



TALKING ABOUT FAMILY DIVERSITY — WHY AND HOW

Ulysse et Alice: A family with two moms?

Resource guide

Ulysse et Alice is a book written in Quebec for children from ages 4 to 8. Through a tender and amusing story, it is intended to help those working with children to deal with the subject of gay parenting in the global context of family diversity. This resource guide which can be used in conjunction with *Ulysse et Alice* will help you to explore this modern-day issue with children and parents. This guide can also be used without the book or with a similar English book.

Why?

Separated families, blended families, multiethnic families, homoparental families—family diversity is a characteristic of our time that cannot be ignored. In schools, daycare, recreation centres, etc., children from different types of families interact. Even if many of them come from traditional family backgrounds, they will eventually come across children of families different from their own.

There are tens of thousands of children living with homosexual parents in Quebec¹. As we know, the identity of young children is closely linked to their families. It is therefore essential that these young people feel that their families

are accepted and respected in society. In order to counteract all forms of prejudice, false beliefs, and hurtful attitudes towards children who live in homoparental families, it is important to educate today's youth about this reality.

Through the transmission of knowledge, schools contribute to the global development of children by helping them to become independent and responsible citizens who are able to adapt to a world that is constantly changing. Schools have an important role to play in addressing family diversity with young children and ensuring that they develop respectful attitudes towards all types of families.



Getting started

First and foremost, it is important to be conscious of your own values and knowledge with regards to family diversity, homoparental families, and homosexuality, in order to communicate suitable information to children. Some may not be sure about what approach to take, while others worry about what questions children or their parents might ask. This resource guide is intended to help you deal with those questions.

Helping... young people to discover and respect difference.

Hearing an adult speak openly and comfortably about difference and diversity is an excellent model for a child. Discussing various family realities teaches children to appreciate difference and that a person can be different from the majority and still be happy. How can we pass on values of acceptance, pride, and respect of self and others to children? We suggest a **learning activity** we call “**The Family Mural**” in the **pink** pages of this guide.

¹ Estimate by Daveluy et al. (2000) based on a social and health survey of the *Institut de la Statistique du Québec*, 1998.



Highlighting... the similarities in diversity.

The book *Ulysse et Alice* does not go into the specifics of homoparental families. Instead, it shows how day-to-day life in various types of families is similar: welcoming a guest, eating breakfast as a family, tidying the house. How can children be helped to understand that the daily life of families is virtually identical everywhere? We suggest a **learning activity** called “**The Diary of the Family**” in the **blue** pages of this guide.

Responding... simply to children’s questions.

Children are naturally curious. Their questions will vary depending on their age and development. It is essential that adults understand the meaning of children’s questions and provide age-appropri-

ate answers. On the **orange** pages of this guide, we provide a list of the most common **questions** children ask, along with **answers** you can adapt to your needs and theirs.

Explaining... to parents and colleagues.

Introducing the subject of same-sex parenting can create fears about the possible reaction of parents or colleagues. How can we respond to fears, criti-

cisms and other reservations? We provide a list of possible questions, comments and responses for adults, in the **green** pages of this guide.

Acting... to encourage appropriate communication.

When they are very young, children sometimes use slurs such as “fag” or “homo” or even “that’s so gay” as an insult, without even understanding what they are saying. Adults should insist that “that isn’t an appropriate way to talk” and initiate a discussion on how words can hurt. The activities suggested in this guide, based on *Ulysse et Alice*, can help you prevent or respond to such incidents, which are too often minimized.



Finding more information.

The resources below will be useful in exploring some of the themes in *Ulysse et Alice*. You can also find numerous books and videos about gay, lesbian, single parent, multiethnic, blended, adoptive and other kinds of families. Information about homophobia and heterosexism can also be found in the resources listed.

Canadian Teachers Federation (CTF)

www.ctf-fce.ca

A number of interesting resources promoting diversity can be found within the CTF's publication catalogue. Amongst these, "Challenging Silence, Challenging Censorship," is a book designed as a professional and practical resource to help educational leaders and policy-makers within K-12 teaching (teachers, administrators, counsellors and teacher librarians), together with public librarians and other community stakeholders, to learn more about how they can take action to challenge and positively change the educational conditions and social climate for LGBT youth and for children from homoparental families.

Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN)

www.glsen.org

A leading American education organization focused on ensuring safe schools for all students. Established in 1990, GLSEN envisions a world in which every child learns to respect and accept all people, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity/expression. The organisation provides an extensive listing of books for children on family diversity and on gay and lesbian issues.

Groupe de recherche et d'intervention sociale (GRIS), Montréal

www.gris.ca

The teaching guide *Démystifier l'homosexualité, ça commence à l'école* is intended to help school personnel instil objective knowledge about homosexuality and to combat the destructive effects of homophobia on young victims, particularly boys. Along with a comprehensive list of community resources, Internet sites, videos, books and films dealing with homosexuality, this teaching guide provides teachers with invaluable insights that enable them to feel more comfortable talking about homosexuality. This document includes a series of learning activities for the elementary and secondary levels, as well as lesson plans on family diversity for younger children. Volunteers are available to carry out activities in elementary (Cycle 3) and secondary schools, in both English and French.

