



# Fact Sheet

From ReproductiveFacts.org



The Patient Education Website of the American Society for Reproductive Medicine

## Talking to Children about Their Gay and Lesbian Parents

### ***What do children of same-sex parents need to know?***

Children with same-sex parents, like all children, need to know that they are loved and cherished unconditionally and that you as their parents will nurture, guide, and protect them. It is through open and honest dialogue among family members that healthy relationships and bonds are created. The goal is to normalize your child's experience and set the stage for his/her evolving understanding of what it means to belong. Parents provide the context for children to accept and value their nontraditional circumstances and grasp that there is no one definition of family and that families come in all types of configurations.

### ***When do I share this information with my children?***

The younger the information is shared the better. It is obvious, even to a very young child, that he/she has two moms or two dads, and what that means to them will change over time. Early on they will accept their parents as a matter of fact, with no need to question or probe. But as their world view grows, they will begin to notice differences among families. This is the time when the details of their particular family story should start to unfold, and it is the parents' responsibility to provide them information. This unfolding needs to be done in an age-appropriate way that will ultimately lead to understanding and acceptance of the facts that there are all kinds of family configurations and no one family type is better than another.

### ***What do I say to my child?***

There is no script outlining exactly what to say, but there are some basic guidelines that have proven to be helpful to other families. Telling the truth is a basic tenet in disclosing the information, but how this truth is shared will depend on your personal style of communication. There are books, films, and experts in child development that can help you prepare to tell your family story. It is important to remember that this is not a one-time event but the start of an ongoing dialogue between you and your child(ren). Your family story needs to be told and retold over the course of your child's lifetime, adding more and more information along the way. It is the parent that sets the stage for how the family feels about its circumstances and how others perceive the family. If you as a parent feel shame, you will project shame and your child(ren) will certainly be influenced by these feelings. If pride and confidence are presented, that is what your child(ren) will experience and communicate to others.

### ***What does age-appropriate mean?***

Maturation is a lifelong process, which evolves and is polished over one's life cycle. What a child takes in and processes when very young is quite different than what is understood as an adolescent or adult. Talking to your child involves an understanding of what is considered age appropriate.

**Ages 3-6:** The world of the very young child is restricted and he/she is primarily interested in getting his/her needs met: feed me, change me, and hold me.

These needs include being nurtured, nourished, and protected. This is the time to set the stage for your later explanations regarding your family story. Children will not understand necessarily the intricacies of what you say at this developmental stage but will respond to your tone and expression as you talk about your family's genesis.

**Ages 7-11:** Children in this age range have evolved an understanding of the reproductive basics. They know it takes an egg and a sperm to make a baby and that only females carry pregnancies. Their friends might be asking them why they have two moms or two dads. These children need to be able to handle these questions with dignity and confidence and not falter in their responses. Their worldview has expanded and they have a need to understand their place in relationship to others, and it is with the parent's help they will be able to do so.

**Ages 12 +:** Young adolescents are greatly impacted by peer opinions and relationships with friends. They crave fitting in and being accepted by their contemporaries. Adolescents continually struggle as they bounce between demanding the independence that comes with adulthood and the dependency they still feel as a child. If parents have done an adequate job up until this time, a child will have honed the skills to tackle whatever he/she might encounter regarding inquiries or feelings about his/her parents. At this juncture he/she also will feel safe enough to talk about any issues or concerns regarding his/her family with you and others.

Family is family, though the rearing parents may not be the contributing genetic or biological providers. The look of family has changed and will continue to change with the passing of time. What all parents need to respect is that being open and 'out' with children is the surest path to a healthy and united family unit.

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