

AN ALLY'S GUIDE TO
TALKING ABOUT



Adoption by LGBT Parents



GREENBERG QUINLAN ROSNER RESEARCH

INTRODUCTION

An estimated two million children in the U.S. are being raised by lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT) parents. While parenting law is supposed to protect the best interests of children, for these families and for the thousands of children awaiting adoption into forever homes, it does not do so. Why? Because the law often denies children the permanency and security of having two legal parents or a forever home—simply because the parents who want to provide that permanency and security are lesbian or gay.

This guide provides conversation tools that can help you build and strengthen support for second-parent adoption and joint adoption by lesbian and gay parents.

TALKING ABOUT ADOPTION & PARENTING

When talking about adoption, focus on the needs and best interests of children. Adoption isn't about "rights"; it's about making sure that kids have strong, secure ties to the parents who love and take care of them. Emphasize how caring lesbian and gay parents provide children with the love, stability, protection, security and guidance that every child deserves. *"Adoption and parenting are about creating loving, stable homes for kids, and about making sure children have the nurturing environment that allows them to thrive and succeed."*

Use the language of everyday family life. Emphasize the daily routines that so many parents share. Talk about making

lunches, changing diapers, playtime and naptime, reading bedtime stories, carpooling, putting Band-Aids on scrapes, supervising homework, and more. Help people understand that good parenting is good parenting, whether parents are gay or straight.

Emphasize why adoption matters to children. Adoption is about creating stable, loving families and legal ties that protect children. Children need to grow up feeling secure in the knowledge that they are loved by their parents—that they are part of a family that will keep them safe and be there for them, no matter what. Whether talking about joint adoption, stepparent adoption or second-parent adoption, focus on the needs and best interests of children—and remind people why adoption and strong family ties are so important.

TALKING ABOUT SECOND-PARENT ADOPTION

Second-parent adoption allows one partner in an unmarried couple to adopt the other partner's child; this can occur in both gay and straight relationships. Public support for second-parent adoption is very strong, with a recent national survey by Greenberg Quinlan Rosner finding that 80% of Americans support second-parent adoption.

Second-parent adoption, which is similar to stepparent adoption, is particularly important for children of lesbian and gay parents. Because same-sex couples are denied marriage in most states, they can't access stepparent adoption to secure and protect their families.

Talking About Adoption by LGBT Parents

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| Adoption and Parenting | <i>"Adoption and parenting are about creating loving, stable homes for kids, and about making sure children have the nurturing environment that allows them to thrive and succeed."</i> |
| Second-Parent Adoption | <i>"Adoption decisions, including second-parent adoption, should be made on a case-by-case basis, based on what's in the best interest of the child."</i> <i>"Parents want what is best for their child and have a responsibility to care for them. If a parent wants to share legal responsibility for their own child, and thinks that having a second legally connected parent is in the best interest of their child, the law should not prevent them from making that decision."</i> <i>"Every child should have the security of knowing that their ties to their parents are safe and secure. No child should be denied health insurance coverage or face being ripped away from the only family they've ever known because the law treats one of their parents as a legal stranger."</i> |
| Joint Adoption | <i>"Not allowing qualified, loving lesbian and gay couples to adopt hurts kids, keeps them in government care, and deprives them of the forever homes they so desperately need."</i> <i>"Adoption decisions should be made on a case-by-case basis by child health and social service authorities, not politicians, based on the best interest of the child."</i> |

Focus conversations on three key areas:

- 1. The best interests of children.** Second-parent adoption is about ensuring that children have strong legal ties to both of the parents who are raising them. Remind people that, *“Adoption decisions, including second-parent adoption, should be made on a case-by-case basis, based on what’s in the best interest of the child.”*
- 2. Parental authority and responsibility.** Americans strongly believe that parents should have the authority and responsibility to decide what’s right for their own children: *“Parents want what is best for their children and have a responsibility to care for them. If a parent wants to share legal responsibility for their own child, and thinks that having a second legally connected parent is in the best interest of their child, the law should not prevent them from making that decision.”*
- 3. How children are hurt by laws that prevent them from being adopted by their other parent.** Bans on second-parent adoption deprive children of the security of a strong legal relationship with both of their parents. *“Every child should have the security of knowing that their ties to their parents are safe and secure. No child should be denied health insurance coverage or face being ripped away from the only family they’ve ever known because the law treats one of their parents as a legal stranger.”*

There are many ways that denial of second-parent adoption hurts children. Consider talking about some of the following examples:

- If a child’s legal parent dies, the child could be ripped away from his or her surviving parent and away from the only home they have ever known.
- A non-legally recognized parent can be barred from visiting their child in the hospital or from consenting to emergency medical treatment for an injured child.
- If the non-legally recognized parent works and provides for the family, the child may be denied medical coverage under that parent’s health insurance plan.

The Voices of Parents

When parents talk about their children, people listen. This is true whether it’s a parent talking about second-parent adoption and the importance of being able to do what is best for their child—or whether it’s foster parents wanting to adopt and provide a forever home to the children they love. Straight parents in particular can be powerful voices for advocating that every child, including those of lesbian or gay parents, has the love and security that comes with having two legally connected parents.

When talking about second-parent adoption, remind people that it can apply to gay and straight parents alike. However, since lesbian and gay families are usually denied marriage and stepparent adoption, second-parent adoption can be particularly important for these families.