LGBT Family Coalition

www.familleshomoparentales.org • info@familleshomoparentales.org • 514 846-1543

Founded in 1998, this bilingual group of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transsexual (LGBT) parents and parents-to-be encourages community, the sharing of information and resources, as well as family activities. The Coalition was responsible for the book *Ulysse et Alice* as well as this resource and activity guide. A list of books and videos, along with interesting links about LGBT-parent families is available on the web site. The Coalition provides free workshop in english and french, for professionals working in Quebec's schools, to promote diversity and combat homophobia.

Pride Education Network

www.pridenet.ca

A valuable list of resources, videos, books and links regarding lesbian, gay, bisexual and transsexual (LGBT) youth and homophobia in the schools. Pride Education Network (formerly GALE-BC) also has an excellent teaching guide that includes lesson plans for different age groups.

Quebec Human Rights and Youth Rights Commission

www.cdpcj.qc.ca

The Commission has a mission to promote and uphold, by any appropriate measures, the principles enunciated in the Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms. The Commission recently published an important report regarding the issues and needs of the LGBT community, which is especially pertinent to LGBT families. The report is available on the web site. There are also bilingual on-line workshops regarding homophobia in the schools with lesson plans to be used with older children and adolescents.

Ulysse et Alice by Ariane Bertouille. Illustrations by Marie-Claude Favreau.

Les Éditions du Remue-Ménage, Montréal, 2006. ISBN 2-923518-04-07

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Email: info@familleshomoparentales.org — Web site: www.familleshomoparentales.org

HELPING...

young people to discover and respect difference

ACTIVITY

The Family Mural

WHY?

This activity is intended to show the diversity of the different types of families represented in *Ulysse et Alice*.

WHO?

This activity is designed for children from 4 to 8 years of age. Depending on their age, it could be more or less complex and the pedagogical objectives may vary. It can be tied in with the competencies of the Québec Education Program of the Ministry of Education of Québec (see below).

WHERE?

In the preschool, kindergarten, elementary 1 or 2 (Cycle 1) classroom or in a school or community library.

WHAT?

Depending on your group's needs and circumstances.

- 1 Information:** to respond to questions from one or more children, to encourage the integration of a child living in a homoparental or other non-traditional family.
- 2 Awareness:** to make the children aware of diversity in the composition of families, including homoparental families, and to respect those differences.
- 3 Intervention:** to react to unacceptable attitudes regarding a child who lives in a homoparental or other non-traditional family, to counteract misconceptions and hurtful language with regard to homosexuals or homoparental families.

WHEN?

We suggest broaching the subject of homoparental families in an integrated manner. In the book *Ulysse et Alice*, the homoparental family is a family like any other (pages 14 and 15). Reading the book (or others like it) and creating the *Family Mural* can be easily integrated into the context of Family Week, Valentine's Day or any other celebration of family, love, diversity or, simply, human relations within the school.

INSTRUCTIONAL METHOD*

Stage 1: Observation of the reality

At this stage, the children are asked to observe what is happening around them. This is the **beginning of awareness**. Children—even very young children—describe differences using rather coarse generalizations. It is also necessary to pay close attention to the children's comments and discussions in order to reduce the effects of false ideas and not reinforce them.

In *Ulysse et Alice*, apart from the family with same-sex parents, there are several situations that underscore differences in a symbolic manner. For example, the cat Capsule grew up among cows; the mouse Alice and the cat Capsule get along together even though cats and mice are not traditional allies; Alice does not have a high squeaky voice like most mice, but is, instead, a baritone. At the same time, the story stresses the similarities with all other families: they entertain a guest for dinner, they solve problems through discussion, they do their shopping and housekeeping, they play together, etc.

