

**Title:** Are those her uncles or dads: Working with parents who are gay

**Session Type:** Conference Session

**Strand:** Family and Professional Collaboration

**Age Level:** 0-8

**Level of content:** Introductory

**Abstract:**

This session will address strategies for including gay parents in early childhood settings. The term gay is to be inclusive of both gay men and lesbians. Specific strategies for including these families in a respectful manner will be addressed. Current research and literature will be shared with participants.

**Session Description:**

**Objective:** There are two objectives for this proposal. The first objective is to provide information and examples to the participants about working with parents who are homosexual. Techniques and strategies that have been utilized in working and including these families will be shared with participants. The second objective is to provide participants with current literature regarding parents who are gay.

**Rationale/importance of proposal:** Data from the 2010 Census indicate that there are nearly 650,000 same-sex couples in the U.S. with approximately 17% of couples raising children (Williams Institute, 2011). According to the Child Welfare League of America (1996-2007), “parents of the same sex are raising at least 200,000 children--possibly more than 400,000--in America (these numbers do not include single lesbian or single gay parents) (par. 6).” There currently is not much research on working with families who are gay (Burt & Lesser, 2008). This presentation is timely and will provide participants with techniques and strategies from the literature for working with parents who are gay.

**Presentation and Organization:** The presentation will begin with a brief overview of techniques and strategies of working with families. The presenters will elaborate on the similarities and differences of working with parents who are straight or gay. Techniques and strategies to use with parents who are gay will be shared along with a handout summarizing these. Participants will be expected to discuss issues and utilize their own knowledge and skills to ensure an interactive session during all phases of the presentation.

**Relevance/Implications for families of a variety of backgrounds:** Sexual orientation diversity will be woven throughout the presentation. The presenters understand that childcare workers may not find the techniques and strategies to be appropriate for their cultural or personal beliefs. A checklist from *Exceptional Children* journal will be available for participants to self-evaluate their cultural competence when working with children and families. The ability to reflect upon

one's own practices and expectations is critical to the success of working with parents who are gay.

**Relevance for professionals:** The increase in the number of children being raised by a parent who is gay has significant implications for practice. Often personnel are not adequately trained or might have their own cultural or personal beliefs regarding individuals who are gay. Teachers and other professionals need resources and guidance to gain confidence and expertise in working with parents who are gay.

**Content:** The proposal will include (1) an overview of current research in working with parents who are gay, (2) strategies and techniques to include parents who are gay, (3) techniques to facilitate communication with staff who may have cultural and personal issues with individuals who are gay, and (4) Results of the Human Rights Campaign, *Welcoming Schools*. A current literature review (books and research articles), curriculum, and personal experiences will be utilized to incorporate information for the presentation.

The information was gathered through a review of current research in early childhood journals including, but not limited to, *Journal Gay and Lesbian Issues in Education*, *Annual Review of Clinical Psychology*, and *Young Children*, as well as the DEC Recommended Practices and NAEYC's Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs.

#### **Measurable Outcomes:**

1. Participants will develop an understanding of strategies and techniques for working with parents who are gay.
2. Participants will gain an understanding of issues in including and welcoming parents who are gay in child care and school settings.
3. Participants will be able to understand how to effectively work with parents who are gay and to work with staff who may have personal or cultural issues with individuals who are gay.

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