



OUR HOUSE:

a very real documentary about
kids of gay and lesbian parents



Welcome To Our House

What does it mean to grow up with gay or lesbian parents? In *Our House*, a one-hour documentary, the sons and daughters of five diverse families talk frankly about what it's like to have a family that's viewed as 'different.' Facing the usual highs and lows of growing up, they are also encountering varied reactions about their parents' sexuality from relatives, classmates, teachers and neighbors. The featured families come from a variety of socioeconomic, racial and ethnic backgrounds and live in different regions of the United States. You will be introduced to...

Jessica (9) and Daniel (13) live with their adoptive dads, Rob and Jon, and three younger siblings in an affluent Long Island neighborhood. Jessica loves having two dads, and dreams of the day that they'll get married. Daniel prefers to play basketball and soccer and wishes that people would stop asking about his fathers.

Ryan (15) and Cary (23) have two moms, Vickie and Sophia, and live in rural Arkansas. In their small town, there was a backlash against Ryan when she told classmates about her moms' commitment ceremony. After two years of teasing and physical abuse at school, she is now being home schooled.

Danna (14) and Ember (16) were raised in a devout Mormon household in Arizona until their father, Dwight, came out and their parents divorced. Both girls struggle to reconcile the Mormon Church's condemnation of homosexuality with their love for their father. While Ember has left the church, Danna still attends with their mother, Jan.

Saveon (9), Sandor (13) and Ivoire (16) live with their two mothers, Rochelle and "Aunt" Pat, in New Jersey. As a family, they attend a nearby gay gospel church. The children don't like to tell classmates about their two mothers, saying it's "personal business." To complicate matters, Saveon and Sandor are often challenged by their father's open disapproval of their mother's sexuality.

Ry (17) and Cade (19) of New York City are part of the second "wave" of children of lesbian and gay parents. Their parents, Sandy and Robin, conceived them through donor insemination. Cade's recent coming out as a lesbian has led to some surprising discussions with her moms. The family also describes their recent victory in a legal battle against Ry's sperm donor who sued them for declaration of paternity and shared custody. Ry wonders, "I wouldn't say that having lesbian parents is an issue in my life, but... will it ever just be nothing?"



These young people have a lot to say about our culture and the evolving American family. By inviting us into their homes, they challenge us to explore our own understanding of what makes a family and how we can support *all* the children growing up in our communities.



My House: About The Filmmaker

Filmmaker Meema Spadola grew up in a small town in Maine. In 1980, when she was ten, her parents separated and her mother came out as a lesbian.

"I thought I was the only kid with a gay parent. During junior high and high school I lied about my mom, because I was too afraid to be out. For a long time, I've wanted to make a documentary that presents realistic portraits of kids of gay and lesbian parents. I hope that the kids out there who believe they're alone will watch *Our House* and see kids like themselves." Her autobiographical essay will appear in *Out of the Ordinary* (see "Resources," below), an anthology by and about children of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender parents.

Building Our House: The Making of the Film

To find the families in *Our House*, Spadola worked extensively with COLAGE (Children of Lesbians and Gays Everywhere), an organization run by and for children of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender parents. In addition, Spadola and her production team conducted a four-month search, using grassroots contacts to find over 300 gay and lesbian families. After interviewing more than twenty families, Spadola selected the final five and filmed during the spring, summer and fall of 1999. Says Spadola, "I was amazed by the number of responses we got from all over the country. As an adult daughter of a lesbian mom, I saw a whole new generation of kids who have been born into gay and lesbian families. It's clear that we've come a long way, but there's still much more we can do to provide support for all kids. In the meantime, I know that there are many more stories to tell, and I look forward to seeing and hearing them!"

Your House: Discussion Topics and Questions

Facilitator's Note: The children in *Our House* speak openly about growing up in households with gay and lesbian parents. Their honesty can set the tone for thoughtful discussions on a range of topics including: different kinds of families, parental roles, sexuality, secrecy and discrimination. You could use these questions to get activities started with your class or group—be creative! "Your House" opens the doors of *Our House* and provides a tool for exploring the similarities and differences of all types of families.

BEFORE VIEWING OUR HOUSE...

- What are some of the images and associations that come to mind when you hear the word "family"?
- What do you think the most important part of being a family is?
- What are some of the things you know about gay and lesbian families?
- Is your own family unique or unusual in some way?



AFTER VIEWING OUR HOUSE...

• How are some of the families in *Our House* the same as or different from your family? • Did any of the characters remind you of someone you know? • If you had a video camera, who would you like to interview from *Our House* and what questions would you ask? After viewing *Our House*, did any of your ideas about gay and lesbian families change?

Religion influences a family's life in many important ways. Compare the religious upbringing of Danna and Ember (Arizona) with that of Saveon and Sandor (New Jersey) and how it might influence their feelings about their parents. • How has your religious upbringing affected your ideas about family, marriage and sexuality?

The kids in *Our House* talk about being teased or fearing harassment because their parents are gay or lesbian. • Why do you think this happens? What are some of the risks and benefits when kids with gay and lesbian parents talk to their friends about their family? • How would you react if you found out one of your friends had gay or lesbian parent(s)? • Would you feel differently about them, or the same? • Why?

• Do you hear people make anti-gay statements? • How do you respond? How do you think schools could protect kids from harassment?

The families in *Our House* live in different parts of the United States—in rural, suburban and urban areas. • How does where they live affect their families? Compare Ryan and Cary's life in Arkansas with Ry and Cade's in New York City. • Why do you think Ryan and Cary's family stays in Arkansas despite the harassment at school? • Do you think the area where you live is welcoming to gay and lesbian families?

