DESCRIPTION OF THE SITUATION

A homoparental family encompasses all types of families (e.g. two-parent, single-parent and blended families) in which at least one of the parents is defined as homosexual.

Even though Quebec exhibits considerable openness to sexual orientation, homoparental families may still experience discrimination and be victims of prejudice. This can impact the parents (as adults and specifically as parents), but also their child. Therefore, to prevent and counteract discrimination, it is important to emphasize respect for differences and promote diversity, especially regarding sexual orientation or gender identity.

WHAT DO HOMOPARENTAL FAMILIES BRING TO THE GROUP?

The daily life of homoparental families is the same as it is for any other Quebec family.

These families can experience the same joys and face the same challenges as everyone does. Also, regardless of the parents’ sexual orientation, every child needs love and guidance. Knowing a homoparental family can help demystify this reality and help combat homophobia.

HOW CAN YOU INTERVENE SO THAT EVERYONE HAS A PLACE IN THE GROUP?

It’s not essential to raise the matter of homoparentality in a group right at the first meeting, unless you feel there is some discomfort among the participants or you have witnessed inappropriate comments. In such situations, it is important to act immediately in order to stress that that type of comment is not acceptable in your group. In such situations, it is also important to demystify sexual orientation, to counter false beliefs and to provide accurate information about sexual orientation and the experiences of homoparental families.

1. The “Towards a New View of Homosexuality” training by the National Public Health Institute of Quebec can be helpful for facilitators who would like to learn more about this subject.
In addition, it is important to relate all sensitive situations to the parental role and not just to one specific social issue. For example, “As a parent, have you ever felt you were not up to the task, or felt different?” This enables all the parents to gain some learning that will help them generalize this question to any other situation or topic (sexual orientation, religious affiliation, ethnicity, parental practice, etc.).

In general, we suggest ensuring that your statements and the tools you use are inclusive of all parents, regardless of their sexual orientation. This approach will help you make the participants comfortable and demonstrate your open-mindedness and the respect that you have for everybody. For example,

- Emphasize complementarity of aptitudes rather than complementarity of genders. For example, “One parent can rock the baby and the other can play with the baby” rather than “Mothers rock babies and fathers play with babies.”
- Adopt a non-heteronormative way of speaking, i.e., do not make heterosexuality a standard or give it prominence. For example, “Do you have someone in your life?” rather than “Do you have a boyfriend or girlfriend?”
- Avoid gender stereotypes when discussing parents and children. For example, “All children have toy preferences, and those preferences can be the same for boys and for girls” rather than “Girls prefer dolls and boys prefer trucks.”
- Value all family models and don’t tolerate denigrating or heterosexist comments. For example, “Adoption or turning to a surrogate mother is a valid strategy for anyone wanting to become a parent” rather than “It’s normal for a heterosexual couple to turn to adoption or a surrogate mother, but not a homosexual couple, because children need parental models of both genders.”

Also, don’t hesitate to ask questions. Discomfort in a group is often created by the unknown and by what remains unspoken. It is highly likely that the homosexual couple or parent is open to speaking about the process they went through to have their child. People who choose to be part of a group of parents are usually open to speaking about their experience and to learning about other people’s. When someone chooses to do so, the facilitator must draw the connection between that discussion and the meeting objective. It is important to support the learning cycle and avoid talking for the sake of talking.

**TAKE CONCRETE ACTIONS IN YOUR ORGANIZATION**

- Put up posters and make brochures available that speak respectfully about differences and combatting homophobia. (For sample materials to download, see http://www.homophobie.org/campagne/campagne-2014-lhomoparentalite.)
- Adopt an internal policy or code in the organization that promotes differences and that openly takes a stand against homophobic comments.
- Welcome everyone, without making assumptions about sexual orientation.

2. To learn more about homoparental families, visit the website of the LGBT Family Coalition: http://www.familleslgbt.org.