Stage 2: Analysis of the reality

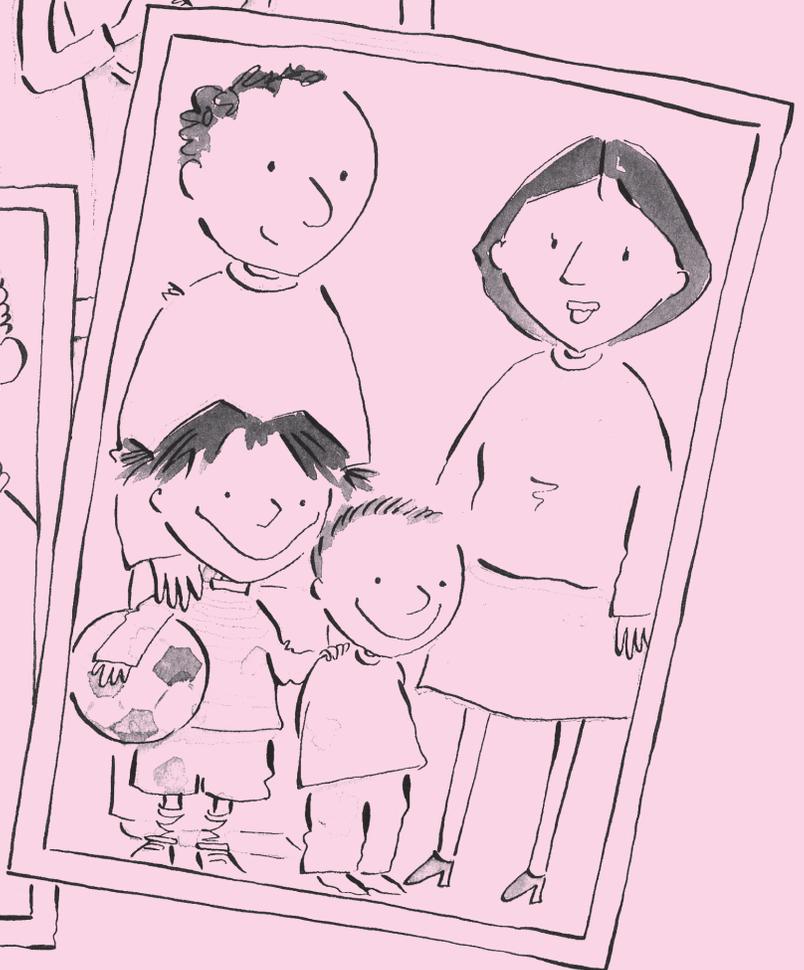
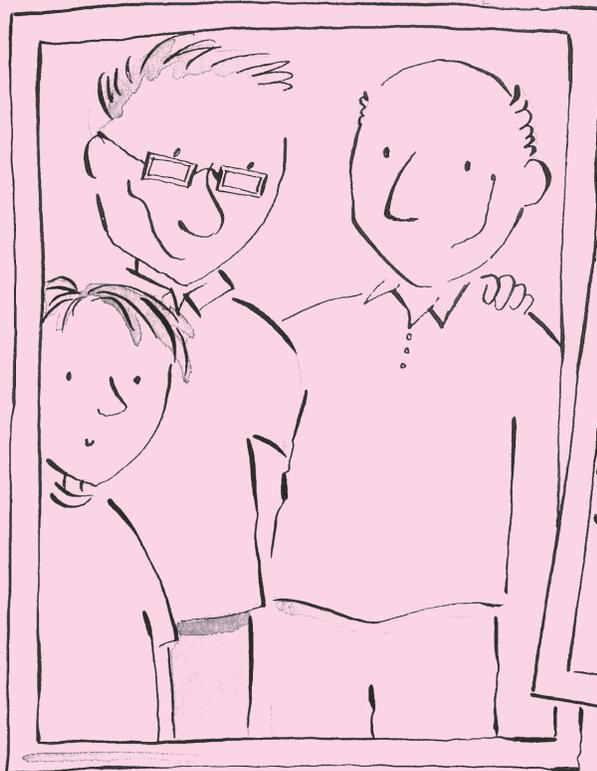
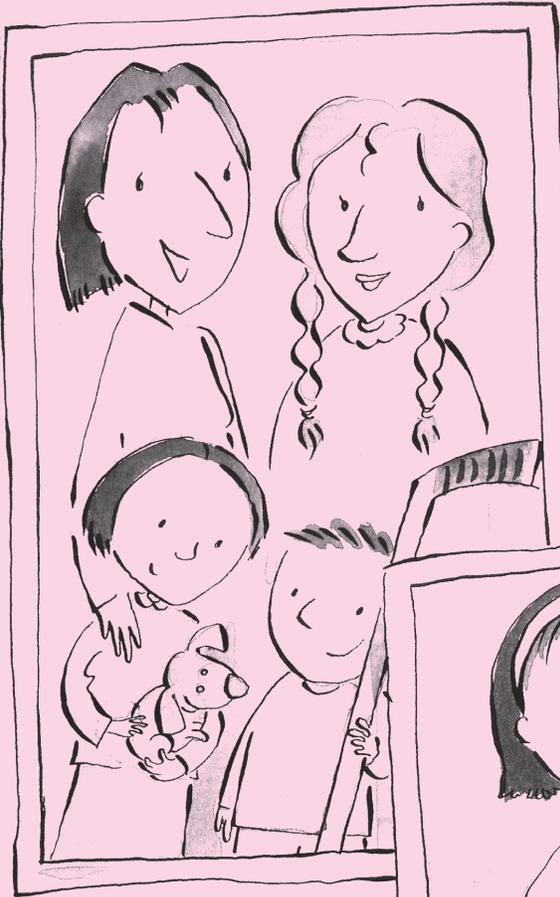
Analysis involves identifying a phenomenon (in this case, the family with same-sex parents) and breaking it up into its essential elements to better understand and explain it. Analyzing is being able to distinguish what belongs to prejudice and what belongs to reality. To do this, the adult must place the child in a **state of awareness** and curiosity.

