

A Step-By-Step Guide: Starting A Parents Group



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INTRODUCTION

Parents groups are the heart of Family Equality Council. They are formal and informal groups of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) parents, families and those considering parenthood who organize social, educational and advocacy-based activities for their families and their communities. Some groups are quite large, and organize conferences, workshops, newsletters and websites. Some are smaller groups of families that meet monthly for potlucks and/or other child-friendly social opportunities. Most are volunteer-run, and serve to connect and strengthen our families.

People involved in parents groups may be partnered, single, considering parenthood, pregnant, parenting and awaiting adoption or surrogate birth. We see families that are adoptive, foster, co-parented, step-parented, blended and extended. While many of our community's parents have access to local parents groups, many more do not. We encourage local volunteers to start up and maintain groups, and we can help!

The Family Equality Council helps to start and revitalize LGBTQ parents groups in rural, urban and suburban areas. This step-by-step guide is designed to help new groups with defining goals and objectives and provide existing groups with fresh insight and new ideas. We encourage you to complete this using feedback from as many families as you can. The Family Equality Council can provide you with newsletters and resources for local parents. We will help you troubleshoot and will support your efforts. All services are provided to LGBTQ parents groups free of charge. Call (617) 502-8700 or e-mail info@familyequality.org with any questions.



This guide has been designed to help new groups create and define goals and objectives. This process is most effective if the input of as many families as possible has been included.

YOUR COMMUNITY

1. Why is there a need for a group in your community? (Visit www.familyequality.org/action/parentsgroups.html to see if there are any pre-existing groups in your area.)
2. Are there other activities or resources for LGBTQ families and parents in your community? If there are, have you contacted those who are involved?
3. Where will parents come from? How will you reach out to them? Is there a local community center? A gay bookstore or newspaper? What about schools where other children of LGBTQ parents may attend?

List where you may be able to find parents and families:

- a)
 - b)
 - c)
4. What supportive organizations exist to help you locate parents and families? List any local gay-friendly organizations or groups such as Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) and/or Unitarian Universalist Churches.
 - a)
 - b)
 - c)

YOUR PARENTS GROUP

1. What will be the focus of your new group? Community building? Advocacy/Action? Education? Parents? Kids?
2. List three things you would like your parents group to do for families and the community.
 - a)
 - b)
 - c)
3. What resources are needed? Keep in mind, there can be expenses involved in starting and maintaining a parents group (running ads in local papers, designing and printing flyers, mailing invitations, finding a location, etc.). Think about what resources you will need to get your new parents group off the ground. List what you might need here:
 - a)
 - b)
 - c)
 - d)
 - e)

4. What resources are available? Look at the list you created and think of creative ways to get these things donated at no cost. Who do you know? You may have a socially active local church/synagogue that does positive LGBTQ outreach or a newspaper run by a gay parent. Those are resources. There may be an available conference room in the office building where you work. That's a resource too!

- a)
- b)
- c)
- d)
- e)
- f)
- g)

5. Who will your parents be? LGBTQ means lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer. Will you be open and inclusive of all these groups? Depending on your mission statement, you may also choose to welcome straight allies as active members within your group.

6. How will you be welcoming to bi and transgender parents? (If it appears that there are no bisexual or transgender parents in your community, remember these families are often invisible). When you speak of the parenting and family community, you also need to recognize those considering parenthood, those formerly married, straight spouses, non-biological parents, foster parents, step families and blended families.

7. Do you want a group exclusively for moms only, dads only, for parents of toddlers or for everyone? Think about who you want to include and why. I would like this parents group to include:

9. How often would you like your group to meet?

10. Where would your group like to meet?

- a)
- b)
- c)
- d)
- e)

YOUR MISSION STATEMENT

Now you are ready to write your group's mission statement. A mission statement is a brief paragraph that gives a clear and concise message about why your group exists and sets a direction for the future of the group. Mission statements are useful as criteria for measuring the effectiveness of your group's activities against the ultimate goal(s) of your group.

The statement should provide a strategic vision and enable all the group members to share and understand the mission.

Brainstorm answers to the following questions (either individually or with potential group members):

1. Who does this group primary serve?
2. What are the basic needs that this group fills?
3. How does this organization meet the needs of those it serves?
4. Is the area served geographically limited? If so, what is the area served?
5. What makes this organization unique?
6. What values does this organization seek to promote?

EXAMPLE

Here is sample mission statement:

The Parents' Club of Providence enriches the lives of LGBTQA-headed families, both within our club and our community. We are a multicultural, multiracial group of parents, grandparents and guardians who have come together to form a volunteer-led, non-profit organization that provides education, support, social activities and structures to promote family equality by creating safe spaces and networking opportunities in which all people are welcome.

TIPS

- Keep your statement concise and simple. The best mission statement is easy to memorize.
- Remember that the statement is flexible; if the group decides to change direction, the mission statement can always be updated.
- Effective mission statements take time to perfect – give your group a few weeks for input and final editing.
- A good mission statement should explain why your group exists, and what it hopes to achieve in the future.
- Make sure that everyone in the group gets a copy of the statement. Use it often and openly; the mission statement should lead the group's planning efforts, goals and projects.

WRITE YOUR MISSION

It's time to write your mission. Using the brainstorming and input from the previous exercises, write a mission that reflects your group—writing it down gets everyone on the same page! Remember, three sentences is a good length.

THE NUTS AND BOLTS OF STARTING A GROUP

1. Who will help put this group together? Be clear on personal commitment and abilities! Consider whether there will be a single group leader or a number of different officials. How will these positions be filled? Most parents are very busy, so be realistic about what you can and cannot do. Some “coordinators” find it helpful to designate how many hours a month they can commit, others have found that being clear on specific job descriptions is useful. Think about what you can do and have all potential group members make a short list.

- a)
- b)
- c)
- d)
- e)

2. Determine your outreach list. On a separate sheet of paper, gather contact information (names, addresses, phone numbers and emails) for the following groups in your community. Add to this list! This will serve as your initial “outreach tool” to advertise and solicit volunteer help.

- a) Parents & families
- b) Local LGBTQ groups
- c) LGBTQ-friendly churches/synagogues
- d) Schools
- e) Bookstores
- f) Local gay papers
- g) Local gay-friendly businesses
- h)
- i)

3. Choose the name of your group. Have fun and come up with something catchy that reflects the personality and mission of the group. Here are the names of some existing parents groups:

The Pop Luck Club - California
Rainbow Families - Minnesota

Orange Pride Parents - New York
P.A.C.T (Parents and Children Together) - Ohio

Brainstorm with other parents and record your ideas here:

- a)
- b)
- c)
- d)

4. Choose contact information for your group. We strongly suggest using a post office box, e-mail address and second phone line or answering machine. You want to be cautious about publishing home contact information. List two ideas for safe contact information here:

- a)
- b)

