

Different families

The experiences of
children with lesbian
and gay parents

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by April Guasp

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Introduction



We have seen significant changes in recent years enabling many more lesbian and gay people to have families. Contrary to what's sometimes suggested by the opponents of equal treatment for gay people, there is no substantive evidence that their children experience any developmental disadvantage into adulthood. We wanted to find out what those children think themselves.

This research provides pioneering understanding of the current experience of the children of lesbian and gay parents. Many come from families which look remarkably like everyone else's. However, their lived experience is often similar to that of so many black or Asian or Jewish children. It's the prejudices of others that cause them far more distress than their own personal or family characteristics.

Having interviewed children as young as four, this study also provides groundbreaking insights into the existence of homophobia in Britain's schools, including primary schools. The children who experience this, although not gay themselves, identify that many schools still don't deal with this appropriately.

We're hugely grateful to the children and young people who took part in this study and we're inspired by all the parents and families who have nurtured and supported such a wonderful group of young people. We're also indebted to the generosity of the Monument Trust for making this research possible. They appreciate, as we do, that all good families have one thing in common – love. Happily, these children appear to have that in abundance.

Ben Summerskill Chief Executive

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The study Stonewall commissioned the Centre for Family Research at the University of Cambridge to conduct interviews and focus groups with children of lesbian, gay and bisexual parents. Between October 2009 and February 2010, researchers interviewed 82 children and young people between the ages of 4 and 27. Researchers recruited participants across England, Scotland and Wales. Participants were spread geographically across the country.

Key Findings

All families are different. They come in lots of different shapes and sizes

How I feel about my family

- Many children of gay parents see their families as special and different because all families are special and different though some feel that their families are a lot closer than other people's families.
- Some children feel that their family is a bit different if they have lesbian or gay parents but this is something to celebrate, not worry about.
- Other children do recognise that children with gay parents are less common than other sorts of families, but don't feel this means that their families are any different to other people's families because of it.
- Very young children don't think their families are different from other people's families at all.

How other people feel about my family

- Most people, including friends at school, are fine about children having gay parents. They think it is a good thing, or don't really care.
- When children are younger though they can be a bit confused and don't understand that someone can have two mums or two dads because their family isn't like that. This means they sometimes have lots of questions for children who have gay parents.
- Sometimes other children can be mean about gay people because they have never met any gay people and don't know much about them.
- Some people make judgements about what it's like to have gay parents. They think children will have a certain type of life and not as good an upbringing. Children with gay parents can find these judgements upsetting.
- Children with gay parents like having gay parents and wouldn't want things to change but wish other people were more accepting.

My experience at school

- Children with gay parents don't like the way the word 'gay' is used as an insult in primary and secondary school. Some children said they try and stop people using the word in this way, but find it difficult.
- Children say that teachers think the word 'gay' is a bit like a swear word and they don't respond to anti-gay language in the same way they respond to racist language.
- Even when children with gay parents are very young they have to answer lots of questions from their friends about their family. This makes them feel unusual.
- Once people understand, the questions stop but they start again when children move to different classes or schools.
- Some children with gay parents find it easy to answer these questions, but others find it annoying and uncomfortable.
- Some of the children are worried about bullying – especially when they first go to secondary school but many children with gay parents haven't experienced any bullying because their parents are gay.
- But when children in primary and secondary school do experience bullying to do with having gay parents, schools aren't always very good at doing anything about it.
- Children with gay parents said that lesbian, gay or bisexual people or families are never mentioned in schools and they find this difficult and it makes them feel invisible.
- Sometimes this means they don't tell people they have gay parents. They are worried about what may happen if other children know they have gay parents. This is stressful and they wish they could tell other people about their families.
- Children with gay parents want their schools to talk about different families and stop homophobic bullying. This would make them feel more able to be themselves in school.



Different families

There's no such thing as a typical family. What makes a family differs from child to child. Some children have a mum and a dad, some live with just their mum or just their dad, or with grandparents, or uncles and aunts, or foster parents or carers. Some children have two mums or two dads. Or some have two mums, a dad and grandparents. Families come in lots of different shapes and sizes. The children who talked to us come from lots of different sorts of families too. Some are described below.

Alice (7) and Hannah's (16) family

Hannah is 16. Her mum was married to her father, but Hannah's parents separated when she was two. Hannah lived with just her mother, Sarah, until Sarah met her current partner, Jo. Sarah, a teacher, and Jo, a civil servant, have always been open as a couple in their small northern town and have never had any problems. Sarah and Jo then had Alice, now age seven. Alice was conceived via anonymous sperm donor to biological mother Sarah.

Hannah sees her father once every three weeks. Hannah sees her biological parents as her parents, and her mother and father's partners as stepmothers. Hannah tends to go to Jo with practical problems, like problems within a friendship group, but to her mother for emotional guidance, such as issues with her father or a boyfriend. Hannah is currently in a sixth form college.

Alice likes to do art with her mother, Sarah, and rides her bicycle and goes jogging with Jo. Alice calls both Sarah and Jo mummy. Alice likes spelling and science, playing chase and football at playtime, but doesn't like times tables. Outside school, Alice goes to singing and keyboard lessons. When Alice grows up, she'd like to first be a pop star, then a famous doctor, next a famous inventor and then to run in the Olympics.

Josh's (12) family

12-year-old Josh lives in the Midlands with his mum and his dog, Spot. Josh's mum and dad were together, but Josh's dad left when he was very young. Josh's older sister has moved out.

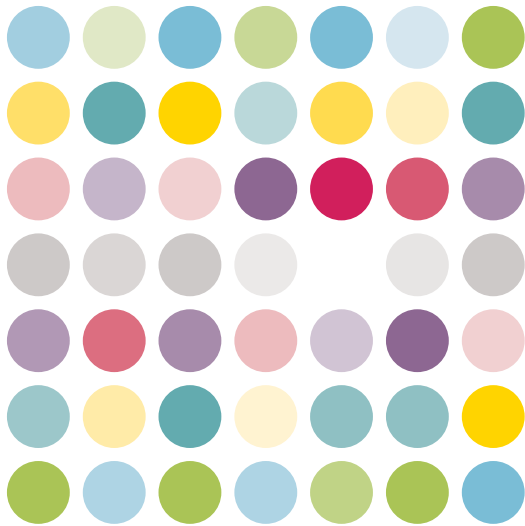
He sees his sister regularly, but doesn't see his father. Josh's mother came out to Josh as a lesbian a couple of years ago when he was ten. Josh enjoys school and has a good group of friends there. He enjoys playing Xbox with his friends, going bowling and going to Scouts.

Anya (16) and Glynn's (14) family

16-year-old Anya's birth parents are her father, Alistair, who's gay, and her heterosexual mother, Amy. Alistair and Amy were friends who decided to have a child together. Amy married John shortly after and had Anya's brother, Glynn, who is now 14. Anya considers herself to have four parents as does Glynn, though he's not biologically related to Alistair or his long-term partner, Roger.

Anya and Glynn live in Wales with Amy and John, but regularly stay with dads Alistair and Roger as well. As Anya and Glynn get older however, friends, school and part-time jobs cut into time spent with the family. Glynn plays rugby, enjoys cooking and has his friends round to spend time with him at both his homes. Anya is now in college, has a part-time job and is mainly hanging out with friends, but generally sees her father and his side of the family on Sundays when they have a meal or go to the cinema.





