

Gay and Lesbian Grandparents

Many Struggle With the Question of Disclosure

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Almost everyone knows someone with two daddies or two mommies. But two grandmas or two grandpas? Gay and lesbian grandparents may be less visible than their younger counterparts, but they do exist. One scholarly article estimates that they number between one and two million. Due to the liberalization of [adoption](#) laws and the growing options for surrogacy, that number is bound to explode in the near future.

Milestones in Gay and Lesbian Grandparenthood

Since one has to be a parent to become a grandparent, the path for arriving at grandparenthood is a bit different for those in the LGBT community. Here's a brief historical summary.

1. The majority of gay and lesbian grandparents are individuals who were in straight marriages that resulted in children.
2. As gays and lesbians began to adopt, the pathway to parenthood and grandparenthood began to change.
3. The earliest adoptions by gays and lesbians were under the auspices of single-parent adoptions. If there was a partner, he or she would have stayed in the background, perhaps occupying the role of roommate or friend.
4. In the mid-1980s options expanded to include second-parent adoption, in which the partner of a biological parent legally adopted the child.
5. About the same time, [gay and lesbian couples began to adopt](#).
6. Today surrogacy, artificial insemination, and similar strategies have expanded the opportunities for gay and lesbian couples to experience parenthood and, eventually, grandparenthood.

Most older grandparents come from the first two categories; however, those individuals who were in the first wave of gay and lesbian adoptive parents could be grandparents by now, especially if they adopted [older children](#).

Special Concerns for LGBT Grandparents

Although their paths may have been different, gay and lesbian grandparents are just like other grandparents, except that they must contend with the question of openness. Grandparents who grew up in a less accepting era may struggle with how much to reveal and to whom. That's a decision for individuals to make, although wise ones will definitely consult with their children before coming out to grandchildren.

Scholarly research on the subject is rare, but one [2010 article](#) reached some not-surprising conclusions:

Disclosure about sexual orientation is a primary concern of gay and lesbian grandparents.

Negative attitudes in the family and in the culture influence some grandparents to keep their sexual orientation secret.

Those grandparents who opt for secrecy do so largely to keep from being estranged from family members, putting family relationships ahead of questions of personal identity.

Gay men and lesbians who can [communicate well with their adult children](#) are likely to have similar relationships with their grandchildren.

Parents usually play a significant role in the process of grandparents coming out to grandchildren.

Grandparents with same-sex partners are also faced with many occasions when they must decide whether to appear as a couple. These include extended family gatherings, such as [family reunions](#) and weddings. [Grandparents Day](#) programs, sporting events, recitals and other occasions involving grandchildren require decisions that may be even more difficult for some. As with the coming-out process, these decisions are best made with input from other family members.

One Sign of Progress

A positive result of growing openness about sexual orientation is the emergence of support groups for grandparents. South Florida's LGBT Grandparents Group is the most prominent. Other LGBT groups may not have a specific grandparents group but may address grandparenting along with other issues.