



## 2022 Report



Community  
Equity  
Collaborative



SAN MATEO COUNTY  
PRIDE CENTER



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# PROJECT OVERVIEW



Kids develop concepts of gender, families, and love before the age of five. As such, it is important that adults have the information they need to support young children in feeling safe and confident in their bodies, families, classrooms and world. These adults might wonder:

- What **everyday influences** shape my child’s sense of what it means to be a “boy” or a “girl”?
- How do I support a **child’s exploration through play** of concepts like family and gender?
- What **strategies** can I use to encourage children to feel safe and confident in their bodies?

Rainbow Kids seeks to strengthen the early foundation upon which all children can “effectively learn and participate, feel safe and seen...and to develop into their true authentic selves.”<sup>1</sup> Many parents and caregivers of young children do not realize the importance of gender-aware and inclusive environments that welcome children’s evolving sense of self during the early years, when they are forming foundational concepts of gender and gender identity. **Traditionally fixed notions of gender and sexual orientation are harmful to all children**<sup>2</sup> and have profoundly negative impacts on children who currently or will eventually identify as LGBTQ.

The objectives of this project were to **increase awareness and basic knowledge about topics related to gender identity/expression among parents of young children** and to provide practical and age-appropriate resources and tools. For parents of children who may not conform to traditionally accepted gender roles and identities, the need for early information and resources is especially great.<sup>3</sup>

## The Need

**Understanding gender identity and expression is critical for parents of young children.**

- By one year, children are able to categorize people by gender.
- Between 18 and 24 months, most children use in their speech culturally defined gender labels.
- By two years, children understand basic gender stereotypes.
- By three or four years, most children have a stable sense of their gender identity.<sup>4</sup>

**An expansive understanding of gender and sexuality are important for *all* parents of young children.** Parents’ messages about gender can have a critical impact on their children’s health and

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<sup>1</sup> [Gender Spectrum](#)

<sup>2</sup> [All Children, Including Cisgender Children, are Harmed by Rigid Ideals of Masculinity and Femininity](#)

<sup>3</sup> [The Needs of Gender-Variant Children and Their Parents, Section 3.7.3](#)

<sup>4</sup> “Early Childhood: Gender 101,” [Gender Justice in Early Childhood](#); Martin, C. L.; Ruble, D. N. (2010). [Patterns of gender development](#). Annual review of psychology; US Department of HHS and National Center on Parent, Family and Community Engagement, [Healthy Gender Development and Young Children: A Guide for Early Childhood Programs and Professionals](#); Rafferty, J. (2018, September 18). “Gender Identity Development in children.” [HealthyChildren.org](#). Retrieved September 20, 2021 from [American Academy of Pediatrics](#).

social-emotional wellbeing, especially when they do not respect and affirm a child's gender identity.<sup>5</sup> Even for children who identify along traditionally binary gender roles, gender aware and inclusive environments open the doors to effective learning and feelings of safety and acceptance. They celebrate and normalize human diversity (including gender diversity), challenge the limitations of gender stereotypes, and empower children to claim ownership over their own bodies and choices.<sup>6</sup>



**Issues of sexual orientation and gender identity/expression are increasingly relevant for parents and children to understand.** A 2018 Pew Research Poll found that more than a third of 13- to 21-year olds know someone who uses gender-neutral pronouns.<sup>7</sup> In the most recent California Healthy Kids Survey (2017-2019) of 19,451 San Mateo County middle- and high-school students:<sup>8</sup>

- 14% identify as not straight or are not sure yet whether they are straight, including:
  - 7% who identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual (compared to 5% in 2013).<sup>9</sup>
  - 5% who are not sure yet whether they are lesbian, gay, bisexual or straight.
  - 2% who identify as something other than lesbian, gay, bisexual or straight.
- 1% are transgender and 2% are not sure yet if they are transgender.

