



The LGBTQ+ community has grown over the past decade to incorporate more identities. The charity Stonewall changed its terminology in 2021 from LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) to LGBTQ+ to reflect a wider, more diverse range of people – including queer, a term used by people rejecting specific labels (though it’s important to note that “queer” is deeply offensive to some).

The 2021 census found that there were 1.7 million LGBT+ people in the UK. Stonewall estimates more than 20,000 children in Britain have same-sex parents, and clearly many more have LGBTQ+ family members or friends.

Campaigners want early years settings to celebrate diversity. Stonewall says: “This helps prevent prejudice developing further down the line.” It also helps children to “feel proud of the things that make them unique”.

How can practitioners ensure that their early years settings reflect the many different identities in our communities?



Rainbow NATION

So how can practitioners show they welcome all kinds of families? Maria Machin, a childminder and parent of a trans daughter, says: "It's really important that we are completely inclusive of the fact that there are so many different walks of life, and it is our job to ensure we are up to date on the terminology." That "opens up opportunities for parents to feel confident when they are choosing their childcare settings".

Listening carefully

Vikkie Murray, of Little Acorns Childminding in Banbury, Oxfordshire, says: "It's important that we use person-first language and treat all people as individuals. Sexuality and gender do not define everything about a person but are a part of their identity. Being respectful, listening carefully and acknowledging the viewpoints of all families, children, practitioners and other professionals is essential in order to ensure everyone is treated with respect and understanding."

Bev Jackson, co-founder of LGB Alliance, says: "Inclusive language is to say mothers

REGULATIONS AND THE LAW

- Creating an environment that supports all children is a requirement of frameworks in England and Wales. It is a requirement of the EYFS in England, and "belonging" is one of the five key developmental pathways in the curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings in Wales.
- Ofsted (England) and CIW (Wales) expect practitioners to promote equality and diversity.
- Settings must comply with the Equality Act 2010. The nine protected characteristics include sexual orientation and gender reassignment. You must avoid direct and indirect discrimination:
 - Direct is treating someone worse than their peers because of their protected characteristic or connection to someone with a protected characteristic.
 - Indirect happens when a policy applies to everybody but disadvantages people who share a protected characteristic. However, it may be lawful if those settings can show there is a good reason.

and fathers or other carers.

It's worth thinking about whether your setting may be unintentionally contributing to bias by assuming that all families are straight. Bev brought up her children in Amsterdam in the 1980s and 90s and sought out settings that would support a family with two mums. "You shouldn't assume that everybody's got a mother. You shouldn't assume that everybody has a father. You shouldn't assume that everybody's situation is the same."

Vikkie says, when a family enquires about places: "I usually ask who lives in their family home, which people are important in the child's life and who has parental responsibility for the child."

Stonewall advises that celebrating family differences "helps children begin to understand the existence of different adult relationships in an age-appropriate way". It's not just important for children from same-sex parent families – discussing different family structures and relationships prepares children for future adult relationships.

Those children with same-sex parents can also hear words such as "gay" used positively. This reduces the word's power as an insult. Phrases such as "that's so gay", meaning bad, are often heard in schools.

Nothing to fear

Vikkie says it's important to share texts, games and images. "We look at photos of our families, share books that embrace lots of different kinds of families and openly discuss and support children in developing their views of the world around them."

She recommends regular reflection "of your environment, communication and provision" to ensure you are being inclusive. "If you are lucky enough to have LGBTQ+ families who are supportive of your setting (as I am), you can

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More help

- Stonewall's list of LGBTQ+ inclusive books for children aged 2 to 4: bit.ly/Stonewall-inclusive-books
- Equality and Human Rights Commission guidance for service providers: bit.ly/EHRC-guidance
- MyPACEY Resource hub topic, Inclusion: pacey.org.uk/inclusion

ask for their viewpoints."

Maria says she's learned a lot from going to meetings preparing for Scarborough's first-ever Pride event later this year. "We will be learning about what Pride is and why we celebrate it."

Ultimately, LGBTQ+ diversity is nothing to fear. Just remember families come in all shapes and sizes. Vikkie says: "I direct my language at parents and carers. This is inclusive of everyone."

Use inclusive language in newsletters and forms, such as "child" instead of boy or girl. Ensure toys, games, books and displays feature a range of different families and people in different roles, such as male nurses and female builders. Resources such as PACEY's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion materials will help your setting shine. 