The proposed activities lead to questioning that can be adapted according to the age of the children. For this period, it is better to discuss one question at a time in a setting conducive to learning and respect. If inappropriate comments are made, adults should intervene and restructure the information to avoid encouraging false and preconceived ideas.

Stage 3: Transformation of the reality

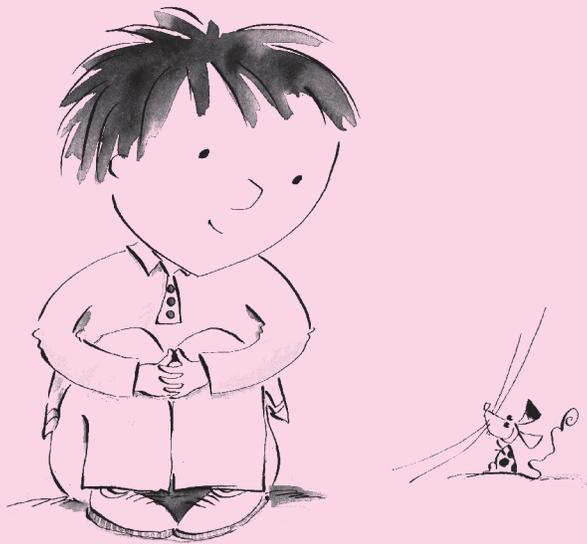
To transform the reality, it is first necessary to **reflect on our ideas and our behaviour**. Children are encouraged to use appropriate behaviour and language towards children living in different family types, including families with same-sex parents. The artistic project created by the children themselves is intended to reinforce and solidify the notion of respect for others, whether or not they are like us.

In the book *Ulysse et Alice*, intentionally, none of the characters are the victims of homophobic attitudes. However, depending on the age and characteristics of the children, the learning activity can generate a commitment to appropriate attitudes and language, that each child agrees to respect.



Links with the Québec Education Program

By adapting the activity to the age of the children, it is possible to tie it in with the Québec Education Program (www.mels.gouv.qc.ca).



AT THE PRESCHOOL LEVEL

Reading of the book *Ulysse et Alice* and the related learning activity fulfil a basic mandate of preschool education: encouraging the total development of the child.

The six competencies of the preschool program are incorporated in these activities:

- 1 to perform sensory-motor actions
(*fine motor skills*)
- 2 to affirm his/her personality
(*questions/answers*)
- 3 to interact harmoniously with others
(*working in groups*)
- 4 to communicate
(*presentation, hurtful language/appropriate language*)
- 5 to construct his/her understanding of the world
(*differences/family diversity*)
- 6 to complete an activity or project
(*creation of an art work in teams*)

AT THE ELEMENTARY LEVEL (CYCLE 1)

Reading the book, the question period and the learning activity can be integrated into the subject being taught: English, citizenship education, arts, moral education. Also, a number of the cross-curricular competencies are touched on by these activities.

• Intellectual competencies

The children learn to exercise their own critical judgement (*competency 3*) in order to recognise their own preconceived ideas and to use creative thinking (*competency 4*) to be receptive to new ideas.

• Methodological competencies

The creation of an artwork in teams requires the child to adopt effective work methods (*competency 5*) to achieve the assigned task.

• Personal and social competencies

Constructing his/her identity (*competency 7*) involves, in particular, helping the child to accept differences and to be open to diversity. These activities are perfectly suited to that objective.

The activity also requires the child to cooperate (*competency 8*) in a team structure and to communicate ideas and questions. Affirmation of the self while respecting others, constructive openness to pluralism and non-violence — all in all, what is being acquired here is how to live harmoniously with others and be open to the world.

• Communication-related competencies

This learning activity requires the student to prepare and transmit a message to the entire group through an artistic creation. The discussion, listening and formulation of questions here will lead the child to a greater mastery of socially appropriate communication (*competency 9*). The theme of hurtful language helps to anchor the concept in the daily reality of the child.

HIGHLIGHTING...

the similarities in diversity

ACTIVITY

The Diary of the Family

WHY?

Through this activity, the similarity of the daily routine of all types of families is highlighted, based on the story *Ulysse et Alice*.

WHO?

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RESPONDING...

simply to children's questions

Educators can use children's natural curiosity as a springboard for teaching about the society in which we live and the acceptance of differences.

