



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

drummond street services respectfully acknowledges the Kulin Nation as Traditional Owners of the land where we deliver our services. We acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders as the first people of Australia. Sovereignty was never ceded, and they remain strong in their connection to land, culture and in resisting colonisation.

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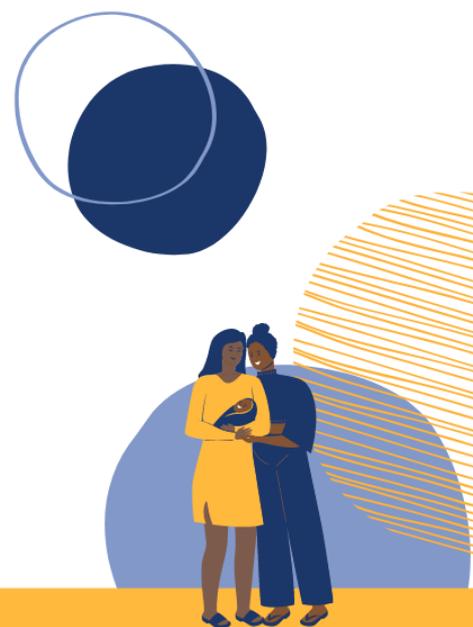
ABOUT THIS RESOURCE

The transition to parenthood is an exciting and demanding time for LGBTIQ+ parents, as it is for all parents. As we adjust to many, varied changes in our day-to-day lives and learn to care for babies or children, we can find ourselves facing surprising challenges and needing to reflect and reassess how to best look after ourselves and our close relationships. Parents who take the time to intentionally consider and actively co-plan for these challenges prior to and in the early stages of parenthood have reported that their reflective processes and shared decision making has built resilience and strengthened their co-parenting relationships.

This resource is one initiative of the LGBTIQ+ Transition to Parenthood Family Violence Prevention Project, led by drummond street's Centre for Family Research and Evaluation and funded by Respect Victoria. The information, tips and suggested activities for parents, co-parents and donors are based on the findings of this action-research project including key insights from the lived experience of other LGBTIQ+ parents. It is designed with key parenting and co-parenting relationships in mind, although is likely of value to single parents also.

This booklet is designed to be used by prospective or new LGBTIQ+ parents as a standalone resource, or to accompany drummond street's New Parents, New Possibilities Parent Seminar. We hope that it will offer families opportunities for reflection and discussion as you move into parenthood.

The booklet begins by highlighting some of the strengths of LGBTIQ+ parented families and concludes with a resource list of services for parents who feel they might need a bit of additional support during this time.



LGBTIQ+ FAMILIES' STRENGTHS & RESILIENCE

In the face of various challenges, the strengths and resilience of LGBTIQ+ parented families are important to highlight. There is so much that could be said!

We know that LGBTIQ+ parents value and actively celebrate the diversity within their families. What we've heard is that a big part of what LGBTIQ+ parents value about their diverse genders, sexualities, relationships and family forms is the ability to challenge social norms.

For many LGBTIQ+ people the creation of family outside of heterosexual expectations provides an opportunity to think about and decide what family and parenting means to them. For a number of parents, these considered and reflective processes allow for the division of roles and responsibilities in parenting relationships to extend beyond gendered social norms. One parent shared:

"It may sound a bit counter intuitive, but because we weren't heavily influenced or directed by the standard heterosexual model, we felt that we had freedom to explore what parenting meant to us and how we would do it. We weren't hooked into a set narrative which we find often couples are. So, I think that was a strength for us because we had that flexibility to explore it." [Cisgender, gay dad]

For other rainbow parents the opportunities for intentional parenthood and closely connected relationships were a silver lining in the long, expensive and emotionally exhausting process of forming their family:

"If you have to work really hard and it takes a really long time to be a parent ... You've just had more conversations. ... I think that time allowed us to really become close and to become connected about how we wanted to parent." [Non-binary, queer parent]

Importantly, chosen families and in many cases the broader LGBTIQ+ community were seen to provide a sense of support and connection for new parents during the transition to parenthood. One parent shared:

