



PROMOTING WELLNESS WITHIN LGBT FAMILIES

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Goal 1:

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FAMILY ENGAGEMENT INITIATIVES
SHOULD PROMOTE FAMILY WELL-BEING.

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The Maryland Early Childhood Family Engagement Framework



OBJECTIVES

The goal of this presentation is to help participants develop cultural competence for family engagement with lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) families in ways that promote wellness and strengthen familial well-being.

After this presentation:

- Participants will understand the challenges and needs of LGBT families.
- Participants will understand how to provide support for LGBT families.
- Participants will learn and implement strategies for the promotion of wellness within LGBT families.

LGBT FAMILIES IN NUMBERS

- Current estimates report that 48% of women and 20% of men who identify as a sexual or gender minority are raising approximately two to three million children under the age of 18 (Borden, 2014; Few-Demo, Humble, Curran, & Lloyd, 2016; Oswald, 2016).
- Furthermore, sexual and gender minorities are raising 1.4% of all adopted children under the age of 18 in the United States (Oakley, Farr, & Scherer, 2017).
- Currently, there is a shift in public opinion, whereas 58% of the United States view gay and lesbian relationship as morally acceptable (Borden, 2014).
- “In 1992, polling showed that only 29 percent of Americans supported the idea that same-sex couples should have the legal right to adopt children. In a 2014 poll, that figure was 63 percent, even higher than support for marriage among same-sex couples” (Gates, 2015, p. 68).

LEGAL MATTERS

- Historically, conservative laws and policy makers have attempted to ban LGB persons from parenting rights (Chung, Szymanski, & Markel, 2012).
- Policy makers have asserted: LGB people are not capable of becoming good parents, children of LGB parents may be molested or are disadvantaged, endangered, or oppressed because of being raised by homosexual parents, and children will become homosexual.
- However, recent research has debunked all these myths and supported policy and laws that provide rights to LGB individuals who want to become parents (Chung et al., 2012).
- Researchers concluded that the parenting style and approach of same-sex couples match that of their counterparts (Gates, 2015).



DISCUSSION

Are children of same-sex parents disadvantaged?

Though views of sexual and gender minority individuals may be shifting, it is clear that discrimination is still prevalent for this population (Borden, 2014).



Many sexual minority and gender minority parents still experience social victimization, stigmatization, and harassment due to their nontraditional family structure, which impacts their daily living and their careers (Chung et al., 2012; Oakley, Farr, & Scherer, 2017).

The perceived discrimination continues to be a risk factor for emotional and behavioral problems across the life-span, making it more difficult to work through parental stress (Oakley et al., 2017).

Often, some sexual and gender minority parents hear criticism that they are selfish, damaging, or dangerous for children (Power et al., 2015). Furthermore, experiences of heterosexism continue to be associated with poorer psychosocial outcomes for sexual and gender minority parents (Oswald, 2016).

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GAIN KNOWLEDGE, PERSONAL AWARENESS,
SENSITIVITY, DISPOSITIONS, AND SKILLS PERTINENT
TO BEING A CULTURALLY COMPETING COUNSELOR
IN WORKING WITH A DIVERSE CLIENT POPULATION ”

(ACA, 2014, C.2.a., p. 8)

Discussion: How do we achieve this goal?



WHAT IS CHANGING?

- There are more choices and options for sexual and gender minority couples to become parents, each choice brings its own set of challenges and obstacles (Chung et al., 2012).
- Thus, providers will see a generational shift in sexual and gender minority parenting behaviors and must work to shift their interventions when working with sexual and gender minority parents (Apperson et al., 2015; Gates, 2015).
- Examples:
 - Sexual and gender minority blended families
 - Change in family resources and services
 - Creating the necessary resources
 - Increase education and training



WE'RE A FAMILY, NOW WHAT?

- Extended family concerns about the child and the challenges they will encounter as a family (Boggis, 2012).
- Encounters with care professionals who invade this choice with a lack of support, heterosexism, and hostility (Boggis, 2012).
- Emotional distancing from family members who choose not to accept or be a part of the relationship, child, or family dynamic (Boggis, 2012).
- Feelings of stress and isolation, as well as an overwhelming void of support, advice, and help navigating the world of parenting (Boggis, 2012).
- Experiencing the loss of other sexual and gender minority friends and community who do not engage in kid-friendly activities and are thus unable to provide the necessary support (Boggis, 2012).

WHAT DOES THE LGBT FAMILY NEED?

Family and Community



Family relationship, friendships with other parents, and ties to a community group that encourage good parenting matter regarding the quality of parenting (Eggebeen, 2012).

Couples and Marriage Counseling



The ability to work on strengthening the couples' support from family and friends can provide a sense of validation and external motivation (Power et al., 2015).

Social Support



Sexual and gender minority parents who receive social and familial support will experience less difficulty adjusting to the role of parents (Chung et al., 2012).

