

GETTING STARTED

CELEBRATING DIFFERENCE
AND CHALLENGING GENDER
STEREOTYPES IN THE EARLY YEARS
FOUNDATION STAGE

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FOREWORD

Over the past decade, Stonewall has worked with thousands of primary and secondary schools across Britain to support them to celebrate difference and tackle homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying. We've seen the incredible impact schools can have when they are very clear that every young person should be included and welcomed, whoever they are.

In recent years, we've been approached by a growing number of early years practitioners asking how they can embrace diversity and inclusion in their settings. The early years are a crucial stage in every child's life, and we know that when children are supported to understand the diversity of the world around them – including lesbian, gay, bi and trans people – this helps prevent prejudice developing further down the line. We also know the importance of celebrating different types of families, including children with lesbian, gay, bi and trans parents or carers. When children learn that difference is something to be celebrated, they can feel proud of the things that make them unique.

More and more early years practitioners are recognising the importance of creating an environment that celebrates difference, and many are taking key steps to make it part of their everyday practice. This guide will draw on this experience to provide practical ideas, prompts and reflections to support you to be inclusive of lesbian, gay, bi and trans people in your setting, whatever your role or experience of diversity and inclusion work.

We hope you find it helpful in supporting your work to ensure that all our children grow up happy, healthy and free to reach their full potential, now and in the future.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ruth Hunt." The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Ruth Hunt

Chief Executive, Stonewall

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1 THE PURPOSE OF THIS GUIDE

The early years are a key time in every child's development.

In these years, children begin to learn about themselves and others. They are influenced by their environment and the adults around them. They learn from everything they see, hear and do. This shapes how they see themselves and others as they grow up.

Every child is different and unique, as is their family. During the foundation years, babies and children's attitudes and dispositions are being shaped by their surroundings, experiences and interactions. They are rapidly developing a sense of self and a sense of others, and are forming assumptions and even prejudices.

All children deserve the chance to thrive, and early years practitioners can play a key role in enabling this. In settings where the things that make each child different are accepted and celebrated, children can be themselves and can, as a result, reach their full potential.

This guide will explain why thinking about lesbian, gay, bi and trans (LGBT) inclusion is important in early years and how this fits easily and naturally into practitioners' existing practice and wider inclusion work. It will show staff how to meet the statutory requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) and is designed to be used by any practitioner working with children aged 0-5, whatever their role, confidence level or knowledge of diversity and inclusion.

WHY DOES INCLUSION MATTER IN EARLY YEARS?

Early years settings have a duty to ensure that every child is included and supported to be themselves.

This includes children who:

- **Grow up in families with single, adoptive, surrogate or same-sex parents, or with grandparents or other extended family members.**
- **Do not conform to gender stereotypes (that is, what is commonly accepted as 'typical' for someone of that gender)**

Settings also have a duty to challenge gender stereotyping and celebrate all diversity, including LGBT people and families, to support every child to understand and embrace difference.

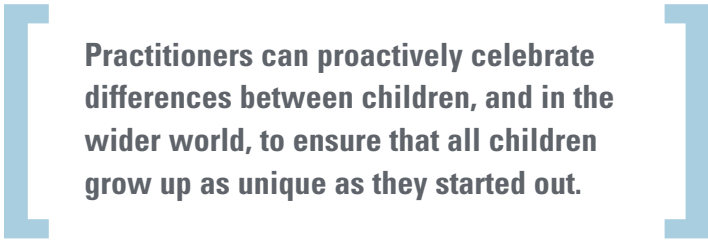
When they don't, the consequences can be significant. There are an estimated 20,000 young people in Britain growing up with same-sex parents, and many more who have LGBT family members or friends. Even at a young age, these children can be asked lots of questions about their families or feel that they must justify or defend them. This can make children feel different to their peers and, as they grow older, make them afraid to tell others about their families.

Research has shown that many pupils who are LGBT, or are perceived to be, face prejudice and bullying. This can have a significant and long-lasting impact on their self-esteem, emotional wellbeing and learning.

Children of all ages are exposed to gender stereotyping regularly in society. It is often assumed that children will like certain things, or behave in certain ways, according to their gender. These expectations can make children afraid to express themselves or access certain activities, which can stop them fulfilling their potential.

Research also shows that young people who don't conform to gender stereotypes are more likely to be bullied at school for being LGBT, regardless of whether they are LGBT or not.

Early years settings have an opportunity to prevent these problems from occurring by ensuring that every child feels welcome and valued from a young age. When all children are supported to embrace and celebrate their own differences, and those of others, every child can grow up feeling good about themselves and go on to reach their full potential.



Practitioners can proactively celebrate differences between children, and in the wider world, to ensure that all children grow up as unique as they started out.

HOW WILL THIS GUIDE HELP?

This guide will provide staff with the tools to create an inclusive setting that meets the legal requirements of the EYFS. It offers ideas on how to start or build on this work, prompts for reflection, case studies for inspiration and tips for overcoming some of the challenges that may be encountered along the way.

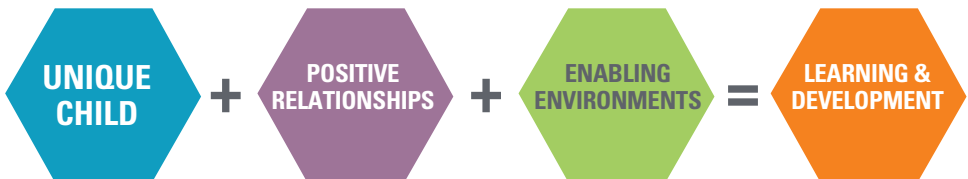
The guide is relevant for all private, voluntary, independent, maintained or academy childcare provision between birth and five years, and includes childminders, preschools, nurseries, school nursery classes and reception classes. Reception classes may also find it useful to refer to Stonewall's *Primary Best Practice Guide*.

2

THE EARLY YEARS FOUNDATION STAGE

Creating an environment that supports all children is a central requirement of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). Fulfilling the requirements of the EYFS means creating an environment that tackles gender stereotyping and celebrates difference, including individual differences and different families.