“One of the strengths that’s been really important is bringing in that chosen family; they map that queer little bubble around us, because sometimes [people outside the community] don’t get stuff ... Having those people that speak the same language and have a queer understanding of families ... [it’s] really important to keep those relationships going.”
[Non-binary, queer parent]

LGBTIQ+ parents’ resilience in the face of discrimination and society’s lack of understanding about their families can also help to build individual and collective strength. Several LGBTIQ+ parents spoke to the personal skills and resources they have developed in advocating for themselves prior to and after becoming parents:

“[N]ow that he’s four, he’s in kinder, other kids [ask him], ‘Why don’t you have a mum, why don’t you have a mum?’ They just can’t grasp the concept of a child not having a mumma. It has ended up being a strength; ... there’s been some resilience building ... [Trans man, queer parent]”

Although far from an exhaustive list, these ideas represent the key themes which came out of consultations with 26 LGBTIQ+ parents. When embarking on significant life transitions such as creating a new family, it could be helpful for LGBTIQ+ parents and the communities who support them to remember and build on these, as well as other individual and collective strengths.



HAVING PRODUCTIVE CONVERSATIONS

Having important conversations with your parenting team is rewarding and necessary. There are some things you can do to help make them successful.

- **Make a time.** Reflective conversation happens best when everyone is equally prepared, no-one feels ambushed and the conversation is not rushed or interrupted. Make a time with your parenting partner/team when you are likely to have quiet and space, when you are not too tired, cranky or hungry.
- **Set the stage.** Make sure everyone has an idea of what you'd like to chat about so you all have time to think about what you would like to say.
- **Approach.** Come to the conversation with curiosity and respect. This is a great opportunity to connect.
- **Chunk it.** Don't feel like you need to decide everything in a single sitting. It's ok to go away, think, and come back. Attend to one thing at a time.
- **Give everyone a chance to be heard.** Ensure everyone has a chance to speak uninterrupted. If you find yourself becoming too upset or angry, take a break.
- **Check understanding.** Do a summary of the main points at the end of the conversation to check that everyone is on the same page.
- **Revisit.** Make a time to check in with your parenting partner/team every couple of weeks or months. Families grow and change, and needs do too.
- **Get help.** Lots of things might make these conversations difficult. Your own family history, confidence in communicating your needs, relationship dynamics or personal circumstances might make it hard for you to articulate what you want and need, or to come to an understanding. A counsellor or other support may be able to help you navigate these conversations successfully and set you up with strategies for the future.



PARENTING – THE BIG PICTURE

The universal struggles of adjusting to parenthood apply to new LGBTIQ+ parents, as they would any other. For example, learning to care for a child (especially feeding and sleeping), coping with sleep deprivation, the loss of a sense of self and feelings of chaos are challenges for all parents.

In addition, LGBTIQ+ parents often face additional pressures around fitting into a heterosexual and cisgender nuclear family mould.

In order to prepare for this time, you might like to reflect on your priorities, values and goals.

1 What does parenting and/or caring mean to each of us, and as a family?

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2 What do we believe makes families healthy and well?

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3 What are each of our values as parents and as parenting partners?

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You may find it useful to revisit these questions as you move further along your parenting journey.

THE BIGGEST CHANGES



Bringing a baby, child or children into your family is one of the most significant life transitions. It impacts nearly every facet of our lives, and for LGBTIQ+ parents it presents some additional challenges and considerations.

“There is such a common ground between every family ... But then there's this added layer of complexity that, pre-conception, pregnancy, engagement with the health system, and then moving into parenthood that we have, that is completely separate and different to what straight couples experience.” [Cisgender, queer parent]

Parenthood is also well known for being a constantly evolving journey, as we as parents adapt and grow with the children we raise.

It is worth thinking about change, how you've navigated change in the past on your own and in your parenting relationship/s, and what your vision might be for navigating change into the future.

- 1 If you've already brought home a child, what has changed most for you so far? Were you expecting this? How have you navigated it?

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2 If you're waiting to welcome a child into your home, what are some changes you're anticipating? How might you navigate this?

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3 If you know other LGBTIQ+ parents, what are some of the strategies they use that resonate with you?

