



*Making Children
a National Priority*

Position Statement on Parenting of Children by Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Adults

CWLA's Position on Same-Sex Parenting

The Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) affirms that gay, lesbian, and bisexual parents are as well suited to raise children as their heterosexual counterparts.

Issue

Since 1920, CWLA and its member agencies have worked to ensure that abused, neglected, and other vulnerable children are protected from harm. CWLA strives to advance research-based best practices and sound public policy on behalf of the nine million vulnerable children served by our approximately 900 member agencies. We believe every child and youth has a value to society and we envision a future in which families, neighborhoods, communities, organizations, and governments ensure that all children and youth are provided with the resources and supports they need to grow into healthy, contributing members of society.

Among its member agencies, CWLA also values and encourages approaches to child welfare that are culturally competent and responsive to the specific needs of our society's broad and diverse population. Included in CWLA's definition of cultural competence is the ability to support children, youth, and families who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender (GLBT), as well as those individuals who may be questioning (Q) their sexual orientation or gender identity.

CWLA has operationalized its support of GLBTQ children, youth, and families by working in partnership with Lambda Legal, the nation's oldest and largest civil rights organization dedicated to supporting GLBT people, as well as people with HIV or AIDS. Together, CWLA and Lambda Legal have created an initiative entitled Fostering Transitions: CWLA/Lambda Joint Initiative to Support GLBTQ Youth and Adults Involved with the Child Welfare System. The goal of the initiative is to increase the child welfare system's capacity to meet the needs of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and questioning (GLBTQ) children, youth, adults, and families. CWLA is pursuing this goal by providing education, technical assistance, resource development and dissemination, programmatic coordination, and advocacy to CWLA member agencies and the greater child welfare field.

The number of children in America currently being raised by gay, lesbian, or bisexual parents is unknown. Resistance to gay and lesbian rights continues to force many gay and lesbian people to remain silent about their sexual orientation and relationships. But several studies indicate the numbers of children with same-sex parents in America are significant. According to the 2000 U.S. Census, there are approximately 600,000 same-sex couples in the United States (Simmons & O'Connell, 2003). More than 30% of these couples have at least one child, and over half of that 30% have two or more children. Therefore, 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). The 2000 U.S. Census also reported that gay and lesbian families live in 99.3% of all U.S. counties (Smith & Gates, 2001). A 1995 National Health and Social Life Survey by E.O. Lauman found that up to nine million children in America have gay or lesbian parents (Committee on Psychosocial Aspects of Child and Family Health, 2002).

Based on more than three decades of social science research and our 85 years of service to millions of families, CWLA believes that families with GLBTQ members deserve the same levels of support afforded other families. Any attempt to preclude or prevent gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals or couples from parenting, based solely on their sexual orientation, is not in the best interest of children.

CWLA, therefore, affirms that gay, lesbian, and bisexual parents are as well suited to raise children as their heterosexual counterparts.

Existing Social Science Research Supporting Same-Sex Parenting

Existing research comparing gay and lesbian parents to heterosexual parents, and children of gay and lesbian parents to children of heterosexual parents, shows that common negative stereotypes are not supported (Patterson, 1995). Likewise, beliefs that gay and lesbian adults are unfit parents have no empirical foundation (American Psychological Association, 1995).

A growing body of scientific evidence demonstrates that children who grow up with one or two parents who are gay or lesbian fare as well in emotional, cognitive, social, and sexual functioning as do children whose parents are heterosexual. Evidence shows that children's optimal development is influenced more by the nature of the relationships and interactions within the family unit than by its particular structural form (Perrin, 2002).

Studies using diverse samples and methodologies in the last decade have persuasively demonstrated that there are no systematic differences between gay or lesbian and non-gay or lesbian parents in emotional health, parenting skills, and attitudes toward parenting (Stacey & Biblarz, 2001). No studies have found risks to or disadvantages for children growing up in families with one or more gay parents, compared to children growing up with heterosexual parents (Perrin, 2002). Indeed, evidence to date suggests home environments provided by gay and lesbian parents support and enable children's psychosocial growth, just as do those provided by heterosexual parents (Patterson, 1995).

