



Same sex parenting guide

Written by the Parent Cloud Team

Introduction

Parenting is tough. Nothing can prepare you for having a child of your own, no matter how much babysitting you've done in the past. Just when you think you have it all sorted, a new situation will arise to challenge you. Everyone's experience is different. There is no handbook to tell you exactly what to do. Parenting is the ultimate 'test and learn'.

Every parent will experience ups and downs. There will be moments of sheer joy as well as those of deep despair. It's a roller coaster ride for everyone. For parents who don't fit into the traditional mould there can be additional issues to face and overcome.

Families in the UK are changing. According to the latest official figures, only two thirds are made up of heterosexual couples who are the biological parents to their children. The remaining third are made up of a variety of different configurations. One of the fastest growing is same sex parents. In 2019, there were 212,000 same sex families in the UK [1]. This number is growing rapidly, up 40% since 2015.

While same sex parents will of course face exactly the same challenges as any other parents - getting their child to sleep through the night, eat a healthy diet or be comfortable in their own skin - there are other challenges they will face because they are different from the 'norm'. This guide is designed to provide useful advice and support to help them navigate these.



[1]<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/families/bulletins/familiesandhouseholds/2019>

Parental leave

In UK law, parental rights are the same for everyone, no matter what their sexual orientation. However, only one partner is entitled to take extended leave, this can be classed as either maternity leave or adoption leave, which is up to 26 weeks ordinary leave, followed immediately by another block of additional leave, also 26 weeks. The other partner is only entitled to up to two weeks leave to be taken in full week blocks only, up to 56 days after the birth or placement of the child.

This separation for the parent who goes back to work can be difficult. "I found it tough being away from my daughter Eliza," says Kim, a director at a large financial services organisation. "I was lucky that I could take four weeks off when Eliza was born, but that flew by, and I seemed to be back at work in no time. As the main breadwinner, it was agreed that it made more sense for my partner to be a home, but it didn't stop me missing being there. I wasn't quite prepared for how challenging that would be."



To help same sex parents spread their time off more equally, they can apply for shared parental leave, if that suits their circumstances, where the maternity/adoption allowance is split. They can also take advantage of unpaid parental leave, which all parents are entitled to. Up to 18 weeks can be taken for each child up to their 18th birthday. Think ahead and plan holidays carefully. Using your annual leave wisely can mean you don't miss out on key milestones.

Inappropriate questions

One thing that heterosexual couples are seldom, if ever, asked about is their relationship with their child. Same sex parents will often have been on a long and often difficult journey to become parents. This can be extremely stressful and emotional. It is also deeply personal. Being asked about the child's parentage or how they came into the world is something that many same sex parents often endure. Recent research in Australia found 32% of LGBTQ+ parents had been asked questions about their situation that they deem inappropriate or insensitive [2]. These questions often come from a place of ignorance or naivety but that doesn't stop them being hurtful and embarrassing. They can also be classed as a form of bias, making people feel excluded. More than half of organisations now have policies on diversity and inclusion, with a significant number planning to do so shortly [3]. These are designed to prevent these kinds of micro aggressions against minorities, so speak to your HR team if you experience any behaviour that makes you feel uncomfortable or excluded so your employer can find ways to change attitudes.

[2] <https://gracepapers.com.au/think-twice-before-asking-same-sex-parents-these-11-questions/>

[3] <https://employeebenefits.co.uk/poll-55-firms-new-di-policies/>



Finding a school or nursery

Choosing the right environment where your child can learn and thrive is one of the most important decisions you'll ever make. For same sex parents, they want to know that their child will be treated fairly and equally, not singled out or made to feel different because of their home situation.

"When we were looking for a nursery for Eliza, we asked a lot of questions about diversity and inclusion. We looked at the type of language they used and their values. We wanted to find somewhere that celebrated differences, that offered children the chance to learn about other cultures and expand their horizons," says Kim. "We found the more open they were to new ideas, the more they understand our position and embraced it."

Using parenting networks is also a useful channel. It is likely that someone will have gone through a similar experience before, so tap into that knowledge. Organisations like Rainbow Families can be really useful sources of information and places to swap experiences or to get help.

Doing the groundwork before you visit is really important. Get as much information as you can from their website, social media feeds and online reviews. Prepare a list of questions you'd like the answers to and visit in person if you can. You'll get a much better feel for a place if you've seen it yourself and observed how the staff interact with the children and how the children play with each other. Ask if they have any children with same sex parents there already and, if you can, speak to them to learn about their experience.



Bullying

One of the main worries of same sex parents is that their children will be singled out and be bullied because of their home situation. There is limited information on this, but a study in the US, where between two and three million children are being raised in LGBTQ+ families, found 40% reported some form of harassment and 23% felt unsafe at school [4].

While these figures are worrying, unfortunately bullying is something that many children from all backgrounds have to deal with. 22% of young people aged between 12 and 20 say they have experienced bullying behaviour in the last 12 months [5].