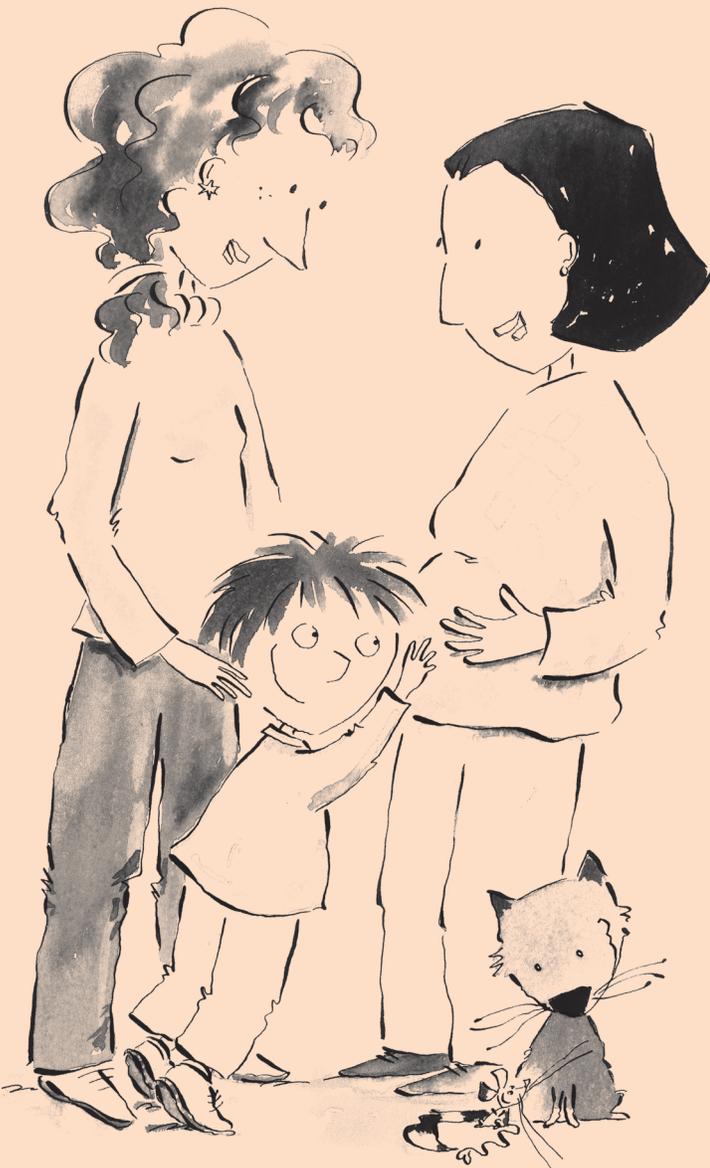
For an adult, talking about family diversity with children and approaching the subject of homoparental families through the book *Ulysse et Alice* (or by other means) is to accept the possibility of questions about how families are formed, about diversity and about sexual orientation.

Children are naturally curious about where babies come from. However, when a young child asks a question about a family with two moms or two dads, he is not really interested in what goes on in their bedroom.

Generally speaking, children are looking for the simplest explanation. Homoparental families can be explained simply as the desire of two men or two women who love each other to have a baby, just like a man and a woman who love each other might want to have a baby.

For the teacher, it is important to identify the level of the child's questioning and to respond at the same level, with clarity and respect.

We have assembled some of the questions asked by 4 to 8 year-olds after they have read *Ulysse et Alice*. We suggest some possible answers, that should, obviously, be adapted to the individual personalities and characteristics of the children in your group.



Questions

Where is Ulysse's daddy?

Ulysse's family is a family with two moms. There is no daddy. Look here (refer them again to pages 14 and 15 of *Ulysse et Alice*), there are all kinds of families: families with a mom and a dad; families with only one parent; families with two moms; families with parents of different origins; families with two dads, etc.

That isn't possible! How can Ulysse have two moms?

Most children have a mom and a dad, but there are all kinds of families. A child whose parents are separated can have two families: one part of the week he or she lives with the mother and the other part of the week with the father, in another house. Some children have only one parent looking after them, whether a father, a mother or, sometimes, a grandmother. Some children have been adopted. Some families have two mothers or two fathers. There are all different kinds of families. We have to respect all of them.

How can two moms have a baby? I thought it took a man and a woman to make a baby!

The passage on the last page of Ulysse et Alice: "And that's how Ulysse's family grew...until next time" may occasionally provoke this question. Some children have a very clear understanding of how babies are conceived; others have only a vague notion. It's up to you to adapt your answers to their level of questioning. We suggest three levels of information you can provide, depending on the age and knowledge of the children.

BASIC LEVEL

Alice also wants to know how you can have two moms. Ulysse explains (pages 14 and 15): "When two people love each other very much, they often want to have a baby. So some children live with a mother and a father. Others live with two mothers or two fathers. Sometimes, children have only one parent, others have adoptive parents. There are all kinds of families that love each other and where everyone feels comfortable." That's how two moms can have a baby.



INTERMEDIATE LEVEL

If two women love each other very much and want to have a baby, they can ask a man to help them make the baby. That's how Ulysse's mother got a new baby.

