



## ANSWERING CHILDREN'S TOUGH QUESTIONS ABOUT FAMILIES: AN EVENING FOR PARENTS/GUARDIANS AND EDUCATORS

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**Suggested Level:** Parents/guardians and educators.

**Length of Time:** 90 minutes in the evening.

### Goals

- To help people feel more comfortable answering children's questions about different kinds of families.
- To help parents/guardians and educators understand different kinds of families.
- To bring parents/guardians in your school community together.

### Objective

Using index cards to solicit questions, participants will work in small and large groups to explore questions and responses to family-related questions their children may ask.

### Notes

Do your children ask questions about other kinds of families that you're not sure how to answer? Children are curious and often ask questions when they come into contact with families different from their own. This evening gathering is an opportunity to share ideas and discuss in small groups how to handle questions about family diversity, including topics such as divorce/stepfamilies, adoption, families with two moms or two dads, single parents, foster parents and multi-racial families. Talking with others helps parents and educators become more comfortable approaching these topics.

This event can be organized by a group of parents or a committee of the PTO/PTA. The more people you involve in planning the event, the more people will come. Prior to the evening, publicize the event well in school newsletters, send flyers home to parents and post notices.

Here are some examples of questions that children may ask: Why doesn't she live with her dad/mom? Why does he have two moms? Where is his dad? Who are his real parents? Why doesn't she look like her parents?

If there are families with different configurations in your school, such as families with two moms or two dads, adoptive parents or foster parents, it can be good for the facilitator to check in with them before the evening to find out what language that they use to refer to their families or answer questions that may arise. If there is only one such family in your school, be careful not to continually single it out as an example.

### Materials

Nametags, index cards, pencils or pens, chart paper, markers, refreshments, a room large enough for the group to break into smaller groups yet stay in the same room.

Optional: Display books on family diversity from your school library or have bibliographies on family diversity available.

### **Arrival and Introduction**

- As people arrive, using index cards, ask them to write down questions that either their children have asked them or that they think children might ask them about different kinds of families.
- The facilitator then looks through these cards and selects a variety of questions to work with during the evening.
- Begin with a welcome and introduce the evening's activities.
- Establish guidelines for discussion — listening respectfully, giving everyone a chance to speak, etc. Write the guidelines on big chart paper. Ask audience members to add to or question any of the guidelines.

### **Activity: Small Group Discussions**

- Have people break into small groups of five to seven. Try to have one of the planners in each group to help facilitate the discussions. Stay in one large room for this activity. The lead facilitator for the evening should not be in a small group.
- The lead facilitator then reads a question aloud.
- Take a few minutes for the small groups to discuss how they would answer the question.
- Have a few people share some of the small group's insights with the large group.
- Move on to the next question. Do this for as many questions as time allows. Make sure a variety of topics are covered.

### **Wrap-Up**

- Come back together as a group.
- Ask for group feedback. What did people learn? What did they like about the evening? What was challenging for them? Are there any further questions that need to be addressed? Should we plan another meeting? If so, what are topics of interest?
- You could end by reading a poem on families.

### **Additional Resources from Welcoming Schools**

- Creating Welcoming Schools: Getting Started
- What You Can Do As a Parent or Caring Adult to Create a Welcoming Elementary School for Your Child
- Connecting with Colleagues: Have You Ever Thought About How You Might Respond? Practicing Age-Appropriate Responses to Students' Questions About LGBT Topics
- Family Education and Community Building Forums
- Bibliographies for Students and for Educators and Parents/Guardians.

*Developed by Respect for Human Differences Committee, Zervas Elementary School, Newton, MA*

