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Answering Children's Curiosity About Family Diversity

The traditional family model of fathers and mothers who generate and raise their sons and daughters is no longer the majority. Family diversity is common in the classroom. Nowadays, there are many other ways of becoming a family. A family does not depend on its composition but on the roles and functions each person develops. The challenge is to help students gain a respectful way of understanding what a family is.

Along with the traditional or nuclear family, other family models have been incorporated in recent decades. These include separated or divorced parents, reconstituted (remarried with at least one child), single-parent, adoptive or foster, and multi-ethnic or homoparental families. This social change must necessarily pass into the classroom so that all children can see the reality of their home in the educational system. Students need to know and understand that there are multiple ways of forming a family.



Children have no filters. They notice everything when it comes to what people say or how folk look. Children at school may also begin to understand that their families might be different. They could start to question whether there are "good" or "bad" families when confronted with families that do not resemble their own. Some of the questions that can appear are:

- She cannot have two dads, right?
- Sarah said she only has a mummy at home but not a daddy. Is that bad?
- Why did Julie's real mum not love her?
- How come George has light skin, and his daddy has brown skin?

Creating a space for children to let their curiosity flourish, particularly when comparing themselves to their peers, will be an essential aspect of their learning. A teacher's role is vital in helping them learn to respect, accept, and welcome their — and other — family dynamics that might look "different" than their own.

In the end, the best thing you can do is to provide your students with an environment that lets them feel safe and accepted.

Surrounding them with positive examples and diverse play experiences as they learn will help build their confidence and acceptance.

- **Don't avoid the questions.**

Answer as best as you can, and stay honest.

For example, when school students want to understand their concept of a family better and whether or not their family fits the mould. The best way to illustrate there is no right or wrong family is to reassure them that all family scenarios are special, matter, and deserve respect. Repeatedly demonstrating this helps children feel secure about their home situation and fully accept others with families that don't look like theirs. Using pictures to communicate your message enables a free and more natural discussion.

- **Understand the background of your students**

Teachers must develop a good understanding of their students' lived experiences and needs in order to understand their curiosity and promote inclusion. Where do they come from? What is their family situation? Knowing your students means also understanding different forms of discrimination they might encounter at school and in society. This means paying attention to the distinct categories that converge in their social identities (race, socio-economic status, gender, disabilities, and so on). Teachers can develop activities through drawings where pupils can express who their family is and how they imagine their family of the future.

- **Be careful with vocabulary**

Each child may have a different conception of what a family is or how they may name it. Respecting their way of naming can give assurance. However, avoiding non-inclusive concepts such as "real mum" or "own children" is also vital. Instead, use other notions like "birth mother" or "biological children".

- Families come in all shapes and sizes
- No one type of family is better than another

