

Stonewall

LGBTQ+

FAMILY FORMATION GUIDE

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OVERVIEW

Thinking about becoming a parent? Congratulations, that's a big and exciting step. Every year, LGBTQ+ people across the UK become parents, forming loving and supportive families in many ways.

There's no single path to parenthood. Whether you're thinking about carrying a child, donating eggs or sperm, co-parenting with friends, fostering, or adopting, there are options to suit your values, circumstances, and hopes for the future. LGBTQ+ communities have always embraced creative, caring, and resilient approaches to raising children, and this guide aims to honour and support that tradition.

Inside, you'll find an overview of the most common routes to parenthood for LGBTQ+ people, along with key things to consider legal steps, medical processes, emotional preparation, and the practicalities of family life. Every parenting journey is unique, and this guide is here to help you feel informed and empowered, whether you're ready to start now or just beginning to explore.

Please remember this is a general guide. It's important to seek specialist advice from solicitors, medical professionals, and adoption or fertility services to get support tailored to your situation.

Wishing you all the best on your journey.

BEFORE YOU START

Parenthood is a life-changing decision, and it helps to talk things through with the people you trust. Whether it's your partner/s, close friends, family, or a therapist, honest conversations can help you reflect on your hopes, fears, and expectations, and give you the space to think things through.

Becoming a parent will affect many areas of your life, from your career and finances to where you live and how you spend your time. Ask yourself practical questions: Will you need more space? How will you manage childcare? What kind of work life balance are you hoping for?

If you're planning to co-parent, either with a partner or someone else, make sure you're aligned on the big things. How will you approach discipline, education, or religious traditions? Having these conversations early on can help avoid misunderstandings later.

LGBTQ+ people can face additional challenges on the path to parenthood, from navigating complex legal processes to dealing with discrimination or unexpected medical issues. While every journey is different, being prepared for things not going to plan can help you stay grounded and resilient.

Your sexuality, gender identity or relationship status shouldn't affect your parental rights, but it's still important to know the law. Understanding UK legal frameworks around adoption, surrogacy, and assisted conception will help you make informed, confident decisions.

Although equality laws offer protection, some LGBTQ+ individuals still face bias when accessing fertility services or pursuing adoption. If this happens, you have the right to raise a complaint or take legal action — and there are organisations that can support you in doing so.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are deeply grateful to the many LGBTQ+ parents, legal professionals, healthcare providers, and advocacy organisations who generously shared their knowledge and lived experiences in the development of this guide. Their insights have helped shape it into an inclusive, practical, and supportive resource.

Special thanks go to the LGBTQ+ parenting networks, fertility clinics, and legal experts who offered detailed feedback and contributed to ensuring the information is both accurate and accessible.

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Disclaimer: This guide provides general advice and information, correct at the time of publication. For tailored guidance, always speak to a qualified medical professional or legal adviser based on your individual circumstances and the parenting route you are exploring.

A NOTE ON LANGUAGE

LGBTQ+ families describe their relationships in many ways. While terms like mum and dad are commonly used and very meaningful for some, they may not feel right for everyone. We use the terms birthing parent and non-birthing parent to refer to different roles in conception and parenting, but these are simply descriptors and designed to be inclusive. In this guide, we've used inclusive terminology wherever possible. However, some legal terms such as maternity leave are gendered under UK law.

Please adapt language to suit your own identity and family structure. We also use the terms assigned female at birth (AFAB) and assigned male at birth (AMAB) when discussing aspects of trans and non-binary parenthood, to support clarity and inclusion.

What matters most is using language that reflects your family and feels right for you. Many LGBTQ+ parents develop creative and personal ways to describe their roles, which can be especially helpful when talking to healthcare providers, schools, and legal professionals.

Inclusive language is always evolving. By choosing affirming words, you can help create a positive, respectful environment for your child and your family.

