

# ***Rainbow Families and School Choice***

Four questions LGBT parents can ask to check if a primary school is safe and warm-hearted for your child

**The modern school play ground:**

**When you don't give back my ball now, I will call my mama's and they will bash your papa's**

*Loesje*

# Four questions for primary schools

Even in a progressive country like the Netherlands, thirty percent of the children in primary schools aged 8-12 experience nasty jokes, impertinent questions, gossiping and social exclusion because they are part of a rainbow family. The levels of bullying and exclusion in a school are closely linked to the way a school deals with these issues. So, it is not a luxury to think carefully about the policies and practices of the current or future school of your child.

In this leaflet we discuss four pillars, which together constitute a good school policy: the school mission, the school environment, the teaching and the student care. We start the discussion of each pillar with the key question you can ask your school and we illustrate the issue with an anecdote we have taken from reality. Each section ends with a few points of attention you can work out in a discussion with your school of choice. We have made a second leaflet with basic information you can hand out to the school, in case the teacher or principal want more information.

You may prefer that others have such discussions with schools. If this is the case, contact your local LGBT organization or GALE to explore if and how this can be arranged.

This leaflet was developed by four University students in the Netherlands on behalf of the Dutch National School Alliance for Sexual Diversity. GALE has translated and published it as part of her policy to identify and share best practices. The students were extremely conscientious in developing this leaflet. They explored all the research on rainbow families, their children and on how to create safer schools. They interviewed rainbow families and school principals and teachers both before the leaflet was written and after a first draft had been developed. This final version has also been reviewed by experts of the Dutch Rainbow Family Association “More Than wanted” and by GALE staff.

We hope this leaflet helps you to make a good school choice for your child or to advocate for a better policy in your current school.

## ***1. How did your school prepare itself for sexual diversity?***

*The children in group 4 (age 8) are asked to make a collage on the class closet doors about different types of families they live in. Rob of course wants to make a collage on his “rainbow family” but there are not enough closet doors for all types and Rob is the only one from a rainbow family. Master Rick says that this type of family is rare, so no matter, Rob can join another group. Rob is upset and does not understand; why can he not make a collage on his family? When the parents of Rob engage in a discussion about this incident with the school, it turns out the school never reflected on sexual diversity or rainbow families or the consequences of ignoring such diversity.*

A good school prepares itself on how to deal with sexual diversity by exploring needs and deficiencies and establishing goals to improve insufficient school practices.

In the school strategy, the following points of attention should be taken into account:

- ✓ The school explores how students and staff feel about sexual diversity. This often is part of a wider exploration of social behavior and sex education needs.
- ✓ The school sets concrete objectives, so everyone knows what the team intends to improve.
- ✓ Enhancing school practices does not happen overnight: the school plans steps to realize the goals by involving the entire staff team, the students and getting support of the parents.

## 2. How does your school work on a safe environment?

*During the daily circle conversation in group 6 (age 10) children discuss their vacations. Mary tells she has been to a camping in France with her two mothers. She gets different reactions from the group. Amina says she finds it "courageous" that Mary told this. But there are also some children who say this is "weird" and "stupid". Miss Clarice supports Mary and engages in a dialogue with the class. Mary feel good about this afterwards. She feels relieved that the teacher and some students support her.*

A good school creates a safe social environment for the children for everybody free to express themselves, where there is no or at least minimal bullying and where teasing is only done when it is certain that the teased person will not feel bad.

To organize such a safe environment, the following points of attention are relevant:

- ✓ There are clear codes for respectful social behavior and tolerance.
- ✓ Children learn both in and outside lessons how to deal with persons who are different than themselves, and with unexpected situations.
- ✓ These codes of behavior are part of a shared and consequent approach of the staff and where possible supported and shared by all parents.

### 3. How does your school teach about sexual diversity?

*In group 6 (age 10), Miss Denise teaches. Anne likes how Miss Denise often uses different examples in lessons. That makes it more clear. Last week, the class had to write a dictated text. They had to write this sentence: "The two fathers of Sandra are going to the supermarket". After the dictation a few children say they think this is a strange sentence. Miss Denise discusses why they think this and gives Anne space to tell about her "rainbow family". Anne feels free to tell she has two mothers and declares: "by giving this example it is more clear".*

A good school integrates attention for sexual diversity in regular lessons in a very natural way. The teachers deal well with surprised or negative reactions on (sexual) diversity.

