

# What's Best for Your Kids?

## Easing Your Children Through Separation or Divorce from an LGBT Spouse

Separation and divorce are always hard, and can become more complicated after one spouse comes out of the closet. As the straight spouse, you may feel shocked, hurt, angry and confused. While no two situations are the same, keep in mind that many lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people come out after they marry, and many couples in this situation have children. While your pain and anger will hopefully lessen over time, the steps you take concerning your children will have long-term effects, so sustaining your and your spouse's relationships with your children should be a primary goal.

### WHEN DECIDING WHAT'S BEST FOR YOUR FAMILY REMEMBER THAT:

- **Your spouse is the same parent.** There's no reason to believe that your spouse will care for your children any less or any differently after coming out.
- **Many good parents are gay.** Children raised by LGBT parents are as healthy, secure and happy as children raised by straight parents. Millions of children nationwide have lesbian or gay parents.
- **Your children need stable parental relationships.** Your children need to continue their relationships with both parents to help them adjust to your separation. Maintain continuity for your children — don't abruptly change or end visits — especially in times of change. When things get rough, consider the situation from the perspective of your children.
- **Children need comfort through separations.** Let your children know that the separation or divorce is not their fault. Make sure that they know they are not loved any less, and are not losing a parent, even though you and your spouse will not be living together.
- **Your spouse may have come out only to you.** Your spouse may not be ready to tell others. Don't out your spouse. If possible, decide together what you are both comfortable telling other people about why your relationship is ending.
- **You can try to work things out.** You can work together, and with a mediator if necessary, to create a positive parenting plan.
- **You want to do the right thing.** When you're ready to make child custody and visitation decisions, don't use sexual orientation against your spouse — it doesn't affect parenting ability.

Courts use a child-centered approach that looks at the best interests of the child — and you should too.

- **You are setting an example.** You will help your children to accept change by modeling respect and acceptance for your spouse.
- **There's help if you need it.** You can get support from others living through similar situations. Find a local group or talk with friends and family. The Straight Spouse Network is a great resource.

### A PACT FOR OUR KIDS

When Jody realized that she might be a lesbian, we made a pact up front: “No matter what happens between

us, the kids come first.” Two-and-a-half years later we were divorced. It wasn't always easy and we've had our issues, but we agreed that they were our issues, and not the kids'. Our early teen daughters were angry at first — that their family was changing and their mother had “done this” to them, but they soon realized that she was still their loving mother. The joint custody we settled on is flexible. We live close by, and our agreement allows the children to decide where they'll stay according to their own needs. No two situations are going to be the same — you have to consider what your kids want and decide what's best for them. For us, our pact has been what made things work. — **Jeff Buechler, Group Facilitator, Straight Spouse Network**



**The Straight Spouse Network (SSN)** is an international support network of heterosexual spouses or partners, current or former, of gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender mates. Members provide confidential personal support and resource information to spouses and partners nationwide and abroad. SSN is the only support network of its kind in the world.

215 Terrace Drive, El Cerrito, CA 94530-3058 | 510-525-0200 |  
information@ssnetwk.org | www.ssnetwk.org



**Lambda Legal** is a national organization committed to achieving full recognition of the civil rights of lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, transgendered people, and people with HIV or AIDS through impact litigation, education, and public policy work.

**Lambda Legal Defense  
& Education Fund**

[www.lambdalegal.org](http://www.lambdalegal.org)

**National Headquarters**

120 Wall Street  
Suite 1500  
New York, NY 10005-3904  
tel 212 809-8585  
fax 212 809-0055

**Western Regional Office**

3325 Wilshire Boulevard,  
Suite 1300  
Los Angeles, CA 90010-1729  
tel 213 382-7600  
fax 213 351-6050

**Midwest Regional Office**

11 East Adams  
Suite 1008  
Chicago, IL 60603-6303  
tel 312 663-4413  
fax 312 663-4307

**Southern Regional Office**

1447 Peachtree Street, NE  
Suite 1004  
Atlanta, GA 30309-3027  
tel 404 897-1880  
fax 404 897-1884

**South Central Regional Office**

3500 Oak Lawn Avenue  
Suite 500  
Dallas, TX 75219-6722  
tel 214 219-8585  
fax 214 219-4455