**By educating themselves on issues of gender identity/expression and sexual orientation, parents and caregivers of young children can increase the likelihood that their children will have positive**

<sup>5</sup> "Early Childhood: Gender 101," [Gender Justice in Early Childhood](#)

<sup>6</sup> From [New York Early Childhood Professional Development Institute](#); [Gender Spectrum](#); "Early Childhood: Gender 101," [Gender Justice in Early Childhood](#) from Riley, E. A., Sitharthan, G., Clemson, L., & Diamond, M. (2011). The Needs of Gender-Variant Children and Their Parents According to Health Professionals. *International Journal Of Transgenderism*, 13(2), 54-63; and Derman-Sparks, L., & Olsen Edwards, J. (2012). *Anti-bias education for young children and ourselves* (2nd Ed.). Stenhouse Publishers.

<sup>7</sup> From <https://genderspectrum.org/articles/pta-resources> quoting this [Pew Research Poll](#)

<sup>8</sup> Of respondents, 4% declined to state their sexual orientation and 3% declined to state whether they are/are not transgender.

<sup>9</sup> DePedro, Chris and Elfers, John. "Health and Safety of LGBTQ Youth in San Mateo County." [ACLU of California and Chapman University. Accessed on The Queer Community Action, Research, Education, and Support \(QCARES\) website.](#)

**outcomes in their teenage years.** According to the Healthy Kids Survey referenced above<sup>10</sup>, LGBT youth in San Mateo County are:

- About 30 percentage points more likely than non-LGBT youth to experience **harassment and bullying** at school.
- 30-to-40 percentage points more likely to exhibit **chronic sadness**.
- 2-to-3 times more likely to smoke cigarettes, binge drink, and to have been drunk or high at school.
- Up to twice as likely to have **considered suicide** (26% of straight/hetero students vs. 44% of LGB and 49% of trans students).

**THE POWER OF AFFIRMATION**

**SMC Youth**

- 14% not straight/not sure
- 1/3 know someone who uses gender-neutral pronouns

**At risk**

- 2X as likely to consider suicide
- 30% more likely to be bullied

**FAMILY ACCEPTANCE**

Protects against depression, substance abuse, suicide

**But these outcomes are *not* inevitable.** According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, children can be emotionally healthy and happy regardless of sexual orientation and/or gender identity or expression. For example, studies show that transgender children whose gender identity is supported by their parents experience levels of anxiety and depression that are the same as their nontransgender peers.<sup>11</sup>

*“When teens have problems, it usually isn't because of their orientation or gender identity. It's usually because of a lack of support from the people they love or because they have been ridiculed, rejected, or harassed.”<sup>12</sup>*

--University of Michigan Health System

<sup>10</sup> CA Healthy Kids Survey (2017-2019)

<sup>11</sup> Family Acceptance in Adolescence and the Health of LGBT Young Adults (Journal of Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Nursing); Health Disparities Facing Transgender and Gender Nonconforming Youth Are Not Inevitable (Journal of the American Academy of Pediatrics); Mental Health of Transgender Children Who Are Supported in Their Identities (Journal of the American Academy of Pediatrics)

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.uofmhealth.org/health-library/te7288>

In fact, teens who believe their parents strongly support their gender identity and expression are **93% less likely to attempt suicide** than teens who do not believe they have strong parental support.<sup>13</sup> Family support is not only a predictor of self-esteem and good health, it protects against depression, substance abuse, and suicidal ideation and behaviors.<sup>14</sup>

## The Opportunity

While San Mateo County families have access to excellent resources around issues of sexual orientation and gender identity/expression (or “SOGIE”) through the Pride Center, Adolescent Counseling Services and others, these groups do not have expertise in early childhood education and **had not developed trainings and resources for parents and caregivers of young children.**<sup>15</sup>

Not only are the preschool years a critical time for brain development in terms of gender identity and expression, **they are often unique in terms of the strength of the parent-educator relationship.** Many parents of young children are new to their role and lean on their child’s teacher(s) for support in successfully managing this intense period in their child’s life. Given these two factors, the early years are a prime opportunity to engage with parents on issues of sexual orientation and gender identity and expression.

In the fall of 2021, Silicon Valley Community Foundation provided funding to Community Equity Collaborative to create and launch Rainbow Kids in partnership with the San Mateo County Pride Center.