ADVANCED LEVEL

It's up to you to identify the vocabulary most suitable to the children's age group.

It's true that, to make a baby, you have to have a tiny part of a woman and a tiny part of a man. The woman's part is called an egg and the man's part is called a sperm. When the egg and the sperm come together, a baby begins to grow in the woman's belly.

When two women love each other and want to have a baby, they can ask a man to give them the sperm. That way, he helps them to have a baby.



How does the man give the sperm to the woman?

It's up to you to identify the vocabulary most suitable to the children's age group.

If a man and a woman want to have a baby, the man puts his sperm in the woman's belly where it meets the egg to create a baby. If two women are in love and want a baby, the man gives his sperm to a doctor, and the doctor puts the sperm into the woman's belly, where it meets the egg to create the baby. Then, the baby grows inside the woman's belly.

How can two men have a baby?

If two men want to have a baby, usually they have to adopt a child.

Don't children need both a mommy and a daddy?

The most important thing for children is to have parents who love them, who will take care of them, and who help them to grow up. In some families, it's a mom and a dad. In other families, it's two moms or two dads. Sometimes, it's only one mom or dad. Other times, it's an aunt, uncle or grandmother who takes care of the child. There are all kinds of families. What matters is that the parents love their child and care for him or her.

What does a child call two moms? Does he or she get the names mixed up?

In the book, Ulysse solves the problem by calling one of his mothers Maman and the other Mamo. In other families with two mothers, the children call one mother Mama Nicole and the other Mama Joanne. Any sensible name will do. It really isn't all that complicated!

Isn't it true that only a woman and a man can get married?

A marriage is a special ceremony that some people who love each other choose to have. In Canada, since 2005, as well as in a number of other countries, two men or two women can marry if they want to. But a lot of people who love each other, whether or not they have children, decide not to get married.

Are the words "gay" and "lesbian" bad words?

It's up to you to decide how to present this information depending on the age of the children. You could also ask them if they have ever used these words or heard them used at school. The question can lead to an interesting discussion with the children about hurtful language (words based on ethnic origin, physical appearance, etc.).

The word "gay" means that two men love each other. The word "lesbian" means that two women love each other. "Gay" and "lesbian" are not bad words in themselves, but some people use them as insults. Perfectly good words can be hurtful depending on how we use them. Kids that use words to hurt other kids' feelings are being mean. Such behaviour is unacceptable. We have to respect people no matter who they are or what type of family they are a part of.

My parents say homosexuals are bad. My big brother says it isn't cool to be gay.

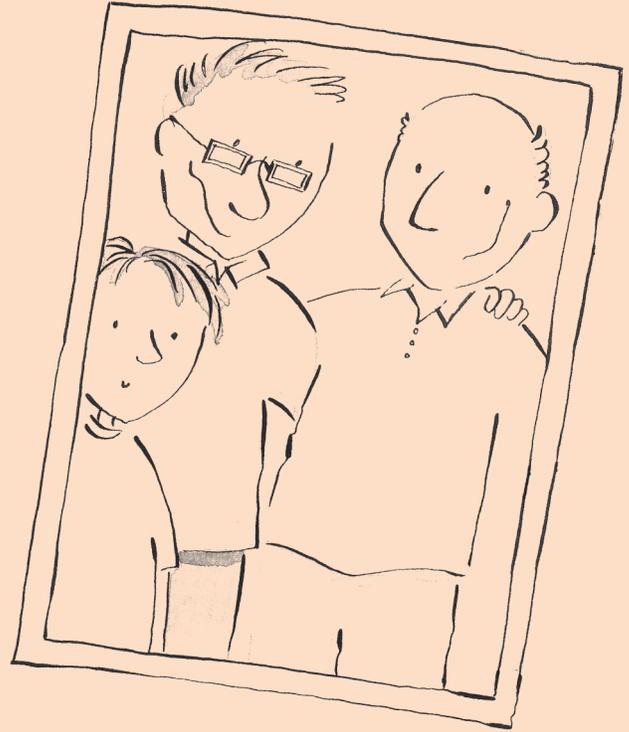
Is that true?

Right from when we are born, we are all different. Some people have dark skin; others have light skin. Some are short while others are tall. Some people are born with a handicap. We can't change who we are.

What's important is to know that it's never okay to judge or be mean to someone because they are different.

A man will sometimes fall in love with another man or a woman can fall in love with another woman. Instead of a man and woman being in love it's a man who loves another man or a woman who loves another woman. It's important for everyone to be who they are and not to hide their true feelings of love.

Whether we're brown or white, short or tall, whether we love a man or a woman, we all have the right to be respected by others. Everyone, whatever his or her differences, deserves respect. Being different doesn't mean "being bad" or "not being cool."



If a child has homosexual parents, does that mean that he or she will grow up to be gay or lesbian?

Kids in families with two moms or two dads are no more likely to be gay than other kids. Being gay is not something you learn from your parents. You either are or you're not. That's the way you are born.