Prevalent heterosexism, sexual prejudice, homophobia, and resulting stigmatization might lead to teasing, bullying, and embarrassment for children about their parent's sexual orientation or their family constellation, restricting their ability to form and maintain friendships. Nevertheless, children seem to cope well with the challenges of understanding and describing their families to peers and teachers (Perrin, 2002). CWLA concludes that problems associated with such family formations do not emanate from within the family unit, but from prejudicial forces on the outside. Children of gay, lesbian, and bisexual parents are better served when society works to eliminate harmful, prejudicial attitudes directed toward them and their families.

CWLA Standards Support Same-Sex Parenting

CWLA's policies and standards are consistent with existing research on outcomes of children raised by gay, lesbian, or bisexual parents. CWLA develops and disseminates the Standards of Excellence for Child Welfare Services as benchmarks for high-quality services that protect children and youth and strengthen families and neighborhoods.

CWLA develops and revises its Standards through a rigorous, inclusive process that challenges child welfare agency representatives and national experts to address both persistent and emerging issues, debate current controversies and concerns, review research findings, and develop a shared vision reflecting the best current theory and practice. The Standards provide goals for the continuing improvement of services for children and families, and compare existing practice with what is considered most desirable for children and their families. The Standards are widely accepted as the foundation for sound U.S. child welfare practice, providing goals for the continuing improvement of services to children and their families.

As they pertain to GLBTQ children, youth, and families, CWLA's Standards of Excellence for Family Foster Care Services do not include requirements for adults present in the home to be legally related by blood, adoption, or legal marriage. Specifically, section 3.18 of the foster care standards establishes a policy of nondiscrimination in the selection of foster parents, stating: "The family foster care agency should not reject foster parent applicants solely due to their age, income, marital status, race, religious preference, sexual orientation, physical or disabling condition, or location of the foster home" (CWLA, 1995).

CWLA also articulates a strong position on the issue of nondiscrimination of adoptive applicants. Section 4.7 of the Standards of Excellence for Adoption Services states:

All applicants should be assessed on the basis of their abilities to successfully parent a child needing family membership and not on their race, ethnicity or culture, income, age, marital status, religion, appearance, differing lifestyle, or sexual orientation. Applicants should be accepted on the basis of an individual assessment of their capacity to understand and meet the needs of a particular available child at the point of the adoption and in the future (CWLA, 2000).

Thus, based on a preponderance of existing research substantiating the ability of gay, lesbian, and bisexual adults to serve as competent, caring, supportive and loving parents, and consistent with the Standards of Excellence for Child Welfare Services, CWLA commits its experience, its resources, and its influence to supporting GLBTQ children, youth, adults, and families involved in America's child welfare system.

Additional Resources

CWLA Online

- ✎ [More information about CWLA](#)
- ✎ [More information about the CWLA/Lambda Legal joint GLBTQ initiative](#)

Empirical Studies on Lesbian and Gay Parenting

- ✧ [American Psychological Association, Lesbian and Gay Parenting](#)
- ✧ [American Psychological Association, Resources on Gay and Lesbian Parenting](#)
- ✧ [American Academy of Pediatrics, *Technical Report: Co-parent or Second Parent Adoption by Same-Sex Parents*](#)
- ✧ [American Civil Liberties Union, *Too High A Price: The Case Against Restricting Gay Parenting*](#)

Books, Articles, and Chapters on Gay and Lesbian Parenting

- ✧ <http://www.apa.org/pi/l&bbks.html>
- ✧ <http://www.apa.org/pi/l&gart.html>

Legal and Advocacy Organizations:

- ✧ [Lambda Legal](#)
- ✧ [American Civil Liberties Union Lesbian and Gay Rights Project](#)
- ✧ [Family Pride Coalition](#)
- ✧ [Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays](#)
- ✧ [Children of Lesbians and Gays Everywhere](#)

References

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Simmons, T., & O'Connell, M. (February 2003). *Married-couple and unmarried-partner households: 2000*. [Available online](#). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Commerce, Economics and Statistics Administration, U.S. Census Bureau.

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URL: <http://www.cwla.org/programs/culture/glbtposition.htm>