Creating a Welcoming Early Childhood Program for LGBT-Headed Families: A Checklist for Programs

This resource is part of a series developed to support programs in partnering with parents/guardians who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or transgender (LGBT). You will also find information and strategies to create an early childhood setting that is welcoming for all children and families. Recommended for directors, teachers, providers, and parents.

A feeling of belonging is critical to every child and family's well-being. The drive to form relationships with others begins in infancy and continues throughout early childhood. These relationships help children fulfill their potential in all areas of development—physical, social, emotional, and cognitive. Quality early childhood programs can expand children's experiences of forming relationships when the culture and core curriculum make partnering with families and communities central themes.

Getting Started!

One of the first steps to creating a welcoming early childhood program is to assess what you are doing well and identify areas for growth. Providers, teachers, and administrators can use this checklist for self-assessment. You can also use it to begin conversations with staff, parents and guardians.

Center and Classroom Family Communications

- ❏ Are the application and other forms that families complete friendly to all families? Do they use language such as parent/parent or parent/guardian rather than mother/father?
- ❏ Do you ask the families about who the important people are in their children's lives, and what children call them? For example, if a child has two dads, are they called "Daddy" and Papi." Or if a grandmother is raising a child, is she "Grandma" or "Nana"?
- ❏ Do all children and families see themselves represented in letters and announcements? For example, do letters say, "Dear Families, welcome to our new program year . . . " or "Please bring this letter home to your family" (rather than to your "mommy and daddy")?
- ❏ Are communications translated into the languages families speak?

Welcoming Environments

- ❏ Are there photos in common areas and in classrooms of families at work and at play; do they depict the many ways that children and families interact with each other and engage with the world?
- ❏ Do photos displays promote inclusive definitions of families? For example, are there photos of adoptive, LGBT-headed, grandparent-headed, and multi-racial families?
- ❏ Do images show people who represent diverse races/ethnicities, economic status, physical ability, age, and family structure?
- ❏ Do posters, children's art, children's book displays, and photos of your real families (including staff) depict the many ways that people work, play, and live as families?
- ❏ Is there a place to display a "Families Gallery" that includes every family (including staff) in your program? Are these photos visible at eye level for children and placed where families can also see them? Are they part of ongoing, day-to-day conversation?

Curriculum—Daily Classroom Activities

In the block area:

- ❑ Do figures of families and people represent different cultures and families?
- ❑ Are there multiple sets of "family" figure dolls so that children can select or create a grouping that most looks like their own family?
- ❑ Are figures stored in arrangements that allow children to make selections that represent their family structures, rather than in arrangements that may only represent one kind of family (e.g., having a mother, father, child, and baby)?

In the dramatic play area:

- ❑ Are there props that encourage multiple ways of playing family or other imaginative play?
- ❑ Are children encouraged to use all of the different props and dress-up materials?

In circle or group times:

- ❑ Do you talk about different kinds of families?
- ❑ Do you address name-calling and hurtful behaviors and teach positive social interactions?
- ❑ Do you communicate with children about things they have in common, and differences?

In the writing area:

- ❑ Are there photos and prompts that encourage children to write (or tell) stories about all kinds of people and families?
- ❑ Are children's stories shared with other children in ways that encourage respectful exploration of each other's experiences and ideas?

In the art area:

- ❑ Are there materials and opportunities for children to express their ideas about themselves, their families, and their experiences?
- ❑ Are children encouraged to share their work and ideas with others in ways that invite conversation and exploration?

In music activities:

- ❑ Is there a thoughtful selection of songs that represent diversity and broaden children's exposure to different kinds of music?
- ❑ Can children identify with the people and experiences they sing about? Can they comfortably discover and discuss differences?
- ❑ Do you change lyrics of common children's songs to be more inclusive? For example, Five Little Monkeys:

  Five little monkeys jumping on the bed
  One fell off and bumped his (her) head
  Mama (Papa) called the doctor,
  And the doctor said
  No more monkeys jumping on the bed.

In the library:

- ❑ Do the children's books that you display and read represent different kinds of families?
- ❑ Do books that are used for discussions with children allow them to share their own experiences, ask questions, and explore the many ways of being?
- ❑ Do you have books that show diverse cultures?
- ❑ Are children engaged in making their own books, especially "My Family" books? Are these displayed with the other books in the library and sturdy enough to be handled regularly by children?

A Note about Day-to-Day Conversations and Storytelling

In all that we do with young children, we have opportunities to explore ideas and ask questions. Children have stories to tell every day. Seeing the world through their own lens and through the experiences of others prepares them to live in a diverse world and see themselves—and everyone else—as belonging.

This resource was adapted with permission from A. Gelnaw for *Welcoming Schools*.

In this Series

Explore the other resources from the Creating a Welcoming Early Childhood Program for LGBT-Headed Families series:

- Partnering with Parents Who Identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and/or Transgender
- Children's Books that Include Diverse Family Structures
- Resources about Diverse Family Structures

Visit our PFCE web portal on the Office of Head Start Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center, at http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/family**.**

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