TALKING ABOUT JOINT ADOPTION

Joint adoption allows two parents to jointly and simultaneously adopt a child waiting for a forever home. While some states allow lesbian and gay couples to adopt, a number of states ban adoption by same-sex couples, and most states are silent on the issue, creating great uncertainty for lesbian and gay parents.

When talking about joint adoption, remind people of why forever homes are important for children, and also discuss who is qualified to make adoption decisions and how banning qualified lesbian and gay couples from adopting hurts kids.

- 1. Joint adoption is about the best interests of children and provides them with loving, stable forever homes.** All children deserve loving homes. As of 2010, there were more than 408,000 children in foster care, with over 107,000 of these awaiting adoption into forever homes. Research clearly shows that children with permanent, stable, loving forever homes do far better than children in foster or state care. *“No child should be denied the stability and love of a forever home simply because the parents who want to provide it are lesbian or gay.”*
- 2. Opposing adoption by qualified lesbian and gay parents hurts kids.** Preventing lesbian and gay couples from adopting hurts children in foster or government care by denying them a loving, permanent home. *“Not allowing qualified, loving lesbian and gay parents to adopt hurts*

Illustrating Harms Through Storytelling

Create an emotional connection through stories that illustrate the harms (such as the denial of medical coverage under a non-legally recognized parent’s insurance) of denying children second-parent or joint adoption. Stories also help people recognize common challenges that many families face—gay and straight alike. For example:

“Brendan is 8 years old. He lives with his birth mother, Alanna, and Gail, Alanna’s partner of five years. Unfortunately, Brendan is ill and has required constant care over the past two years. While Gail’s employer provides much better health insurance coverage than Alanna’s, Gail can’t cover Brendan under her plan because she isn’t a legally recognized adoptive parent. Alanna and Gail worry about how to get Brendan the health care he needs—care he is denied because the law in their state bars Gail from being his adoptive parent.”

kids, keeps them in government care, and deprives them of the forever homes they so desperately need."

- 3. Child health and social service authorities, not politicians, should be making adoption decisions.** When the government takes adoption decisions out of the hands of those most qualified to make them, they're putting politics above the best interests of kids and putting those kids at risk. *"Adoption decisions should be made on a case-by-case basis by child health and social service authorities, not politicians, based on the best interest of the child."*

In addition, banning adoption by lesbian and gay couples strips straight parents of the freedom to make decisions about their own child's well-being. Parents should have the ability to designate the person or couple they feel would best serve as their child's legal guardian, should they die unexpectedly. *"When lesbian and gay couples are banned from adopting, straight parents can be legally blocked from choosing a close lesbian or gay family member to raise their child."*

Child Advocates Support Adoption by Lesbian and Gay Parents

All mainstream child health and social services organizations—including the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Academy of Family Physicians, the National Association of Social Workers, and the Child Welfare League of America—unanimously support adoption by qualified lesbian and gay parents. The most important thing is that children have loving, stable families.

THINGS TO AVOID

- 1. Don't talk about adoption "rights," the "rights" of lesbian and gay parents, or use other "rights" language.** Adoption isn't about "rights" for adults; it's about providing love, stability, protection and forever homes for children. Always focus adoption discussions on children; for example, *"Adoption is about making sure that children have the loving, nurturing homes that they need to thrive."*
- 2. Don't use the term "gay adoption."** Instead, use *adoption by lesbian and gay parents*. Talking about *parents* (rather than "couples") helps emphasize what adoption means to children. Again, keep the focus on children, and on the parents who love and take care of them.

Terminology: Talking About Adoption

General Terms

- adoption by loving, caring parents
- adoption by lesbian and/or gay parents
- two moms, two dads

What Adoption & Parenting Are About

- the best interests of children
- taking care of and providing for children
- providing children with love, safety, security, stability and forever homes

Talking About Social Science Research

Studies show that children raised by lesbian or gay parents are just as happy and well-adjusted as children raised by straight parents. So why do anti-gay activists often say the opposite? Here's what you need to know:

The research shows that children of lesbian and gay parents do just fine. There's a large and growing body of research that examines outcomes for children raised by lesbian and gay parents. All of this research consistently concludes that being raised by lesbian or gay parents has no adverse effects on children. Kids of gay parents are just as healthy and well-adjusted as other children.

Social science research does indicate that, all other things being equal, children tend to do better with two parents than with only one. But anti-gay opponents have distorted this finding to claim the research shows children do best only with a mother and a father. In fact, the research opponents cite does not even study children raised by lesbian or gay parents.

Don't get sidetracked when talking about parenting research. Correct the record on misleading claims by opponents, but keep it simple: "Those studies didn't look at children raised by lesbian or gay parents." Then focus on what makes a good parent: love, stability, and patience; taking care of and providing for children; keeping them safe and secure.



TALKING ABOUT LGBT ISSUES: ABOUT THIS SERIES

This is one in a series of resources for effectively talking about LGBT issues, including: Overall Approaches; Ally's Guides to Talking About Marriage, Adoption by LGBT Parents, and Transgender-Inclusive Non-Discrimination Laws; Inclusive Employment Protections; Inclusive Hate Crimes Laws; Suicide & LGBT Populations, Ending Don't Ask, Don't Tell; Talking About LGBT Equality with African Americans; Talking About LGBT Equality with Latinos & Hispanics; and an Ally's Guide to Terminology. To download, visit www.lgbtmap.org/talking-about-lgbt-issues-series or www.glaad.org/talkingabout. © 2012 Movement Advancement Project (MAP).