

# A guide to supporting our kids through the postal plebiscite

**The Australian Marriage Laws Postal Survey is being conducted to ask Australians whether or not the law should be changed to allow same-sex couples to marry.**

*Diversity contributes to the richness of our society and provides a valid evidence base about ways of knowing ... when early childhood educators respect the diversity of families and communities, they are able to foster children's motivation to learn and reinforce their sense of themselves as competent learners.*

**The Early Years Learning Framework**

## What's the debate about?

The postal plebiscite is about changing the law to give same-sex couples the right to marry. The marriage debate is not about whether LGBTIQ people can or should have children. In Australia, 33% of lesbians and 11% of gay men are parenting children already. In NSW same-sex parents may be registered on their child's birth certificate.

## So what do the kids have to do with this?

When marriage equality was debated in France, Ireland, the US and UK, the children of same-sex couples became the focus of some hurtful statements and campaigns.

**LGBTIQ people already have families.** Marriage equality

This poll has opened up debate in the community. There is much discussion about lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and Intersex (LGBTQI) people, and also their children. Some comments are hurtful to children and their families.

Rainbow Families has created this resource to help educators and early learning staff to support LGBTQI-parented children who are part of your schools and communities.

won't change that. It will, however, give these children the stability of knowing that their parents' relationships have the same recognition as those of their friends' parents.

And it will tell young LGBTIQ people that they are equal; they are loved and respected the same as anyone else.

All children have a right to feel accepted and respected. This is a principle set out in the United Nations' Convention of the Rights of the Child, which emphasises the importance of children developing a connection to culture and community as a means of fostering a strong sense of personal identity and belonging. This idea is reflected in the Early Years Learning Framework and the National Quality Standards.

## The research says our kids are alright

Rainbow families, like many modern families, come in

all shapes and sizes and are formed in many different ways. But the thing we all have in common is that our families are created through love.

Over thirty years of peer-reviewed research into same-sex parented families shows that children from these families do as well as their peers from heterosexual-parented families.

*There are no noticeable differences between children of heterosexual parents and children of homosexual parents, other than discrimination. What we need to do is combat discrimination, so then there are no differences at all.*

**Damien Riggs, associate professor of social science at Flinders University and APS fellow**

# How can I support rainbow families in my school community?



01

**Start early.** Early childhood is a crucial time to instil in children a sense of pride in their family and identity, and an appreciation of diversity. By teaching children the importance of treating others equally and celebrating different families and cultures, educators can have a significant impact on how children's attitudes mature and develop. You are important in nurturing acceptance, harmony and inclusion.

02

**Be inclusive.** Simple things like using inclusive language in school messaging (think "parents and carers" instead of "mum and dad") can go a long way in supporting rainbow families.

03

**Be open.** It's important not to avoid or ignore tricky questions or comments. You can share some of your own experiences to help students engage with the issues. You can encourage empathy by asking children, parents and other educators to consider how they would feel as the subjects of this discussion.

04

**Build respect.** Encourage children to take action to challenge discrimination when they see it. Reinforce the themes of equality, inclusion and respect. Regardless of the debate taking place, all children have an equal right to play, learn, make friends and grow.

05

**Be a role model.** Children learn most from our words and actions so it's important to lead by example.

06

**Celebrate diversity.** Introduce a "Family Wall" where children can share pictures of their family and where diversity is celebrated. Think about the language used at school and how to ensure representation of diverse families in any communication.

07

## **Call out homophobia and transphobia.**

If you hear people making offensive or disparaging comments about LGBTIQ people or their children, call it out, whether it comes from staff, parents or children in the playground. It can be difficult to call people out, but research shows that when we challenge disparaging comments, we support not only the person who was targeted, but the people around them.

08

## **Support children who have experienced discrimination or prejudice.**

Listen to them. Encourage them to talk about how they feel and be positive about their family and identity. Keep the communication lines open. If you feel that a child from a rainbow family may need extra support at this time, chat to the family/carers about how you can work together.

09

**Educate your communities.** Start having conversations with your colleagues, friends, families, and networks about the diverse families you know and why diversity and acceptance are important.

10

**Support rainbow parents.** Refer parents to the Rainbow Families website where they can access support by linking with the many groups around NSW, or access free resources like the "Plebiscite Support Guide". Develop your knowledge about rainbow families here: [rainbowfamilies.com.au](http://rainbowfamilies.com.au)

## **For the community, by the community**

Rainbow Families is a 100% volunteer not for profit organisation, providing a network of support to children and families within the NSW LGBTIQ community. Rainbow Families delivers playgroups, parenting programs, social and cultural events, educational resources and advocacy to support a mission of connecting and empowering LGBTIQ parents and their children. [rainbowfamilies.com.au](http://rainbowfamilies.com.au)