## The Project

Rainbow Kids bridged the gap in SOGIE resources for parents of young children in San Mateo County by:

- **Developing a customized, culturally relevant SOGIE training** for parents/caregivers of various backgrounds.
- Creating **awareness-building materials** highlighting the importance of SOGIE training for parents of young children, and distributing them throughout the ECE network.
- Developing **concise yet substantive resource materials** pointing to further SOGIE education opportunities for parents/caregivers of young children.
- Using the partners’ connections within **San Mateo County’s early childhood education network** to market the trainings, resources, and awareness-building materials.
- Creating a **library of resources** that the Pride Center and others can use in the future.

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<sup>13</sup> From <https://genderspectrum.org/articles/supportive-parenting> quoting [this study](#)

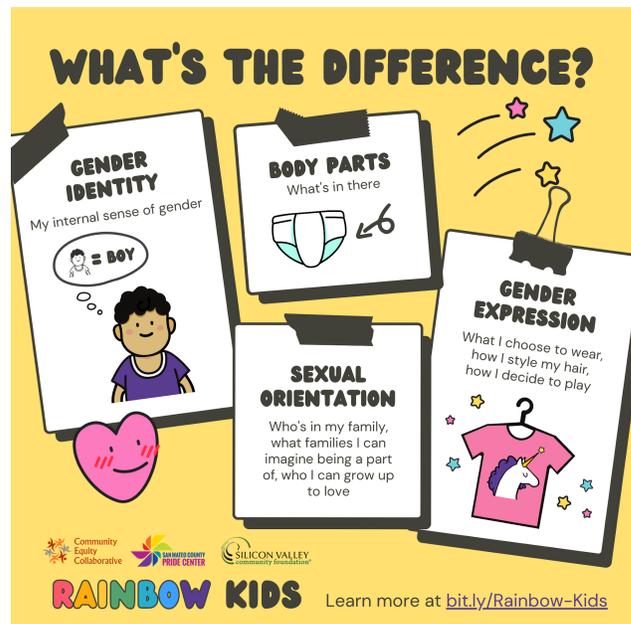
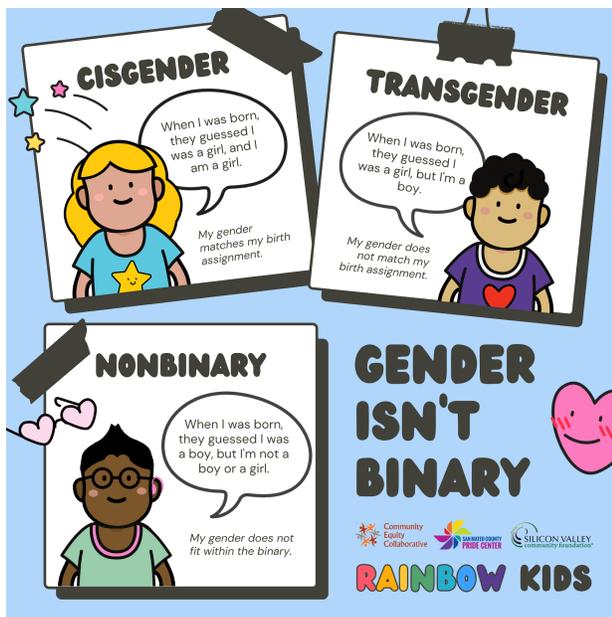
<sup>14</sup> [Family Acceptance in Adolescence and the Health of LGBT Young Adults](#) (Journal of Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Nursing)

<sup>15</sup> Local SOGIE trainings for parents currently focus on children ages 10 years and above; resources for caregivers of very young children (such as [Gender Wheel](#)) are limited and generally target child-serving professionals (educators, service providers, etc.).

In order to reach as many parents/caregivers as possible, the Rainbow Kids team partnered with several organizations to share information about the trainings via their newsletters and social media accounts. We also created messaging specifically for child care providers who wished to invite their program’s families to the trainings. Distribution partners included:

- 4Cs of San Mateo County: 726 child care centers and family child care home providers
- First 5 San Mateo County: 500 individuals invested in early health and education
- Child Care Partnership Council: 135 members and guests