ROUTES TO PARENTHOOD

There are several ways to build your family, each with its own legal, medical, and financial considerations. The right path for you will depend on your circumstances, preferences, and the kind of support you have around you.

HOME INSEMINATION

This is a lower-cost option that allows you to conceive using sperm from a known donor, typically in a private setting. While it can feel more personal and flexible, it's important to consider the legal implications carefully, especially around parental rights and responsibilities.

INSEMINATION AT A FERTILITY CLINIC (IUI OR IVF)

Intrauterine insemination (IUI) and in vitro fertilisation (IVF) are medically supported methods that offer higher success rates and legal protections. They are more expensive than home insemination and may involve additional procedures such as hormone treatments.

SURROGACY

This involves another person carrying the pregnancy. In traditional surrogacy, the surrogate uses her own egg. In gestational surrogacy, the embryo is created using eggs and/or sperm from the intended parents or donors. Surrogacy arrangements require clear agreements and legal steps to secure parental rights after birth.

ADOPTION AND FOSTERING

LGBTQ+ individuals and couples can adopt or foster children in the UK. The process involves assessments, training, and support to ensure a stable and loving environment for the child. Many LGBTQ+ families have found this to be a deeply rewarding route to parenthood.

CO-PARENTING

Some LGBTQ+ people choose to raise a child with someone who is not a romantic partner. This might be a friend or another couple. Co-parenting involves sharing responsibilities and decisions, so having clear written agreements in place can help avoid misunderstandings.

FERTILITY PRESERVATION

If you are not ready to become a parent yet, you might consider freezing eggs, sperm, or embryos for future use. This is especially relevant if you are undergoing medical treatments or transitioning and want to keep your options open for the future. Below are examples of fertility preservation:

- **Egg Freezing:** A common option for those wanting to delay parenthood, eggs are harvested and frozen for future use in IVF.
- **Sperm Freezing:** Available for those who may undergo medical treatments, or other life changes that could affect fertility.
- **Embryo Freezing:** If undergoing IVF, embryos can be created and stored for later implantation.
- **Ovarian Tissue Freezing:** Less common but an option for individuals undergoing treatments that may affect fertility long-term.

FERTILITY TESTING

Fertility tests typically involve hormone assessments, ovarian reserve tests, and ultrasound scans to check the health of the reproductive system. Semen analysis is the most common fertility test, evaluating sperm count, motility, and morphology. This process can vary depending on your gender identity or any medical treatments you have had. For trans and non-binary individuals: If hormone therapy has been used, fertility testing can determine whether sperm or eggs are still viable or if pausing hormone treatment is necessary.

Each path to parenthood has its own legal, medical, and emotional considerations. Taking time to understand these fully will help you feel more confident as you begin your journey.



CONCEIVING A BABY

CONCEIVING AS A NON-BIRTHING PARENT

If you are not the person carrying the pregnancy, your journey to parenthood may look a little different. However, non-birthing parents play an equally important role in the conception process, the pregnancy itself, and beyond.

Non-birthing parents can be actively involved in many aspects of conception. This might include donating sperm or eggs, supporting a partner through fertility treatments, or working closely with a surrogate. Your role may be emotional, practical, or medical, depending on your circumstances.

It is essential to establish your legal rights as early as possible. This includes making sure you are recognised as a legal parent and that parental responsibility is clearly defined. The legal framework varies depending on how your child is conceived, so it is worth getting professional advice to protect your rights from the beginning.

Non-birthing parents are often closely involved in planning and decision-making throughout pregnancy. You might attend appointments help shape your birth plan and prepare for your child's arrival. Some non-birthing parents have a biological connection to their child through donation, while others become parents through adoption, fostering, or co-parenting.

No matter the path, being legally and emotionally present from the outset lays the groundwork for a secure and fulfilling parenting experience.

DONATING EGGS OR SPERM FOR A PARTNER

For LGBTQ+ couples, one way to create a biological connection to a child is for one partner to donate eggs or sperm. This approach allows both partners to play a role in the conception process, even if only one will carry the pregnancy. It can be a meaningful way to share the experience and build a deeper sense of connection to the child from the very beginning.