Alisha's (7) family

Seven-year-old Alisha lives in the east of England with her mum, Rosie, her other mum, Shirley, and pet rabbit, Snowy. Alisha was conceived by donor insemination with an anonymous donor. Shirley is disabled and although she could walk when Alisha was born she is now immobile and struggles a bit with talking. Rosie works for the council and Shirley was a social worker, but is no longer working. Alisha especially likes seeing her grandparents on weekends where she gets to play with their dogs, Toby and Frank.

Maheen (13), Faariha (9) and Megan's (23) family

Maheen, 13, and Faariha, nine, live in a large northern city with their two Mums, Barbara and Andrea, as well as with their two grandmothers and grandfather. Maheen, who has a hearing impairment, and Faariha were adopted along with their older sister, Megan, who is 23 and away at university. Both mums work part-time, one as an artist and one as a writer, and share childcare. Their mums ensure that the girls' Asian heritage is incorporated and celebrated in daily life, for example in clothing and holiday celebrations and destinations.

Maheen and Faariha both enjoy swimming. Maheen does particularly well and wants to swim in international competitions. Maheen also enjoys horse-riding and generally working with animals. Faariha enjoys cross country running and netball.

Together the family regularly holiday in an isolated cottage, which the girls particularly enjoy because it has no electricity. They also attend art exhibitions and go on lots of walks – though their grandparents don't always join them on these walks as according to Maheen they're 'too old'.

Francis's (20) family

20-year-old Francis is from the north of England. His family is made up of his mother, Barbara, her partner, Jan, and his older brother, Sam. Francis was born when Barbara was in a heterosexual relationship with Francis's father, but has grown up with two mums for as long as he can remember. Francis was mostly raised with Barbara's previous partner, Jill, who died a few years ago.

Francis has learning difficulties and after the funding for his support worker was taken away when he moved up from middle school into senior school, he struggled with school after having made earlier progress. He left school at 14, but enrolled in a cooking course in college, which he really enjoyed. Francis has now moved into his own flat and is doing some volunteering work as a gardener.

Holly's (19) family

Holly grew up with her elder sister, Zoe, in what she describes as a 'patchwork family'. Their mum, Nicole, had Zoe when she was in a relationship with Zoe's father. Holly was born by anonymous sperm donor to her biological mother, Nicole, and her second mum, Vera. Vera and Nicole split up when Holly was eight and since then her mum Nicole has been with Gail. Gail and Nicole have had a child, Jacob, who is now four. Holly is quite clear about defining Gail as a third mum, rather than a stepmother.

Growing up, Holly divided her time equally living with Nicole and Gail, and her other mum Vera. Holly worries about Vera and would like to see her with a partner. Holly's family enjoys shopping and going to restaurants together but this is more difficult now due to new nieces and a little brother to tend to. Holly went to a girls' grammar school on the outskirts of London and is now studying to be a doctor.

Keya (13) and Jasmin's (8) family

Keya, 13, lives with her two mums, Tina and Anita. She was adopted from India when she was four. Anita is also Indian. Keya knows her biological family and visits her biological mum and siblings once a year in India. Keya also lives with her younger sister Jasmin who was adopted in Britain, but also has an Asian parent. Jasmin was adopted after her birth mum had died. The sisters are very close.

The family live in the south of England and are part of a group of families that get together for activities such as swimming and camping where Keya and Jasmin socialise with other kids who have gay parents, some of whom have also been adopted.

Lauren (17) and William's (15) family

Lauren is 17 and lives with her mum and younger brother, William, 15, in the south-east of England. Lauren's mum and dad ended their relationship when she was seven and at ten years old she found out her father is gay. Lauren and William are close to their father, but getting to know their dad's new partner has not been without some difficulties. Lauren makes clear, however, that this is not because she or William have a problem with their father being gay or having a partner.

Lauren and William see their father during the week and on alternate weekends. Lauren and William are happy to have friends over at either their mum or dad's home. Lauren and William each attend single-sex Roman Catholic schools.

Freddie (6), Matthew (8), and Michael's (10) family

Freddie, six, Matthew, eight, and Michael, ten, became brothers when their respective mothers, Fran and Donna, met four years ago. Fran and her biological sons, Freddie and Matthew, changed their surnames to Donna and Michael's and they've been living happily together as a family ever since in a small town in the north-west of England. The boys really enjoy playing on their PlayStation, and sometimes Mummy Fran will join in. Their granddad picks the boys up from school most days. Both mums take turns cooking and putting the boys to bed, depending on who's home from work.

Mark's (8) family

Mark, eight, lives in London and is the only child of mums Kate and Di, but is surrounded with aunts, uncles, cousins and grandparents. Mark is top of his class in maths, reading and spelling. Mark doesn't really like playtime anymore, because some of his good friends have left the school, but does enjoy playing football. At home, when not cooking with his mums, he enjoys watching Willie Wonka 'over and over and over again'.

Joseph (9) and Daniel's (7) family

Joseph, nine, and Daniel, seven, were adopted from abroad by dads Martin and George. Joseph and Daniel attend a private school in London that attracts a lot of families from abroad, particularly from the Middle East. Joseph was three years old when adopted and Daniel was a baby.

Joseph likes to cook with Martin and go to the cinema with George. Joseph is particularly proud of the medals he's won at school for sports and swimming. Outside school he likes to go to museums and to the park over the road from his home.

Daniel and Joseph and their family go to a house in the country for Daniel's birthday. When there, Daniel enjoys going to the jungle gym and enjoys being pushed on the swings by his Daddy – Daniel calls George, Daddy, and Martin, Papa. At school, Daniel enjoys maths, outside-break, sewing and singing.



Alfie (4) and Briony's (6) family

Four-year-old Alfie and his sister Briony, six, live with their Mum and Mummy in their home in London. Both mothers are each the biological parent of one of their two children. Alfie and Briony have the same Daddy, a friend of the family who was the sperm donor and who is also gay. Mum works as a lawyer and Mummy is currently a full-time parent.

Alfie likes painting and opening his Christmas presents with his Mummy and buying sweeties and magazines with his Mum. With his Daddy, Alfie likes going to Disneyland and Legoland. Alfie and his friends play with blocks, wild animals and dinosaurs and he says he likes school because he gets to play after lunch and sing.

Briony particularly likes going to the zoo with her family. Briony explains that sometimes she likes school and sometimes she doesn't. She enjoys drama and art, but doesn't like going to school during the winter when she sometimes feels sick, but still has to go.

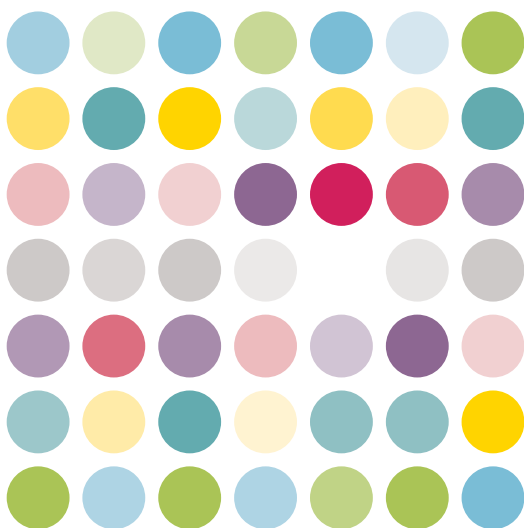
Morag (18) and Nathan's (15) family

Morag, 18, and Nathan, 15, live with their mums Terry and Angela. They have an older sister, Eithne, who is away at university. They live on an isolated farm in the north of England. Terry works at a university in a nearby city and Angela runs the farm and home. Eithne and Morag were conceived by the same donor, while Nathan was conceived by a family friend who he has now met. The girls know the name of their donor and that he has a family, but don't want any contact with him.