We don't learn how to be gay from other people. Some people are born gay or lesbian, just like some are left-handed and others are right-handed. Some kids with right-handed parents are lefties. It's the same when we talk about being gay. You're either born that way or not, no matter what your parents are.

Won't those kids that have two moms or two dads get teased a lot?

Kids that are different in any way can get teased, so for sure those kids might get teased because their family is a bit different from other families. If you think about it, everyone is different for one reason or another, including you. People have different skin colour, look different from each other, eat different kinds of food and dress differently. Most kids do get teased at one point or another and so, yes, kids with two moms or two dads might get teased sometimes. If people would understand that families with two moms or two dads are just as good as anyone else's then maybe they would get teased less.

EXPLAINING...

to parents and colleagues



In *Ulysse et Alice*, the two mothers are presented as two people in love who decide to have a child just like any other family.

It has nothing to do with sex education. The book and the learning activities in this resource guide are tools to help those working with young people to promote acceptance of differences. This is not, therefore, a course in sexual education.

Talking about family diversity and families with same-sex parents is an appropriate subject for children ages 4-8. School is the ideal place to do it, since schools have a mandate to oversee children's global development. Amongst the fundamental goals is the development of children's understanding of the world in which they live along with their social development to encourage relationships with others that are harmonious and respectful, regardless of individual differences.

The identity of young children is closely linked to their families. Children from homoparental families must see that their particular family reality is recognised and respected in their school in the same way as any other kind of family. Ignoring families with two mothers or two fathers in a presentation of family diversity amounts to denying their existence, and for children living in that situation, denying who they are.

The vast majority of people are open to talking with children about family diversity. Despite that, you will occasionally have to convince them of the importance of your choices and approach. Here are some questions and comments you might encounter, along with suggested responses, to help you deal with any doubts or criticisms. We offer several ways to respond, as well as a variety of arguments. You can select those that are most suitable to the particular situation.

Questions

Why are you using the book *Ulysse et Alice* with children?

Ulysse et Alice is the first book published in Québec for children ages 4 to 8 that tells the story of a family with two mothers. It presents homoparental families as one reality amongst the many kinds of families that exist in our society.

Ulysse et Alice uses an approach adapted to children ages 4 to 8 to introduce the homoparental family. It presents a situation that enables children to observe a particular reality. From its first pages we know that Ulysse has two moms. In the following pages the family does what all other families do. There is nothing in the story or the language used that is either shocking or provocative.

Finally, the learning activities concerning family diversity in this resource relate to broader school objectives. For instance, the activities are linked to the competencies of the Preschool Education Program and the Elementary Education Program of the Ministry of Education of Québec.

How is talking about same-sex parenting part of the school's role?

The role of the school is the global development of the child. Adults who work with youth on a daily basis are well placed to help them achieve their intellectual and social potential. Our school's goal is the education of the whole child, not just the academics. That includes informing them about the realities they confront or will confront, helping them to construct their understanding of the world in which they live, showing them how to communicate appropriately and interact successfully with others. The learning activities based on *Ulysse et Alice* were created with those objectives in mind.

It is important that those responsible for educating children transmit values of openness to difference. From their earliest years, children should develop the values of self-respect and respect for others.

Our institutions reflect the values of our society, which has the welfare of all its children at heart. Schools should provide an environment that welcomes all children, regardless of their ethnic origin, social status, or the sexual orientation of their parents.

The identity of young children is closely linked to their families. Children from homoparental families must see that their particular family reality is recognised and respected in their school in the same way as any other kind of family. Ignoring families with two mothers or two fathers in a presentation of family diversity amounts to denying their existence, and for children living in that situation, denying who they are.



Why are we talking about this?

It doesn't concern us, since we probably don't have any children with homosexual parents here.

Actually, talking about gay issues is pertinent to everyone. There are kids in alternative families, but there are also kids who themselves will become gay or lesbian when they grow up. Furthermore, almost everyone has someone in their families who is gay or lesbian and if not, in their lives they will certainly encounter gays and lesbians, at their work, their neighbours, and their friends.

It is thus essential that the school create an environment open to gays and lesbians by informing children about that social reality. It is never too early to begin the fight against homophobic prejudice.

Through the transmission of knowledge, the school encourages the total development of children by helping them to become independent and responsible citizens, able to adapt to a world of constant change. Consequently, its role includes introducing young children to the idea of family diversity and instilling in them respect for all types of family difference.

Even if children of homoparental families are in the minority, they have the right to feel they are accepted like any other child. Children with two moms or two dads are part of a family that is as valuable as any other. It is important to communicate that basic message to all children.

NOTES

Aren't these children too young to talk about homosexuality?

Today's children have already heard all sorts of things about gays and lesbians. Insults such as "fag," "homo," and "that's so gay," are not uncommon, even in daycare. While children may not always understand the meaning of these or other insults that they might use, they are, nevertheless, fully aware that they can be used to hurt. Even before they begin school, children have accumulated a wealth of information, whether correct or not, about the subject of homosexuality.

