



Starting kinder or day care

Kindergartens and childcare centres can vary significantly, with different programs, philosophies and management styles. You may have a number in your area from which to choose, or you may only have one within travelling distance. Some will have experience working with rainbow families, but many may not and yours may be the first rainbow family to attend.

How a centre supports you as a rainbow family is important, but will likely not be your only consideration. A range of other factors may come into play including: the approach to learning, the age or experience of staff, buildings and outside space, location, diversity of children attending, involvement of parents, cost and whether the centre feels like a 'good fit' for your child.

Choosing a kinder or childcare centre

Unless you know exactly where you want to send your child, it makes sense to visit a number of centres before choosing. You can often get a sense of how diverse and welcoming the centre is from posters, notices, artwork and books.

Taking a tour of the centre during daytime hours, talking to staff and observing the children can give you a real sense of whether it's what you are looking for. Ask the coordinator if they have had same-sex families attending the centre; their response will give you a sense of whether the centre is going to be supportive of your family.

Once you've chosen a kinder or centre, you can help foster positive relationships and a supportive environment for your child by:

- attending centre functions, volunteering to help, or being involved with the management committee
- providing your child with some age-appropriate responses to questions they may be asked
- providing information and being willing to educate staff about rainbow families.

Being open and willing to engage in up-front discussions will enable you to manage any issues as they arise.

Parents say ...

The first thing is about his needs, what kind of kid he seems to be and therefore what kind of learning environment we want for him. Then I guess a question about their attitude: Do they have other same-sex families and if not, how would they handle that? **Pia**

My approach has always been to be very out, very early. I spent a year working in an early childhood centre and I knew what was important to me. I chose the one that felt the best, that felt right to me, and I spent a lot of time there. **Bec**

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We went to all the kinder open days we could get to in our area, plus a few others. We visited while the classes were in session and talked to the kids and the teachers. I was more concerned about how they handled the students' welfare than how they handled the gay and lesbian thing in particular. I thought we'd cross that bridge when we came to it. When we found a quality kinder teacher the other stuff followed naturally. **Ruth**

When we looked at kinders, I thought inner city was going to be friendlier and, in fact, it was; ten years ago things were a bit different. **Trudy**

We only approached one day care place. We've got a friend who works at this one and we had heard positive reviews about it. We had a look at it and it really exceeded our expectations. I couldn't have imagined a day care centre that would be so well set up and such a positive environment. **Anthony**

We chose the kinder because it was down the road from my work. We both had a look around and we had a conversation about the fact that we were a same-sex family. The director was very honest and said that they hadn't dealt with a same-sex family before, but that they were open to working with us to make sure our needs were met. **Nicola**

There was one kinder where we both found the teacher really cold and standoffish and I wondered whether that was the whole lesbian thing. I think probably our anti-gaydar was working subliminally. **Ruth**

We made an assessment based on an initial conversation; you just get a feel for a place. They were very inclusive of Carol, but there was also a range of other considerations about the quality of care, how we connected with them, and did Frances seem to like it. I thought the way they were with us as a rainbow family was important, but one of a range of things. **Trudy**

I got in touch with a few families I knew; it's good to talk to them because they've got older kids so I've been able to ask them about kinder and school. **Pia**

I think a good kinder is mainly about the programs. I'm a teacher myself and so really value the education experience our kinder offers. **Ruth**

I think we chose our first kinder because the teacher was a man, which was quite unusual. I felt it would be a bit different. I was still in that stage of making sure everybody knew that my partner was female and I think being up-front like that meant it was never a big deal. **Bridget**

We didn't specifically quiz them about how they would handle the whole gay and lesbian thing, but finding out about their policies generally was enough to give us a good understanding of whether they were likely to be flexible, inclusive, diverse and welcoming. **Ruth**

The kinder staff were just good people and they seemed nice. They had a beautiful outdoor area and all the stuff that is probably important to most parents, so I didn't overly pursue whether they were okay with same-sex couples or not. I just sort of assumed they'd be okay, but we were always very straight up about it. **Bec**