Nathan and Morag are an academic pair – both in line for straight As and A*s – Morag is hoping to go to Cambridge this year and Nathan in two years. Nathan and Morag are also very musical, particularly Nathan who plays several instruments including guitar, electric guitar and saxophone.

Alexei (7) and Jess's (10) family

Jess, ten, lives in London with her two mums and little brother, Alexei, seven. Jess and Alexei live with their mums, but stay with their dads on Fridays and for the whole of every third weekend. Jess and Alexei's dads are also a couple, one was the sperm donor. Jess and Alexei refer to their parents as mum, mum, dad and dad – except for when Alexei calls them by made-up nicknames. The family often have family days where they spend a day together going to a pantomime, theatre or cinema. Jess loves school, has many friends and says that her only real worry is about whether she'll be chosen to sing the solo in the school play. Alexei really likes maths and writing in his diary, but doesn't like the recorder. At home, Alexei enjoys standing upside down on his head on the sofa.



Jade's (14) family

14-year-old Jade lives with her mummy and Cath, her mother's partner, in the south of England. Jade likes to go bowling with her family ('when they have the money', she says), swimming and to the park for picnics. Every year Jade and her mum have a special day that they spend together, just the two of them, when they go down to a small seaside town. On this summer day trip they visit a funfair and go to Pizza Hut. Every year Jade's mum and Cath go to Glastonbury and Jade is looking forward to joining them for the first time when she turns 16.

Jade struggles with school. Jade has ADHD and admits that she's not so good at spelling. The only thing she currently likes about school is getting to see her friends. Jade would like to go to a new school that specialises in supporting young people with her needs.

'I feel special' – How I feel about my family



The young children who spoke to us don't think their family is different because they have gay parents. **They think their family is special because it's their family**

Four-year-old Alfie says he sees his family as different to his friends' families **'because it's more nicer and more ... better'**.

Seven-year-old Lewis doesn't see his family as particularly different for having two mums:

Interviewer: *Do you think your family is like other peoples' families, or is it a bit different?*

Lewis: ... **I don't really get that.**

Interviewer: *OK. So if you think about your friends' families, do you think that there are things similar with your family and their family, or do you think there's some things different?*

Lewis: **I think they're all different.**

Lewis explains, for example, that his friend Joey's family is different because it's smaller as there are only four of them and that his friend Ben has a different family because he has a sister and a dog.

Eleanor, eight, feels that her family may be different, but not particularly due to having two mothers. When asked if her family is like other people's families or different, Eleanor replies **'I think it's different. I think that ... well first of all, they don't have Charlie, my little brother, running around the place spoiling everything ... dribbling all over your homework. I don't know how to explain it but I just feel there's some difference between the other families and us. The way we all work together really, yeah. We all link up like a puzzle.'**

Daisy, nine, says her family is different **'because you have different faces, different colour hair and different sizes of hair'**.

Jasmin, eight, thinks her family is different to others, not for having two mums, but because Jasmin, her sister and her mums were all born in different parts of the world. She says she really likes this **'because I feel special'**. She also explains that her family is unique because **'well because**

sometimes they can really understand you and they can be really generous, and sometimes in other families, well ... it's less like that'.

Jasmin thinks her family is similar to others because **'well we still do things together, and we're still a big family and we're still happy ... and we still care for each other and we're still there when someone needs someone'**.

Maheen, 13, and Faariha, nine, see their family as different to other families, but once again not because of having gay parents. Maheen explains **'well, one of my best friends, her and her dad argue all the time, and for me it's really shocking what she does. Yeah, we don't really do that sort of thing. It was kind of a shock.'**

Faariha adds **'like some shout a lot, some let you do anything you want and mine don't, they just ... well, care. Their mums and dads aren't really looking out for them as much.'**

Faariha says what she really likes about her family is that **'they're caring and they look after you'**. Maheen and Faariha agree the most important thing about their family is that **'we all love each other'**.

When children get older, they may begin to notice that their family is a bit different to other people's families, but that's not a bad thing.

When Briony, six, is asked if her family is like other families or if she thinks her family is different, she says **'I think it might be a bit different, but I don't think very different'**. Briony explains that this is because **'most peoples' families you don't have to explain to everybody about your whole family, but I do in the playground. People will be like oh, how come you've got two mummies, you can only have one, and then I have to explain it all, but other people don't really have to do that'**. Briony doesn't want anything about her family to change and says an especially good thing about her

family is that she has **'more parents'** because **'when I'm older I'll get extra pocket money!'**

Seven-year-old Alice says that she thinks her family is different from other families **'because I think I'm the only person in my class who has two gay mums'**. Alice says she feels **'very grateful'** to have two mums **'because they're both very nice mums'**. What Alice likes about her family is that **'everybody loves each other in my family and we always care for each other and we watch out for each other'**.

14-year-old Jade explains that she sees her family as more fun than other families. **'Mine's funner because my mum and Cath go to Glastonbury and we're more of a hippy family. We don't get up in the mornings, have breakfast, go to work and then moan when we get back about how our day's been. Ours is different to that so it's not like a normal family where there's a brother, a sister, a dog, a dad and a mum. It's funner than that. My life's a bit more colourful than other people. People are like ... oh don't you have a dad? A lot of families now haven't got a dad 'cos their mum and dad broke up. That's my opportunity I've got. To have two people instead of one and to have both of the same sex – because guys don't really know how to talk about periods and all that and it's nice to have two people that I can talk to.'**

Holly, 19, explains **'I feel like our family is very different, very very different. I mean I've never had an issue.'**

I like it, I like that we're different and I enjoy that. I do get times when I think, oh what would it be like to have a dad and I think it's just the fact I don't know, but then other people don't know what it's like to have two mums, three mums. I was always brought up knowing that our family was a bit different but I've always felt lucky to have my family. We're different and we're not embarrassed about it, and we're all very open about it.'

In fact, some young people said they enjoy feeling particularly special.

Lauren, 17, says **'there's another girl in my school who has a gay dad but she doesn't talk about it so I feel I'm the only person with that situation at school and that kind of makes me feel special. It makes me different and everyone looks at me like, oh she's got the gay dad, how cool – like, you know, gay best friend, all girls' school, I'm the one with the gay dad ... you know lots of people have divorced parents and stuff but yeah, my story's special so it makes me special, in a good way.'**

Sacha, 19, says **'I didn't want the same stereotypical mum, dad, two children and a dog family. I like having a little bit that makes me a bit special.'**

Children said that even if they felt a bit different for having gay parents, families all do the same sort of thing whether they're gay families or not.

**Well we still do things together,
and we're still a big family
and we're still happy ... and we
still care for each other and
we're still there when someone
needs someone** Jasmin, 8

My little sister said to me:
'I've got two parents who love me. It doesn't matter if they're a boy or a girl.' And to be honest I think that's the best answer anyone could ever give Hannah, 16

When Chris, 12, whose mum and dad are both gay, is asked if he feels his family is different to others', he responds **'not so much, but ... only the fact that my mum and dad don't live together, and they never got married, but that's it. It doesn't feel that much different, I don't feel like unique or something. I don't want to either.'** Chris explains that there's only one thing he would change about his family.

