

A Step-By-Step Guide: Event & Activity Planning



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INTRODUCTION

The Family Equality Council recognizes the power that parents groups have to advance the movement toward LGBTQ equality. We also recognize that, when balancing a variety of commitments and schedules, the thought of organizing an event or activity for your parents group can be stressful. In an effort to alleviate some of that stress, Family Equality Council has created a step-by-step guide designed to make the planning process less daunting and therefore, more enjoyable and effective. We have compiled a variety of event planning ideas that aim to increase your group membership, promote sustainability and heighten visibility while also encouraging the celebration of your group's mission and its members.

Organizing events and participating in activities with other parents group members can benefit you, your group, your family and your community in many ways. They promote fun, encourage community building, combat discrimination and inspire proactive change. It is important that your families be seen and that your stories be shared. Many of the suggested events and activities will provide your parents group with an opportunity to enjoy the company of friends and family members while also increasing visibility. Generating this type of positive, public exposure can be an exciting and effective way of increasing LGBTQ awareness within your community.



ACTIVITIES AND EVENTS

We have compiled a list of activities and events designed to educate, increase visibility, build community and entertain. No action is too large or small in scale – just remember to choose an activity that corresponds with the mission of your group and the interests of its members. Here are some ideas:

1. Organize a playgroup for group members' children

Bake cookies, take a nature walk, create arts and crafts, spend a day at a children's museum, play dress-up, finger paint, put on a play, take a trip to your local library, make sock puppets, design homemade photo albums, play board games, organize a scavenger/treasure hunt, etc.

2. Attend a local PTA meeting as a group

PTAs can be quite powerful, affecting school policy and setting the tone for what school communities will accept and expect from parents, teachers and students in terms of how they treat one another. PTAs run by anti-LGBTQ or anti-diversity voices will directly impact your children's education and well-being. PTAs that adopt an anti-bullying statement that directly addresses homophobia will send a clear message: bigoted attacks have no place in our school and will not be tolerated -- by parents, teachers, students and staff! Show others that you care about the school and that you're unwilling to take a back seat.

3. Participate in a political rally

Stand up for your rights and the rights of others. Take part in a peaceful demonstration with people who share similar values (either LGBTQ specific or not) and make your voices heard. Get your friends and family members involved by encouraging them to help you make signs and attend the event with you. This can be a fun and effective way of advancing any movement.

4. Visit your representatives in their district office as a group

Introduce yourselves to your elected officials. Research shows that non-LGBTQ people are more likely to support family equality if they know three or more LGBTQ individuals personally. Keep in mind, your representatives include more than just members of Congress; you may want to visit school board members, the mayor or local council members. Map out bus routes, hop in the mini-van or walk down to your local district offices. If you can't get to the office in person, write a letter or make a phone call. Decisions are being made now that affect our families—every effort encourages change.

5. Write a letter to your legislator about your parents group, its members, and their families

Your legislator is in office to represent you and your interests. It's important that your state and Congressional representatives know you and your family so they can better represent you. One of the best ways to do this is to engage them by mail. Legislators keep detailed records of their correspondence with constituents and a personal letter is likely to stand out. Tell your legislators about how thankful you are to have your family, how the kids are doing in school, the latest recital, etc. Include your representatives in your holiday card mailing and send them a picture of your family to show how much your families resemble theirs.

6. Create a book group

Read and discuss! Starting a book group will not only encourage members to read LGBTQ relevant books on a regular basis, but will also work to fuel lively group discussions. Create a formal adult's book group or gather more casually with parents and their children to read a family friendly book out loud over pizza or snacks. Encourage members to submit their reading suggestions and share their thoughts – use this as an opportunity to educate and inspire each other.

Visit Family Equality Council's eStore (<http://www.familyequality.org/eStore.html>) and refer to “The LGBTQ Family Friendly Children's Book List” (<http://www.familyequality.org/resources/publications>) for more reading ideas.

7. Host a potluck dinner

The best conversations often take place over meals. Invite a member of the school board or another community leader over for a bite to eat. Sharing a meal with someone who affects your families' experience in schools, politics, etc., could produce lasting results. It's an opportunity for you and your group's members to share your stories in a safe space - open your home and make a friend or ally.

8. Work to change the policy of an organization to make it more inclusive

Inclusivity isn't just about embracing sexual orientation and gender identity in anti-discrimination clauses. Inclusivity means welcoming people of all economic groups, races, cultures, languages, etc. Ask the following questions of the organizations to which you and other group members belong:

Is the organization gender inclusive—do forms ask for gender? Are titles gender neutral (i.e. chairperson instead of chairman)? Are there gender neutral bathrooms? Is the organization accessible to all people—including people who do not speak English? Is your organization's location accessible by public transportation—do you advertise these routes?