Bullying is something that any parent may have to deal with. Being open and honest with your child, encouraging them to talk if they have any worries and giving them love and support will provide a solid base to rely on if they do face issues. If you suspect your child is being bullied:

- Explain to them what bullying is and ask them if they have anything like that happen to them.
- If they don't want to talk to you, let them know how else they can go to. This could be another family member, a trusted adult or a teacher. They can also access help through services like Childline.
- Help them to feel good about themselves by doing something they enjoy.
- Give them reassurance and let them know it's not their fault.
- Report what is happening to wherever the bullying is taking place, be that a social media site, at school or at a club.
- If they are getting bullied because of their situation, this can be classed as a hate crime and maybe a criminal matter. You can discuss it with the police by dialling 101 or if it is urgent ring 999. If your child is a victim of crime, specialist help is available through victim and witness information.

[4] <https://www.psychologytoday.com/gb/blog/media-spotlight/201612/gay-parents-and-the-fight-acceptance>

[5] <https://www.antibullyingpro.com/support-and-advice-articles/in-depth-facts-and-statistics-on-bullying-and-cyberbullying-behaviour>

For same sex parents there is a worry that their child may be disadvantaged because of their family life, but studies in the US have shown there is no evidence that is the case. They found children raised by same sex parents fared no worse than other children on a range of behavioural, educational, emotional and social outcomes [6].

Being a parent is never easy. You are always questioning your decisions or asking yourself if you could have done things better. You can only do your best and the most important thing is to care about your child and teach them to treat others as they would like to be treated themselves.

Useful resources

If you are looking for additional help and support, the following organisations have specialists who can help:

FFLAG – dedicated to supporting parents, families and their LGBTQ+ members.

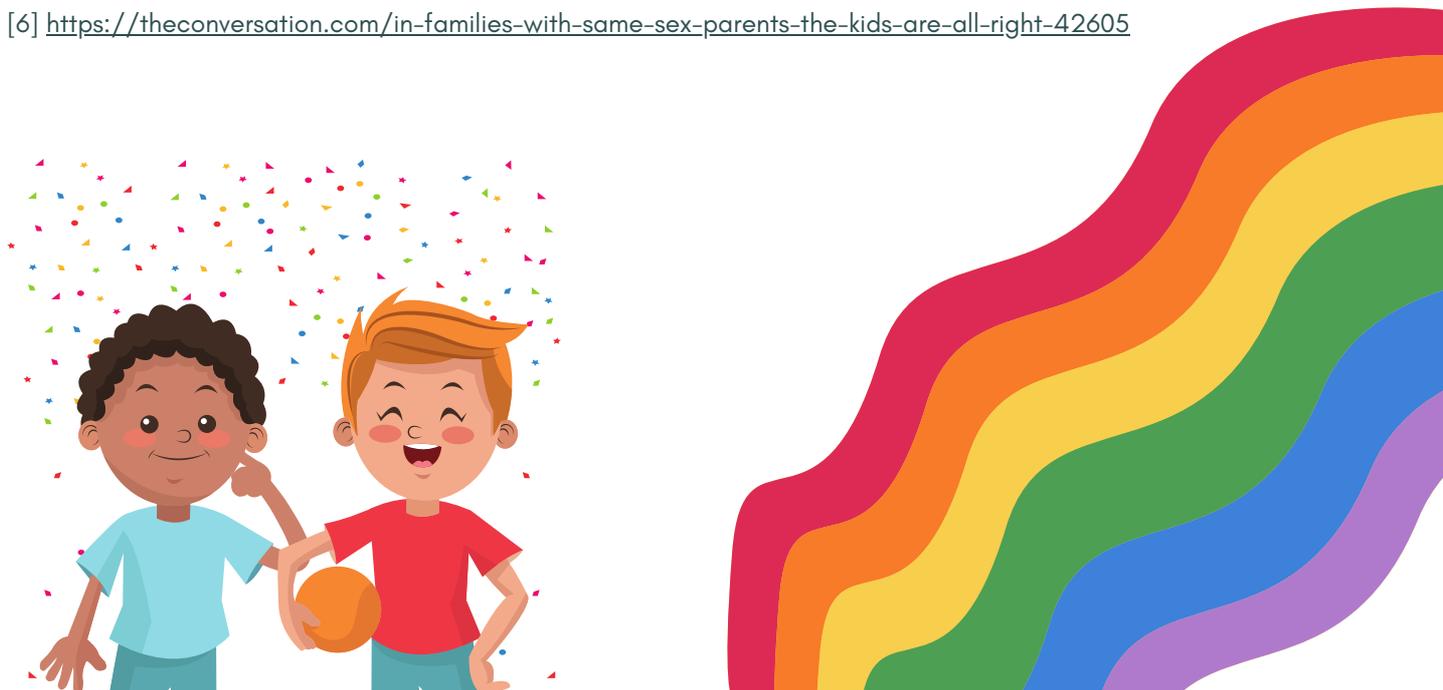
Stonewall – support for LGBTQ+ people and their rights.

National Bullying Helpline – information and advice on all forms of bullying.

Parents Online – emotional support from fellow parents.

Young Minds – helpline for parents concerned about their child's mental health.

[6] <https://theconversation.com/in-families-with-same-sex-parents-the-kids-are-all-right-42605>





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