EGG DONATION IN LGBTQ+ FAMILIES

- **Reciprocal IVF:** Reciprocal IVF is a fertility option that allows both partners in a same-sex female couple to be physically involved in the conception process. One partner provides the eggs, and the other carries the pregnancy. This approach enables both parents to share a biological and emotional connection to the pregnancy.
- **Medical considerations:** Egg donation involves a series of medical steps. The partner donating eggs will need to undergo hormonal stimulation, followed by an egg retrieval procedure. Once the eggs are fertilised, the resulting embryo is implanted into the partner who will carry the pregnancy.
- **Legal considerations:** If conception takes place through a licensed fertility clinic, the partner who carries the baby is automatically recognised as the legal parent. However, additional legal steps may be required to ensure both partners have full parental recognition and responsibility. Seeking legal advice early in the process is highly recommended.

SPERM DONATION IN LGBTQ+ FAMILIES

- **Known vs. anonymous donors:** Couples may choose a known donor (e.g., a friend or relative) or use a licensed sperm bank.

- **Home insemination vs. clinical insemination:** Home insemination is more accessible but can pose legal risks, whereas clinic procedures provide medical safeguards and clear legal frameworks.

HOME INSEMINATION

Home insemination is an option for those who prefer to conceive in a private and familiar environment.

Advantages:

- More affordable than clinical methods.
- Can be done in a comfortable, familiar setting.
- Offers greater flexibility with timing and donor involvement.

Considerations:

- The success rate is lower than fertility treatments performed in a clinic.
- If using sperm from a known donor, legal agreements should be in place to clarify parental rights.
- Proper handling and storage of sperm are crucial for effectiveness.

FERTILITY CLINICS

For those seeking a higher success rate, fertility clinics offer professional support and medical oversight.

Advantages:

- Higher success rates than home insemination.
- Medical monitoring ensures optimal timing.

Considerations:

- More expensive than home insemination.
- Requires visits to a fertility clinic.
- May involve hormone treatments to stimulate ovulation.
- If conception occurs through a fertility clinic, the donor has no legal parenthood rights unless otherwise agreed upon.

TRANS PREGNANCY

For trans and non-binary people who wish to carry a child, pregnancy can be an affirming but complex journey. It is possible for trans men and non-binary AFAB individuals to conceive, even if they have been on testosterone.

Considerations for trans pregnancy:

- Testosterone must be paused before conception and pregnancy.
- Some fertility treatments may be needed, particularly if ovulation has been suppressed.
- Emotional and psychological support is crucial, as pregnancy can be both affirming and dysphoric for some trans individuals.
- Many healthcare providers are becoming more aware of trans pregnancies, but advocacy may still be needed to ensure inclusive care. Seeking out an LGBTQ+ friendly healthcare provider can improve the experience.

IN VITRO FERTILISATION (IVF)

IVF is a fertility treatment where eggs are fertilised outside the body and then implanted into the uterus as described above.

IVF considerations

- IVF is more expensive than IUI (Intrauterine insemination).
- It may take multiple cycles to achieve pregnancy.
- Dual-mother and/or birthing parent IVF, also known as reciprocal IVF, allows both partners to be biologically involved.



SURROGACY

Surrogacy is a significant option for LGBTQ+ individuals and couples who cannot carry a pregnancy themselves. It involves a surrogate carrying and giving birth to a child on behalf of the intended parents.

Types of surrogacies

- **Traditional surrogacy:** The surrogate uses their own egg, making them the biological mother and/or birthing parent of the child. This process is less common due to its legal and emotional complexities.
- **Gestational surrogacy:** The embryo is created using the sperm or eggs of the intended parents or donors, meaning the surrogate has no genetic connection to the baby. This is the preferred option in most cases.
- **Surrogacy agreements:** While surrogacy agreements are not legally binding in the UK, they help set expectations between intended parents and the surrogate.
- **Parental orders:** Intended parents must apply for a parental order after birth to gain legal parenthood.
- **Surrogacy costs:** Expenses include medical costs, legal fees, and surrogate compensation for reasonable expenses.