Interviewer: *And is there anything about it that you'd like to be different?*

Chris: **... No not really, the only problem is that my mum makes me tidy my room, that's it.**

Interviewer: *And do you do it?*

Chris: **Not really ... ha ha ... it either goes under my bed or in my wardrobe, but don't tell mum that.**

Jennie, ten, is matter-of-fact about having two mums. **'I think it's pretty much the same. I mean it's alright to have two mums, there's nothing wrong with that, it's just they love each other. As long as they love each other it's alright.'**

Morag, 18, doesn't feel her family is particularly different to others either. **'I think we're pretty much the same as other people's families really. Pretty much the same sort of functionality, works the same way as others do.'** Morag explains there may be just one difference between her and her friends' families. **'We get along quite well over dinner and stuff. Some of my friends are quite surprised when they come round and we have tea and**

we are all sat there, chatting about stuff, having discussions and arguments, but like friendly arguments. And they're like, wow, you actually talk to your family and it looks like you're having a good time, and we say, yes, we actually do. That's the only time we really all sit down and chat. But it's really good.'

Most of the children we spoke to didn't really think about how their family compares to others.

Megan, 23, explains **'I don't think there is a sort of general, you know, stereotypical family anywhere really. I think you get to know anyone's family and there's all kinds of weird quirks and interesting things and things that are really great and things that are not so great.'**

The most important thing to the children researchers spoke to is that their relationship with their parents is a good one.

Hannah, 16, says **'no matter how much we argue or, if there's a rift, or anything like that, I know that if anything serious happens we would all pull together and we would definitely be there for each other. And like me and my sister, even though there's a ten year age gap, we're still really, really close and we always will be.'**

Hannah explains that she was discussing with her younger sister Alice, seven, how she feels about having two mums as parents. **'Alice said, "I've got two parents who love me. It doesn't matter if they're a boy or a girl." And to be honest I think that's the best answer anyone could ever give.'**

'Oh my god your parents are so cool' – How other people feel about my family



Children said **having two mums or two dads wasn't an issue for their friends**

Nine-year-old Joseph explains **'I say that I have two dads and they're fine with it, and then they tell me about themselves.'**

Jennie, ten, says that everyone in her school knows that she has two mums and that she doesn't really get much comment about it. She explains how her friends feel about it. **'My friends say it doesn't matter, it's just like a man and a woman, it's alright.'**

Many children said they get positive reactions from their friends.

Jamie, nine, sums up the kind of reaction most children researchers spoke to have about having two mums, **'well ... quite a good one. Got quite a lot of friends.'**

Morag, 18, reflects on the reactions of her friends. **'When I went to high school I thought it might be a little bit awkward if someone came round to the house. They'd ask where's your dad? I would say I've got two mums, and they'd say "coo-ool" so it wasn't like a massive thing.'**

Morag's brother Nathan, 15, recalls the questions and reactions from his friends **'a lot of them were, don't you feel you've missed out. And then they'd be like, actually my mum's my favourite parent and I'd say "I've got two of them".'**

Keya, 13, says **'I was walking with my friend the other day and he was trying to understand my story, so he was like right, so you're adopted, and you live with two mums, well then who's your dad? He asked all these questions, and he was really confused. It was quite funny that when I told him I was like ... oh, I've got three mums and I've got one dad and I've got six brothers and three sisters. He got really confused with everyone and he said he would really like to have**

three mums! It was quite funny. With most people I can say like ... oh, I'll ask my mum Tina. And they will be like oh, but you said your mum's called Anita, and then I can explain to them oh, I've got two mums and they live together and most children are OK with it.'

Paula, 13, explains that her parents are particularly popular among her friends. **'All my friends they go "oh my god your parents are so cool". I have to say my parents are kind of mad and my parents are always just really happy. So it will be like "oh your parents are so cool they're so much fun to be around". I'm like ... thank you ... My parents always get on really well with my friends and are happy to talk to my friends.'**

But some children told us that sometimes their peers weren't so positive.

Ten-year-old Jennie explains an experience that she's had being teased by some older boys. **'It used to be some boys in an older year, they kind of picked on me sometimes, but that was years ago. They just went oh, you've got two mums, I think that's wrong, blah blah blah ... I just ignored them and said it's fine, you know, it's the same as a man and a woman, and they kind of left me alone after that. They were just silly, they were trying to have a laugh, they thought it was funny but ... hollow brains.'**

Alisha, seven, said **'well a boy in Year 6 came up to me and said have you got a dad? And I said ... I was quite afraid to say it, and I said no. And he said well that's stupid isn't it, and I was like ... no. He said yes it is, and he started ... he tried to chase me and he got me once and he kicked me.'** Alisha also explains that on a separate occasion **'I think it was a girl in Year 5 this time, and she ... she knows me and she said ... you've got no dad, and you've got two mums and I think you're really really really really weird and I was like**

that's really annoying! She said it's not annoying, you're just weird. And I didn't even tell the teacher this time, I didn't even cry, I just thought ... I don't really care, and I just walked away.'

Hannah, 16, explains an incident she had when starting college. 'I remember, back in September, in my second week, the girl on a course whose classroom is near ours came up to me and said "oh, I know I don't know you very well, but there's a couple of girls been saying that your mum's a lesbian. I thought I should just tell you." And I was like, "oh, my mum is a lesbian." And she said, "what?" And I was like, "yes, she is," and she went, "oh my God, that's sick." And I was like, "what do you mean?" "Well, being with another woman, that's just gross. Doesn't that make you feel really gross?" And I was like, "not really. It's my mum's choice, it's not mine. I personally wouldn't be with a woman, but it's different tastes, isn't it?" Ever since then she's never really spoken to me, she looks at me in a weird way. Sometimes, when you don't really know people very well and you first tell them, especially if it's girls, sometimes you get the odd girl who thinks you're going to start looking at them in a certain way or checking them out, that kind of thing. And you're not at all, it's only when they get to know you better that they realise it's not like that.'

13-year-old Keya explains how other people's homophobia has made her feel in the past. 'I used to think it was really bad that they were together because other people didn't like it. But now I know that some people don't, won't agree with it and we can't make them, but that's OK because it's their opinion ... and now I think it's really good that I've got two mums.'

The children and young people said that sometimes other people assumed that they'd had a worse upbringing because they have different parents. Every child we spoke to said this wasn't the case.

Stacey, 20, said 'I do a neighbour's hair over the road and I can't remember what she said exactly but she said something like "oh it must have been really hard for you growing up with lesbian parents ..." and I sort of didn't know how to react. Obviously I'm doing her hair, I can't be like rude to her and I just went "Erm no it wasn't" and she went "but you didn't have a father in your life" and I said "well yeah I did, I saw him" and she went "Oooh" ...'

15-year-old Daniel also explains his reaction to assumptions about his upbringing by two mothers. 'People say it's proven that they have worse lives if they don't know their father. I hope I'm one of the ones that proves it doesn't matter.'

Asked if he's ever wanted to know his biological father, Daniel responds 'I haven't, no, because I have two parents that I know love me.'

Holly, 19, resents assumptions about her upbringing. 'My lecturer said if you haven't got a maternal and a paternal figure together then you're going to be a bit messed up, basically ... and I just thought ...no! No! I mean I understand what people say like it's important to have ... even if he isn't your father, a male figure in the family, and yeah I had male figures, not particularly paternalistic but I had male figures. I don't think I'm screwed up and I just think it's funny when people say that because I'm like well, I'm evidence that you're not like that at all.'

However, regardless of any negative incidents or comments, the children made it clear that they don't want their families to be different – they want other people to change their attitudes. Holly, 19, explains 'my closest friends were Afro-Caribbean Christians and their families were quite against it and I didn't realise that at the time but my parents did and they found that quite tricky ... so I mean, I wouldn't have changed it. I just wish other people would have been more accepting.'

