



Welcoming LGBTQ Families into your School or Organization

Over the past ten years, same-sex couples and gender non-conforming individuals have gone from being outliers in the Jewish community – often not participating at high rates in the organized Jewish community or preferring LGBT Jewish organizations – to being fully participating and active members of mainstream congregations of all denominations. Additionally, children are “coming out” or publicly declaring their homosexuality at earlier ages, often supported by their parents, and, with advances in the fields of psychology and medicine, more children are transitioning genders at an earlier age.

This document is meant to give you guidance for welcoming LGBT and transitioning parents or students into your school. This was published in the summer of 2015, please be aware that terminology is always evolving and that some wording may not be current.

For school/organization administrators:

Make your congregation/space accessible:

- Forms
 - Membership and school enrollment forms should read “Parent/Guardian 1 and Parent/Guardian 2” instead of “Mother/Father”
 - If there is a place for gender on enrollment forms for children, consider adding a third choice to the traditional male and female. Choices might include, gender queer, gender non-conforming, enby (non-binary), or prefer not to specify.
- Information gathering and sharing:
 - Parents may choose to share some or all of their story or their children’s story. It is natural to be curious; only ask questions that will impact a child’s classroom experience. Share only necessary information with teachers.
 - For small children who are transitioning, or have transitioned, you might ask what pronouns they use in their family (older children may want to express this themselves.) You may want to do the same for parents who identify as gender-queer or gender non-conforming.
 - If it is relevant to classroom or school functioning, you might ask how children refer to their same-sex parents. (In one synagogue setting, a teacher told a kindergarten teacher to relay a message to her mommy. The child didn’t relay the message because she didn’t think her Mommy, who chose to be uninvolved in synagogue life, would be interested. her *Ima*, who was very involved, never got the message.)
- Environment:
 - A rainbow flag outside the building is a signal that all families will be welcomed.
 - Some organizations have chosen to designate one of their restrooms as gender neutral, meaning that anyone can use it, regardless of their gender identity.



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- Place a rainbow, ally, or safe space sticker on the door of each classroom. These are available through a number of different agencies. A few are listed here:
 - Forty to None Project <http://fortytonone.org/stickers/>
 - GLSEN (Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network) <http://www.glsen.org/safespace>
 - Keshet <http://www.keshetonline.org/resource/lgbt-jewish-safe-zone-stickers/>
- Display images of many types of families. Some resources are listed here:
 - Jewish Multiracial Network https://org2.salsalabs.com/o/7104/p/salsa/donation/common/public/?donate_page_KEY=10900
 - Bechol Lashon http://bechollashon.org/cart/product_info.php?cPath=22&products_id=78

For all classrooms:

- Don't assume heterosexuality.
 - When teaching younger students, especially about life cycle or home holiday celebrations. Instead of saying "When you have a husband/wife..." You might say, "When you have a family..." or "When you are grown up..."
 - Teachers often try to build relationships with students by asking them about their lives.
Instead of asking older students about a boyfriend or girlfriend, you might instead ask if they are seeing someone. Be aware that this line of conversation might make some students feel uncomfortable.
- Language
 - Use precise language where possible. Terms like gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender are preferred to *homosexual* or *gay* when it is used to refer to anyone or everyone in the GLBTQ community. (A larger glossary of terms is included at the end of this section.)
 - Use inclusive language like significant other instead of boyfriend and girlfriend, spouse instead of husband and wife, and parent instead of mom and dad.
 - Ask students for preferred names and pronouns. Ze –pronounced zee and hir – pronounced heer are among pronouns used among people identifying as gender non-conforming
 - Be aware of abusive and/or bullying language. "That's so gay" is a common playground epithet used to indicate that something is uncool or worthy of scorn. Stop this type of language and explain why it might be hurtful.
 - Some helpful terms (please remember that language is fluid, this list is current as of summer, 2015):