ADOPTION

Adoption provides a path to parenthood for LGBTQ+ individuals and couples. The process involves assessments, training, and legal procedures to ensure a stable home for the child.

The adoption process

- **Initial inquiry:** contact an adoption agency and attend an information session.
- **Assessment stage:** social workers assess lifestyle, relationships, and parenting potential.
- **Approval panel:** applicants are reviewed and approved.
- **Matching process:** a child is identified and placed with the adoptive parents.
- **Legal finalisation:** adoption is legally confirmed through court proceedings.

FOSTERING

Fostering provides temporary care for children who cannot live with their birth families. LGBTQ+ individuals and couples are encouraged to apply.

Types of fostering

- **Short-term fostering:** temporary care until a child returns to their family or is adopted.
- **Long-term fostering:** ongoing care when reunification is not possible.
- **Emergency fostering:** immediate, short-term care for children in urgent need.

ANTENATAL CARE

Accessing inclusive and respectful antenatal care is an important part of the parenting journey for LGBTQ+ families. While awareness among healthcare professionals is improving, not all services are equally familiar with diverse family structures. You may still need to advocate for yourself or your family to ensure your needs are recognised and respected throughout your care.

What to expect during antenatal care

- Regular health check-ups, including ultrasounds and blood tests.
- Discussions about birth plans, pain management, and delivery options
- Guidance on nutrition, prenatal supplements, and mental health

Challenges faced by LGBTQ+ parents

- Lack of inclusive language from healthcare providers
- Legal complexities if one partner is not recognised as a legal parent.
- Some services may be less familiar with trans pregnancies or non-traditional family structures.

REGISTERING A BIRTH

Registering a birth is a legal requirement in the UK and establishes parental recognition on a birth certificate. This process differs depending on how conception occurred and the legal status of the parents at the time of birth.

Who can register a birth?

- The birthing parent is always listed on the birth certificate.
- If the birthing parent is married or in a civil partnership, their spouse is automatically recognised as the second legal parent.
- If the parents are unmarried, the non-birthing parent must be present at registration to be added.



FAMILY LEAVE AND FAMILY BENEFITS

Types of parental leave:

- **Maternity leave:** birthing parents are entitled to up to 52 weeks of maternity leave.
- **Paternity leave:** non-birthing partners may be eligible for up to two weeks of paternity leave, provided they meet the relevant criteria.
- **Shared parental leave:** parents can share up to 50 weeks of leave and up to 37 weeks of pay, allowing flexibility in how they care for their child.
- **Adoption leave:** available for individuals adopting a child, with entitlements like maternity leave.

Financial support:

- **Statutory maternity pay (SMP):** eligible birthing parents receive paid leave, with the amount depending on their earnings and length of service.
- **Statutory paternity pay (SPP):** eligible non-birthing partners receive paid leave, with the amount depending on their earnings and length of service.
- **Child benefit:** a monthly payment available to individuals responsible for a child under 16 (or under twenty if they are in approved education or training).
- **Tax-free childcare:** A government scheme assisting with childcare costs, where for every £8 paid into an online account, the government adds £2, up to £2,000 per child per year.



LAUREN'S STORY

My partner and I are in a same-sex relationship, and a few years ago, we went through IVF. We were incredibly fortunate to conceive our beautiful daughter, who will turn three in May. The journey was challenging, especially since my partner was working for the Hertfordshire Fire Service, and I was serving in the RAF. We had no family support nearby, and neither of our employers could provide financial assistance for the process. We were refused consideration for funding until we had completed at least 12 cycles of IUI, which we couldn't afford.