I wouldn't have changed it.
I just wish other people would
have been more accepting Holly, 19

I was walking with my friend the other day and he was trying to understand my story, so he was like right, so you're adopted, and you live with two mums, well then who's your dad?

He asked all these questions, and he was really confused.

It was quite funny that when I told him I was like ... oh, I've got three mums and I've got one dad and I've got six brothers and three sisters.

He got really confused with everyone and he said he would really like to have three mums!

It was quite funny

Keya, 13

'Calling my dad a donor dad' – My experience at school



The majority of the children and young people researchers spoke to **enjoy school**

When Daniel, seven, is asked how he feels about school, he says **'it's perfect'**. Daniel explains that he likes **'maths, outside-break, sewing ... and the best thing is having good lunches. And I like to make good friends and stuff. I like to be in assembly to sing songs, carol service, even when I'm not a Christian ... yeah.'** The only thing Daniel doesn't like about school is that he finds the snack break too short to both eat and play.

Jennie, ten, also likes school. She says **'school has been brilliant'**. Jennie says what she likes about school is **'my friends'** and her **'education'**. She explains **'I like maths. I know it sounds weird but I do like maths. I'm very good at it. And I'm good at science. I've actually been sent to a science summer school for 3 days, and we actually dissected a rat ...'**

What Jennie doesn't like about school is similar to a lot of girls of her age – feeling left behind by friends whose interests are changing. **'Jess and Coral kind of talk about stuff like ... CDs and singers and stuff that I don't know about, I don't even like JLS, which they're mad over. They're mad over loads of stuff, X Factor and I'm a Celebrity Get Me Out of Here. I don't watch any of this stuff. They like things I really hate, like Hollyoaks and Eastenders. It may sound crazy to some people but I don't really like it. I don't take an interest in it.'**

Though children of gay parents aren't immune to general school troubles as Jennie illustrates, 14-year-old Luke's story exemplifies the experience of most of the children researchers spoke to. **'I quite like school really. I can meet up with all my mates and stuff. In primary school all my mates knew about my parents and in secondary school all my mates know. Everyone's quite alright with it. They're not really bothered they just think it's normal really.'**

Holly, 19, also reflects on her school experience. **'I loved secondary school. Just because I was ... I think I**

enjoyed being challenged and I loved having the work to do because I felt like I could prove that I could do it ... and I loved the girls I was with, I had a fantastic friendship group who were wonderful and supportive. I had a really good time, really good time.'

However, the children and young people told us that they could sometimes face issues in school.

Questions, questions

Lots of young people don't know that families can have two mums or two dads and this means many of the children and young people we spoke to had to answer lots of questions from their friends, even when they were as young as four. Six-year-old Briony doesn't mind others asking questions about her family and says that it's done **'in a nice way'**. However, she can struggle to respond to questions, **'I say well ... like ... I don't have ... well umm ... it's quite hard ...'**

Alexei, seven, says **'well, people ask me ... it's impossible to have two mums and dads ... it's not possible, it's above the human abilities ... stuff like that and I say it's obviously possible ... I just go yes it's possible and then they say ... no it's not ... and I say yes it is ... and then they say no it's not and then I say oh yes, just be quiet, yes it is.'**

When Alice, seven, first meets someone new in school, she introduces herself and her family, **'well first of all I say my name's Alice and then well ... I tell them about my sister and that I have some gay mums and erm ... that I have some very nice chickens and cats.'**

Alice says that **'sometimes they ask what does gay mean'** and that she explains **'it's like if it was a man and two mans loving each other I'd say that or if it was a woman it would be two women loving each other'**.

While some children such as Alice are at ease with answering questions, some like Siân, age nine, can feel uncomfortable. **'Sometimes people ask me and I get a bit awkward so I just sort of ... I try to cut down the story as much as possible so I don't have to say that much. I feel sort of a bit awkward about it. It got a teeny bit annoying because they were like ... how were you born then? So I think umm ... stop it.'**

Children said that once people in their class understood they had gay parents, the questions stopped but when they met new people, they had to answer the questions all over again. The children and young people said that because nobody else in school talked about different families or same-sex parents,

the job of explaining gay people always falls to them.

Hannah, 16, explains **'when people find out my mum's gay I can guarantee every single time someone finds out, well how are you here? Then I have to explain that my mum was married to my dad, and now she's not, and then they ask, what about your sister? And then I say well she was donor insemination. They just accept it, but sometimes people don't understand IVF, they're a bit confused, and I have to explain.'**

Hannah explains that most questions and comments aren't malevolent. **'A lot of it is ignorance. I mean that in the true sense of the word, where people just don't understand.'**

Well, people ask me ... it's impossible to have two mums and dads ... it's not possible, it's above the human abilities ... stuff like that and I say it's obviously possible ... I just go yes it's possible and then they say ... no it's not ... and I say yes it is ... and then they say no it's not and then I say oh yes, just be quiet, yes it is Alexei, 7

Well in school now I don't like it how people make fun of lesbian people. Like when they say oh, that's so gay.

It's really, really irritating.

This guy who I know, Sam, he said oh, your pumpkin's turning gay Maheen ...

I'm like what's that supposed to mean? And everyone

thought that he wasn't being mean, but I knew that he was saying something about gay people. It's just like they don't have to use the word gay.

Most people say it as a joke, and it's not funny at all

Maheen, 13

That's so gay and you're so gay

Recent research shows that 98 per cent of young gay people hear 'that's so gay' in school and we know from polling evidence that teachers don't necessarily respond to it when they hear it. Children with gay parents told us that it affects them too.

While some young people with gay parents say they don't find this language personally upsetting, more often children are bothered by it. Maheen, 13, explains **'well in school now I don't like it how people make fun of lesbian people. Like when they say oh, that's so gay. It's really, really irritating. This guy who I know, Sam, he said oh, your pumpkin's turning gay Maheen ... I'm like what's that supposed to mean? And everyone thought that he wasn't being mean, but I knew that he was saying something about gay people. It's just like they don't have to use the word gay. Most people say it as a joke, and it's not funny at all.'**

Maheen feels it's important to respond when children say these things. **'What I do is I go back home and make sure that it is being rude. I tell mum and Barbara and I ask "that is rude isn't it?". And then I tell the person the next day that you shouldn't say that, you know. They usually say oh, it was just a joke. Basically I think it doesn't matter what colour you are, what religion you are, what ... like ... if they're lesbians, if they're ... you know ... I don't know ... it doesn't matter what they are, it's about their personality, and I don't think anyone should really be thinking that lesbians are horrible, because that's just not true.'**

13-year-old Keya similarly finds this language distressing. **'When I'm in school it's a bit hard, especially when children go ... as an insult they go oh that's so gay about something they don't like. Say they might have done a drawing they didn't like and they go oh, that's so gay, and they've done a bad piece of work, oh that's so gay.'**

Happily, some children explained that their schools were tackling this behaviour.

Emily, 14, shares **'in our school they have an equality group that deals with not very nice gay comments and saying the "gay" word all the time and sayings like that. They deal with it really well to be honest. Basically, they spread the word how it's not very good to say "oh this is so gay" "that's so gay" even though it's used as a different meaning. They tell them that's wrong and why you shouldn't say that. At one point there was loads of people saying "that's so gay" and we just basically educated people and we gave assemblies about it, we put up posters, we put up Stonewall posters, loads of things.'**

Younger children told us they hear these comments in primary school too.

