



Mother's Day and Father's Day

Mother's Day and Father's Day present some challenges for rainbow families. Almost all schools, childcare centres and kinders have events or activities around these days and they are often important fundraisers. They can be a difficult time for rainbow family kids, and other children who don't have a mother or a father.

Many places – but certainly not all – include *Special Person* in the title of their day to ensure that children are not entirely excluded from the day's activities. A few schools have replaced Mother's Day and Father's Day with *Family Day*, and children are able to invite whomever they like.

Schools and centres vary in how well they handle these days, but many are sensitive to the concerns of rainbow families and will happily discuss the issue with parents. Many kids with two mums or two dads produce two of whatever card or gift they are making in class. Sometimes,

this is at the instigation of the teacher, while sometimes it is at the instigation of the parents.

Prior to Mother's Day or Father's Day, it can be helpful to discuss how you want to manage the event and come up with an idea or strategy that works for you. Also consider your kids' feelings and how they would prefer to approach the days. If you have concerns, you may want to raise them with your child's teacher or principal before the day.

Some rainbow families make the day about other people in their child's life, including

grandparents, older siblings, or friends of the family. Others allocate one day to one parent, and the other day to the other parent, but this doesn't work for everyone.

Parents say ...

Experiences

Our childcare centre and kinder had a really great approach to Mother's Day and Father's Day. They simply had Family Day around those times and anyone could come along. That was a really nice thing.
Mandy

There were no discernible problems until we got to Father's Day and we had to work out what to do. It was great that they actually asked, 'What shall we do on Father's Day?' We decided that one of us would do Father's Day and the other would do Mother's Day and that was easy. **Alison**

Sally got her own set of paintings on Mother's Day and her own set of cards from the girls. That was all at the instigation of the teacher. She told us the girls had been *very busy* – in other words they'd been trying to make a double lot of everything! **Ruth**

They always included both of us and always had two presents for Mother's Day. That was really good the entire time we were there. **Trudy**

In relation to Mother's Day, the teachers are always great. We are also quite lucky because they do have their dad in their lives and he actually has a male partner as well. At kinder this year, my daughter made two things for them as well. **Bridget**

The little kids make something for Chris, their big brother. And because there's a 10–11 year age gap with them, it's kind of like he is the man of the household, so to speak. **Jenny**

They do a *mama's* card and a *mummy's* card, and for Father's Day this year they had *Special Person's Day*. Last year they did *grandpa* cards. We make it about the men in her life. **Eli**

From grade one, the school has just instinctively made two Mother's Day gifts or cards. That was never at our instigation, always the school's, or maybe it was at the kids' instigation. To be frank, I never asked, but it has just always happened that they came home with two Mother's Day cards. **Jenny**

We decided that Mother's Day would be my day and that we would celebrate my partner's day on Father's Day. That works, and the school has been really responsive to that. **Nicola**

At the occasional care place, they didn't do very well on Father's Day and Mother's Day. On Father's Day, they asked if we wanted the kids to do a card and we said, 'Yes', but they stuck *Happy Father's Day* all over it. And for Mother's Day, they only did one, and they knew the girls had two mothers. They were late middle-aged women with their ways set in stone – a little bit *old biddy*. **Ruth**

For Mother's Day, we didn't say anything, but Annie did some paintings in art and she did two. I do think that, luckily, she's a strong and forceful personality. She needed to educate everyone and say, 'I've got two mums', at least when she first started there. And that seems to have gone okay. **Patricia**

They would ask how many Mother's Day or Father's Day presents we wanted and that was it. We're probably the first and last rainbow family they're going to see for quite some time. **Katrina**

Concerns and challenges

I went to the principal and said, 'Look, this is the one day of the year when our kids can feel left out'. I explained that at other schools they call it *Father's and Special Person's* or *Special Friend's Day*, and that seems to be a much more inclusive approach. The kids can bring along grandparents or whoever they want. She was embarrassed that we had to raise this with her. She said, 'My father died when I was very young and I always hated Father's Day. I can't believe this needed to be brought to my attention'. And when the newsletter came out the next week, the headline was *Father and Special Friend's Day* – a great success. **Patricia**

Our kids mostly handle it okay. But there are other kids who don't have parents – or might have a single parent, or a mother who's died – who really are struggling with some of these situations and just have to put up with these days. I think that's a real shame. **Mandy**

It's a tricky one, because a lot of the mothers volunteer to make the Mother's Day and Father's Day craft, and they put in a lot of hard work. You don't want to say, 'Let's just wipe it all out and not have it'. It's about finding a compromise that the community will accept. My preference would be a universal approach, where the child can choose whichever family member they want to, and it's just a family day. **Mandy**

Mother's Day and Father's Day just irritate me, but we talk to the kids about it. Now that they're older, we just don't do it and we say, 'Don't worry about it'. We've got a relationship with their donor dad, so if they want to give something to him, that's great. If they want to do it for a grandparent, that's fine too. I just want them to put the apostrophe in the right place!

Bec

We went with what the girls wanted to do. For a few years, they allocated Mother's Day to me and Father's Day to my partner. Last year my partner decided that she was a bit sick of that and that she really didn't want to do that anymore. They had a stall at school and my daughter bought a mug that said: *World's Best Dad*. The great irony, of course, was that the *World's Best Dad* is a mum. That was quite hilarious. **Claire**

We realised that a lot of school activities were structured around Mother's Day and Father's Day, and the issue for us was not only about our own family, but what happened in other families that didn't have a mother or a father. There was a kid in our daughter's class whose mum had died a couple of years ago and some of the kids were quite upset for that child on Mother's Day. **Mandy**

We went with allocating the days, but now we actually don't like what that says about our family – we don't think it reflects our family. So, we will need to support them come next September in how they talk about that. They will work out the default position, but we're not going to have a default father. We don't want to do that. **Claire**

Chris's dad passed away when he was eight. Prior to that we did Father's Day. Afterwards, we thought, *What do we do now?* Basically, Father's Day became about Granddad, so he would make something for Granddad and on Mother's Day he would make something for us. **Jenny**

The kinder is changing the way their forms are written and putting *Special Person*. It used to be *Bring your dad to kinder day* and now it's *Bring a Special Person*. There is an acknowledgement that there are plenty of single parents out there and different family makeups. So I consider that great progress. **Alison**

In relation to things like Mother's Day and Father's Day, they followed our lead. There was an incident around language on forms, and they also had a roster displayed of which kids were attending on which day. It had a Mother column and a Father column. So, it had me as the mother and Laura just wasn't anywhere. Our son wasn't the only one who just had one parent listed and we suggested that wasn't particularly appropriate. **Nicola**



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