

Answering the Questions of Children Rainbow Families

In acknowledging the hurt that the Church has traditionally engendered in the LGBTIQ Community, care and attention needs to be given to addressing the fears that a family coming into the church may bring with them. A noticeably affirming welcome will bring grace, hope and challenge for broadening the faith and understanding of all the congregation.

In the Journey of Grace, Rainbow families need to be actively welcomed by creating a safe and affirming space. This means responding positively to people's and children's questions.

The children of diverse families need to be considered for the fears that they may also bring to church. The negativity and fears that they express of not being welcomed, or both their same gender parents not being accepted, need to be addressed - for example one child of a same gender family, said after a Sunday School session "That person doesn't like people with two Mums," even though no words were said to that effect. It's not enough to just to keep quiet, what is not affirming is perceived to be negative.

Kids raised to be negative about gender diversity, and are reiterating parents' viewpoints, also require respect and encouragement to expand their understanding of diversity in a quiet, non judgmental, and often non-verbal, affirmation. In some instances, there may be a curiosity about diverse families they may be uncomfortable answering. Just because you are curious it doesn't mean that you should ask. Questions should be based on understanding and building relationships.

Understanding diverse people

Preschool age (3-5) This group understands only simple and concrete answers to questions.

5 year old asks: Is that person a Boy or Girl?

Answer: I'm not too sure? Does it matter? They are a person.

We answer this way because they are learning male/female and we don't want to define that for them. (We don't want to enforce gender stereotypes). It also ok to say, I don't know. It is okay to get to know the person and then find out their pronouns.

School age (6-12) Children are beginning to explore and understand who they are.

10 yr old: Is that person male or female?

Answer: I am not to sure, some people are born one gender but feel in their heart they are another gender.

Some people don't mind if children asking them about who they are as they are coming with a healthy sense of curiosity rather than being driven by an agenda. One approach can also be to invite the child to have a conversation with that person and as they might be comfortable in discussing their gender from the perspective of a child's curiosity.

Adolescents (age 13-18, but mainly ages 13-16 who will ask questions or make statements)

13 yr old: Why does Jo have a hairy face but goes into the female toilets?

Answer: The person identifies as a woman and uses the women's bathroom.



Sometimes the simple answer is enough in the moment as the community is not there to take away from parental discussions. Perhaps a more in-depth answer could include that some women have different levels hormones and as a result some women have facial hair.

Understanding diverse family questions

Preschool age (3-5) This group understands only simple and concrete answers to questions. For example a 5 year old asks: Why does Sam have two mums?

Answer: They have two mums just like you have a mum and a dad – they have two parents just like you have two parents.

When answering, use their language that the child understands and just answer the specific question. They just need to just understand that different is still normal not a great long explanation.

School age (6-12) Children are beginning to explore and understand who they are.

10 year old: Why does Jay have two dads? How did that happen?

Answer: Maybe they adopted, or they had a donor that helped them have a baby.

10 year olds are not asking for great detail about the making of a baby again that is for the joy of parents to explain to their own children. A simple answer is often enough to allow the child to except difference.

Adolescents (age 13-18, but mainly ages 13-16 who will ask questions or make statements)

13 year old: Why does Jay have two dads?

Answer: Jay has two parents, like many other children and that is possible because they probably had a donor and a surrogate. There is no need to explain this further as the 13 year old will either ask their parents or do their own research and then come back to ask more questions if they are really seeking understanding. In speaking with a parent or youth group leader they may be using the conversation to gauge what your reaction is to their friend's situation. Listening without making any judgements is important for this age group.

Negativity in a Church setting

Preschool age (3-5) This group understands only simple and concrete answers to questions.

5 yr old: My dad says gays are sinners?

Answer: No they are not – sin is when you hurt people, and if they aren't hurting each other.

School age (6-12) Children are beginning to explore and understand who they are.

10 year old: Are gay people sinners?

Answer: No because they love and respect each other and they are not harming each other. God is a God of love, so why would God send people who love each other to hell

Adolescents (age 13-18, but mainly ages 13-16 who will ask questions or make statements)

13 year old: My dad says gays can't marry and they are going to go to hell?

Answer: The God I know would not send anyone to hell for loving someone, in a respectful and equal relationship.

If there are Transgender, Intersex or non-binary children and people have more questions about the journey's or challenges facing children and parents in these situations, seeking further education would be appropriate. Also if anyone is wanting more information to unpack some of the questions with their own children please find the below websites helpful resources.

The Uniting Church is a place that welcomes diversity and welcomes a questioning mind. This one page document is to help people understand some of the differences that congregations may encounter as they meet new people from the LGBTIQ community who are seeking a spiritual place to belong. If we can put aside our fears of the unknown, the difference, we can find ourselves erring on the side of compassion and seeking understanding, rather than simply questioning. May you find moving your congregation from accepting to affirming people from the LGBTIQ community an enriching experience of the whole body of Christ.

<https://www.careforkids.com.au/child-care-articles/article/241/celebrating-diverse-families>

<https://gendercentre.org.au/>

<https://pflagaustralia.org.au/>

<https://resources.beyondblue.org.au/api/prism/document?token=BL/1138>

<https://www.relationships.org.au/>

<https://www.freedom.org.au>

<https://qlife.org.au> Safe place to ask questions

Tori and Rev. Miriam Parker-Lacey, a Rainbow family of four who have journeyed, often painfully, with the Uniting Church as one of its own. The Parker-Laceys are one of the first same gender couples to conceive a child within their relationship in the Uniting Church NSW/ACT, and went on to adopt a second son and have continued to foster over the last decade.