Mark, eight, explains that because he has gay parents **'when people say "gay" ... I feel worse than other people'**. He says that a lot of the children in his school say this, but when asked how teachers handle it, Mark says **'well they're not usually there. The people are clever by being naughty'**. Mark doesn't say anything when this happens. He says **'I just ... walk away from them.'**

Jess, ten, says the word gay is used inappropriately at her school and explains a particular incident where a boy in her class shouted at another boy **'it's all your fault! You're gay.'** Jess says he uses this in a negative way **'because he doesn't know what it means'**. Jess explains how she feels about this. **'I think if they know what it means, it's definitely wrong. If they don't know what it means and they're just using it because someone else has done it, I think they should find out why they are using it.'**

Jess explains however that her classmates help her stop other people doing this now they know about her family. **'Especially the people that I've been with the whole way through the year they actually now stand up if anyone says "oh you're gay", they'll go "there's nothing wrong with it", which is quite nice because even the people that don't really like me ... who kind of just ... the boys mainly ... even they do it 'cause of me and Siân [her friend who also has gay parents].'**

Even with a confident friend like Jess, Siân can feel down about the other kids' comments and simply states, **'I wish that people didn't be rude about gay people.'**

Bullying and the fear of bullying

Many of the children researchers spoke to were worried that they might get bullied and that stopped them telling anyone about their parents.

Luke, 14, just like many children in this study, was initially nervous to tell others about his mother when first starting secondary school. His experience turned out to be typical. **'I was a bit worried about telling them in the first place just in case they did say anything but when I told them they were like ... Is that it? And they didn't really mind about it and it was like all ok really.'**

Luke's older sister Ruth, 16, also explains she didn't have any problems with bullying and was more likely to come

across a lack of understanding rather than any direct prejudice or bullying. **'I've never actually had that much problem with it to be honest. I've never really had a problem with like friends at school or anything and no one's ever been horrible to me about it. I think people have like felt sorry for me before, like they didn't really understand the situation, but I've never been bullied.'**

There were, however, some incidents of bullying. Children said some schools were better than others at handling it. Alisha, seven, had trouble with bullying by an older boy in Year 6. Alisha told the teacher and the boy was found in the Year 6 class, told off in front of his peers and made to apologise. Alisha was initially nervous that the other kids would also make fun of her, but her confidence was boosted when the Year 6 kids said 'that's cool' about having two mums.

Meg, 16, explained that in her school **'the teachers were really great and they were just like, oh if you've got any problems you can just tell us and we'll sort it out straight away. I went to a really good school for that, and they had a strict no bullying policy and everything got sorted out.'**

Meg didn't have many problems, but did suffer one particular incident of bullying in her last year at secondary school that was swiftly tackled by the school when it came to light. **'I had a thing last year on MySpace and Bebo. I had this one girl who started saying loads of things and like cyber-bullying me. It just carried on and it started to get quite serious. I never told anyone about it because I didn't really want anyone to know. I felt quite embarrassed I'd let it happen and I thought I could just deal with it. Then she got hold of my mobile number and kept ringing me. It got to the point where she started threatening me, so I told my school and they got the police in straight away. I told my school in the morning and the police were in by lunchtime. They had rung her up and we weren't allowed to talk to each other anymore. If she did speak to me again, then I could contact the police again and they would get a court order on her. But she never spoke to me again after that so that was fine.'**

The thing was, we were quite good friends and she'd admitted to having a bit of a crush on me. I said, oh look, I'm sorry, I don't feel like that about girls, and I still see you as a really good friend. And she said, well your mum's gay, so why aren't you? I said well it doesn't quite work like that. It just scaled up from there and then it turned to really nasty comments about my mum. **Oh your mum's an effing dyke and all this stuff and I just thought that's not on. But I didn't want to say anything back because then I'm just as much in the wrong. I just ignored it, but it just got worse.'**

In some circumstances, however, there were instances of bullying that weren't handled so well by the school.

Eight-year-old Mark shares his experience with bullying. **'Sometimes they say ... you know, everybody's got a dad, he must be dead, or something. I say no, he's not dead. Well he's not there, he's never been there. All I've got is a donor dad and sometimes I get teased by them calling my dad a donor dad, donut dad.'**

Mark has had other comments as well.

Mark: Well somebody asked ... on the way out of school they said ... which one's gay? Ha ha ha ...

Interviewer: Ha ha ... so what did you say to that?

Mark: Ha ha ... both of them! Ha ha ...

Mark also explains, **'they say ... I know what gay means, it's two naked men dancing around on a boat, somebody told me.'** To which Mark responded, **'I said "you don't know what you're talking about!".'**

Mark explains that he and his mother had been in to see the teacher earlier in the year after one particular incident which Mark explains, **'Zach was hugging me and then I fell backward and then some Year 5's came over and said what happened, and I said I was hugging him and then the Year 5 boy stopped and went and he got his friend and said to Zach to explain I was hugging him and then he said did you hear that, hugging? And then they started saying that's gay ...'**

Mark's mother had spoken with the teacher about making it possible to talk about these things with the class and the teacher agreed that she'd address these issues in circle time, however Mark explains **'the teachers keep on saying they'll do it, and about a month ago they said definitely tomorrow ... and then they kept on saying that for the whole rest of the week ... and now they've forgotten completely.'**

When Mark was asked what would happen if somebody was being teased because of the colour of their skin or because they come from a different place, Mark immediately explains that **'nobody ever' does this 'otherwise they're dead! Really dead, by the teachers'.**

15-year-old William goes to a single-sex boys' Roman Catholic school. William has experienced some homophobic bullying that started in Year 8. **'Normally people just say like ... "gay dad" ... and stuff like that, and then some people pretend they just found out and they say ... is this true and this true ... like just keep asking, and obviously I know they know so it just gets annoying. Normally I try and say something back because it like makes me feel better. Or I just try and ignore it. That's harder obviously.'**

William said he would tell teachers in some particular instances, but it didn't solve things for him. **'Well they tell them off but like secretly they'd like always carry on.'**

They always tried to stamp out racism and stuff, but ... homophobia was not a really big issue that came up, except you know, in RE class, when you had that class. At primary school a bunch of the boys went through a phase of calling this one girl a Paki ... they didn't know what it was, but they were calling her it, and that got sorted out straight away ... Fiona, 17

William says of that time **'I wasn't happy to go to school because I knew it would happen.'**

19-year-old Sacha experienced some bullying and repeatedly went to teachers for help, but wasn't supported. **'I would get people coming up to me and saying, your mum's gay. And I was like – it started to get to me because I realised then it wasn't normal, it was different. I sort of felt picked on and the amount of times I went to see the teachers and they said, just ignore them, they'll get bored. They never did get bored.'**

17-year-old Fiona recalls **'they always tried to stamp out racism and stuff, but ... homophobia was not a really big issue that came up, except you know, in RE class, when you had that class. At primary school a bunch of the boys went through a phase of calling this one girl a Paki ... they didn't know what it was, but they were calling her it, and that got sorted out straight away. Those same boys went off on one boy about being gay, and they really really freaked out my poor friend. They used to pretend that they fancied him, and it messed him up so bad the poor kid. He's alright now.'**

We had gay history month and loads of things ... they'd always say oh there was this famous person who's gay and it didn't make a difference to what they did in their life, and it just became a big part of what we did in school Saffir, 18

Keeping my family a secret

Many children of gay parents, such as Rosie, 12, are happy to be open about their families. **'Well if people ask about my family I'm happy to tell them but you know I don't go up and just tell people as soon as I meet them ... ha ha.'**

However, the majority are careful about who they tell. Chris, 12, explains **'unless they're like really good friends and I know I can trust them I don't tell them.'** Chris explains how he works out when he can trust someone to tell them. **'When they tell me one of their biggest secrets or they're just really really good friends with me. I don't know, I just know that they won't be horrible about it.'**

Some young people keep their families a secret from everyone and they find this stressful. Children told us they keep their families a secret if schools don't do anything to tackle homophobic bullying.