CONNECTION TO THE LARGER COMMUNITY

Developing relationships with other sexual and gender minority parent families is crucially important for the reemergence of connection and a sense of community (Goldberg, Sweeney, Black, & Moyer, 2016).

For example, engaging in child-centered gatherings with sexual and gender minority parent families, Pride parade family-centered activities, and sexual and gender minority weddings offer a sense of oneness and connection to the larger community (Goldberg et al., 2016).



These experiences provide both parents and children an opportunity to engage with other families, with similar dynamics and racial backgrounds, in an affirming environment (Goldberg et al., 2016).



At times, providers may need to create safe, affirming spaces for diverse sexual and gender minority parent families to interact with one another. For example, a sexual and gender minority parent support group or family gathering that includes the children is one way to support families in reconnecting to the larger community.

EXPLORING AND ASSESSING THE NEEDS OF THE CHILDREN

- We must also consider the needs of the children within the family (Goldberg, Kinkler, Rischardson, & Dwning, 2012).
- Children may view themselves as a minority among their peer groups due to the sexual and gender minority status of their parents (Goldberg et al., 2012).
- This possibility warrants an assessment of the children's needs through individual counseling including further exploration of their perception and understanding of sexual identity, gender identity, and the family dynamic.

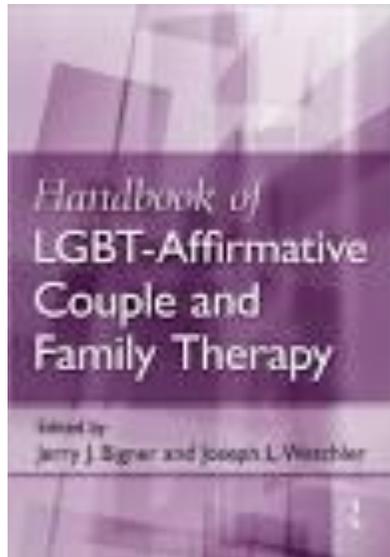
Discussion: How do we achieve this goal?

OUR LGBT FAMILY

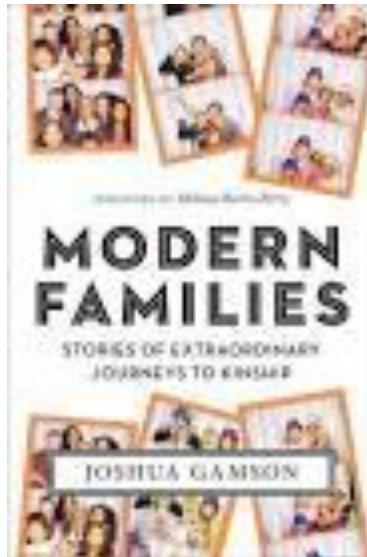


- Chad (39-year old attorney), Marco (41-year old stay-at-home Dad) and Jason (2 ½-year old adopted son)
- Family just relocated to Bethesda, MD from New York for Chad's new position at a law firm in DC.
- Jason's adoption was finalized six months before the move.
- Marco is alone in his search for child care and resources while Chad settles in to his new position.
- Both Chad and Marco have a few friends, without children, in the DC area, but no friends or family nearby.
- At Jason's recent well-baby check-up, the doctor gave Marco several pamphlet about early detection and warning signs for developmental delay.

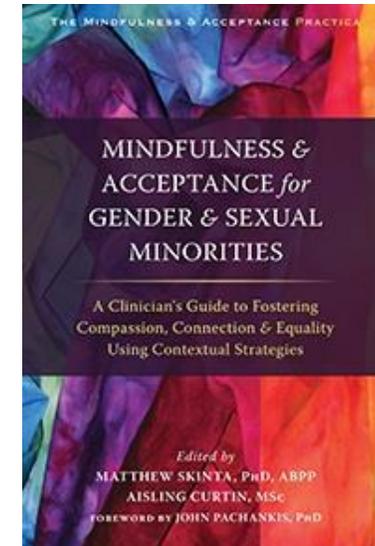
PROFESSIONAL READING AND RESOURCES



Bigner, J. J., & Wetchler, J. L. (2012). *Handbook of LGBT-affirmative couple and family therapy*. New York, NY: Routledge.



Gamson, J. (2015). *Modern families: Stories of extraordinary journeys to kinship*. New York, NY: NYU Press.



Skinta, M. D., Curtin, A., & Pachankis, J. (2016). *Mindfulness and acceptance for gender and sexual minorities: A clinician's guide to fostering compassion, connection, and equality using contextual strategies*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications.

RESOURCES FOR LGBT-PARENT FAMILIES



Family Equality Council –
A Resource for LGBTQ
Parent Groups and
Communities

http://www.familyequality.org/get_involved/parent_groups/



Gay Parent: LGBT
Magazine – A Leader in
Gay Parenting Resources
since 1998

<http://www.gayparentmag.com/support-groups>



PFLAG – Public effort to
unite LGBTQ with families,
friends, and allies since
1972

<https://www.pflag.org/>



QUESTIONS???

THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION!