

Talking Points on Gay and Lesbian Parenting¹

Q. *Doesn't lesbian and gay parenting harm children?*

A. No, there is absolutely no empirical evidence for this claim whatsoever. Social science research indicates that lesbian and gay individuals and couples can parent as well as their heterosexual counterparts. Their children are as happy, healthy and emotionally well-adjusted as other children.¹ Psychologist Charlotte Patterson reports that “not a single study has found children of gay or lesbian parents to be disadvantaged in any significant respect relative to children of heterosexual parents.” Children of gay and lesbian parents have good relationships with their peers, although sometimes they are subject to anti-gay harassment.² They are less inclined to hold stereotypical understandings of gender roles and more likely to be tolerant of differences in others.

Q. *But what about adoption—should gays and lesbians be allowed to adopt?*

A. With half a million children in the U.S. foster care system, many of whom bounce from foster home to foster home until they turn 18, it is not in the interest of child welfare to restrict the pool of potential parents on the basis of prejudice against their sexual orientation. The Child Welfare League of America, the nation’s premier child advocacy organization, says that adoption “[a]pplicants should be assessed on the basis of their abilities to successfully parent a child needing family membership and not on their . . . sexual orientation.”³ The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and the North American Council on Adoptable Children also support evaluating gay and lesbian applicants for adoption on the same basis as heterosexual applicants.⁴

Q. *Wouldn't it be best if children were raised by a married man and woman?*

A. Studies show that the lesbians and gay men make just as good parents as their heterosexual counterparts, and that the presence of a married father and mother is not a prerequisite to having a good childhood. Many single parents and same-sex couples provide loving and nurturing homes to their children. Given the huge waiting list for adoptive homes among children in foster care, restricting adoptive parents to heterosexual married couples effectively cheats children out of the chance to grow up in a loving home. This is especially true for older children, as well as children with special needs. Lesbian and gay families are well equipped to provide these children with the stability and nurturing that they need.

¹ Stacey, J., & Biblarz, T. (2001). (How) does the sexual orientation of the parents matter? *American Sociological Review*. 66 (2).

² Patterson, C. J. (1995). *Lesbian and gay parenting: A resource for psychologists*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association. Available at <http://www.apa.org/pi/parent.html>

³ Kreisher, K. (2002, January). Gay adoption. *Children's Voice*. Available at <http://www.cwla.org/articles/cv0201gayadopt.htm>

⁴ American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry. (1999). Policy statement: Gay, lesbian and bisexual parent. Approved June, 1999. Available at <http://www.aacap.org/publications/policy/ps46.htm>; North American Council on Adoptable Children. (2002). Policy statements: Gay and lesbian foster and adoptive parenting. Approved April 14. Available at http://www.nacac.org/about_policystatements.html#gay

Q. *What about pedophilia? Isn't there a significant association between homosexuality and child molestation?*ⁱⁱ

A. Any notion of a link between pedophilia and homosexuality has been definitively refuted by peer-reviewed social science research. A 1998 study in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* noted that 90% of pedophiles are men and that 95% of these individuals are heterosexual.⁵ One researcher explained this statistic by noting, “Gay men desire consensual sexual relations with other adult men. Pedophiles are usually adult men who are sexually attracted to pre-pubescent children. They are rarely sexually attracted to other adults.”⁶ In fact, gay men and lesbians are less likely than heterosexuals to sexually abuse children. Two studies that examined the sexual orientation of convicted child molesters found that less than 1% in one study and 0% in the other were lesbian or gay.⁷

About four in five cases of child sexual abuse reported to child protection authorities involve a girl who is abused. But because the sexual abuse of boys is less likely to be reported, it is estimated that one-quarter to one-third of all sexually abused children are boys, while two-thirds to three-quarters are girls.⁸ Because 90% of child molesters are men, some have argued that “homosexual child abuse” is widespread and that homosexuals abuse children at a rate higher than their proportion of the population.⁹ Such claims are based on the false belief that men who sexually abuse boys are homosexual. In fact, the overwhelming majority of men who sexually abuse children live their lives as heterosexual men. One psychologist reviewed the existing social science literature on the relationship between sexuality and child sexual abuse and found that “a gay man is no more likely than a straight man to perpetrate sexual activity with children.” Further, “cases of perpetration of sexual behavior with a pre-pubescent child by an adult lesbian are virtually nonexistent.”¹⁰

A review of 352 medical records of children evaluated for sexual abuse during a 12-month period at a Denver children’s hospital found that less than 1% had been abused by a gay man or a lesbian. Of 269 adult perpetrators of child abuse identified among the 352 cases of abuse, only two were gay or lesbian. The vast majority of the children in the study (82%) “were suspected of being abused by a man or a woman who was, or had been, in a heterosexual relationship with a relative of the child.” And the review concluded that in this sample, “a child’s risk of being molested by his or her relative’s heterosexual partner is over 100 times greater than [the risk of being molested] by someone who might be identifiable as being homosexual, lesbian, or bisexual.”¹¹

⁵ Holmes, W.C., & Slap, G.B. (1998). Sexual abuse of boys: Definitions, prevalence, correlates, sequelae and management. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 280(21), 1855-1862.

⁶ Stevenson, M.R. (2000). Public policy, homosexuality and the sexual coercion of children. *Journal of Psychology & Human Sexuality*, 12(4), 8.

⁷ Groth, A. N., & Birnbaum, H. J. (1978). Adult sexual orientation and attraction to underage persons. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 7(3), 175–181; Jenny, C., & Roesler, T. A. (1994). Are children at risk for sexual abuse by homosexuals? *Pediatrics*, 94(1), 44.

⁸ Finkelhor, D. (1994). The future of children: Sexual abuse of children. *Journal of Psychology & Human Sexuality*, 4(2), 46–47; Stevenson, M. R. (2000). Public policy, homosexuality and the sexual coercion of children. *Journal of Psychology & Human Sexuality*, 12(4), 8.

⁹ Finkelhor, 1994.

¹⁰ Stevenson, 2000.

¹¹ Jenny & Roesler, 1994.



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ⁱ Source: Cahill, S., Ellen, M., & Tobias, S. (2002). *Family Policy: Issues Affecting Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Families*. New York: The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Policy Institute. Available at http://www.thetaskforce.org/reports_and_research/family_policy

ⁱⁱ Source: Cianciotto, J., & Cahill, S. (2003). *Education Policy: Issues Affecting Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Youth*. New York: The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Policy Institute. Available at http://www.thetaskforce.org/reports_and_research/education_policy