Gemma, 14, explains **'that's the only thing I'd want to be different so I could tell people and people would understand.'** Gemma continues, **'I do have friends round but if Pamela's here [her mother's partner] I'll tell them that she's my Auntie because everyone just thinks that they could be sisters ...'** Pamela and Gemma's mum

support Gemma's wishes by pretending Pamela is an aunt or a friend. **'They wouldn't do anything to make it look like they were lesbians in front of my friends.'**

Gemma explains that she doesn't tell her friends because, **'I've heard people be homophobic about other things or other people. I'd just be scared that if I told them that they'd react in that way towards me and be nasty to me about it. Well, everyone's like "oh my god that's so gay" because everyone uses that term. I do think, well if I told them I wonder if they'd be that way towards me? Yeah they would maybe even not be my friend anymore but I don't know.'**

12-year-old Katie says she wishes **'I could talk openly about it to people. I'm too scared to, too scared of what would happen, of what would they say, what about if they told someone ... I said not to tell anyone and they told somebody, and although it might not seem a big thing to anybody else, it does to me. Lots of people ... you know like when you just say something, and my friends often just say oh, that's gay ... The school know people say, you know, it's gay, and you wouldn't say it like with a teacher listening because they'd say you can't say that and stuff. But ... they tell them off, but it's not like ... it's just like swearing, it's ... it's not like racism.'**

Inclusive lessons

None of the children or young people in this study was able to relate an experience at primary school where families like theirs were reflected in the classroom in any way.

Sacha, 19, recalls **‘the videos that they used to show you in school, all about life and everything, it would be the conventional family with mum, dad, kids and dog. And it wasn’t two mums or two dads. It was always a mum and dad.’**

Katie, 12, had a particularly upsetting experience. **‘I can still remember when I was younger we had to draw a medal that said No. 1 dad. I said I didn’t want to do it. And they just said ... well my teacher, it was like a supply teacher, and if I’d have had my normal teacher I think she would have said well you could draw one for your mum, but she just sort of said ... well just do one, don’t moan. And I found that really hard.’**

18-year-old Saffir had a positive experience of lesbian, gay and bisexual people being included in lessons regularly throughout secondary school as she explains, **‘we had LGBT history month and loads of things ... they’d always say oh there was this famous person who’s gay and it didn’t make a difference to what they did in their life, and it just became a big part of what we did in school.’**

However, Saffir was in the minority as most of the young people we interviewed, like her twin sister Adyna who went to a different school, expressed disappointment at how lesbian, gay and bisexual people and issues were excluded from the curriculum.

Adyna explains **‘I had a completely different secondary school experience to Saffir, in a school that would like to think of itself as liberal but completely ignored the subject of anything to do with being gay, even in relationships education, where it should come up, you know it really should.’**

I never experienced anything negative from school but they just ignored the topic. There was one teacher who was rumoured to be gay and it became something to gossip about. She moved to a boys’ school but she obviously went through a really hard time from people. She got talked about a lot and that was possibly for other people in my school the only experience of learning about someone who was gay, which is really sad because they never learnt about it in an educational way.’

Mike, 17, would also like to see lesbian, gay and bisexual people and issues included in the general curriculum.

‘I think that if a lesson involves current affairs or something, just throwing in every now and then a current lesbian or gay issue would really help normalise it. Because since it is never mentioned it makes it impossible to mention, except in a negative light which people seem to find really easy.’

Lauren, 17, attends a Roman Catholic girls’ school and was very upset when she was discouraged from continuing with a project that dealt with gay issues.

‘I got really into this project and I went and told my teacher about it because he asked what we were going to do it about and he was like, well, can you stay off the gay topic? And I kind of sat there and my whole class was listening to the conversation and I was like ... what? And he was like ... well, you know, the whole gay topic, Catholic school ... I kind of snapped and I didn’t say anything to him because you’re not allowed, it’s your teacher, but I started crying. All the girls knew my dad was gay so they knew gay was a sensitive topic. I spoke to him another time ... I was like, so what’s wrong with the gay topic, you know, I think it would be quite interesting, and he just said ... oh well, can you choose something different, you know, we’re at a Catholic school blah blah blah, and I was really offended by that.’

I nearly went and spoke to my head of year and said I have a gay dad and I was told I wasn’t allowed to do something on people being gay – can you sort that out please? I haven’t ... I was close to.’

If issues about gay parents are included in lessons, it’s important that this is done appropriately, as Holly, 19, explains **‘I was in Religious Studies in, it would have been Year 11, and my teacher was talking about sperm donation saying that sperm donors ... she said something along the lines of ... it’s very sad because sperm donors generally just do it for the money and I was so angry and I said no you’re wrong.’**

I remember coming home and crying to my mum. I remember being very angry and very upset. My mum was very angry and did a load of research and printed off and highlighted all the bits saying ... you only get the money that you haven’t got from work and the money to get there, like travel expenses, you don’t get a whole load of money like they show in like American sitcoms. I showed it to the teacher the next day. I handed it to her and said – I wasn’t very nice – “You need to think about who’s in your lesson. I was really upset by what you said and I think this might help you out in your future lessons”.’



Recommendations for schools

“you need to think about who’s in your lesson” Holly, 19

1 DON’T MAKE ASSUMPTIONS

‘There was one time when we had to do some exercise like write down your name and what your mum and your dad do and I remember being like ... well you know, I could write down what my mum and my dad do, but I don’t live with my dad, is that what you mean? Do you want me to write down what my mum and Kim do? They hadn’t thought that there might be children there that weren’t in a typical family. There are always going to be children that don’t have a dad around or whose mum died or something and I think that’s just insensitivity.’ Simon, 23

The children who spoke to us said there are lots of occasions, whether in the classroom or in letters sent home, where it is assumed that everyone has a mum and a dad. The children and young people find this excluding and want schools to stop making assumptions about their families.

“how come you’ve got two mummies?” Briony, six

2 START EARLY

‘I think it’s important in primary school that if anything is brought up by little children about ... oh you haven’t got a daddy, you’ve got two mummies that’s weird, that it can be talked about and discussed as opposed to a child feeling like they’re different and unusual and that’s not a good thing.’ Holly, 19

‘I think primary school children should be more educated on it, because otherwise ... if one person says when you first find out about it, like ... it’s disgusting ... then everyone starts to think that.’ Anna, 16

Children want to see gay people and their families talked about and celebrated in primary school. This would mean that all children learn about gay people in a positive way, not just from negative comments, and it would mean that children with gay parents could stop being the people who have to educate everyone else.

“they just ignored the topic” Adyna, 18

3 TEACH OTHERS ABOUT DIFFERENT FAMILIES

‘One of my friends asked me, because she’s gay, she was asking me about sex with girls, for me to ask my mum. At school you learn nothing about safe sex with same-sex couples and when you learn about families and making babies, you learn nothing about same-sex parents and how same-sex parents could get children. I remember being in biology and having to explain to my teacher, who was teaching us about sex education, about how my sister was born because he just had no idea. He didn’t know anything about donor insemination.’ Hannah, 16

The young people we spoke to were very clear that lessons about families and relationships education should include gay people. Lessons about families should make reference to same-sex parents, and sex education lessons in secondary school should talk about same-sex relationships.