The EYFS sets out the statutory welfare requirements in the UK and the learning and development requirements in England for children up to five years old. Good early years practice is based on the four underpinning themes of the EYFS:



WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT HOW YOUNG CHILDREN LEARN

In settings where every child's individuality is celebrated and supported; where warm, nurturing and secure relationships are formed; and where children are offered a safe and well-resourced space, meaningful learning will take place.

The Characteristics of Effective Learning, which focus on how children learn rather than what they learn, set children up to be resilient, curious and adventurous learners for life.

A child's brain is only starting to form at birth but develops rapidly by the time they are five. This development is dependent on the influences around them. The connections that are made from birth between the brain's cells shape physical, intellectual, social and emotional development. The more an experience is repeated, the stronger the connection that is made in the brain. Celebrating difference at a time when habits and attitudes are forming helps to prevent children from developing prejudices as they grow up.

3

WHAT THE LAW SAYS

The EYFS isn't the only legal standard that requires early years settings to celebrate difference and tackle gender stereotypes.

This duty is also underpinned by the Equality Act 2010, and is looked at by Ofsted in inspections of all registered early years settings.

EQUALITY ACT 2010

The Equality Act 2010 legally protects people from discrimination in the workplace and in wider society based on several characteristics, including their **sex, sexual orientation** and **gender reassignment**. This means that settings are breaking the law if they discriminate against:

- Children with LGBT family members, including same-sex or trans parents
- Children who don't conform to gender norms
- Children who are trans or who are questioning their gender identity

Under the Public Sector Equality Duty outlined in the Equality Act, public sector early years settings (services provided by local authorities or state schools) are required to actively promote equality of opportunity and eliminate discrimination. It is best practice for private settings to do the same.

Many settings are already taking steps to ensure their provision is inclusive of other protected characteristics, including disability, religion and race. This guide will help practitioners do the same with respect to making LGBT people visible and challenging gender stereotypes.

OFSTED

The Common Inspection Framework sets out how Ofsted inspects registered early years settings in England. It requires early years settings to be fully inclusive:

OFSTED KEY CRITERIA	INSPECTORS WILL EVALUATE THE EXTENT TO WHICH:	OUTSTANDING GRADE DESCRIPTORS:
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Leaders, managers and governors: • Actively promote equality and diversity, tackle poor behaviour towards others, including bullying and discrimination, and narrows any gaps in outcomes between different groups of children. • Actively promote British values	The promotion of equality, diversity and British values is at the heart of the setting's work. <i>British values, as defined by the Department for Education, include mutual respect and tolerance for those with different faiths and beliefs</i>
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Teaching, learning and assessment promote equality of opportunity and recognition of diversity through teaching and learning.	Practitioners provide an exceptional range of resources and activities that reflect and value the diversity of children's experiences. They actively challenge gender, cultural and racial stereotyping and help children gain an understanding of people, families and communities beyond their immediate experience.
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Provision is successfully promoting and supporting children's personal development, so that they are well prepared to respect others and contribute to wider society and life in Britain.	Practitioners give children a wide range of experiences that promote understanding of people, families and communities beyond their own. They teach children the language of feelings and give them opportunities to reflect on their differences.

4

KEY STEPS TO INCLUSION

Creating a fully inclusive setting is more straightforward than staff might think. There may already be good practice in place to ensure children learn about difference. These five simple steps will help any early years provider make sure they are including LGBT people and families in this work:

1

CELEBRATE DIFFERENCE

One of the easiest ways to create a setting where every child can be themselves is to actively celebrate difference. Doing this highlights the diversity of the world beyond children's immediate experiences, which includes LGBT people and families. Staff can support children to understand that everyone is unique and special and that no one should have to worry about the things that make them different.

2

CREATE AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT

Work to celebrate difference and diversity shouldn't just be a 'one off', or a topic that is presented to children. This can be tokenistic and ultimately counterproductive. Nor can staff choose which areas of diversity to make visible or keep invisible. Settings should ensure that all areas of the environment and provision reflect and represent unique children and their families.

3

CHALLENGE GENDER STEREOTYPES

Sending out a clear message to children that there is no such thing as a 'typical boy' or 'typical girl' ensures that every child feels comfortable being themselves and doing things that they enjoy without being limited. When every child is encouraged to follow their interests, whatever their gender, they can reach their full potential.



4

GET TO KNOW CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Finding out about children's families and building strong relationships is crucial in fully supporting all children's wellbeing and development. Celebrating different family structures, including those with LGBT members, ensures all families are represented and feel welcome. It helps all children understand that there are all sorts of families and that every family is special.

5

MAKE IT HAPPEN

Inclusive settings make their vision and values about celebrating difference and diversity clear through every area of policy and provision. Being fully inclusive is a constant work in progress. Settings should regularly reflect on what works well and where changes can be made as part of their ongoing quality improvement work. All staff should be supported to feel confident, understand and identify opportunities to champion inclusion.

The next five chapters will show how practitioners can put these steps into practice.

5 CELEBRATING DIFFERENCE



One of the easiest ways to create a culture free of prejudice, and support children to develop a true sense of self, is to actively celebrate difference.

This helps children to understand that no two people are the same, and in turn makes all children feel happier and more secure.

Children should be supported to celebrate all aspects of themselves, including their likes and dislikes, their physical characteristics, what they are good at, what's important to them and who is in their family. Although there will be similarities, the combination of all these aspects will be unique for every child.

Many staff already know the value of ensuring children explore diversity by learning about different cultures, food, religions, languages and ethnicities in their immediate world and beyond, but opportunities to include LGBT people and families are often missed.

WHY DO WE NEED TO CELEBRATE DIFFERENT FAMILIES?

A child's family is their most important point of reference, particularly in their earliest years. For all children to be fully supported to understand the world around them, they need to be aware that families come in many different forms. This includes families with same-sex parents or LGBT family members.