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You may find it useful to revisit these questions in a few months. It might also be good to reflect on the following:

4 Since bringing a child into your family, has anything changed about your roles in the family and/or home, or your awareness of these changes?

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CONSCIOUS ESTABLISHMENT OF FAMILY

“If you have to work really hard and it takes a really long time to be a parent ... You've just had more conversations. ... I think that time allowed us to really become close and to become connected about how we wanted to parent. And I certainly think now, looking back, that it's been really important that we did go through that process.” [Non-binary, queer parent]



Whilst all families face some challenges during the transition to parenthood, for many LGBTIQ+ parents the long, emotionally demanding and expensive pathways to family formation can add stress to this time. LGBTIQ+ parents have found that the process of thinking through family formation, including lengthy conversations around the social and legal implications of different methods of family formation, can also be a way of strengthening or adding resilience to relationships.

For those who have already formed families, taking the time to reflect on how you are responding to changing demands and pressures on your family can be helpful. Doing so can allow you to make deliberate adjustments where responses are out of step with your values and needs.

- 1 What are some relationship strengths or strategies you have developed through the process of forming your family formation process?

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2 What is an example of a time that you have had to navigate differences of opinion in deciding how to proceed with a choice or an issue within your parenting relationship? What are some of the challenges and tensions that tend to get in the way of healthy, collaborative approaches to reconciling differences?

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3 What was helpful to you in those negotiations? What was not so helpful?

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4 How would you like to respond when differences arise? How can you ensure that everyone's opinions and needs are valued in the process?

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ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES

In the absence of visible role models for healthy relationships that reflect our own identities, and what our relationships look like, it can be challenging to establish our own visions for what family can mean to us. That said, there can be value in creating our own moulds.

“I think, it may sound a bit counter intuitive, but because we weren’t heavily influenced or directed by the standard heterosexual model, we felt that we had freedom to explore what parenting meant to us and how we would do it. We weren’t hooked into a set narrative which we find often couples are.

So, I think that was a strength for us because we had that flexibility to explore it.”

[Cisgender, gay parent]

Regardless of how we identify, we live in a society which normalises certain power structures and promotes roles and responsibilities according to who we are perceived to be. This often means that we receive conscious and unconscious messages to take on prescribed roles and responsibilities that may differ from those we would like for ourselves. During the transition to parenthood, we may unintentionally slip into roles that we never imagined for ourselves. Whilst many LGBTIQ+ parents actively challenge gender roles in parenting and gendered expectations of the division of labour, others have highlighted that it can be easy to ‘fall into’ gendered norms without realising it. It has been highlighted that a traditional division of labour around one parent working and one staying at home can lead to unequal power dynamics within relationships.

It may be worth thinking about what would feel right to you as individuals and as a parenting team, in terms of roles and responsibilities during the transition to parenthood and how these may shift throughout your parenting journey.



The following questions may help you reflect on roles in your relationships:

- 1 What are the strengths you bring to your relationships? What are the strengths of your parenting partner/s?

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- 2 What would you like your role as a parent to look like? What would you like the role of your parenting partner/s to look like?

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- 3 Do you envisage that these roles will change over time? How would you know if you wanted to reassess these roles?

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You may find it useful to revisit these conversations about roles and labour over time, and as your family grows and your needs change.



IT TAKES A VILLAGE

Even when leaving the house feels like a mammoth task, social connection and support is vitally important during the transition to parenthood. Seeking out and fostering connections that make you feel good about yourself, your relationships, and your family are imperative. For many LGBTIQ+ parents the shared experiences, connection and support that is provided by other LGBTIQ+ parents is this main source of social connection.

“I mean, I think we've managed as well as we have, and maybe this is another strength of being LGBTI, by having a really strong network of people around us that we called on a lot!” [Cisgender, queer parent]

It is a good idea to consider some people you may reach out to for practical support if needed, as well as relationships that help you maintain a sense of self, beyond your role as a parent. Identifying your village and putting some supports in place early is a good idea; doing this when you are stressed or sleep deprived can be a lot harder.

The following questions may help you reflect on relationships that are important to you during the transition to parenthood:

- 1 Outside of your parenting partner or romantic/sexual partner/s, who do you have in your life that brings you joy and fulfillment? How can your partner/s and support people assist you in maintaining your connection with these people?

