

REAL TALK

“Our two-Mum family was given a Father’s Day card”



The strangest experience Mum Jane (she/her) has had since her son Danny was born was with another woman at a children’s centre.

“When I told her my son had two mothers, she was absolutely blown away. She said she’d heard about this before and asked me how it worked with our husband. She’d thought I was saying I had a husband who had multiple wives. I had to explain what being gay was. I couldn’t quite believe we were having this conversation,” she says.

For LGBTQIA couples, there are more options than ever for starting a family. But how are these parents navigating the relationship with their local communities and childcare settings?

Jane is keen to stress her experience at the childcare centre was an extreme example and that in general her family has been made to feel welcome, if at times, very different. She was thrilled when she looked around schools for her son Danny and spotted a Stonewall poster and pictures of gay and trans icons on the walls of the corridors.

“My partner and I both just baulked at the idea that that would happen in a primary school. It actually made us feel a bit emotional, we thought it was quite wonderful,” she tells me.

Similarly, Jules (she/her), who lives in Edinburgh with her wife and three-year-old son, describes her joy when his preschool hosted a whole week of Pride-themed celebrations, asking the children to create a piece of artwork around what they think when they see the rainbow flag.

“One child had written: ‘Leo has a mummy and a mama’, which meant that Leo was able to see another kid acknowledge something related to Pride about his family, which was really a lovely thing.”

However, for the families I spoke with, there have also been challenges along the way. Ruth (she/her), who

lives in London with her partner and two sons aged seven and two, explains that although her overall childcare experiences have been positive, they had a difficult moment when it came to Father’s Day.

“The nursery we sent our first son to suggested that my son make a grandfather’s card instead. But with the second nursery, when we went to pick up my son, we were handed a card our son had made which said, ‘Happy Father’s Day, you are my hero!’ I was a bit gobsmacked to be honest and said, ‘Who’s this for?’ The woman who gave it to us couldn’t really understand why I might have an issue. She just said, ‘It’s for you!’ We complained to the manager though and she was really great about it.”

regular basis. And there’s just no need for it at all. They’re just children and should be treated just as children and then let their identities come to the surface when they’re ready.”

So, what advice would more seasoned rainbow families give to newer parents looking to select a childcare provider which will be the right fit for them?

When investigating childcare for their 14-month-old son, Rowan (she/her) and her wife describe deciding to enter these relationships looking to be as generous and non-suspicious as possible.

“We have a happy, well-adjusted small person, and we didn’t want to go into any space with our armour on, expecting people to think that the fact that we were two women parenting together was a problem.” She suggests allowing people to be curious and to ask questions, as long as they are genuinely interested and not being rude or judgemental, and provided you are comfortable with disclosing what is being asked.

Rowan also highlights the importance of looking at how inclusive all the different year groups at the setting are, not solely the one that your child will be joining. She explains that although the manager for the baby room may be supportive and welcoming, that’s just one individual and when your child moves up to the next stage, the attitude of the whole childcare setting will become more important.

For others, like Sophie (she/her), who has a son with her wife and currently uses a childminder, checking out the setting’s book collection to ensure families like hers are represented is important, as is tapping into her community of other rainbow families to ask them about their experiences.

“Mostly though, I took really kindness,” she says. “That really does go a long way, and covers most things!”

HOW RAINBOW FAMILIES ARE NAVIGATING THE RELATIONSHIP WITH THEIR CHILDCARE PROVIDERS AND COMMUNITIES
WORDS HANNAH MACKENZIE

“When I told her my son had two mothers, she was absolutely blown away”

Ruth is not alone in having some concerns about how inclusivity for rainbow families can be handled by some childcare settings. When Jane visited one school, she was told they host an annual “marriage day” where the children dress up in pretend suits and bridal dresses with no option given to step outside of traditional gender roles. “We just found that very off-putting. That’s a big red flag.”

Meanwhile, Jules is troubled by the day-to-day language used at her son’s preschool, where the children are often referred to as “boys and girls”. “Neither myself or my wife are non-binary,” she tells me. “But we have non-binary friends and I imagine it would be really unhelpful for them and their kids to be having that kind of language reiterated on a



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