Celebrating family difference helps children begin to understand the existence of different adult relationships in an age-appropriate way. This is not just important for children from same-sex parent families; talking about different family structures and relationships, and what underpins them – love, respect and care – begins to prepare all children for their own future adult relationships.

Image above:
A display to celebrate difference and encourage a sense of belonging

Understanding that some children have same-sex parents also means that children hear words such as 'gay' used and explained in an appropriate way. The phrases 'that's so gay' or 'you're so gay' (where 'gay' is used to mean something bad) are commonly heard in Britain's schools. Supporting children to understand what the word 'gay' means in an age-appropriate way reduces its use as a derogatory word further down the line.



Image above:
A display celebrating
different families

Same-sex couples have been able to marry in England, Scotland and Wales since 2014, and have been able to form civil partnerships since 2005. Some children's experiences of what relationships and marriage mean have already started to broaden. Settings should ensure that language and provision does too, and there are lots of ways to do this.
(See Chapter 6)

EYFS UNDERSTANDING THE WORLD: PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES

Early Learning Goal: Children talk about past and present events in their own lives and in the lives of family members. They know that other children don't always enjoy the same things, and are sensitive to this. They know about similarities and differences between themselves and others, and among families, communities and traditions.

Celebrating difference: best practice reflections

- Adults talk positively about similarities and differences with children as they play, including family make-up.
- Adults don't make assumptions about children's likes, interests or experiences.
- Children are encouraged to make choices and be independent, which lets them know that their preferences are valued and their efforts are respected.
- Activities exploring what makes us special and unique are planned so that children can celebrate themselves and find out about others.
- All children and families feel genuinely welcome and visibly reflected in the setting.
- Displays show pictures of children's families alongside images of other family types

6

CREATING AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT

The learning environment is often referred to as the ‘third teacher’ in early years education. What children access, see, hear and feel needs to be full of direct and indirect meaningful references to all areas of diversity.

How the physical environment is set up and resourced has a direct impact on the quality of children’s experiences and learning. Providing a wide variety of resources and opportunities enables children to play with what they already know, while exploring beyond their familiar references.

How a setting feels to everyone, including the relationships that are fostered and how everyone is encouraged to behave and interact, determines the **emotional environment**. This needs to be as inclusive as the physical environment.

CONTINUOUS PROVISION

The activities, resources and visual references that are available to children throughout the day are extremely influential and shape children’s understanding of the world around them. Everything on offer should encourage and reflect all areas of diversity equally, as having a small number of resources reflecting different people can make them seem tokenistic. *This includes:*

- **Role play** – Settings should ensure that a variety of dressing up clothes and props are available to all children to give them open-ended opportunities to develop their imagination and make sense of the world around them.
- **Small world characters and props, puppets and persona dolls** – Settings should support children to play with a wide variety of these to give children opportunities to retell stories, and express and develop thoughts and feelings.

- **Displays, photos and images** – Settings should ensure that the displays and images children see include different families and pictures that celebrate children’s uniqueness.
- **Books** – Settings should ensure a variety of books are freely available and shared together with adults spontaneously.

REVIEWING AND CHOOSING BOOKS

Many books for young children reflect a narrow range of diversity, with limited references to difference, especially different families and LGBT people. Many also reinforce stereotypes about what it means to be a boy or a girl, or a man or a woman.

However, there are a growing number of high-quality picture books which celebrate difference, and have characters who don’t conform to gender stereotypes. There are also books which introduce different families to young children. Reading about different families ensures that different adult relationships can be explored in an age-appropriate way in the context of what children already know.

When reviewing current books and choosing new ones, consider:

- **Is there a balance between traditional stories and those that include characters that challenge stereotypes?**
- **Are there books that encourage children to celebrate the things that make them unique?**
- **Are there lots of books that include different families as well as families with a mum and a dad?**
- **Does the book allow children to gain enough insight into the lives, emotions and cultures of others?**
- **Do the dual language books on offer encourage children to celebrate the things that make them unique?**

A list of books that celebrate difference and challenge gender stereotypes can be found at the end of this guide.

Creating an enabling physical environment: best practice reflections

- Children and adults explore areas of the setting and resources together and discuss them, especially when something new is introduced.
- Adults take the time to explain resources and activities that may be unfamiliar to children, and encourage them to access them, so they understand their relevance.
- Photographs and displays are planned in a meaningful way – they are accessible, interactive and interesting to children and their families.
- Adults regularly audit books to ensure a balance of traditional stories and those that challenge stereotypical stories and characters. They take regular opportunities to share these with children and use them to form the basis for adult-led activities and discussions, which challenge assumptions about families and gender.
- Planning for inclusion is embedded in the setting's ongoing observation, assessment and planning cycle.

ADULT-LED ACTIVITIES

Alongside a well thought out and resourced physical environment, adults can plan specific activities for children to think about what makes them, and others, unique and special.

USING BOOKS

Books provide opportunities for adults to explore specific themes with children, either at story time or as part of a planned focus. These discussions can encourage children to think about different families and how everyone is different.

IN PRACTICE: In one early years setting, staff developed a specific resource around the story book *'And Tango Makes Three'*, a true story that focuses on two male penguins who adopt a chick together. The setting created a story sack containing the book and props, so that after listening to the story children could retell and re-enact it. Children were encouraged to discuss the story and to understand that many families are different and some have two dads.

PLANNING ACTIVITIES

To celebrate difference, staff could explore, discuss and display:

*What makes
me special*

*All
about me*

What I like

Being me

*Everyone
is special*

IN PRACTICE: Children in one setting completed a project of work called *'The Wonderful World of Me'*. Every week, a different child was invited to bring in photos and objects which were special to them. They discussed and shared these with the other children.

To celebrate different families, staff could explore, discuss and display:

*Who's in
my Family*

*Who's
special to
me*

*I love my
Family*

*What
makes
a Family*

My Family

Children's families are made up of many different people, far beyond biological parents and relatives. Families come in many different shapes and sizes. When celebrating family difference, it is important to:

- Find out who is special to each child. This could include extended family, friends, foster carers, adopted or same-sex parents. Children may have their own names for these people.
- Encourage children to understand that every family is unique but that what makes a family is the same: **love**.

