



# Educating the community

Many parents recognise the benefits of educating the broader community about rainbow families and are happy to take on this responsibility. In fact, parents often welcome the opportunity to talk about their families with other people. However, parents also draw a distinction between questions they regard as appropriate and helpful and questions that are intrusive or inappropriate.

Sometimes, it's difficult to assess the level of knowledge and understanding of a service, a kinder or a school, and parents can find themselves teaching 'Rainbow Families 101', especially if they are the first rainbow family the organisation has encountered. People might just need a little time to process what they are learning and get used to the idea of a different family formation.

A greater awareness among any staff or parents is almost always seen as a good thing, with

positive outcomes for children. Often, that awareness is passed on to others within the organisation, or in the broader community.

Sometimes educating people is about explaining our differences, while sometimes it's about pointing out the similarities. Open and honest conversations with others can go a long way to making them feel comfortable with your family and making your family comfortable with them.

You don't have to come out every single time someone makes an assumption that isn't correct.

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Some days you will just want to let this pass. Once children reach a certain age, however, they will be aware of what you say, and in what circumstance, and you will have to manage that.

# Parents say ...

## The role of 'educator'

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I've got a large family in Melbourne and some of them have said our family has led to some really good conversations with their kids about queer families. **Claire**

We do feel that we have an educative role in the school community and we're happy with that. One mother said to me that when our daughter said she had two mums, she assumed it was her mum and her stepmum. I said, 'No, no, she's actually got two mums', and she was fine about that. I certainly feel like we've got to be out there, visible and educating the whole time. **Patricia**

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A lot of the time, what we have trouble with isn't discrimination, it's simply difference. That's how I see it. And people aren't horrible to us, but they do see us as a little bit different and some don't necessarily want to get to know us. But a lot of other people do, so that's fine. **Mandy**

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I don't mind educating people, except when I'm in a clothing boutique and people start asking how I got my twins and was it natural or was it IVF? It's none of their business. We had a one-liner for a few people, which was, 'I had a really low sperm count'. **Ruth**

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We have a lady who is our cleaner and nanny. She popped up because she has a daughter who is lesbian who had just come out and she decided working for us was a good way for her to get to know more about gay people. I guess she's building some bridges and coming to understand her daughter. **Anthony**

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I was out at work, but not with the students – but they were all very young, anyway. If I hadn't been gay myself, I probably would have felt more comfortable advocating for gay people and talking about that stuff in the classroom. **Sally**

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I always felt that I had to do the coming out thing quite frequently. As time has gone on, I have learnt that I don't always have to. You don't always have to point out the error if someone uses 'he' for your partner, you can just let it slide sometimes. I think I was quite righteous about that at first – I really wanted to make it known every time. **Bridget**

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A lot of the time you are trying to show people that you are not very different; that we are actually fairly boring old people, like they are, who struggle with the same domestic issues that they do. **Mandy**

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I think we don't just educate people about the gay community; I think we educate them about gender diversity as well. What people do, who they are, and what they can contribute, is not necessarily based on their gender, even though that's been a perception for a long time. We make people stop and think: if it's not the same for us, it could be different for other people, too. **Ruth**

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It felt like, in the two years since we had had our first daughter, things had really improved. And I do think that that's partly because of the activism of rainbow families and other people speaking out. Things have shifted in the last ten years or so. **Mandy**

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I think being up-front about it helps our children be okay about it. Our kids haven't ever come across anything negative. In fact, they have had friends who have commented to their parents about how lucky they are, having two mums. **Bridget**

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Rainbow families put a huge amount of effort into parenting and school communities because we don't want our kids to feel different and we need to feel part of that process. It does require a huge effort on our part as parents. **Mandy**

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I wasn't aware of the lack of exposure that people had had to gay families, so I was probably a bit blasé to begin with. I expected they would be completely *au fait* with it all. Then I realised that they actually had no tools to handle this situation, and no precedent. I think we might have been groundbreaking at that particular kinder. **Alison**

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It's important to educate the staff so they can carry that on in the classroom with the kids and it's not all on our children's shoulders to be educating everyone. I don't mind doing it, but I think it's a bit much to expect children to have to be constantly educating their peers. **Patricia**

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It's hard for people to get their heads around – it took me a while to get my head around it. People say, 'Do the kids have contact with their mum?' And it's like, *Well, which mum are you talking about?* You try to explain it: you tell them there's a biological mum and then there's the surrogate mum. You can see people haven't had time to think about it and they're confused. **Anthony**

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I remember once I took David to swimming lessons and I was talking to a mum who assumed I was breastfeeding. I just thought, *I'm in the middle of a swimming lesson, I can't really be bothered explaining that I'm not the mum that gave birth and my partner is breastfeeding.* I wouldn't ever want the kids to think that this is a secret, but then it's just a mum in a pool, and you don't have to come out every time.

**Michelle**

There are good family posters splashed all over the place. It's fantastic because people are being made aware that there are different sorts of families out there – people who would otherwise only meet heterosexual, nuclear families. **Alison**

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My 11-year-old had a play with a new friend and I dropped her off and sat down for a quick chat. The mother referred to my husband in one of those moments when I didn't bother to correct her. And then I thought, *I have just left Naomi there with that.* She had overheard me let it go and I had left her with the responsibility of coming out. I won't do that again. **Bridget**



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Researched and written by Jacqui Tomlins.

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