seek to adopt or foster. Side-stepping the issue of adoption and foster parenting by LGBT people, or pretending that concern about the issue does not exist, does not protect children. It runs counter to the Adoption and Safe Families Act legislation and prevents some children and youth from becoming part of a loving and permanent family, which all children deserve.^{xvii} States and child welfare agencies are responsible for ensuring a timely and appropriate foster or adoptive family for every child who needs one. In meeting this responsibility, states and child welfare agencies must explore all potential resources for all children and youth awaiting placement in a family, including qualified LGBT people who wish to parent and are eager to open their hearts and lives to children and youth in need.

Visit the NRCPCF hot topic webpage on “LGBTQ Issues & Child Welfare” for additional resources: <http://www.nrcpfc.org/is/lgbtq-issues-and-child-welfare.html>

Tips for Child Welfare Professionals: Talking About LGBT-Headed Families

This NRCPCF resource for child welfare professionals provides considerations and guidance for talking with children/youth and birth families about LGBT-headed resource families

http://www.nrcpfc.org/is/downloads/Tips_LGBT_Families.pdf

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Endnotes

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- ^{vi} Brodzinsky, 2011
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- ^{viii} Mallon, 2004, 2006; Mallon & Betts, 2005
- ^{ix} Brodzinsky, 2011; Gates, Badgett, Macomber, & Chambers, 2007; Movement Advancement Project, Family Equality Council, & Center for American Progress, 2012
- ^x Cass, 1983/1984; Human Rights Campaign, n.d.
- ^{xi} Nelson, 1997
- ^{xii} Chan, Brooks, Patterson, Raboy, & Patterson, 1998; Sutfin & Fulcher, 2004
- ^{xiii} Sullivan, 1995, pp. 5–8
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