



Maternal and child health nurses and new parents' groups

New parents are referred to a maternal and child health centre in their local area. The maternal and child health nurse (MCHN) will provide ongoing care and support for the family, including regular health check-ups.

The MCHN will generally ask if parents would like to be part of a mothers' or new parents' group. New parents' groups can provide a supportive space for parents to share their experiences, ask questions and learn about the early days of parenting.

In some cases both mothers or fathers choose to attend the group, in others the primary carer, regardless of biological relationship, might attend. Early group sessions tend to cover the experience of birth, hormones and physical changes to the body, and breastfeeding.

The groups are facilitated by the MCHN for a set period of weeks, but parents often decide to

meet independently once the group has finished. Some lesbian mums and gay dads form lasting friendships; some find they don't really connect with the other group members at all.

Being clear with your MCHN about your family structure at your first appointment can be helpful. It can also be useful to discuss any concerns you may have about participating in a new parents' group with the MCHN before the group meets for the first time. It might then be worth going to the first few sessions to see how inclusive the group is and how comfortable you feel.

Lesbian mums and gay dads may find themselves on the receiving end of curiosity and questions.

Some questions may be appropriate and asked in the spirit of understanding your family. Some may be intrusive.

Lesbian mums may have reservations about new parents' groups, but the groups can be welcoming and supportive and a valuable source of information.

Gay dads may find it hard to find a group in which they feel comfortable, but some certainly do.

In some cases, it may work better for you to connect with other new parents in the LGBTI community.

Parents say ...

Maternal and child health nurses

Our maternal child health nurse was just absolutely glorious – a wonderful woman. We just really lucked out there. **Bec**

When we had Naomi in 2002, we lived in a new estate where there was nothing, and we did feel like trailblazers out there. I was really anxious, but I struck it lucky with a really great maternal health nurse. **Bridget**

We attended Tweedle – the sleep school – as well, and Carol was certainly very included in that. Pretty much everything to do with Frances – maternal and child health – was all perfect. **Trudy**

Our maternal child health nurse was great and was very inclusive and on board with Jo. She always acknowledged Jo and included her. I think that was just her own personal approach, because I don't think all the nurses that she worked with had the same kind of attitude. **Pia**

Certainly, the treatment from the hospital and the maternal and child health nurse was great; everyone was lovely. **Michelle**

The maternal and child health nurses were a mixed bag, but I would say, on the whole, I find them very staid and old-fashioned in their approach to the business of giving birth and bringing up a newborn. But they were never negative and I never had anyone make any judgement or anything. **Alison**

We had a visit at home from a maternal and child health nurse who was perfectly fine. The only problem was that we would have liked them to come more because it was very hard to get out with the twins. **Ruth**

If service providers were a little more aware – if they had a little bit more experience, that would be better. I do remember one woman saying, ‘Oh goody. I’ve been on a course about this’, which was cute. She was really positive about it and that’s fantastic, if slightly patronising, but that’s okay. I’ll take that above total ignorance. **Alison**

I must say that after the first 5-6 weeks we were an absolute mess because we weren’t getting any sleep. This midwife came over and said, ‘I’m taking the babies, you two are going out. Go and have coffee. Go!’ We went to a local coffee shop and sat there and cried. Then we pulled ourselves together and decided it was going to be okay and it was a huge turning point. **Jenny**

I think Rachel was on the vulnerable register with maternal and child health and they were pretty concerned about her. She was certainly very unwell, but she was well-supported. **Katrina**

I did get misplaced sympathy from a couple of people about how hard it must be because I was on my own. I think they’re just trying to be kind at a time when you’re feeling pretty tired and vulnerable. **Alison**

Mothers’ and new parents’ groups

We requested to be in a mothers’ group because normally, for a second child, they wouldn’t do that. But it had been nearly nine years and we were in a different area. They were okay with that and the group included both of us. People responded to us really well. There was some curiosity and, when they got to know us, they asked questions but there were no issues whatsoever. **Nicola**

One very early comment at mother’s group was, ‘I don’t know, but are you guys finding it really hard to get your husband’s tea ready by 6 o’clock?’ I just thought, *That’s it. I’m done.* As it turned out, she and I never hit it off, but there were two women there whose friendship lasted me through those early years. **Bec**

We asked about parenting groups and I think we were dissuaded by the early childhood nurse. She said, ‘Oh there aren’t really any twins’ groups at the moment’. I’m not sure if it was her get out. My hunch is that she just didn’t think we would fit into a parenting group. **Anthony**

We ummed and ahed about who was going to go along to mothers’ group. Lara went and formed great friendships and everyone was quite comfortable. Basically, all the other mums were jealous because I actually helped around the house and none of their partners did. **Patricia**

Mothers’ group was fantastic and we’re still friends with them all. They’ve all been absolutely wonderful. I think in the hills people are slightly more alternative, which helps. **Eli**

With my mothers' group, it took me about eight meetings to tell them my partner was female and I was very nervous about it, but they didn't blink. I never quite connected with them the same way as I did with a same-sex playgroup later on, but we were always treated well.

Bridget

I'm still in a mothers' group and I was a bit surprised that it was all straight couples and that there wasn't another queer family. They've been pretty good, but I've probably had to educate them a bit. They're all young, in their early 30s, so hopefully that means they are open-minded anyway. **Pia**

My partner went to mothers' group because she had our first child. That was always a bit of an issue because it would be, *Mum's night out* and then, *Dad's night out*, and I didn't go to the *Dad's Night Out*, so that felt a little bit odd. **Mandy**

Rainbow Families' groups

Yes, there was a mothers' group. I was the birth mother and I was the stay at home mum for a period so I would go to the group. As the kids got older, we started to see more rainbow families and we formed a little connection, which was good. **Jenny**

I went along to Rainbow Families Playgroup and that pretty much saved me, because we could talk about all sorts of things and I just felt that I wasn't the weird one. **Bec**

The lesbian parent playgroups were really useful at that time and made a huge difference to us feeling like we were not the odd ones out. That was really positive. You could share your experience with other women and we could all talk about being non-biological parents or other issues. If they hadn't been there, I think it would have been a lot harder. It made us feel like we were understood somewhere by other people who had similar experiences, so it was really useful. **Mandy**

The parent groups we were offered were teenage mums and just weren't really our thing. We hung out with rainbow families in Melbourne and other friends who were having babies. **Katrina**

We found support through the Multiple Birth Association and I'm actually their gay and lesbian contact person. They realised it doesn't matter what sex you are, having twins is hard. So we had this common bond, a different shared experience, which gave us a completely different basis for relating to and understanding each other. It's a lot easier to forget about other differences when you've got this massive commonality. **Ruth**



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