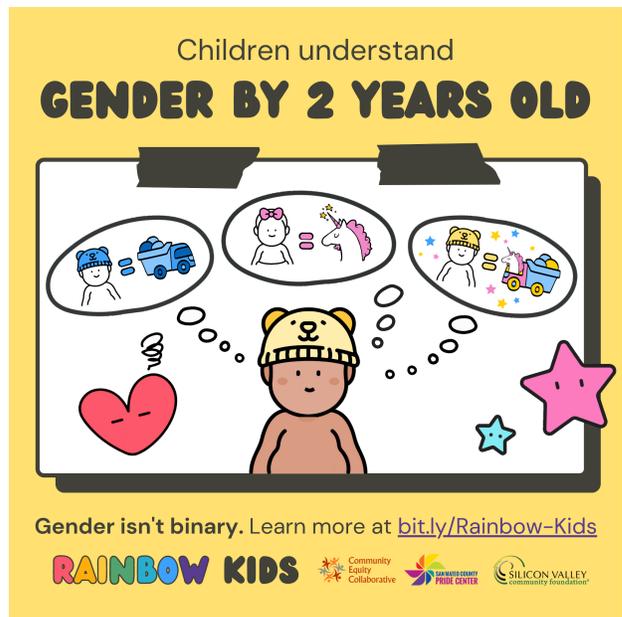
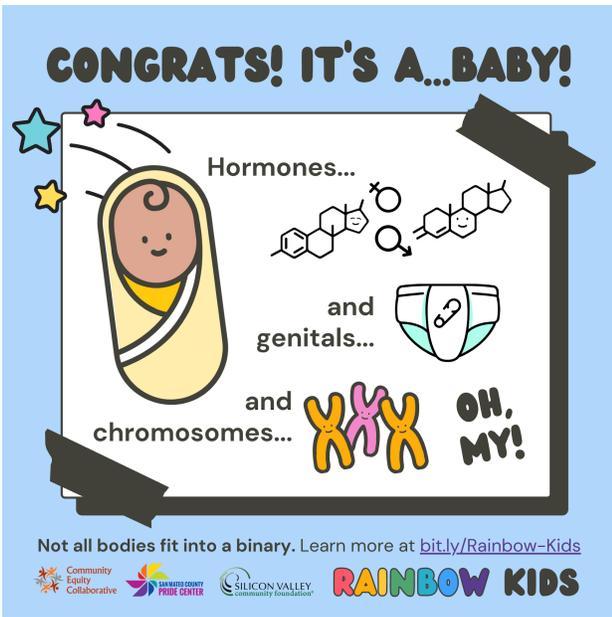
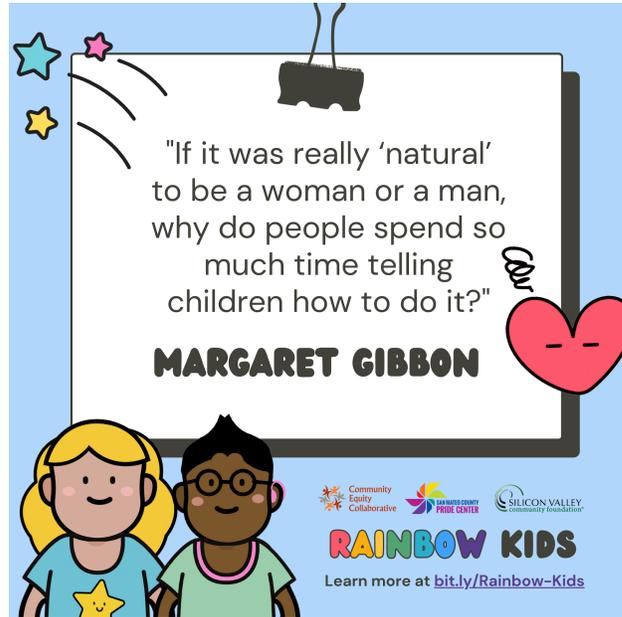
We designed the **social media posts** in order to not only spread the word about the upcoming trainings, but also to increase general awareness of SOGIE topics for parents/caregivers of young children:



Sample social media posts:

- *“Congratulations! It’s a..... BABY! Not all bodies fit into the binary of “male” or “female.” In fact several chromosomal varieties exist beyond just XX and XY. Join us for a webinar about creating a more expansive, welcoming world.”*
- *“Have you ever shopped for a dollhouse family? Usually, it includes 1 mom, 1 dad, 1 boy and 1 girl, all of the same ethnicity. But that’s not reality! Join us for a webinar about creating a more expansive, welcoming world. “*
- *Kids receive constant messages about what it means to be “girl” or “a boy.” How can we help them feel safe and confident in their bodies, families and classrooms? Join us on 4/5, 12, or 27 for a webinar about creating a more expansive, welcoming world.*

Social media images (continued)



# RESOURCES

In response to questions we received from the community about SOGIE issues for young children, we developed four information sheets as well as a website with local and national resources for continued practice and learning. These resources can be found at <https://bit.ly/RKidsResources>.

# Information sheets:

## SIMPLE WAYS TO DISCUSS GENDER AND DIVERSE FAMILIES WITH YOUNG CHILDREN

As adults, we influence what young children hear, see and experience each day. Below are a few strategies to spark conversations about gender, families and love that will give children the language and freedom to explore a more diverse and inclusive world.

### GET CREATIVE DURING STORYTIME

A lot of children's stories perpetuate stereotypes, like fairy tales that portray princesses as victims and love that's only between a boy and a girl. By changing characters' genders when we read aloud ("the princess rode in on her horse and rescued the prince"), making up stories that challenge biases, and choosing books and movies with diverse families and characters who do not fit the gender norm, we broaden young children's sense of what's possible.

### CHALLENGE MARKETING MESSAGES

When we take young children to the clothing, toy, or even grocery store, they are inundated with messages about how to dress or act like a "boy" or a "girl", as well as what makes a family. By noticing and discussing these stereotypes, we help children choose what is right for them, not simply what the world is telling them to be.

### USE INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE

We can make room for diverse families and non-traditional gender roles and identities by incorporating more inclusive language into our lives. For example, instead of assuming a person's gender based on their appearance, or using phrases that presume family makeup and/or gender ("mom and dad", "boys and girls"), try more neutral words like those on the right.

Maybe that child in the sandbox would like to play.

Did Mei Ling's family come to school today?

Friends, it's time to clean up!

Learn more at [bit.ly/Rainbow-Kids](https://bit.ly/Rainbow-Kids)

## GENDER, FAMILIES & LOVE: THE BASICS

These concepts are helpful in order to support and affirm young children as they explore their identities, as well as the diversity of the people and families around them.

### BODY PARTS AND PHYSIOLOGY

Genitals don't necessarily determine gender identity and sexual orientation (e.g. someone born with a vulva may not identify as a girl, want dresses and dolls, and grow up to love men). Anatomy, hormones, and chromosomes interact in complex ways with cultural influences and personal experience to determine who someone is and who they love.

### INTERSEX

"Intersex" is an umbrella term for people whose body parts do not fit into the male/female binary. About 2% of humans are born intersex, the same percentage born left-handed or with red hair. Intersex individuals may identify as female, male, nonbinary, or another gender.

### GENDER IDENTITY

Gender identity is the gender you feel yourself to be. If you're **cisgender**, your gender matches the gender the doctor assigned to you at birth. If you're **transgender**, your gender is different than the gender the doctor assigned to you at birth. If you're **non-binary**, you may not feel male nor female, or you may feel like both.

### GENDER EXPRESSION

Gender expression is how people communicate their gender identity to others through what they wear, how they style their hair, and how they act and play (e.g. what toys they choose).

### SEXUAL ORIENTATION

Sexual orientation means who people grow up to love and to whom they are attracted. It is related to, but separate from gender. An age-appropriate way of talking about sexuality with young children is to focus on families and love. What can families look like in a child's home, community, and in their play?

**CISGENDER**

When I was born they guessed I was a girl, and I am a girl.

**TRANSGENDER**

When I was born, they guessed I was a girl, but I'm a boy.

**NONBINARY**

When I was born, they guessed I was a boy, but I'm not a boy or a girl.

Learn more at [bit.ly/Rainbow-Kids](https://bit.ly/Rainbow-Kids)

## GENDER & DIVERSE FAMILIES: WHY TALK ABOUT THESE WITH YOUNG CHILDREN?

When we engage in age-appropriate conversations with young children about the diversity of families and gender, we give them the language and freedom to explore their identities while creating a more expansive and inclusive world for everyone.

### THEIR BRAINS ARE PRIMED

From an early age, children think about and categorize by gender. At 12 months, they might call everyone they think of as a man, "Daddy." By age 2, children start to reflect ideas about gender through play ("Girls play with dolls"), and around 2 1/2 years, young children talk about their own gender ("I'm a big boy!").

### WE MUST INTERRUPT BIASES

Our society puts people into boxes based on gender: children understand what it means to be a "boy" or a "girl" based on what they hear and see in books, on TV, at the store, and from their families. Children will learn to perform these roles unless we help them notice, reflect, and act differently.

### ACCEPTANCE PROMOTES WELL BEING

What we say about gender and love has a profound impact on children, especially those who do not fit society's narrative. LGBTQ+ youth are far more likely to consider suicide, abuse substances and suffer depression than their peers. But there is good news: family acceptance protects youth against these negative outcomes. It is never too early to support young children in feeling confident in their own bodies, families, classroom, and world.

Learn more at [bit.ly/Rainbow-Kids](https://bit.ly/Rainbow-Kids)

## NATURE VS. NURTURE: WHAT DETERMINES GENDER IDENTITY AND WHO WE LOVE?

Have you ever heard that boys are made of "snips and snails and puppy dogs' tails" and girls are "sugar and spice and everything nice"? Children are often told who they are and can be based on their body parts, but biology and culture interact in complex ways to determine how people identify and who they love.

### NORMS VARY ACROSS TIME & CULTURE

What it means to be a "boy" or a "girl" is shaped by culture and has changed over time; it is not prescribed by anatomy. For example, in the 1800s, young American boys wore lacy dresses and long hair. In many indigenous cultures, there is a third gender; sometimes called "two-spirit" people, individuals of this gender are often revered spiritual leaders in their communities.

### HUMANS ARE BIOLOGICALLY COMPLEX

Hormones, chromosomes and anatomy interact in complex ways to shape gender identity and sexual orientation; gender is not as simple as XX or XY. For example, 2% of humans are born "intersex" (their bodies don't fit into the male/female binary), which is the same percentage born left-handed or with red hair.

### SOCIETY SENDS POWERFUL MESSAGES

Children are inundated with messages about how they should look, act, and play (as well as who they should love) based on their gender; in the toy store, on TV, in books, and even on the packaging of household items. Unless we disrupt these biases, children will learn to perform these roles starting at an early age. By noticing and reflecting on these stereotypes, we give children the freedom to explore who they are with confidence.

What might a child see when shopping for a dollhouse family?

Learn more at [bit.ly/Rainbow-Kids](https://bit.ly/Rainbow-Kids)



# TRAINING



To increase awareness and basic knowledge about issues related to gender identity and expression and provide practical and age-appropriate resources, we also developed a training webinar for parents, caregivers and anyone who wants to create a more expansive, welcoming world for young children.

- **Dates:** April 5, 12, and 27, 2022 (content same in each webinar)
- **Format:** 1.5-hour webinar, including 30 minute Q&A; all sessions were free, close-captioned and in English.
- **Content:** Scenario practice and interactive activities helped participants engage via the chat function and by submitting questions in advance and using the Q&A function.
- **Facilitators:** Azisa Todd (Lead Trainer for the San Mateo County Pride Center) and Nathanael Flynn (Early Childhood Educator and co-author of *Supporting Gender Diversity in Early Childhood Classrooms*).

**WHAT DOES OUR WORLD TELL YOUNG CHILDREN ABOUT...**

Being a "boy" or a "girl"?

Who can be a family?

This **free webinar** is for parents, caregivers, and anyone who wants a more expansive, welcoming world for young children.