These are just some of the important questions to ask. Write a list of your own, and make policy changes in the organizations to which you and your group members belong.

9. Have a family night out at the movies or stay in and host a movie party to educate your friends

Film is a great medium through which to educate friends and allies about the need for LGBTQ inclusion. Think about all the great movies you've seen that have impacted the way you view the world. The beauty of film is that serious and often difficult material is compressed into a few short hours of drama-packed, educational experience!

Invite some friends and allies over this week and show them your favorite LGBTQ-inclusive film. For a family friendly flick, check out *All Aboard: Rosie's Family Cruise*. It's a great portrayal of LGBTQ family life, highlighting both the hardships and the fun. For something a little heavier and more "adult," try *The Laramie Project*, *Boys Don't Cry*, *Philadelphia* and other powerful films.

10. Participate in group volunteer opportunities at schools, nursing homes, etc.

By volunteering at your children's schools, you'll show parents, teachers and other school officials that you care about the people and the institutions that help your children learn and grow. Every parent can find some way to contribute. Participate as much as you can. You'll not only improve the schools your children attend; you'll make family equality a visible issue as well.

Prepare and serve dinner at a local soup kitchen. Not only will your food and friendly faces brighten someone's day, but you will be in the perfect position to share the love of your families with those who are less fortunate.

Recent polling has shown that seniors are among the most movable cohorts regarding issues of equality for LGBTQ people. Not only are they movable, they are the group of Americans that vote most consistently. Make friends with some seniors today—tell them about your family and what they can do to help make sure your family stays safe and protected.

The environment is important to everyone. Opting to participate in a city-wide cleanup will allow you to help protect the earth while also interacting with other environmentally conscious community members. This is a great opportunity to make friends, share your stories and present your parents group and its members in a positive and productive light.

11. Write a letter to the editor

As a group, take the time to sit down and compose a letter to the editor—send it to a mainstream parenting magazine, your local newspaper, the newsletter at your place of worship, and of course, Family Equality Council. Some great topic ideas for your letter include how denying access to marriage equality hurts your family, how increasing the pool of potential foster/adoptive parents helps children and why it is important to stand up for equality—all families should be treated fairly! Don't worry about writing a large amount or including many statistics. Stick to what you know—your families.

For step-by-step instructions on how to write a letter to the editor, refer to our guide, *Putting the Power of Parents to Work*.

BE VISIBLE

Organize events in a communal space or take part in activities that are open to the public. By showing community members that your families are just like theirs, they will become more likely to learn about LGBTQ issues and support inclusive policies. Creating change can take time, but you're more likely to inspire others if you're working side-by-side. As mentioned earlier, research shows that the more LGBTQ people a straight person knows, the less likely that individual is to support anti-LGBTQ policies.

- **Start a group garden on a public plot where members can collectively grow veggies, flowers, etc.**
- **Attend a local cooking/art/yoga class**
- **Plan a weekend camping trip for your group members and their families**
- **Participate in a parenting workshop**
- **Speak at a town hall forum or other community event**
- **Host a holiday party and invite your neighbors**
- **Attend an educational seminar**
- **Spend a day at a museum**
- **Organize a family friendly sports game and barbeque at a local park**

TAKE STEPS WITH FAMILY EQUALITY COUNCIL

Become OUTSpoken

The OUTSpoken program works to train both parents and allies about how to speak to family members, friends, co-workers, school officials, legislators, etc., about the importance of family equality. To join OUTSpoken and fill out your own speaker's profile visit <http://www.familyequality.org/OUTSpoken/index.html>.

Participate in an event hosted by Family Equality Council and/or other LGBTQ advocacy organizations

Visit <http://www.familyequality.org/action/calendar.html> to view our online events calendar.

MAKE OUR IDEAS YOUR OWN

Many of these activities and events can be individually tailored to meet the needs and interests of your group and its members. If one of our suggestions inspires you to do something entirely different - go for it! Each activity can be altered depending on your group's resource availability, time constraints, religious affiliation, member interest and enthusiasm, etc.

Outdoor activities, for example, can easily be adjusted according to season and geographic location. Depending on the time of year and where you live, you might decide to host a family friendly pool party rather than spearheading your group's annual "leaf peeping" hike this fall or you might opt to spend a day bike riding rather than ice skating at a community rink.