I am passionate about spreading the message that this kind of discrimination is unacceptable. Being gay isn't a choice, and everyone should have equal opportunities to have and love a family, regardless of race, gender, or sexual orientation.

LAUREN SMITH
PMO LEAD MANAGER AT ISS

LEGAL PARENTHOOD AND PARENTAL RESPONSIBILITY

Understanding legal parenthood is crucial for all LGBTQ+ parents, as laws vary depending on conception method and legal agreements in place before birth.

If you are planning to conceive using a known sperm donor, it is essential to understand the legal implications. Without clear agreements in place, the donor may have parental rights, which could lead to complications later.

When using home insemination, the non-birthing parent is not automatically recognised as a legal parent. To secure legal parenthood, additional steps must be taken, such as being named on the birth certificate (if eligible) or obtaining parental responsibility through a legal process.

Before beginning any fertility journey, it is always best to speak with a solicitor who specialises in family law. This can help you set clear expectations and avoid potential disputes in the future.

Defining legal parenthood

Legal parenthood determines who has rights and responsibilities for a child. Legal parenthood is typically assigned at birth but can be amended via parental orders, adoption, or legal agreements.

Establishing parental responsibility

- Parental responsibility refers to the legal rights to make decisions about a child's upbringing, education, and healthcare.
- Automatically granted to birth parents, married spouses, and those named on the birth certificate.
- Can be obtained through legal steps, including parental orders, stepparent adoption, or guardianship applications.

Non-birthing parents and legal parenthood

For non-birthing parents, securing legal recognition early is crucial, particularly in cases of surrogacy or assisted conception.

Options for non-birthing parents

- **Stepparent adoption:** allows a non-biological parent to obtain full parental rights.
- **Parental orders:** required for intended parents in surrogacy arrangements.
- **Guardianship agreements:** useful for non-traditional family structures or where legal parenthood is unclear.

CO-PARENTING

Co-parenting involves raising a child with someone who is not a romantic partner. This approach is common among LGBTQ+ individuals who share parenting responsibilities with friends or other parents.

Key considerations for co-parenting

- **Legal agreements:** A clear co-parenting agreement outlines parental rights, responsibilities, and financial arrangements.
- **Parenting philosophy:** Parents should align on discipline, education, and medical decisions.
- **Financial planning:** Costs and responsibilities should be agreed upon in advance.



FURTHER RESOURCES

For additional guidance, support, and legal advice, the following resources may be useful:

LGBTQ+ PARENTING AND ADVOCACY GROUPS

- **New Family Social:** UK-based charity supporting LGBTQ+ adopters and foster carers.
- **Pride Angel:** connects donors, co-parents, and LGBTQ+ individuals seeking fertility options.
- **Families Together London:** support network for LGBTQ+ families.
- **Rainbow Families:** community for LGBTQ+ parents and prospective parents.

LEGAL SUPPORT AND GUIDANCE

- **UK Government Adoption Services:** Official guidance on adoption and fostering.
- **Reed Smith LLP LGBTQ+ Family Law Services:** Legal services focusing on LGBTQ+ family law.
- **The Law Society:** Find a solicitor specialising in surrogacy, parental rights, and fertility law.

FERTILITY CLINICS AND HEALTHCARE RESOURCES

- **HFEA (Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority):** UK fertility clinic database and regulation.
- **LGBT Mummies Tribe:** Resources and support for LGBTQ+ people exploring fertility options.
- **BICA (British Infertility Counselling Association):** Specialised counselling for LGBTQ+ people undergoing fertility treatments.

SURROGACY AND DONOR CONCEPTION

- **Surrogacy UK:** Support and guidance for intended parents and surrogates.
- **Brilliant Beginnings:** UK-based non-profit helping LGBTQ+ individuals navigate surrogacy.
- **Donor Conception Network:** Support for families using egg, sperm, or embryo donation.



Stonewall, 192 St John Street, London EC1V 4JY
info@stonewall.org.uk
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