The use of such hurtful language should be discouraged as early as possible. It is, in fact, a kind of verbal violence that adults legitimise if they remain silent. No one, nowadays, would accept a child using insults based on ethnic origin. There is universal agreement that children should be taught the value of respect for ethnic difference. Respect for sexual diversity should be no different.

Talking about same-sex parenting, with the right approach, is an extension of those values of respect for difference. Teaching children that family diversity is a reality and that different kinds of families all deserve respect is a concrete way of preventing or combating verbal violence, harassment and physical violence based on the excuse of difference.

Broaching the issue of homoparental families with children ages 4 to 8 is, therefore, entirely appropriate if the adult uses material and language adapted to the children and communicates information by responding at the level of their questioning. It provides an opportunity for children to acquire respect for the many differences that they will certainly encounter throughout their lives and in all areas of society.

Why talk about homosexuality in school?

It is neither appropriate nor necessary. It isn't the place to talk about such things.

Pejorative comments about gays and lesbians are commonly heard in school classrooms and playgrounds. It is a kind of harassment, often the result of ignorance about homosexuality. All children (not just those from homoparental families or those who will later recognise their own homosexuality) are negatively affected by this kind of ignorant comment.

Educational institutions are the most logical place to communicate accurate and pertinent information to children, particularly with regard to family diversity. Schools are the ideal venue for combating all kinds of ignorance and stereotypes, and for refuting the misconceptions and myths that often lead to comments and actions that hurt many children and families.



Are there any authorities that state that this subject should be discussed in schools? How is this part of the school curriculum?

A number of official organisations explicitly state that schools should take action as early as possible to prevent homophobic acts.

Québec's Ministry of Education urges schools, including the pre-school and elementary levels, to develop in children an attitude of openness to the world and respect for diversity. The school should teach children openness with regard to differences, including sexual diversity, as well as self-respect and respect for others. It should play an active role in encouraging the fight against homophobia taking into account the age of the children.

According to the Québec Human Rights and Youth Rights Commission: "it is essential that school boards, administrations and other bodies, associations and professional corporations, parents, along with all personnel working in the education sector provide unconditional support in the fight against homophobia in the schools."

A judgement by the British Columbia Court of Appeals in 2005 concerning a school board, serves as a warning to all school boards in the country, with respect to their responsibility for acts of discrimination and harassment related to the real or perceived homosexuality of a student. According to the Court, it is not sufficient for schools to wait for acts of intimidation to occur in order to take action. Schools must ensure the provision of a preventive anti-homophobic education adapted to their students. The school board in question was condemned to pay substantial damages for having omitted to intervene in order to prevent the homophobic harassment to which one of its students was subjected.

In Québec, there is a consensus that homophobia in schools is a real problem. The real or perceived homosexuality of a student is all too often the source of verbal harassment, and sometimes even physical violence from peers. Early intervention with children is called for to prevent perpetuation of such unacceptable attitudes. Speaking about family diversity is an excellent way to start.

Homosexuality violates my beliefs. Why is the school talking about the subject?

Some adults may justify their reservations about discussing homoparental families in schools based on their personal, moral or religious beliefs.

Some examples: "I don't believe that all kinds of families are equally valuable"; "It's up to me to teach my child values regarding sexuality"; "I am opposed to homosexuality. It is a perversion"; "Homosexuals should not have the right to be parents"; "My religion is opposed to homosexuality"; "You're trying to make my child into a homosexual", etc.

How do you answer people who reject same-sex parenting or to those who fear the reaction of such people?

Since 2002 in Québec, homoparental families have been explicitly recognised in the Civil Code of Québec. The names of two mothers or two fathers are entered on the child's birth certificate; the parents have the same rights and obligations with regard to the child as any heterosexual couple. Similarly, the right of homosexual couples to adopt a child is entrenched in Québec law.

In Québec, this judicial reality recognises the will of a society to respect the sexual orientation of its individuals. Educational institutions must, therefore, transmit this information to all children, whatever objections certain people may have.

The Charter of Rights and Freedoms governing social relationships clearly states that discrimination based on sexual orientation is quite as unacceptable as discrimination based on ethnic origin. The Quebec English School Boards Association (QESBA), the Quebec Professional Association of Teachers (QPAT) and the Commission Scolaire de Montréal (CSDM) all have specific anti-homophobia policies.

Schools and other institutions for children have a responsibility to protect and support the children of homoparental families. They have the vital mission to teach respect for differences to all children. While everyone is entitled to his or her individual beliefs, society, its institutions and the individuals that work in these institutions cannot tolerate intolerance. Social realities, such as same-sex parenting, are recognised in our laws and therefore must be acknowledged. Through silence and inaction we become complicit to intolerance.













It's your
turn to draw
a family!