- Include same-sex couples in discussions about marriage so children learn marriage is not just between men and women.
- Consider all children when planning for Mother's or Father's day. If the setting marks these occasions, ensure children can make more than one card and send them to anyone they choose.

IN PRACTICE: One early years setting stopped marking Mother's and Father's day cards and hosting events like Mother's Monday and Father's Friday. Instead, they made cards for 'someone who is special to us' more regularly than once a year and invited 'special people' in to the setting to share activities. They felt that as there were lots of children in single parent and same-sex families, as well as those looked after by grandparents or extended family members, they didn't want anyone to feel left out or not have someone to invite to an event.

INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE AND INTERACTIONS

There are many specific resources and activities that practitioners can use to support inclusion. However, these alone are not enough.

Practitioners and teachers are the biggest and most influential resource of any early years setting. Adults' attitudes, language and timely interactions during children's play are crucial in creating an emotional environment that teaches children about difference and diversity.

IN PRACTICE: Adults in one setting use terms like '*the grownups*' are outside waiting' at home time rather than blanket statements like '*mummies and daddies*' so that they don't reinforce a message that a child must always have a mum or a dad.

Adults should create opportunities to build on what children already know alongside their play to help them understand the wider world, outside of their familiar reference points. These often provide the most meaningful exchanges of information for children, as they are in the context of what they already know.

IN PRACTICE: A reception class teacher observed children turning the role play area into a wedding. Some children made invitations, others food for the party. Two girls were planning to marry each other and one child said that it must be a boy and a girl. The teacher took the opportunity to explain to the children that two women can get married and that two men can also get married.

Using inclusive language: best practice reflections

- Adults reflect on their everyday language when talking to children and families to ensure it doesn't include assumptions about children's interests or who's in their family.
- When children bring marriage and weddings into their play adults take the opportunity to share that marriage can be between people of the same sex as well.
- Children hear regular references to diversity (including the LGBT community, and same-sex parents) so that diversity is not unusual.
- Adults create regular opportunities to build on what children already know by telling them about the world beyond their immediate experiences during their play.
- Adults include regular incidental examples of different families during conversation and activities – for example, saying '*Sophie and her two daddies went to the 'sh-o-p'*' as an example sentence in a 'letters and sounds' session.

POLICY GUIDANCE

Settings should make their ethos on celebrating all areas of difference and diversity clear and visible through policy, as well as through practice, language and the environment.

While not statutory, it is best practice to have a written equality policy, either as a standalone policy or included within existing policies. Settings are required to demonstrate how they give due regard to and comply with equality and inclusion requirements for all children. A policy will help with this work.

Most policies on inclusion and equality highlight the importance of celebrating diversity, but often are not explicit about what this means and which areas of diversity are included.

Including specific reference to how the setting makes **LGBT people and families visible to children** will make clear the setting's ethos on welcoming everyone and supporting all children to understand all types of diversity.

Settings could include within a policy how they:

- Include all areas of diversity and difference in the local community and the wider world, including family diversity and references to LGBT people.
- Actively challenge gender stereotyping, and how this helps children to be themselves.
- Challenge all discriminatory attitudes, remarks and behaviour including homophobic, biphobic and transphobic language and behaviour.

A written policy will ensure staff feel supported to do this work and can implement this guide into every aspect of daily provision and practice. It will also provide a clear message to all families of the vision and values of the setting.

7

CHALLENGING GENDER STEREOTYPES

Gender stereotyping is a deep-rooted and common problem.

As such, stereotypes can be easily reinforced unintentionally.

The key to challenging gender stereotyping is to take a step back and reflect on practice to identify where they are being compounded. Then, as individuals and as a team, staff should agree and take steps to help break them down.

WHAT IS A STEREOTYPE?

Stereotypes are oversimplified preconceptions about what a person will like or how they will behave, simply because they belong to a particular group.

When it comes to gender, stereotypes are based on an assumption that all boys will be the same and like the same things, and all girls will be the same and like the same things.

These days there is an increasing understanding that gender stereotypes are unhelpful and that there is no such thing as a 'typical' boy or girl. However, they do still exist throughout society and an inclusive setting will proactively challenge them.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

As children become exposed to assumptions of what boys and girls should like and how they should behave, it can make them reluctant to access things they perceive as 'not being for them'. It can also limit their understanding of what is possible for them to do or achieve.

As a simple example, a girl might think that she can't play sport because 'that's not what girls do'.

It's common to hear children saying things like 'you can't play with us because you're a boy' or 'it's pink so it's for girls'. This can prevent children from trying out things they may otherwise enjoy.

EXAMPLES OF COMMON STEREOTYPES:

Boys

- Physically active
- Loud and boisterous
- Like playing with cars and trains
- Unruly
- Like wearing shorts/trousers and t-shirts
- Like playing outside and play-fighting
- Don't like reading or writing

Girls

- Not physically active
- Quiet and polite
- Like playing with dolls
- Responsible and well behaved
- Like wearing dresses and sparkly things
- Like playing in the home corner
- Good at reading and writing

What are the messages that children may pick up from statements like these?



'That's not a very ladylike thing to do.'

'I need a strong boy to help me!'

'She's a proper girly girl.'

'Boys will be boys!'

'He's a real boy, needs to play outside a lot to let off steam.'

'Man up' or 'Come on, big boys don't cry'

'She's a real tomboy, always likes to play with the boys.'

How might it feel for them if they are not conforming to stereotypical behaviours? Do some of these statements imply there is something wrong with being a girl or a boy or that there is a particular way to be girl or a boy?

In early years settings and later in schools, we often reinforce these assumptions by using resources, planning activities and using language that encourages children to conform to these stereotypes.

Further down the line, gender stereotyping can lead young people to think that certain subjects or careers aren't meant for them. Young people who don't conform to a stereotype of what a 'boy is' or 'girl is' are more likely to be bullied at school for being LGBT, whether they are or not.