Likewise, holiday themed activities are also open to interpretation. You can paint Easter eggs or build birdhouses to celebrate spring, decorate ornaments for Christmas, make playdough Menorahs for Hanukkah, bake coconut biscuits for Kwanzaa and Moon Cakes to celebrate the Chinese New Year, create handprint turkeys for Thanksgiving and shamrock paper crafts for St. Patrick's Day, carve pumpkins and organize a trick-or-treat together for Halloween, make poppy wreaths for Veterans Day, clean up a local park to celebrate Earth Day, etc. The following holiday ideas are designed specifically to educate others about LGBTQ families:

Sit down with the members of your parents group and write an Op-Ed for Mothers'/Fathers'/Grandparents' Day

Mothers' Day, Fathers' Day and Grandparents' Day are days to recognize the value of all loving parents. Often LGBTQ-headed families are left out. Take these days as opportunities to share your family story with your community. Write an op-ed explaining why all loving families should be recognized, respected, protected and celebrated. Submit it to your local papers and/or a mainstream parenting magazine.

Make Valentines that include your families' portraits

Let everyone know how proud and loving you and your LGBTQ-headed family are! Send homemade valentines with a picture of your family to extended family members, friends, neighbors and even your legislators.

Collectively push equality forward this Fourth of July

While watching a local parade or fireworks show, take the opportunity to remind your fellow community members that LGBTQ Americans and their families are still treated as second-class citizens. Tell them what marriage inequality means to you and what the inability to establish legal ties to your children means to your family's right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

1. Be sure that you have a clear understanding about what it is you hope to accomplish by executing your event. Consider whether you are trying to inform, educate or entertain your audience. Objectives can be very simple (e.g. to have fun with friends and family members) or more detailed and content specific (e.g. to educate group members about the various facets of raising a child with special needs). Identify your goals and record your objectives here:

a)

b)

c)

THE BASICS

When beginning to plan an event or activity for your parents group, it is important to answer the following questions:

WHAT

1. What is the activity or event you would like to organize? Will it be relaxed or more formal? Are you hoping to inspire, entertain, inform? Briefly describe your vision.

WHY

1. Why is this activity or event important? Consider its purpose. Will it work to further educate the group and/or community members, act as an information exchange during which parents can comfortably voice their joys and concerns or simply provide LGBTQ families with an opportunity to bond over fun and good food?

WHO

- 1. Who will be organizing the event or activity? Will there be a single coordinator or will the planning of this event be a group effort?
- 2. Who is invited? Consider your target audience. Would you like this event to be open to the public, other parents groups or your group members only? Is this event designed for adults or is it family friendly?

WHERE

1. Where will this event be taking place? Will it be held at a group member's home, a local park, a campground or movie theater? Or will it be held at a more formal venue? List your top three event locations here:

- a)
- b)
- c)

WHEN

1. When will this event be taking place? Brainstorm possible dates and make your final selection based on the following considerations:

Does the preferred date have any special significance? Is it a holiday or anniversary? Is this date attendance friendly? Will you be convening on a regular meeting day? If not, will scheduling conflicts keep an increased number of group members from attending?

List three possible dates here:

a)

b)

c)

HOW

1. How will this event be funded? Will a single family or parent be sponsoring this event or will its costs be evenly afforded by all group members?

2. If the event is open to the public, how will it be advertised?

THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND

It's never a bad idea to have a backup plan. Think about what you will do if a hired speaker cancels at the last minute, you run out of craft supplies or you find that you are going over budget. Having a "Plan B" is especially important if your event is weather dependent or is subject to any other critical changes.

Make an effort to be inclusive! When planning your activities, you should be sure to consider the interests and needs of multiracial families, parents of disabled children, etc.

Consider the age of all group members' children when hosting a family-friendly event. It is important that the gathering be both inclusive and age appropriate.

Stick to your budget. Remember to take the varying costs of food, supplies, transportation, entertainment, etc., into account when planning your event. Be sure to consider the socio-economic standing of the families within your group and, in turn, the affordability of the events you choose to partake in. Events and activities do not have to be expensive to be fun – make sure the events that you execute are those that you can afford.

The more the merrier! Depending on your group's mission statement, it may be appropriate for you to encourage members' children to invite friends (from either LGBTQ or straight families) to attend and participate in certain events. Not only will this be a fun opportunity for your children, but it will heighten visibility and work to combat discrimination at a young age.

