

# 5 EASY WAYS PARENTS CAN BE MORE **LGBTQ-FRIENDLY**

By **Katie Slivovsky**

*“The experience of being welcome or unwelcome, visible, or invisible begins in early childhood.”*

—from *Do No Harm* (article) in *Young Children*, January 2010, NAEYC

We parents and caregivers have the privilege and opportunity to model inclusion and acceptance every day. Here are a few tips to help ensure our LGBTQ\* family and friends are welcomed and included in our homes and communities.

\* LGBTQ = Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning

## **1** Include LGBTQ people in your conversation and daily life

- Mention LGBTQ people in everyday conversation: “Remember my work-friend Cynthia? She and her wife just got a puppy!”
- Going to a wedding? Mention all the marital possibilities: man/woman, man/man, woman/woman, transgender.
- By reading LGBTQ family-friendly children’s books on a regular basis (link to book list below), children can be more supportive and welcoming when they encounter a transgender child or a family led by a same-sex couple.

## **2** Think beyond the gender binary

- It takes a little thought and practice, but avoid reinforcing the gender binary by always thinking in terms of girl/boy, woman/man, female/male.
- Rather than saying, “Hi boys and girls” try, “Hi friends” or address a group based on what children are doing: “Hi artists/climbers/explorers,” etc.
- Doing this makes room for children who feel they don’t fit into either category and deemphasizes perceived differences and focuses instead on what children have in common.

## **3** Challenge your gender assumptions

- When hosting playdates, don’t let gender determine the activity. Offer art, active play, dress up, superhero play, dance, etc. to all children, no matter their gender.
- When purchasing gifts, don’t limit yourself to toys labeled “boys” or “girls.” All children deserve the opportunity to explore a variety of interests.

## **4** Broaden your definition of love and family

- The people who love you and take care of you are your family. When meeting your child’s new friends, ask “So, who’s in your family?” or “Tell me about your family” rather than assuming children live with a mom and dad.
- If a boy and girl are playing together, avoid comments that assume they’re boyfriend/girlfriend.
- As children get older, don’t assume the gender of their love interests. Keep language gender-neutral: “So, who do you have a crush on these days?”

## **5** Share resources with friends and teachers

Visit [chicagochildrensmuseum.org/lgbtq-inclusion](http://chicagochildrensmuseum.org/lgbtq-inclusion) to access the following resources:

- A list of LGBTQ family-friendly children’s books
- A LGBTQ glossary vetted by [www.WelcomingSchools.org](http://www.WelcomingSchools.org)



*Katie Slivovsky, mother of two, is the Exhibit Development Director and LGBTQ Inclusion Chair at Chicago Children's Museum.*