Restricting children in this way does not allow for rich expression and goes against efforts to celebrate difference and uniqueness.

HOW TO CHALLENGE GENDER STEREOTYPING

Settings that actively encourage all children to play with a variety of resources, to play with different children and to access different experiences, will ensure that they are supported to reach their full potential. Naturally, many of the resources, activities and opportunities that help settings to celebrate difference also challenge gender stereotyping.

Settings should also consider:

THE ENVIRONMENT AND RESOURCES

- Consider whether certain areas of the settings are favoured by one gender in particular. Staff should observe and talk to children about why they like or don't like playing there – it may be that they subconsciously think a space is 'meant for girls' or 'meant for boys'. If so, staff should develop ways to encourage all children to take part in these activities and play in these areas.
- Display images of different people in various job and domestic roles that challenge stereotypes in different areas of the setting – for example, images of boys as nurses in the role play area or girls building in the construction area. This will help prompt all children to play in these areas.
- Have a variety of open-ended resources that are not gender specific – for example loose parts that inspire creativity and excite all children to play with them.
- Ensure books do not reinforce gender stereotyping and use books that actively challenge stereotypes (*see Chapter 6*).
- Ensure dressing up and role play props offer variety and are not limited to costumes that may be aimed specifically at boys or girls.
- Actively encourage all children to access activities and resources that they might not normally consider doing.



LANGUAGE REFLECTIONS AND INTERACTIONS

- Adults should reflect on the things they say that reinforce gender stereotypes and what they could say instead to be neutral and inclusive.
- Adults should sensitively and appropriately challenge stereotypes every time they hear them during children's play. This will support their understanding that everyone can do or like anything, regardless of gender.
- Adults should ensure all children are supported to explore, understand and have their developing emotions validated regardless of gender, through conversations and interactions.

IN PRACTICE: An early years practitioner visiting a nursery was asked by a group of children: "Are you a girl or a boy?". The practitioner asked the children if they were boys or girls, to which they all said they were girls because they had long hair. The practitioner had short hair, which challenged the children's understandings of what girls' hair looked like. The practitioner started a conversation about hairstyles, asking the children why short hair should be only for boys and long hair for girls. More children joined in and offered their own examples of boys and men they knew with long hair, or vice versa, and in the end the children decided it did not really matter which hairstyle you liked.



PLANNING AND ORGANISING ROUTINES AND ACTIVITIES

- Invite adults with jobs not commonly associated with their gender to come in and talk – for example a female police officer or firefighter, or a male cook or nurse.
- Ensure planned activities appeal to children's interests rather than assumptions of what they will enjoy based on gender.
- Plan activities to explore children's similarities and differences, reinforcing that it's OK to be different.
- Ensure games are mixed so that all children have a chance to show how strong, fast or careful and quiet they are.
- Never divide children for activities, routines or 'special jobs' based on their gender.
- Help children explore gender stereotyping in an age-appropriate way. Discuss how they feel when they aren't allowed to join in or play with something because they are a boy or a girl.

IN PRACTICE: A reception class read *'The Sissy Duckling'*: a story about Elmer, a boy duckling who is teased for being a 'sissy' because he is a boy who enjoys putting on puppet shows and baking cookies. The teacher discussed how Elmer was happiest doing what he enjoyed and led a

discussion with children about the importance of being yourself, whatever your gender. After, two girls independently drew pictures showing how much they enjoyed sports that some people think are just for boys.



Challenging gender stereotypes: best practice reflections

- Adults understand the effects on all children if gender stereotyping is left unnoticed or unchallenged.
- Adults reflect on their own assumptions and attitudes about what boys and girls like to do or how they 'typically' behave, and how this may affect the way they plan activities, resource areas or treat different children.
- Inclusive language shows children it's fine for them to behave in a way that makes them feel comfortable, rather than conforming to stereotypical norms.
- Adults ensure they talk about (and to) children in a way that doesn't group them by gender.
- Adults ensure that language about job roles, sport, likes and dislikes are free from assumptions and stereotyping.
- Children are supported to consider gender stereotyping in order to challenge it for themselves.

8

SUPPORTING STAFF TO MAKE IT HAPPEN

Strong leadership will ensure that inclusive values are embedded consistently throughout the setting and that this work is seen as every member of staff's responsibility, whatever their role. To create an inclusive setting, every member of staff needs to be engaged and equipped to celebrate difference and challenge gender stereotypes.

Staff want the best for all children but may lack the confidence, knowledge or skills required to put this work into practice. They might not know why it is important, or about their legal responsibilities. They may worry about whether it is appropriate to talk about LGBT people and how some children's families may react.

Providing clear leadership and training is key to supporting every member of staff to champion inclusion for children and families. It also sends a clear message that it is an environment where all staff, including those who are LGBT, are welcome, supported and able to be themselves at work.

RECRUITMENT AND INDUCTION

To ensure that staff are aware of a setting's inclusive ethos from their very first contact, managers should ensure that all recruitment, interview and induction procedures include references to their commitment to celebrating diversity, challenging gender stereotyping and welcoming every child and their family. To do this, managers can:

- Refer to their inclusive ethos in promotional materials for recruitment.
- Ask applicants questions during interviews, for example: why is it important to celebrate diversity? What impact may it have when different families are visible? Why should gender stereotypes be challenged in early years?

- Include a copy of the setting's inclusion policy in induction packs for new staff which makes clear the legal requirements to celebrate difference and challenge gender stereotypes.

SUPPORTING LGBT MEMBERS OF STAFF

Every member of staff can reach their full potential when they feel welcomed, confident and valued for who they are at work. By actively celebrating difference, settings can send a clear message to LGBT members of staff that they are welcome and can be themselves at work. To ensure that LGBT members of staff feel included and supported, managers can also:

- Ensure their staff policies explicitly prohibit bullying, harassment and discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity. This should be clearly communicated to all staff.

CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Providing all staff with opportunities for development and reflective discussion is crucial for creating an inclusive setting. Doing this will give staff the tools and confidence to celebrate difference and challenge gender stereotyping in their work. Training and reflection will give all staff the opportunity to:

- Discuss the importance of doing this work.
- Consider their own practice and share experiences.
- Plan practical ways to celebrate difference and challenge gender stereotyping as a setting and within their own interactions with children and families.
- Discuss any questions or concerns they may have.

Training can be tailored to the setting's needs and delivered by a senior member of staff or an external organisation (such as a local authority or training provider). It can be held during routine staff meetings, dedicated twilight sessions or on INSET days.

STAFF TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT – DOING THIS IN PRACTICE

Sharing information and discussing it with staff will help them to understand and reflect on the importance of inclusive practice and how to ensure its success. Staff can be supported to:

- Understand how this work is in line with the EYFS and Ofsted requirements. (Chapters 2 and 3)
- Understand their legal responsibilities. (Chapters 2 and 3)
- Understand why it is important to celebrate different families, regardless of which families use the setting. (Chapter 5)
- Understand what different families could look like, including families with single parents, adoptive parents, foster carers and same-sex parents. (Chapter 5)
- Discuss how the environment can be resourced and organised to celebrate difference. (Chapter 6)
- Consider how activities and experiences can be planned to celebrate children's uniqueness and differences, as well as family difference. (Chapter 6)
- Explore how adults' language reinforces assumptions about families and gender stereotyping. (Chapter 6)
- Explore where there may be deep-rooted gender stereotyping, why it is important to challenge and how this can be done. (Chapter 7)
- Discuss how the setting ensures it is welcoming to all children and families, including those with LGBT members. (Chapter 9)

Exploring scenarios will enable staff to reflect on how to make the most of spontaneous opportunities and best support their children's understanding of difference. Scenarios settings can explore include:

- How to respond when a child asks why another has two mums. (Chapters 5 and 6)
- How to respond when a child says 'why does he have long hair when he's a boy'. (Chapter 7)
- How to respond to parents' questions about your work to celebrate difference. (Chapter 9)

Supporting staff to make it happen: best practice reflections

- The setting has a clear vision and set of values about inclusion that are shared with all staff and volunteers.
- Leaders and managers model and plan for LGBT inclusion so that all staff develop an understanding of collective responsibility.
- Training on LGBT inclusion is built into regular professional development opportunities for all staff, and is monitored.
- Effective supervision provides an opportunity for staff to reflect on their understanding of LGBT inclusion and their confidence in doing this work.
- Staff have an awareness that choosing to make certain areas of diversity 'visible' and others 'invisible' is discriminatory practice.

9 GETTING TO KNOW CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Forming strong partnerships with all families is crucial in providing the best support for them, and for their children's learning and development. Engaging families in work that celebrates difference and challenges stereotypes is also essential to ensuring its success.

THE ROLE OF THE KEY PERSON

The key person approach ensures that children can form a secure attachment with an adult in the absence of their significant family members. The key person is a crucial 'bridge' between home and the setting and as such becomes a very significant person for the whole family in fully supporting the child's wellbeing and development.

From a family's first contact with a setting they can begin to form strong and trusting partnerships. This provides an opportunity to send out a clear message about the setting's inclusive approach.

To do this, staff should consider how they:

1 GET TO KNOW CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES

- Establish thorough 'getting to know you' procedures, including a home visit where possible. This gives staff the opportunity to find out about children's likes, interests and needs, and make families feel valued.
- Foster a trusting relationship, which actively encourages families to share information about themselves.
- Plan settling-in sessions for everyone to get to know each other in order to help meaningful relationships develop.
- Ensure '*All About Me*' activities do not assume that every child has a mum and a dad and include plenty of space for children and families to share the information important to them – for example, children could be encouraged to draw '*who's in my family*' instead of '*my mummy*' or '*my daddy*'.

(continued overpage)

- Ensure paperwork lets families explain who they are rather than tick generic boxes. Many families will be excluded by forms that have ‘mother’s name and father’s name’ written on them.

IN PRACTICE: A setting revised their registration forms so that they no longer said ‘mother’s name’ and ‘father’s name’. Other paperwork from the setting was also changed so that there was space for families to write about: *‘Things you should know about my family’*, which now captures information like: *‘I see my daddy on Sundays’* or *‘I live at home with my daddy and granny.’*

2 AVOID MAKING ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT FAMILIES

To ensure all families feel welcome, staff should avoid making assumptions about:

- The make-up of a child’s family: children live with relatives, foster carers, adoptive parents, single parents as well as in same-sex families.
- Whether a child’s parent has a partner and the gender of their partner.

3 MAKE EVERYONE FEEL WELCOME

All families want their children’s lives reflected in the environment. Making everyone feel welcome helps build genuine relationships. Settings can:

- Reflect on what it feels like for a child in a same-sex family, a foster family or a child being cared for by extended family, and then take action. When they enter the setting, they should be able to see their family make-up reflected in the environment.
- Display photos of every family in the setting as well as images of other families not represented by the current group of children (**see Chapter 6**).
- Encourage all families to stay and play regularly.
- Invite families to be part of all aspects of the setting, including volunteering, fundraising and celebration events.

- Display Stonewall's '*Different Families, Same Love*' poster or a picture of the rainbow flag to send out a clear message that LGBT people and families are welcome. These also act as discussion prompts for children.
- Encourage adults to demonstrate positive and respectful interactions when talking about different families.

4 COMMUNICATE THE SETTING'S APPROACH TO INCLUSION

Sending out a clear message to families about the setting's commitment to celebrating difference lets them know that everyone is welcome. It also helps families to consider the importance of this work and their own role in contributing to it. To support this, settings can:

- Give families a copy of the setting's policy on inclusion and diversity (**see Chapter 6**) and include information in any induction materials or prospectus.
- Provide opportunities to explain the setting's approach to inclusion and the importance of doing this work.
- Share with families the things children have been doing around inclusion (as with other topics) and the objectives of the activities (**see Chapters 6 & 7**).

