

Enlarging the circle:
Taking a look at where we stand on welcoming LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) families, children and colleagues

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We may have children in our program with 2 dads. Perhaps one of our school-aged students is openly gay. A colleague may “come out” to us as lesbian, and introduce her partner to us. How welcoming are we? This workshop invites us to consider choices available to us. As you reflect on the questions below, you will always have a choice about what you want to discuss or not. The workshop and questions are not demands, but invitations.

1. Recall the 1st time you heard or learned about homosexuality. What or who was your source of information. Was there a judgment of rightness or wrongness conveyed along with the information? Did that experience leave you with any “lasting impressions”?
2. Is someone in your life LGBT? How comfortable are you with that person? As a result of knowing her/him, what have you learned about welcoming others who may differ from you? How do you feel about the treatment this person receives from others, including the law?
3. For some of us, our religious background includes beliefs about sexual orientation. In Christianity, the *Book of Leviticus* contains warnings against homosexuality. The film, *I exist* chronicles the exclusion LGBT Americans of Middle Eastern descent and religions, experience from their families. What did your religious and/ or ethical upbringing teach about homosexuality?
4. Some years ago, Public Television produced a children’s program, “Postcards from Buster”. One “Postcards” segment, on maple syrup gathering in Vermont, included a family with 2 moms. The Secretary of Health and Education strongly opposed the segment’s inclusion of a homosexual family. PBS recalled the segment. Stations could individually decide whether to air the segment. What are your thoughts about exposing children in developmentally appropriate ways to diverse families, including LGBT families?

5. The *NAEYC Code of ethical conduct* (revised 2005) sets this standard: “To respect the dignity and preferences of each family and to make an effort to learn about its structure, culture, language, customs and beliefs.” (Section II, I-2.5) What would you say to a colleague who tells you she “gets sick to her stomach” in disgust every time she has to talk with Marissa’s 2 mommies?
6. The American Psychological Association (APA) no longer views homosexuality as an illness. In a recent video, the APA head affirmed research findings that homosexuality is genetic in many cases. The mission of some organizations is to assist homosexuals in becoming “straight”. What are your thoughts about this?
7. In Massachusetts, gay and lesbian couples can marry and enjoy many of the same rights as “straight” married couples. Other states, such as Vermont and New Hampshire, authorize “civil unions” for same sex couples. Still other states have passed amendments to the state constitution defining marriage as “the union between a man and a woman”. What action, if any, do you think your state should take?
8. The film, *Brokeback Mountain*, followed the relationship of 2 gay cowboys, who “passed” (pretended to be) heterosexual married men. If you saw the film, how would you describe: a) the men’s feelings about themselves; and, b) the reception they received from family and friends? Throughout American history, what other minority group members have attempted to “pass” to be accepted by the majority?
9. What resources such as children’s books do you have in your classroom or program that include LGBT families? In what ways are LGBT family structures represented in lesson plans? Name the steps you could take to work with: a) pre-schooler, Morgan, picked on by Taylor because of Morgan’s 2 mommies; b) teacher Gerry, shunned by peers for being gay; and, c) Taylor’s dad who insists Morgan and his mommies be kept away from his son?
10. Gandhi said: “We must be the change we want to see in the world.” Of the choices you have about working with LGBT families, children and peers, what action will you decide to take?

Wheelock LGBT Course Bibliography: Spring 2008
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