

FIRST CONTACT WITH GAY AND LESBIAN PARENTS

FORMS AND LETTERS



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Often, the first contact parents have with schools or other institutions involves forms to fill out. This first contact, even through a form, can leave a positive or negative impression, depending on whether or not the family finds itself recognized in the paperwork to be completed. Parents and guardians who are part of different family types have indicated that they feel frustrated when these forms do not reflect their type of family, even if the Québec Civil Code clearly recognizes homoparental families. But they are not alone. An American study showed that between 30–60% of students in urban schools did not live with their biological parents, but rather with people who had legal guardianship (Hampton, Rak and Mumford, 1997). Different family types are also present in regions.

These families are made up of not only same-sex parents, but also adoptive or foster parents, stepparents, or other family members such as grandparents.

In order to reach all of these families, schools and community organizations should use inclusive, neutral language in their forms and documents. In so doing, institutions send a strong positive message that they are open to family diversity.

Most school forms have a space for the child's "Father" and "Mother." These terms can easily be changed to "Parent/Guardian." Several lines labelled "Parent/Guardian" can be present to accommodate blended families and multi-parent families. Schools can include all parents' names in their directory (with permission, of course).

A second contact with parents and guardians tends to occur during enrollment or during a curriculum evening. In the material distributed to parents, teachers and the principal could include a letter emphasizing that the school welcomes all families. An example of this type of letter is presented on the following page. A small gesture such as this can let all parents and guardians, from all types of families, know that they and their children are part of a welcoming and inclusive environment.



LETTER TO PARENTS

_____ School understands the essential role that all families play in our school, as well as in the community. In today's world, families take on many forms. This diversity must be respected. We welcome all families, be they single-parent families, two-parent families—no matter their sexual orientation—adoptive or foster families, blended families, extended families and children who live with their parents or not. Every one of you can significantly contribute to our school and to the educational experience of your child.

We would like to facilitate your inclusion in our school and we invite you to share any information about the composition of your family (including exact names and addresses) that you feel is necessary, and to share with us any problems or obstacles that may impede your integration into our community. If you would like to meet with us more formally, we would be pleased to set up a communication strategy that would best meet your needs.

We encourage you to attend school events, such as information nights, concerts and other student presentations. We also hope that you will participate in the School Board or the Parent Participation Committee, whether as a parent volunteer or a member of these school groups.





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