Sample letter for families:

As part of our ongoing work to celebrate diversity and difference, we will be learning about different families.

We will be encouraging every child to talk about their family and what makes it special. We would like to celebrate all families and ensure everyone's family is included, whether they have one parent, two parents, carers, same-sex parents, siblings, pets, grandparents and more. Please encourage your child to think about what makes their family special, and if they would like to, bring in a photo we could display in school.

Engaging families as partners in inclusion work has a powerful reinforcing effect in supporting every child to be themselves.

CONVERSATIONS WITH FAMILIES

Maintaining an open dialogue with families is key to engaging them in work to celebrate difference and challenge gender stereotypes.

Being clear and open is particularly important when a family asks questions or raises concerns about work on inclusion. Some families might feel uncomfortable about challenging gender stereotypes: for example, a boy's family might ask why their son is encouraged to play with dolls and 'girls' things. Others may not think it is appropriate for children to be learning about LGBT people at a young age.

Whatever concerns are raised, it is important to reassure families and help them to understand why inclusion is vital to supporting every child's learning and development. Some staff may need to be reassured in order to feel more confident too.

The following principles can act as a guide:

1. Listen to concerns and find common ground: By listening carefully to families' concerns, staff can find common ground. For example, many families will share values of respect and being kind to one another. Staff can explain that work to celebrate difference and challenge stereotypes forms part of this.

2. Remind families that this work is about making everyone feel included and celebrating all types of difference: Reassuring families that this work is about supporting every child to be themselves, helping them develop inclusive attitudes and ensuring no one is left out, whoever they are, can help families understand why it is important.

3. Make families aware of the legal obligation to do this work: Many people will not know about settings' legal responsibilities around inclusion. By referring to the EYFS and the requirements of Ofsted and the Equality Act (see Chapters 2 & 3), staff can help families understand this.

4. Be clear about what is involved in the work to celebrate difference and challenge stereotypes: Many fears will be based on a lack of understanding of what is involved and how the setting will share information with children. Making it clear what the setting does, and why, will dispel any myths and provide reassurance.

5. Be firm and professional: Adopting a clear, firm and professional stance about why this work is important sends out a strong message that fully inclusive practice is a necessity and means making all diversity visible. It is OK to take time to respond to a query or concern rather than answer on the spot.



I don't like my son wearing a dress.

Staff can:

- Let them know the setting is a space which encourages all children to play with what they enjoy.
- Reassure them that there is nothing wrong or unusual about their son trying on a dress; it is something that plenty of other children do and it is helping him to develop his imagination.
- Communicate a shared sense of wellbeing for the child, reassuring them that children grow up happier and feeling more comfortable with themselves when they are free to express themselves.
- Reassure them that they are welcome to discuss their concerns further at any point.



I feel uncomfortable about the 'Different Families' poster you have put up. Don't you think children are too young to learn about being LGBT?

Staff can:

- Let them know that supporting children to develop inclusive attitudes towards all different types of families, including families with same-sex parents and families with a trans parent, will help prevent prejudice, including bullying, as children grow up.
- Remind them that families with LGBT parents are part of British life, like any other family, and that settings have a legal duty to celebrate differences between people, including LGBT people.

- Remind them that work about celebrating difference, including LGBT people, won't 'make' a child LGBT. It's all about ensuring no-one is made to feel excluded or that there is something wrong with them or their family.
- Reassure them that all work to celebrate different families and make LGBT people visible is age-appropriate.



My child doesn't conform to gender stereotypes. How should I support them? I've heard about trans children, does this mean they could be trans?

Staff can:

- Let them know that the key to supporting any child is to celebrate the things that make them different and encourage them to do what they enjoy, without any judgement. When adults create a loving, supportive environment where their child feels valued and understood, a child can reach their full potential.
- Explain that one of the things children explore at a young age is gender: some children, for example, like dressing up and might explore being a 'boy' or a 'girl' during role play. Highlight that challenging stereotypes alone shouldn't be taken as an indication that a child is questioning their gender identity.
- Explain that, by contrast, a small minority of young people will truly and strongly feel that they are a different gender than the sex they were assigned at birth. If a child consistently, persistently and insistentlly identifies as a different gender to the sex they were assigned at birth, they can be directed to support (see below).
- Let them know that it is important not to make assumptions or jump to conclusions about a young child's gender identity. This is because labelling young children may prevent them from exploring who they are.

When a child and their family does need support, professional guidance is always beneficial to explore the best way forward for them as individuals. For more information, visit: www.gids.nhs.uk

Getting to know children and families: best practice reflections

- Settling in procedures are well planned so that adults fully support children and their families as they start at the setting.
- Adults understand the value of genuine partnership with families, ensuring time and space to get to know and learn from each other.
- Every family knows who their child's key person is and understands why this is important in supporting their child's wellbeing, learning and development.
- All families feel equally valued, welcomed and listened to, and feel secure in their relationship with the setting's staff.
- Adults take time to find out about their local communities. This ensures staff can meet the needs of all the families in their setting and celebrate the diversity of their local communities.
- There is clear guidance from leadership and management team about the setting's ethos on inclusion. All staff are supported to feel confident when answering questions or facing challenges about inclusion.

10

TOP TEN RECOMMENDATIONS

1

ACKNOWLEDGE AND IDENTIFY THE NEED

All staff should understand the need for making different families 'visible', ensuring all children learn about the diversity of the world around them in an age appropriate way. This is key to preventing prejudice as they grow older.

2

LEAD FROM THE TOP

This work doesn't succeed if it's just the responsibility of one individual. Staff doing this work need to know that this is a priority of the leadership team. It is the leadership team's responsibility to ensure staff have the training and support necessary to feel confident with this area of inclusion.

3

BE CLEAR ON THE LAW

Staff must understand their shared responsibility in making sure that children from all backgrounds feel included and valued. The EYFS and Ofsted provide strong justification and statutory guidance for doing this work. Staff should share this with families too.

