



The At A Glance Series: Who are Allies & How Do They Help?

The Family Equality Council (formerly Family Pride) is the national advocacy organization committed to securing family equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer parents, guardians and allies. Our work consists of strategically linked initiatives—broad in scope, but simple in vision—love, justice, family, equality.

Who is an Ally?

In the fight for family equality, an ally is not the same thing as a friend, although friends often do and should become allies. Allies are people who understand how important it is that all lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) individuals and their families are recognized, respected, protected and celebrated. In order to achieve this, allies must recognize their own heterosexual privilege and work to make the lives of LGBTQ-headed families better.

If a child is bullied at school for having an LGBTQ parent and the school organizes a panel of parents to discuss family diversity issues at the school, an ally would agree to sit on that panel because she or he knows that speaking out as a straight parent broadens the base of support for making the school more inclusive of all types of families.

A *friend* in this situation might say, "You know I love your family, but I just don't feel like it's my place to get involved."

Allies and friends both care, but allies **get involved**.

LGBTQ-Headed Families Need Allies to:

Combat Stereotypes

Prejudice and discrimination stem from misinformation. If people know more about LGBTQ-headed families, who we are, how we are being treated and what support we need to be fully recognized, respected, protected and celebrated, they will be more likely to support pro-family policies and display pro-family attitudes.

> Educate & Speak Up: One of the common misconceptions that family members struggle with when a loved one comes out is the myth that their LGBTQ relative will not be able to have a family. That is simply not true. There are several different ways for LGBTQ people to create and raise a family: donor insemination, adoption, surrogacy, foster care, guardianship, co-parenting and in kinship relationships. LGBTQ people need help to educate people and de-bunk such myths.

Allies have a unique point of view. They have seen the challenges, struggles and hardships that our families work through from a different perspective. One can use that perspective to educate others that loving families come in a vast array of constellations—a single-parented or blended family, families with two moms or families with two dads.

Helping others understand that love, commitment and support are what makes a family and that a diversity of family structures should be recognized, respected, protected and celebrated is important, and those actions are the key to achieving family equality in our lifetime.

> Share our Stories: One of the best ways to combat stereotypes is to share personal stories. Real faces and real names make a real difference. Allies use personal experiences with LGBTQ-headed families or individuals to put a face to the cause – to make our families visible. When allies talk about their weekend, they don't hesitate to include the time they have spent with our families. When they discuss family holidays, allies talk about the diversity of their family and friends.

Unity Builds Strength

Allies can help bring about change with and for LGBTQ families and individuals. Allies can act as a bridge between communities, building common ground through their words and actions. Here are some ways to support LGBTQ-headed families in your community.

Stand Up for LGBTQ-Headed Families

When you hear jokes, comments or remarks that are homophobic or derogatory regarding gender presentation or identity, or if you encounter anti-LGBTQ policies, educate people as to why they are hurtful and discriminatory. Having these conversations helps change hearts and minds and can create new allies.

Vote!

School board members, city councilors, mayors, judges, governors, representatives, senators, presidents—these are all elected officials that particularly affect how LGBTQ parents and their children are treated, supported and protected in our communities. Do some research and tell a friend about a particular candidate's stances on LGBTQ issues. Allies make marriage equality, safe schools legislation and LGBTQ inclusive non-discrimination policies part of their litmus test for selecting their candidates.

Come Out in Support

> **Lead by Example:** You have the power to set a welcoming and inclusive example in:

- **Your Children's Schools** – use our Rainbow Report Card to assess how inclusive your school system is (or isn't) and speak with your school administration about improving policies that affect LGBTQ-headed families.
- **Your Community** – be mindful of language, policies or practices that may exclude some families at community centers, neighborhood associations and in your local faith communities.
- **Your Workplace** – be an ally to your current and future colleagues by ensuring there are anti-discrimination policies in place that include sexual orientation, gender identity, parental status and both maternity and paternity leave, which is not limited to parents who are biologically related to their child/ren. By speaking out in support of these issues and telling our stories, you help bring about valuable change in the way our families are discussed and treated in the workplace.

Invite Our Families & Be Inclusive

Include all families when planning parties, gatherings, events and meetings. Avoid asking questions that include the phrase “mom and dad” and instead opt for the word “parents.” When planning events, try to take that extra step to be more inclusive – offer a book by an LGBTQ author for your book club or organize friends to see a movie about LGBTQ issues from time to time. These small gestures can really show our families that we are welcome and valued as a part of the greater community.

Fundamentally, this fight is about fairness. Thank you for STANDING UP for all loving families by STANDING OUT for us.

To Learn More :: www.familyequality.org

- > **Visit** www.pflag.org (Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays)
- > **Explore** www.straightforequality.org and read their “Straight For Equality in the Workplace” publication to get some ideas on how to be proactive at work
- > **Download** the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation's “Be an Ally & a Friend” Resource Guide from their website at www.glaad.org