

Colours of the Rainbow among Families

The term "rainbow families" is used when referring to families that consist of lesbian, gay, bisexual or transsexual/trans gender parents and their children. Examples of these are families of two women, two men, or a non-heterosexual single parent, as well as families with more than two parents. There are thousands of rainbow families in Finland.

Rainbow families mainly lead the ordinary family life where the gender or the sexual orientation of the parents plays a minimal role. Studies have shown that the children of these families grow up to be similar to those growing up in heterosexual families. Children's concept of their own gender or their sexual orientation are no different than those of children of heterosexual couples, nor are they bullied any more than other children.

Love Makes a Family

Parenthood is a relationship between a child and an adult that is based on nurturing, security and intimacy. Parenthood in rainbow families is not always dictated by biological ties. A parent, or parents, are the most important thing in a child's life - regardless of the number or gender of those parents - while a child is dear to his or her parents, regardless of whether the relationship is based on biological kinship or not.

Rainbow families are formed in several different ways. Children in some families are the offspring of previous heterosexual relationships. Single lesbians and lesbian couples have children also via fertility treatments or at-home inseminations. Gay men can become parents by, for example, having a child together with a female couple and participating in the child's life according to an agreement.

Family-Sized Gap in Legislation

The Finnish legislation at present is insufficient because it does not always recognize the existence of rainbow families. A family may officially be seen as a one-parent family, when in reality there are two parents or more. Changes in legislation and attitude would cause a noticeable improvement in the quality of life for rainbow families - and especially for the children living in them - as one type of family among others.

Children need permanent and secure relationships with parents taking care of them, even if the parents separate or one of them dies. The best means to ensure this would be to open up the possibility of second-parent adoption in which a non-biological parent could adopt the child(ren) of his or her spouse.

Surrounding Attitudes Have an Effect on a Child

Relatives, family acquaintances or authorities may sometimes have difficulties in seeing the family of a gay or lesbian couple as a "real" family. This may be due to negative attitudes or just plain ignorance. Professional personnel should therefore be trained to meet rainbow families and their special needs.

Children may be so afraid of discrimination that they stay entirely "in the closet" at daycare or school, which is hard on the whole family. Children are entitled to expect and demand of their surroundings that their family be seen as equal to other families. If a child's family is called into question, it is an insult to both the child and his or her parents. Openness requires that the parents are brave and have a healthy self-respect.

Advocating for Rainbow Families Together

The Finnish Rainbow Families Association is a non-profit association for families with children. It was established in 1997 and is one of the member organisations of SETA (Seksuaalinen tasavertaisuus, or Sexual Equality). Its members consist of various kinds of families with children, people who are planning to have children, and people in other situations in life.

The Finnish Rainbow Families Association

- offers a meeting place and a discussion forum for children as well as adults. The association organizes gatherings, camps, tours and other events in different parts of the country. On-line discussion board for rainbow families can be found at www.keskustelu.seta.fi.
- attempts to influence the public discussion and decision making in different ways, for example in regards to the Act on Assisted Fertility Treatments, Act on Registered Partnerships and second-parent adoption.
- acts as a specialist and offers consultation services in questions relating to rainbow families. The association also offers training services for schools and workplaces.
- maintains an extensive data bank and carries out information work.

For more information on the Finnish Rainbow Families Association and its services, see <http://www.sateenkaariperheet.fi> or info@sateenkaariperheet.fi