“help normalise it” Mike, 17

4 INCLUDE LESBIAN AND GAY PEOPLE IN THE CURRICULUM

‘When you’re learning about someone in a lesson, often kind of like a writer, you learn about their background and often the things that have influenced their work somehow and often race comes up and sex. I remember this a lot from English writers and then finding out after I’ve studied a book that they were gay and it was just never mentioned and it must have had a really big effect on their life, especially when you do historical figures. It would be nice for that to be mentioned as part of the background. Not just kind of superfluous like – oh, and they were gay – but talking about how they were gay and the effect on their lives the same way that we talk about other background things when we’re talking about someone in context.’ Adyna, 18

Young people would like to see gay people reflected in everyday lessons to increase awareness and understanding about how gay people participate and contribute to society.

“ **I wish that people didn't be rude about gay people** Siân, nine

5 RESPOND TO HOMOPHOBIC LANGUAGE

'In our school they have an equality group that deals with not very nice gay comments and saying the "gay" word all the time and sayings like that. They deal with it really well to be honest. Basically, they spread the word how it's not very good to say "oh this is so gay" "that's so gay" even though it's used as a different meaning. They tell them that's wrong and why you shouldn't say that. At one point there was loads of people saying "that's so gay" and we just basically educated people and we gave assemblies about it, we put up posters, we put up Stonewall posters, loads of things.' Emily, 14

Many children of gay parents find the use of the word 'gay' as an insult upsetting. Young people explain that they confront their peers, but they want teachers to do so too.

“ **I went to see the teachers and they said, just ignore them** Sacha, 19

6 PREVENT HOMOPHOBIC BULLYING

'My brother and I knew some people in our school that had gay and lesbian parents that did get bullied quite a lot and that scared us from telling people ... so yeah we never really told anyone. It was hard keeping secrets.' Stacey 20

Children told us that they were upset if they were bullied but also upset if they saw other people being bullied. When homophobic bullying goes unchecked, it makes them feel unable to be honest about their families. Schools should take steps to prevent homophobic bullying.

“ **it's not treated like racism** Katie, 12

7 SHOW THE CONSEQUENCES OF DISCRIMINATION

'My mum got beat up because she was gay. That was all over the newspapers and that was in Year 6. Now in Year 9 they've just started to pick on me. I told a guy who was picking on me to type in my mum's name on the computer. He saw a photo of my mum's face when she got beaten up and then he kept apologising to me and now they've just stopped it after they saw the picture.' Jade 14

Children told us that homophobia is not treated in the same way that racism is in their school. This means that other children don't understand the impact of their prejudice. Schools should tackle all forms of discrimination.

“ **none of it is ever mentioned** Mike, 17

8 PROMOTE A POSITIVE ENVIRONMENT

'Just this year a new English teacher joined who is gay, I think, and he has one of the Stonewall 'Some People Are Gay, Get Over It' posters in his classroom. I don't do English but I know him because I go to debating and he runs that. Just seeing the poster in his room is really cool, especially at a school where it's never mentioned, none of it is ever mentioned. So just to see that in his room is really cool – rare, but nice to see.' Mike, 17

Children of gay parents feel that initiatives such as posters, displays and assemblies have a positive effect on the school culture. They would like their schools to do more of this.

“ **if anyone says anything, just let me know** Sacha, 19

9 SUPPORT ALL PUPILS

'If a teacher had come up to me and said, look, we understand your parents are gay, fine. If you ever get any problems from it, or anyone saying anything negative then come and tell us. That makes me feel it's absolutely fine, no one is really bothered. But if there is someone who is bothered, I have someone to talk to.' Hannah, 19

Many of the young people said they want to feel supported by teachers, but not singled out. They want teachers to show that they understand that having gay parents isn't a problem but other people's reactions can be a problem.

“ **Surprisingly accepting** Stacey, 20

10 ENCOURAGE ROLE MODELS

'We did have a couple of gay teachers and I think that helped. They came when I was in Year 10/11 and people were, for me, surprisingly accepting of them. Even the boys because you think boys might be like "oh he's gay" or whatever. I think it helped people around me and my friends realise that gay people are nice they're not horrible you shouldn't go "oh they're gay"... I mean luckily these teachers were really nice teachers and I think people realised that it doesn't matter.' Stacey, 20

Young people in this study feel that having openly gay teachers helps other pupils have a more positive attitude towards gay people. They want schools to create a positive and supportive environment where teachers can be role models for other pupils.



Further resources

For further information on Stonewall's Education for All campaign, homophobic bullying and to find out about all events, reports, materials and teaching resources, please visit www.stonewall.org.uk/atschool

Stonewall education events

www.stonewall.org.uk/educationevents

- Education for All Conference for youth and education sector professionals
- Youth Events for young lesbian, gay and bisexual people

Stonewall resources

www.stonewall.org.uk/educationresources

- Education Guide *Challenging homophobic language*
- Education Guide *Supporting lesbian, gay and bisexual young people*
- *FIT* – an interactive DVD teaching resource for Key Stages 3 and 4 accompanied by a teacher resource pack and online lesson plans
- *Spell It Out* training DVD for teachers which covers issues such as how to challenge homophobic language in the classroom and staff room and how to react when a young person comes out
- 'Oh no! Not the gay thing!' lesson ideas on how to integrate lesbian, gay and bisexual issues into the curriculum for seven subject areas at Key Stages 3 and 4
- *The School Report* (2007) a survey of over 1,000 lesbian, gay and bisexual young people
- *The Teachers' Report* (2009) a YouGov poll of over 2,000 primary and secondary teachers and other school staff
- Department for Children, Schools and Families guidance *Preventing and responding to homophobic bullying in schools*
- *Some people are gay. Get over it!* materials including stickers, posters, postcards, t-shirts and travelcard holders
- List of books for primary and secondary schools

Further links and information

- *What's in my area?* – database for local LGBT community and youth groups www.stonewall.org.uk/whatsinmyarea
- For links on issues such as health, family and friends, faith www.stonewall.org.uk/atschool/links

Stonewall programmes

- Education Champions programme for local authorities www.stonewall.org.uk/educationchampions
- Youth Volunteering Programme for young people 16-25 www.stonewall.org.uk/youthvolunteeringprogramme
- Diversity Champions programme for employers www.stonewall.org.uk/diversitychampions



Stonewall's Education Champions Programme provides bespoke support and guidance to local authorities in tackling homophobia and homophobic bullying with their local schools. Local authorities work with Stonewall and each other to establish ways in which they can address homophobic bullying and promote a safe and inclusive learning environment for all young people.

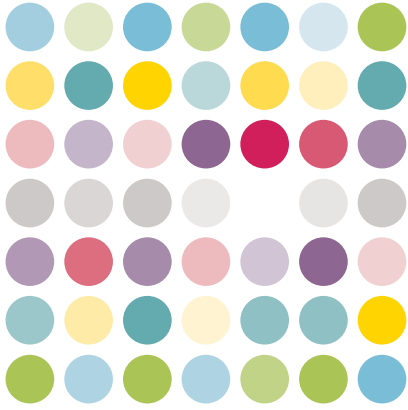
If you would like more information on Stonewall's Education Champions Programme please visit www.stonewall.org.uk/educationchampions or email educationchampions@stonewall.org.uk

We'd like to hear from you!

Tell us what you think about Stonewall's materials and find out how you can get more involved in the Education for All Campaign, visit www.stonewall.org.uk/atschool email education@stonewall.org.uk or call 08000 50 20 20 (free from landlines).



Education for All is Stonewall's national campaign to tackle homophobic bullying
education@stonewall.org.uk
08000 50 20 20
www.stonewall.org.uk/educationforall



Different families

The experiences of
children with lesbian
and gay parents