Danna and Ember's father came out after a divorce. Cade and Ry were born into a lesbian family. Compare the differences of these two situations and how they might affect the kids. • If you were in either of these families' situations, how would you want your parents to talk to you about their sexuality?

The parents in *Our House* play different roles within the family. Compare what Rob and Jon's (Long Island) children say about their roles to those of Vickie and Sophia (Arkansas). • How might having two moms be different from having two dads or a dad and a mom? • What kind of roles do your parents play?

Jessica (Long Island) dreams of the day when her two dads will get married while Ryan and Cary (Arkansas) participated in their two mothers' commitment ceremony.

• Currently gay men and lesbians do not have the legal right to get married; do you think they should have that right? • What do you think are the differences and similarities between gay marriages and straight marriages? • How do you think the kids' lives would change if their parents could be married?

Some people say that gay and lesbian parents affect their children's sexuality. In *Our House*, Cary (Arkansas) said he thought a lot about if he was gay or not after his mom came out; Daniel (Long Island) knows that he is straight; and Cade (New York City) recently came out as a lesbian. • Do you think parents—gay or straight—influence their children's sexuality? • In general, how do your parents influence you?



Around Our House: Resources

RESOURCE ORGANIZATIONS

American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)
Lesbian and Gay Rights Project
212/549-2627
www.aclu.org

The Lesbian and Gay Rights Project brings “impact” lawsuits—cases designed to have a significant effect on the lives of lesbians, gay men and bisexuals. Project staff write and promote laws and policies that will help achieve equality and fairness for gay people. The Project educates the public, policy makers and opinion leaders through publications, lectures, and media campaigns. Their book *Try This At Home* is about passing state and local laws and business and university policies to end discrimination and recognize lesbian and gay couples.

Children of Lesbians and Gays Everywhere (COLAGE)
415/861-KIDS
www.colage.org

COLAGE’s mission is to foster the growth of daughters and sons of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) parents of all racial, ethnic, and class backgrounds by providing education, support and community on local and international levels, to advocate for their rights and those of their families, and to promote acceptance and awareness in society that love makes a family.

Family Pride Coalition
619/296-0199
www.familypride.org

The mission of the Family Pride Coalition is to advance the well-being of LGBT families through mutual support, community collaboration and public understanding. The Coalition sponsors parenting groups, family events and a listserv, and provides technical assistance and information packets.

Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD)
800/GAY-MEDIA
www.glaad.org

GLAAD promotes fair, accurate, and inclusive representation in the media as a means of eliminating homophobia and discrimination based on gender identity and sexual orientation. They organize the LGBT community to respond to negative and positive media portrayals; educate media professionals; offer training to help LGBT organizations work with the media; design and implement public education campaigns with positive LGBT images; and study and articulate trends, issues, and controversies.

Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN)
212/727-0135
www.glsen.org

Through its 85 chapters in 35 states, GLSEN volunteers educate education leaders about the need to pass non-discrimination policies in schools, train teachers, and serve as a community resource for teachers, parents, and students grappling with LGBT issues. GLSEN creates and distributes teacher training materials and curricular resources to elementary and secondary schools, and provides support to high school-based Gay-Straight Alliances.

Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG)
202/467-8180
info@pflag.org
www.pflag.org

PFLAG promotes the health and well-being of LGBT people, their family members and friends through support, education and advocacy. PFLAG is the family voice of the LGBT movement, and with 435 chapters nationwide, PFLAG reaches communities—both urban and rural—in all 50 states.



BOOKS

Different Mothers: Sons and Daughters of Lesbians Talk About Their Lives edited by Louise Rafkin. Cleis, 1990.

The Kid: What Happened After My Boyfriend and I Decided to Go Get Pregnant: An Adoption Story by Dan Savage. Dutton, 1999.

The Lesbian and Gay Parenting Handbook: Creating and Raising Our Families by April Martin. Harper Perennial, 1993.

Love Makes A Family: Portraits of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Parents and Their Families by Gigi Kaeser and Peggy Gillespie. University of Massachusetts, 1999.

Out of the Ordinary: Essays on Growing Up With Gay, Lesbian and Transgender Parents edited by Noelle Howey and Ellen Samuels. Preface by Dan Savage. Foreword by Margarethe Cammermeyer, Ph.D. and Tom Hawken. St. Martin's, 2000. (Features autobiographical essay by OUR HOUSE filmmaker Meema Spadola.)

Reinventing the Family: The Emerging Story of Lesbian and Gay Parents by Laura Benkov Ph.D. Crown, 1994.

The Velveteen Father: An Unexpected Journey to Parenthood by Jesse Green. Villard, 1999.

Women in Love: Portraits of Lesbian Mothers & Their Families by Barbara Seyda and Diana Herrera. Bulfinch, 1998.

MAGAZINES

Alternative Family Magazine
800/256-8519
www.altfammag.com

Gay Parent Magazine
718/997-0392
www.gayparentmag.com

EXHIBIT

Love Makes A Family
413/256-0502
www.lovemakesafamily.org

"Love Makes a Family: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender People and Their Families" is an award-winning touring photograph-text exhibit with photographs by Gigi Kaeser and interviews edited by Peggy Gillespie. (Also see "Books," above.)

WEBSITES

Families Like Mine
www.familieslikemine.com

Kids of Gays and Lesbians Out on the Web
<http://members.tripod.com/~caitlinphillips/index-kids.html>

ABOUT ITVS AND THIS GUIDE

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Independent Television Service
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*"I've spent my entire life
explaining my family to people
who don't get it."*

Viewer's Guide