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2 Who makes you feel good about yourself and your new family?

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3 Who can you lean on for practical support if needed?

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4 Are there any new relationships, networks or communities you would like to invest in?

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You may find it useful to share this with your parenting partner/s, including exploring any shared vision for new parenting networks or support.



MONEY & SHARED DECISION MAKING

Power imbalances related to finances should be considered in any relationship, particularly during the transition to parenthood when earning dynamics can change within relationships. Going in with eyes open and being on the same page with your parenting partner/s can be helpful in setting expectations and appropriately responding as a team when things aren't going according to plan.

There is value in having open and honest conversations and practicing shared decision making around finances. Some questions to reflect on and discuss include:

1 How has or how will my income change as a result of becoming a parent?

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2 How has or how will my parenting partner/s income change as a result of becoming a parent?

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3 What strategies do we have for sharing decision making around finances?

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PAST EXPERIENCES

When forming our own families, we are presented with an opportunity to reflect on our experiences of family growing up, and other significant relationships in our lives. These experiences, including more positive and more negative experiences, may impact on your transition to parenthood.

Past relationships and experiences also present an opportunity to learn and grow. There is strength in reflecting on these experiences, making changes if necessary and consciously fostering respectful relationships.

It is important to consider the type of parent and partner you would like to be, in addition to reflecting on the type of home you want your child/ren to grow up in. If you are having trouble making this a reality, it is important to seek help.

Some questions which may support your reflective processes, include:

- 1 What values or experiences from my childhood and past experiences of relationships would I like to share with my growing family?

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- 2 What values or experiences from my childhood and past experiences of relationships would I like to leave behind?

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3 What does a respectful co-parenting relationship look like to me?

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COLLECTIVE & SELF CARE

While you may feel like you have no spare time during the transition to parenthood, as you learn to look after a little person, it is still important to look after yourself and find ways to support your parenting partner/s too.

It is well known that the transition to parenthood is a stressful time for most parents and some strategies are more helpful than others in responding to this stress. Strategies such as connecting with others and communicating how we're doing with loved ones are important to consider.

"I think one of the biggest challenges for us was we'd always been each other's first support, and now that there was something that was coming down on both of us ... we couldn't prop each other [up] as well; so we made it a thing that as soon as one of us wasn't coping, we would bring someone else in as well."

[Cisgender, queer parent]

When we think about staying 'healthy and well' in this section, we are referring to overall wellbeing, including mental and physical health (and whatever else might be important to you).

1 What are some diverse examples of things you do, or would like to do, to help you stay healthy and well?

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2 What are some challenges you can foresee, or that you experience, in prioritising these things?

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3 How can you and your loved ones address those challenges to ensure those things are able to be prioritised?

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4 How might a parenting partner/s, loved one, or friend know when you're struggling or upset? What would be a helpful way for them to respond, or to support you in those moments?

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Know that

- Your family is worth recognition and celebration!
- All families face challenges during the transition to parenthood.
- Even if you worked hard to create your family, you are allowed to be tired, talk about it, and seek support for the challenges.
- Family violence can occur in LGBTIQ+ parented families.

WHEN TO SEEK HELP

If you're concerned about any of the following, it might be worth exploring some options for help:

- You've stopped being able to do what you want or need to for your wellbeing.
- You find yourself cut off, or withdrawing from people.
- You can't talk to anyone about parenting difficulties.
- Your partner makes you feel bad about your identity.
- You feel like you have to walk on eggshells at home.
- You're in new, escalating, or concerning conflict with your partner/s.
- You're feeling overwhelmed by experiences of discrimination.
- You're having trouble sleeping, and it's not about the baby/child.
- You're concerned about your use of drugs or alcohol, or those of a parenting partner/s.
- You're worried all the time.
- Your ways of coping with stress are concerning you.
- You're constantly worrying about being able to pay the bills.

If these apply to you, please reach out to drummond street services on 9663 6733 to discuss how we could provide support, and/or who else might be able to do so. Please also see the Services & Resources listed below for other services which may be of interest.