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- Cisgender (or cis) - refers to people whose perception or experience of their gender identity matches the sex they were assigned at birth. Some prefer the term gender-normative.
- Gender-queer - refers to someone who does not identify as either male or female, man or woman.
- Transgender (or trans) - refers to someone whose perception or experience of their gender identity is different than the gender they were assigned at birth
- Transition - refers to the period during which a person changes their outward gender identity. This may include medical intervention such as hormone therapy and surgery.
- FTM (MTF) - female to male (or male to female) - this refers to the gender someone identified as before and after transitioning
- Gender variant (also gender non-conforming) refers to someone whose gender identity doesn't conform to socially accepted notions of male or female.
- Enby - Taken from the initials of non-binary, this is used by people who feel as though they don't fit neatly into a societally defined gender category or prefer not to identify with one gender. For more information go to www.nonbinary.org
- Don't use the gender binary.
 - Don't split into teams (lines, groups) by boys and girls. Instead, count off, use birth-months, clothing color, pull cards or colored popsicle sticks, etc.
 - Have a "Shabbat Family" instead of a Shabbat "Mom and Dad." Have both boys and girls light candles and recite Kiddush.
 - If women are allowed or encouraged to wear kippot in your building when learning or praying, offer them to both girls and boys in these instances.
- Maintain confidentiality
 - Create an atmosphere of trust, so that students feel comfortable sharing about their lives with you personally and in a classroom setting.
 - Do not "out" a student who has confided in you but has chosen not to share information about his or her sexual identity with a larger circle.
 - Do not speculate about a student's sexual or gender identity with other staff members.
 - If you feel that a student is in danger of harming him/herself or harming others, please alert the appropriate parties. This may include parents, clergy, or, in case of an emergency, the police.
- Know your resources (and your limitations)
 - Remember you are a classroom teacher and not a therapist. (Even if you have the appropriate training, this is not your primary role.) Though you can, and most certainly should, be a compassionate and trusted adult, issues of sexual and gender identity can be complicated. You have not failed a student if you feel as though you cannot manage their struggles on your own. Remember you can often turn to the head of school, the clergy, and the parents to be part of the team supporting a student.



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- Know your resources. Is there a counseling center in your area geared toward children or adolescents? Is there one that works primarily with issues of sexual and gender identity? Is there a Jewish social service agency or counseling center that might provide support?
- Include books with GLBT content or characters in your classrooms. Many ideas are available at <http://glbtrt.ala.org/rainbowbooks/about>. The Rainbow Book List is created by the Rainbow Book List Committee of the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Round Table of the American Library Association.
 - A few suggestions for younger grades:
 - *The Purim Superhero*, about a boy who has trouble deciding on a Purim costume, features two dads. <http://www.keshetonline.org/resources/thepurimsuperhero/>
 - *Gal and Noa's Daddies* is taken from the real life story of an Israeli activist and his partner and talks about same-sex parents around the word. This book, originally in Hebrew, was translated into English in 2014. <http://awiderbridge.org/gal-and-noas-daddies-released-in-english/>
 - *And Tango Makes Three* is the true story of two male penguins at the Central Park zoo who formed a couple and were given an egg to raise.
 - *Jacob's New Dress* is the story of a boy who wants to wear a dress to school, the kids who make fun of him and the parents and school officials who have to decide if they will honor his request.
 - A few suggestions for middle and high school students:
 - NFTY- the North American Federation of Temple Youth (affiliated with the Reform Movement) has put together a list of non-fiction books and links to resources for fiction here: www.nfty.org/glbtc/books/
 - *Better Nate than Ever*, about a young boy who leaves his home in a small Pennsylvania town and tries to make it on Broadway.

The following are some wonderful organizations that work with, or represent, the LGBTQ community. You might find resources here for students, teachers, administrators, and clergy:

- PFLAG, which began in 1973 as Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays, or Parents FLAG, supports, families, allies and LGBTQ persons through education and advocacy. www.pflag.org
- *Keshet*, as found on their website: *Keshet* is a national grassroots organization that works for the full equality and inclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) Jews in Jewish life. www.keshetonline.org
- Jewish LGBT Network is an organization, based in San Francisco, which strives to keep an up-to-date listing of LGBT and LGBT friendly congregations, social, and support groups both in the US and abroad. <http://jewishlgbtnetwork.com>



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- *Nehirim* sponsors spiritual and cultural events, such as a number of annual retreats, across Jewish denominations for queer Jews. <http://www.nehirim.org/>
- *Bechol Lashon* attempts to educate both Jewish people and the wider community about the racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity of the Jewish community. <http://bechollashon.org/>
- The World Congress of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Jews: *Keshet Ga'avah*, consists of more than 50 member organizations worldwide. Among their organizational goals is to ensure that GLBT Jews can live fulfilling lives anywhere in the world. <http://www.glbtjews.org/>

If you'd like to learn more about LGBTQ issues and Judaism, you can read more here:

- Homosexuality in Jewish Thought. <http://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/homosexuality-in-jewish-thought/>
- Homosexuality in Orthodox Judaism. http://lookstein.org/resources/homosexuality_amsel.pdf
- Homosexuality in Halakhah (Jewish law). <http://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/homosexuality-and-halakhah/>
- Understanding Transgender Issues in Jewish Ethics. <http://www.jewishrecon.org/resource/understanding-transgender-issues-jewish-ethics>
- Transgender 101. <http://www.myjewishlearning.com/keshet/transgender-101/>