**REGISTER** at [bit.ly/Rainbow-Kids](https://bit.ly/Rainbow-Kids) or by scanning the QR code.

**APRIL 5, 12 OR 27**

Community Equity Collaborative | SAN MATEO COUNTY PRIDE CENTER | SILICON VALLEY community foundation

## Participation

A total of **105 individuals attended** the webinars (an additional 93 individuals registered but did not attend; all who registered received resources and other information). Of the attendees:

- 43.3% were educators
- 36%: were parents/guardians. Of these:
  - 66% had children aged 0-5 years
  - 27% had children aged 6-10 years
  - 6% had children older than 10 years
- 15.2% were community members
- 5.3% were caregivers

The facilitators customized each training using the questions/comments individuals provided at registration. These questions/comments fell into four general buckets:

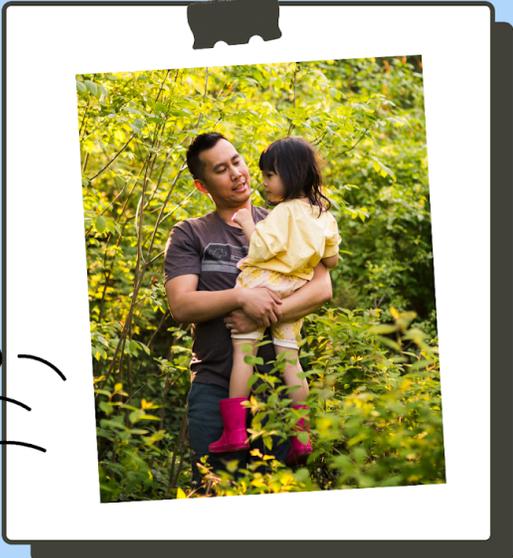
### Support for trans/gender-fluid children, including:

- *"My 6-year-old came out recently. I want ideas about supporting her and preparing her to face potential prejudice in a fortified way"*

- *"How to talk to others about my trans son"*
- *"During preschool my daughter would say she feels like a boy. I want to understand this better."*

**Support with speaking with those who don't understand, or don't agree, such as:**

- *"How do we approach parents who don't want Tommy to put on that dress, or paint his nails?"*
- *"How might I support children and families that might come from a culture that does not support the LGBTQIA+ community?"*
- *"How do you support people that cite "religious" reasons why they won't provide gender-expansive opps for children?"*
- *"How to explain to my child's grandparents/other elders who do not understand the concepts of gender expansiveness?"*
- *"I want to feel more confident in how I speak up for LGBTQ+ when speaking with people who are "against" them."*



## TODAY'S GOALS

- ★ Reflect on messages children receive about gender, love, and family
- ★ Understand LGBTQ+ identities, and
- ★ Build skills to talk about these ideas with young children.

**Assistance developing language to help children understand these topics, such as:**

- *"How to explain to 3- to 4-year-olds about families who have same-sex marriages"*
- *"Keeping questions and answers about gender age-appropriate"*
- *"How to talk to my kids about gender inclusiveness"*
- *"How to introduce they/them pronouns?"*

**Requests for general knowledge about LGBTQ+ topics, like:**

- *"Resources that we can offer staff and parents around this topic"*
- *"Learning more about a demographic that I don't usually engage with in my job"*
- *"Knowledge about gender and the different 'labels'"*
- *"Both concrete steps and language that I can use to support younger LGBTQIA+ friends, family, and*

- community members”
- “What are all the new pronouns and what do they mean?”

## Training Evaluation

We shared an online evaluation form via a link at the end of each training as well as in a follow-up email. The evaluation contained 15 questions, including 8 demographic questions; **33% of the webinar participants completed an evaluation form**. Below are some highlights. (For a full report, see the detailed [Training Evaluation Summary](#).)

Of those who completed the evaluation:

- **88% agreed or strongly agreed** that the **training gave them a better understanding** of how LGBTQ+ issues relate to early childhood.
- **97% agreed or strongly agreed** that the **topic(s) presented during the training were relevant**.
- **100% agreed or strongly agreed** that the training was **well-paced and engaging**.
- **97% agreed or strongly agreed** that they would **recommend the training to others**.

**Narrative responses to the question, “What did you enjoy about the training?”:**

Respondents focused on positive reviews of the presenters, content, value for educators and the practice and participatory elements of the training.