Staff and parents

There were occasionally problems with other kids at kinder who were clearly repeating something they had been told by their parents. One child said, 'A child having two mummies makes God cry'. Luckily, that wasn't said to our children, it was said to one of the staff members who said, 'No, no – keep that to yourself'.
Patricia

Pretty early on one of the parents offered to help. She said, 'I'll give you my number and just ring me any time'. She has twin boys, too. **Anthony**

She went to kinder locally [in a small regional area] where she had attended occasional care, so she was well known and they were absolutely fine. Not particularly aware, but because we had a personal and ongoing relationship, whenever stuff came up there was always a phone call. **Katrina**

All kids at this age, including mine, are absolutely sure they're right. What they have been told is the truth because they believe everything their parents say and if you've been told you need a mum and a dad to make a baby then you believe that. It's not that the kid is coming from a bad place, they're just certain about their own reality and their parent hasn't introduced any possibility of there being multiple realities. **Claire**

If the staff read her a book they will change mummy and daddy to mummy and mama. **Eli**

He went to day care in the city and he has just finished kinder there. They have mostly been really good, but there have been a few hiccups. They asked questions and they were really receptive to things that we asked them to do and not do. **Nicola**

A couple of people probably thought we were interesting and that they might like to get to know us because we were different – because we were a lesbian couple – and then they found out we were just as normal as everyone else. **Ruth**

Lucy, my daughter, has a kinder that she goes to now and we've been educating the kinder teachers all year. **Alison**

There is one worker who's been a bit prickly about what time we bring the children and little things. I feel really uncomfortable about stuff like that and I don't know how to handle it. I'm not really sure if that's just the way she is, or whether she's a little bit directive to us because it's us. Apart from that, everyone else has been really friendly and flexible and accommodating.
Anthony

Thoughts and suggestions

Other families have been fine; we haven't had any problems at all with friends coming over, or the kids going to their houses. We're pretty open around the school and the kinder. At events, we're both there and involved so we're not hiding it and we haven't met any resistance at all. **Nicola**

We try to join things and not let our fear of not being accepted stop us. You've got to try to overcome anxiety about those things in order to go along to social nights or whatever. The best approach for us has been thinking, 'Too bad, we're part of this community, we're going along'. We're not going to let those fears stop us because we can't communicate that message to our kids. That's not easy and I'm not the most super confident person in the world. **Mandy**

When possible, both of us try to do pick-up and drop off. It's very affirming for your kids if you're both showing up; it means your child has got a strong sense of your family being involved. **Alison**

We had a few more issues at kinder with our son. He is a little bit gender creative; his favourite colour is pink and he likes to wear dresses. Once they got to know him – he's a beautiful, lovely little guy – they just accepted him for who he is, but some of the other kids made comments. The staff responded to our requests to address that and they talked to the kids about diversity and about how everyone is different and about celebrating uniqueness; they had Diversity Day and they called it Rainbow Day. Each year it has taken a bit of work and some conversations, but they've got there and it is a really safe place for him now. **Nicola**

There was a good preliminary orientation period the year before she started. They hosted a couple of family barbecues which was fantastic so we basically got to come out and all the parents got to know each other. And the kids didn't have to feel like they were coming out as well. **Alison**

I think if you are confident and positive about it all you just don't give people the space to criticise or be negative and I find that works quite well.

Patricia

At pre-prep, the manager of that section was very inclusive and said, 'Tell me what books you want and we'll go and buy them'. So they've got lots of books that they just toss in with the others and the kids can pick up a book about mum and dad or mum and mum. **Jenny**

When they were in kindergarten we equipped the kids with things to say like, 'I've got two mums and that's okay', but the other kids kept coming back and saying, 'But you have to have a dad. Why haven't you got a dad?' So they actually killed off their 'dad', but unfortunately they used different stories; in one he died in a skiing accident, in the other it was something else. **Claire**

We gave them the *Love Makes a Family* posters and they put them up. **Nicola**



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Researched and written by Jacqui Tomlins.

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