

How to support LGBTQ+ parents in the workplace

LGBTQ+ parents often face specific challenges in the workplace including discrimination, legal and social issues, mental health problems and lack of opportunities for career advancement.

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Addressing these challenges requires specific policies to be implemented that are centred around inclusion, training and education, support and understanding, advocacy and cultural change. These are designed to make LGBTQ+ parents feel seen, valued, validated and supported in the workplace.

LGBTQ+ employees who have children may feel isolated and unsure of how to navigate their problems at work. In this article, Dan Buckley, CEO of *Cognexo*, and expert in elevating the employee experience, shares 10 initiatives or techniques your company can implement to create a truly inclusive environment for LGBTQ+ parents.

1. Employee Resource Groups (ERGs): No matter the company size, there is room for employee-led groups to be built, to create a safe space for people. What I mean by this as a CEO is making sure our staff have the space and resources to connect and share experiences, should they wish to!
2. Ongoing diversity, equity, and inclusion (DE&I) training: This is not, and should never be, a box ticking exercise - creating a diverse and inclusive workplace takes time and ongoing effort. Invest in workshops and experts to deliver training programmes for employees to understand this specific group and what their challenges are.

3. Visibility and representation: Seeing themselves reflected in leadership positions, company materials, and company panels sends a powerful message to LGBTQ+ parents that they belong. Representation is of paramount importance! Also, simple actions such as using inclusive language in all communications (e.g., terms that are gender-neutral and acknowledge diverse family structures) and ensuring that company facilities (like bathrooms) are inclusive can have a significant impact on making employees feel represented.
4. Inclusive parental leave policies: Traditionally, parental leave has been based on gender, so what happens when a family is mixed or doesn't follow that 'traditional' family structure? We can help review and revise parental leave policies to ensure they are inclusive and supportive of ALL family types.
5. Flexible work arrangements: I think this goes without saying in any job! Flexible work arrangements, such as remote work options or compressed workweeks, can help with childcare logistics and allow LGBTQ+ parents to achieve a healthy work-life balance.
6. Family-friendly benefits: Adoption leave? Surrogacy support? Benefits packages that include childcare assistance, adoption and surrogacy support, as well as access to LGBTQ+-inclusive healthcare providers will go a long way to demonstrate a commitment to supporting all family types.
7. Open communication: We all know communication is absolutely essential in a healthy workplace, but especially for those that might feel marginalised. Making sure communication is a bi-lateral arrangement and ensuring your entire office feels heard is very important.
8. Employee assistance programmes (EAPs): Not every company might be of a size to offer this kind of support, but EAPs offer confidential counselling and support services to employees and their families. Knowing the company you work for supports all the different LGBTQ+ family structures can reduce stress and anxiety for LGBTQ+ parents.

This allows them to focus their energy on their work and family life, leading to greater overall wellbeing and a healthier work-life balance, which is exactly the goal.

9. Celebrating Pride!: Pride is so much more than hanging a few rainbow flags up in the office, or turning your company logo multicoloured for four weeks in June! Actively participating in Pride Month through events, displays, or sponsorships demonstrates your company's commitment to LGBTQ+ inclusion.
10. Continuous feedback and improvement: At Cognexo, we are all about continuous feedback and improvement. Regularly soliciting feedback from LGBTQ+ parents through surveys or focus groups allows you to identify areas where you can further improve support.

It's important for businesses to really care about underrepresented groups, like the LGBTQ+ community. Active listening is key to really understanding the day-to-day challenges they are facing - but more importantly companies need to act on that feedback and develop initiatives to address issues raised.

By implementing these ideas at your workplace, employers can hopefully create a more inclusive environment where LGBTQ+ parents feel valued, supported and empowered to thrive.

Dan Buckley is CEO of *Cognexo*.



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