



Social & Emotional Development / Valuing Diversity

Family Differences



Dear Debi,

I have a 4-year-old child in my care that's being raised by a single dad. The other kids always ask her where her mommy is. How do I let them know that her family isn't the same as theirs?

Jackie, Hayworth, CA

Debi's Tips



Debi Gutierrez

Host

- There's no such thing as the "typical family".
- Partner with parents.
- Help kids understand similarities and differences between families.

Expert Advice



Susan Wood

Director, Children's Center at CalTech

The family that is considered typical – two parents and children – is not the average family in the U. S. Regardless of the configuration, if the family nurtures and supports all family members, it's doing what it's supposed to do.

When child care providers and parents (no matter what the family structure) support each other, everyone benefits, especially children. Forming that partnership between school and home is important for all families. But it's especially important for what society wants to call non-traditional families.

At our center we provide opportunities for families to get together. That gives parents a chance to get to know each other. We use our center as an opportunity for parents to realize that they're not alone, regardless of the make-up of their family structure.

A provider can help children understand the similarities and the differences and appreciate the uniqueness of their family, by displaying materials and books that depict different family structures.

At our center we welcome all families and incorporate their differences into the curriculum. If a child has two moms or two dads, for example, or the child lives in a single parent home, we use their life experience to learn math.

Bottom line is, never judge a family, because it will affect the child later in life.

Child Care provider Comments



Mary

Provider for 10 years

In my 10 years as a provider, I've cared for children from all types of backgrounds. I had a little boy whose father was from Spain and his mother was from Japan. He spoke English, Spanish and Japanese at 3.

I had another boy who had an African American mother and a white father. Other kids I've cared for were being raised by their grandparents or in a single family home.

Children who have two parents don't understand why any other kid would have only one. And if they talk about it without understanding what happened, it can create problems. That's when I jump in and try to explain what a divorce means and get the parents informed so that they get involved too. It is important to explain it and talk about it with everyone, not only the kid whose parents are divorced.



Jo-Ann

Family child care provider for 2 years

There is a girl I care for who is being raised by a single parent, she lives with her mother. My whole theory is to make life as normal as possible for her and not to create differences. If the children have two parents or one parent, I try to be truthful with them and not pretend. I explain to them that families are different, that some have a mom and a dad, others just a mom, or even two moms or two dads.

I teach them not just to accept the children who are different from them, but also to be compassionate toward the children who are less fortunate.

Parent Comments



Angi

Mother of two children

I'm from a same sex couple. We have two children, Cooper and Eleanor. Cooper's 4 and Eleanor's 3.

Our biggest challenge is to raise our kids in an accepting environment. By building strength of character and sense of self, we hope that other people's questions and doubts won't bother our kids. We are honest with them all the time and never shield them from the truth, from the fact that their family is different.

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