"I think we're highly reflective and we've experienced a lot of adversity, discrimination and all that stuff that queer families and transgender people experience... I think those experiences build us and build a particular focus on the world."

[Non-binary, queer parent]



TIPS FOR NAVIGATING SERVICES

- Research and seek out services that are inclusive of you and your family – often other LGBTIQ+ parents have suggestions based on past experiences, or there is a resource list to begin with on page 22.
- Consider if you'd like to access specific LGBTIQ+ programs or connect with LGBTIQ+ identified staff, and if so, ask if these are available.
- Remember mainstream services are funded to support you, like anyone else. Some people like accessing support where they know they will not speak to anyone who is connected to LGBTIQ+ community.
- Depending upon the service you are accessing, it may be possible for you to change practitioners if you are uncomfortable with them, or if it's not a good fit. Make sure you ask questions about these options and processes when you're reaching out to the service.
- Know that you are not responsible for educating professionals about your gender, sexuality, relationships or family. You may however want to provide our companion resource for professionals to your service provider.
- If you choose to provide feedback on negative service experiences or opportunities for more inclusive practice, it is important to consider your emotional wellbeing. Consider the best timing, and a format that works for you.



Self-advocacy is a great strength for many LGBTIQ+ people. Providing feedback to improve services and society can also be very tiring, so look after yourself.

SERVICES & RESOURCES

LGBTIQ+ specialist services

- queerspace, drummond street services
9663 6733 | <https://www.queerspace.org.au/>
- Thorne Harbour Health
9865 6700 | <https://thorneharbour.org/>
- Switchboard/QLife
1800 184 527 | <http://www.switchboard.org.au/>
- Northside Clinic General Practice
9485 7700 | www.northsideclinic.net.au
- Equinox Gender Diverse Health Centre
9416 2889 | www.equinox.org.au
- Rainbow Door
1800 729 367 | www.rainbowdoor.org.au

Family violence services & resources

- w|respect, LGBTIQ+ specialist family violence service
1800LGBTIQA | <https://www.withrespect.org.au/>
- SafeSteps, 24 hour family violence crisis service
1800 015 188 | <https://www.safesteps.org.au/>
- Victims of Crime – provides support to men who have experienced family violence
1800 819 817 | www.victimsofcrime.vic.gov.au
- InTouch Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence
1800 755 988 | www.intouch.org.au
- Our Watch – family violence primary prevention resources | www.ourwatch.org.au
- Respect Victoria – family violence primary prevention resources
www.respectvictoria.vic.gov.au
- The NW Network – LGBTIQ+ family violence resources | www.nwnetwork.org
- Intersex Human Rights Australia – Domestic and Family Violence | <https://ihra.org.au/familyviolence/>

Perinatal services

- PANDA, National Perinatal Anxiety & Depression Hotline
1300 726 306 | <https://www.panda.org.au/>

- Ready Steady Family, drummond street services
9663 6733 | <https://ds.org.au/our-services/ready-steady-family/>
- Tweddle – support with sleep, lactation and other challenges
9689 1577 | <https://www.tweddle.org.au/>

Mental health services

- CareinMind free mental health services – accessed through your GP
<https://nwmphn.org.au/health-systems-capacity-building/careinmind/>
- Better Access initiative – accessed through your GP
<https://www1.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/mental-ba-fact-prof>
- drummond street services
9663 6733 | www.ds.org.au

Alcohol and other drug services

- QHealth, Merri Health – specialist LGBTIQ+ AOD service | 1300 637 744
<https://www.merrihealth.org.au/services/young-adults/LGBTIQa-health-alcohol-and-drugs/>
- Cohealth
9448 5521 | www.cohealth.org.au
- StarHealth
9525 1300 | <https://www.starhealth.org.au/>

LGBTIQ+ community resources

- Rainbow Network
www.rainbownetwork.com.au
- Rainbow Families Victoria
www.facebook.com/RainbowFamiliesVictoria/
- Gay Dads Australia
www.gaydadsaustralia.com.au
- Intersex Human Rights Australia
www.ihra.org.au
- Victorian Pride Centre
www.pridecentre.org.au