These points of attention are valuable:

- ✓ Do not limit yourself to stereotyped male/female or heterosexual gender roles. Consider offering examples like "the two mothers of Mary are repairing a bike".
- ✓ In lessons give attention to different genders, races, cultures, religions, sexual orientations and abilities.
- ✓ The school possesses resources on sexual diversity. Think about books, films, theme lessons, posters, games.

## 4. How does your school offer care and support around sexual diversity?

*Ahmed is being raised religiously. When he came home and told about the two mothers of Rose (a girl from his class) his parents reacted shocked and declared that such relations are forbidden by Islam. Now he does not know how to behave towards Rose, he likes her! Ahmed shares his concern with the school counselor Hank. Hank schedules a private conversation with Ahmed. Hank explains how everybody is different and that it feels good to be respected for who you are. This means that Ahmed and his family are religious and can show this, but also that Rosa and her family can be who they are and deserve respect for their family. Now Ahmed understands: "You don't have to agree, but you have to respect it".*

A good school cares for children who need extra attention and care, whether they are victims of bullying and discrimination or whether they themselves feel homophobic or transphobic.

The following points of attention need to be taken into account:

- ✓ The school has a counselor who knows how to support children who are challenged by homophobia or transphobia.
- ✓ The school counselor is available for questions and complaints by (LGBT) parents.
- ✓ The school supports children with developmental issues, like same-sex attraction and gender confusion. Such questions are not treated as irrelevant for primary school children.

## ***And some questions for yourselves to think about ...***

- ✓ What are your own ideas about how a teacher can give proper attention to sexual diversity in lessons? What type of examples would you prefer? How will you deal with different opinions by teachers?
- ✓ How would you like to be introduced as “rainbow” parents to other parents, for example during parent’s evenings?
- ✓ How would you like your home situation to be known with other children?
- ✓ How would you like it when your child is being asked to tell in class about her/his family?
- ✓ Would you be interested to take part in a class discussion to explain how you live as a rainbow family?
- ✓ How can you communicate your expectations to the school, when the school has not thought about sexual diversity or rainbow families before?
- ✓ How should the school celebrate Father’s Day and Mother’s Day, and prevent misunderstandings, awkward questions and comments?
- ✓ How would you like the school to respond when your child is being teased or bullied because of her/his “rainbow family”?



### **Dutch National School Alliance for Sexual Diversity**

This leaflet was originally published by the Dutch National School Alliance for Sexual Diversity. This is a platform of organizations who cooperate on full integration of sexual diversity in all aspects of school policy.

[www.onderwijsalliantie.nl](http://www.onderwijsalliantie.nl) [info@onderwijsalliantie.nl](mailto:info@onderwijsalliantie.nl)



### **Global Alliance for LGBT Education**

GALE, The Global Alliance for LGBT Education, is a worldwide network of educators who cooperate to identify, enhance and share good practices for education about sexual diversity and safer schools. The GALE Foundation, which supports the platform, is based in Amsterdam, The Netherlands. [www.lgbt-education.info](http://www.lgbt-education.info), [info@lgbt-education.info](mailto:info@lgbt-education.info), +31 20 428 8073.

GALE has translated this brochure and edited it for international use. We hope this example can be used in your country by editing it to you specific needs. A Word version of this leaflet is available on request. We only ask in return that we get a copy of your edited version and that we are allowed to publish your version.

Colophon: Lisa Bieleman, Ingeborg van Dijk, Lavinia Langezaal, Nathalie Verheggen, Peter Dankmeijer (2014). *Rainbow Families and School Choice. Four questions LGBT parents can ask to check whether a primary school is safe and warm for your child.* Amsterdam: Dutch National School Alliance for Sexual Diversity & GALE.

Translation: Peter Dankmeijer, Marinus Schouten.