



## AAP policy: No relationship between parents' sexual orientation and children's well-being

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A new AAP policy statement supports access for all children to civil marriage rights for their parents or willing, capable foster and adoptive parents, regardless of the parents' sexual orientation.

All children need nurturing relationships with adults, security, and social stability, according to the policy statement, *Promoting the Well-Being of Children Whose Parents Are Gay or Lesbian*, from the AAP Committee on Psychosocial Aspects of Child and Family Health. The statement was early released on March 21 and is published in the April issue of *Pediatrics* (2013; 131:827-830; <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/cgi/doi/10.1542/peds.2013-0376>). It is accompanied by a technical report (2013;131:e1374-1383; <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/cgi/doi/10.1542/peds.2013-0377>).

### Rights of children, responsibilities of parents

Children depend on their parents for guidance, nurturing, protection, support and love. Their resiliency derives from their sense of permanence, security and unconditional attachment. Modern societies have developed the legal and social contract of marriage to ensure the permanent commitment of parents to each other and to their children, and thus to provide social and emotional security and an optimal environment for children to thrive.

Marriage offers many legal rights and responsibilities, including the joint responsibility to care for children and to make decisions (including medical decisions) for them. The former AAP Task Force on the Family pointed out that married couples are physically and emotionally healthier, are less likely to engage in health risk behaviors than are unmarried adults, and have more financial and social resources to nurture and raise children. Families created by gay and lesbian adults are no exception. Nevertheless, children whose parents are gay and lesbian have been subjected to laws, social policies and disapproving attitudes that create legal, social and health-related disparities and challenge the stability of their families as well as their optimal social and psychological development.

### Legal, demographic issues

Because of the value of marriage to society, there are few legal restrictions on who can marry. The only legal limitations to marriage equality for consenting U.S. adults are for adults who are certified as mentally/emotionally incompetent; when marriage would lead to a polygamous relationship; for those who are of minor age; those who are related by blood; or those who are the same gender (in a majority of the states).



Increasing numbers of same-gender couples are raising children today, and the numbers are likely to increase. The 2010 U.S. Census reported that 646,464 households included two adults of the same gender. These couples are raising approximately 115,000 children 18 years and younger and are living in essentially all counties of the United States. When these children are combined with single gay and lesbian parents who are raising children, almost 2 million children are being raised by gay and lesbian parents in the United States.

The policy statement points out that scientific evidence demonstrates that children have similar developmental and emotional needs, and receive similar parenting, whether they are raised by parents of the same or different genders. Extensive research documents that there is no causal relationship between parents' gender or sexual orientation and children's emotional, social and behavioral development. Children's well-being is affected much more by their relationships with their parents, their parents' sense of competence and security, and the presence of social and economic support for the family, than by the gender or sexual orientation of their parents.

Therefore, if two capable parents choose to create a permanent bond by way of civil marriage, it is in the best interests of their child(ren) that legal and social institutions allow and support them to do so, irrespective of their sexual orientation, according to the statement. If two parents are not available to the child, adoption or foster parenting should be available without regard to the sexual orientation of the parent(s).

### Recommendations

The Academy works to ensure that public policies help all parents, regardless of sexual orientation and other characteristics, to build and maintain strong, stable and healthy families that are able to meet the needs of their children. In particular, the AAP supports, without regard to their sexual orientation:

- marriage equality for all capable, consenting couples as a means of guaranteeing all federal and state rights and benefits and long-term security for their children;
- adoption by single parents, co-parents adopting together or a second parent when one already is a legal parent by birth or adoption; and
- foster care placement for eligible children to qualified adults.



*Dr. Perrin is a co-author of the AAP policy statement and technical report.*