4

COMMUNICATE CLEARLY TO FAMILIES AND NEW STAFF

Clear references within existing policies or a specific inclusion policy will ensure all members of the setting's community are clear on the ethos. New families, as well as new staff, will know the setting's approach from the start of their relationship with the setting.

5

ENGAGE ALL FAMILIES

The best outcomes for all children will only occur when families are genuinely encouraged to be part of their children's development. Being transparent about celebrating difference and diversity means that families are more likely to respond positively. Strong partnerships will help if they do face resistance.

6 GET TO KNOW EACH CHILD

Warm and consistent relationships between babies, young children and their key person ensures that their emotional wellbeing is nurtured and developed, and that they are known as individuals. Their developing interests and preferences are considered, extended and supported.

7 EXPLORE THE IMPACT OF GENDER STEREOTYPING

Staff need to be supported to understand how deeply ingrained gender stereotyping can be within their attitudes, interactions, language and provision, as well as its limiting effects on children. This needs to be explored to provide effective challenge and to enable all children to reach their full potential.

8 ENCOURAGE CHILDREN TO BE THEMSELVES

Settings should provide a range of experiences that celebrate difference to encourage children to develop a positive sense of self as well as a positive sense of others. This creates a culture where children can fully be themselves.

9 PROVIDE AN INCLUSIVE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

Spaces should be planned to ensure visible, genuine and meaningful references and resources, which depict all areas of diversity. This includes different families and gender diversity rather than tokenistic and occasional references. All children need to be supported to access all experiences and activities.

10 CREATE AN INCLUSIVE EMOTIONAL ENVIRONMENT

All staff should consider the use of everyday language with children and families. This includes not making assumptions that every family has a mum and dad, and also ensuring that gender stereotypes aren't emphasised.

11

GLOSSARY AND RESOURCES

The terms **lesbian**, **gay** and **bi** describe someone's **sexual orientation** (who someone is attracted to).

A **lesbian** is a woman who is attracted to other women.

Gay refers to a man who is attracted towards other men. It is also a general term for lesbian and gay sexuality – for instance some women defined themselves as gay rather than lesbian.

A person is **bi (bisexual)** if they are attracted to more than one gender.

We are all assigned a sex at birth (male or female), but our **gender identity** is our internal sense of gender. Our gender identity may, or may not, sit comfortably with the sex we are assigned at birth.

Trans is a word that describes people whose gender is not the same as, or does not sit comfortably with, the sex they were assigned at birth.

Homophobia is the fear or dislike of someone who identifies as lesbian or gay.

Biphobia is the fear or dislike of someone who identifies as bi.

Transphobia is the fear or dislike of someone who identifies as trans.



MATERIALS

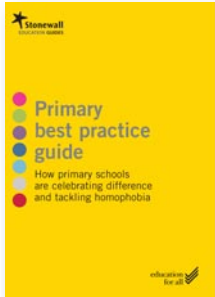
Different Families posters, stickers, postcards and Mothers' and Fathers' day cards

GUIDES

While written with primary school settings in mind, much of the information in these guides is applicable in early years settings.



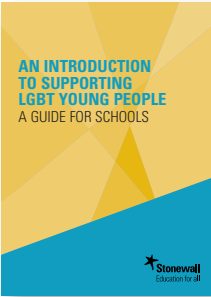
Working with faith communities
A guide on how to celebrate difference and tackle homophobic bullying in a religious context.



Primary best practice guide
Best practice and case studies showing how primary schools across Britain are tackling homophobia and celebrating difference.



Including different families
A guide to help staff ensure children of same-sex parents, and parents themselves, feel included in their settings.



Introduction to supporting LGBT young people
A great introduction to supporting LGBT young people.

DVD
Celebrating difference
celebrating difference,
being yourself and
different families.



RESEARCH
Different Families (2010)
Research with the University of
Cambridge into the experiences of
children of same-sex parents



BOOKLIST

CELEBRATING DIVERSITY AND DIFFERENCE

Giraffes Can't Dance **Giles Andreae**
Mister Seahorse **Eric Carle**
Friends **Kathryn Cave**
Something Else **Kathryn Cave**
The Other Ark **Lynley Dodd**
Tyrannosaurus Drip **Julia Donaldson**
Dogs Don't Do Ballet
Anna Kemp and Sara Ogilvie
Colour Me Happy **Roddie Shen and Ben Cort**
It's Okay to Be Different **Todd Parr**

DIFFERENT FAMILIES

Picnic in the Park **Joe Griffiths**
Mommy, Mama, and Me **Lesléa Newman**

Daddy, Papa, and Me
Lesléa Newman Rhythmic
King and King **Stern Nijland and Linda de Haan**
And Tango Makes Three
Justin Richardson and Peter Parnell
Emma and Meesha My Boy: A Two Mom
Story **Kaitlyn Taylor Considine**

CHALLENGING GENDER STEREOTYPES

The Sissy Duckling **Harvey Fierstein**
The Night Pirates
Peter Harris and Deborah Allwright
The Paper Bag Princess **Robert Munsch**
Iggy Peck, Architect
Andrea Beaty and David Roberts
Rosie Revere, Engineer
Andrea Beaty and David Roberts

This is not an exhaustive list, and a growing number of books that challenge gender stereotypes and celebrate difference are published every year.

Staff should ensure the books chosen are relevant for the age and stage of development of the children in their setting.

Thank you

Many of the best practice examples in this guide are taken from the work of several early years settings and staff across the country. Without the contributions from these settings and the excellent work that they have been doing, this guide would not have been possible. Thank you to:

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GET IN TOUCH WITH STONEWALL

Everything we do is based on meeting the needs of early years settings, schools, staff, children and young people. Please do get in touch with us to share your experiences and tell us what you think about our materials.

If you have any questions or would like to speak to Stonewall's education staff please email education@stonewall.org.uk or call Stonewall's education helpline on **020 7593 1881**.

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www.stonewall.org.uk/get-involved/education

www.facebook.com/stonewalluk

Twitter: @stonewalluk

www.youtube.com/user/stonewalluk

GETTING STARTED