- *“Respectful. Clear. Wonderful trainers. Informative.”*
- *“This was a very informative, engaging and inclusive forum to touch on areas we have been silent about in the preschool world.”*
- *“I wish all early learning educators could participate in a training like this as part of their preparation to teach.”*
- *“It was interactive and engaging with good examples and ways to practice.”*

**Narrative responses to the question, “What improvements would you suggest for the training?”:**

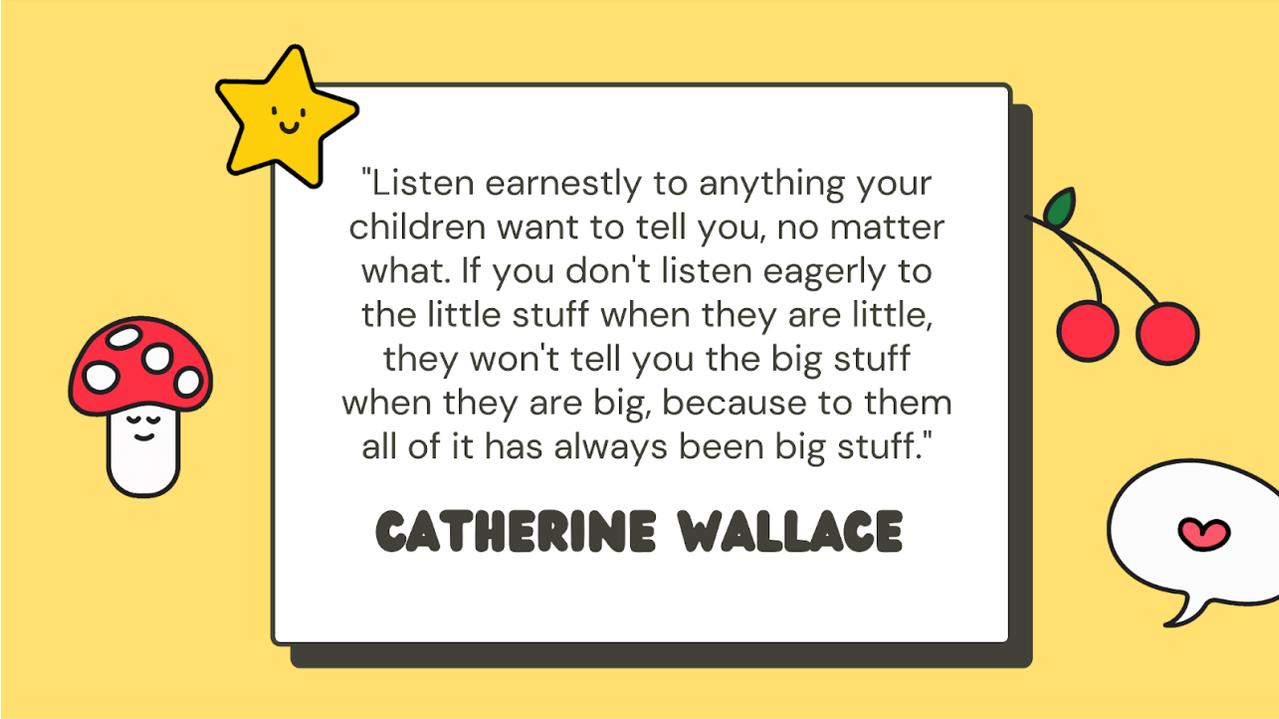
Respondents primarily made suggestions about adding scenarios, resources or additional trainings as well as commented about the webinar format.

- *“...[S]plit it...one [training] for parents with scenarios they would encounter and one for providers with scenarios they would encounter that might be different than for parents.”*
- *“I’d love to see a full workshop around this for ECE providers.”*
- *“Maybe allowing folks to speak up and not just have the chat function enabled to simulate an in-person type training/workshop.”*

## Summary

Rainbow Kids was extremely well-received by the community. Participants want more! Future opportunities include developing custom trainings for particular parent/caregiver groups (for example, a training for the Latinx community that speaks specifically to its cultural/religious norms). Another possibility is to create a train-the-trainer model so that Rainbow Kids can be used more broadly throughout California and the nation.

Community Equity Collaborative is extremely grateful for the support that made this project possible: funding from Silicon Valley Community Foundation as well as the expertise and passion of Nathanael Flynn and Azisa Todd, plus Azisa's colleagues at the Pride Center. Thank you!



For more info about Rainbow Kids, contact Heather Hopkins at [heather@communityequitycollaborative.org](mailto:heather@communityequitycollaborative.org)