



FAMILY DIVERSITY VOCABULARY

This list is intended to be a starting point for important conversations about family diversity with your students. Many families have multiple identities and might include themselves in multiple family definitions.

Most children see the caring adults who love and take care of them as their family and will refer to them in that way. It is important to recognize the complexity and variation amongst all families. We recommend that you connect with families in your classroom community to find out the language that they use to refer to their families to help respectfully answer questions that may arise. We encourage you to expand beyond this list so that all of your students and their families feel welcomed in their school community.

ADOPTION: When adults bring children into their families and legally become the parents of those children.

ADOPTIVE PARENTS: The parents of children who have joined the family through adoption.

BIRTH PARENT: A biological parent. People may also use the terms birth mother or birth father. Most often used in the context of adoption.

DONOR OR SURROGATE: People who help other people have children.

BLENDED FAMILY: Two families who come together to form a new family. This may include stepparents and step-siblings.

CHOSEN FAMILY: People who you care about and consider family, such as friends or neighbors.

DIVORCE: When people legally separate and end a marriage.

EXTENDED FAMILY: All of your relatives, including your grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins. In some families, this can include neighbors, friends and chosen family.

FOSTER PARENT: People—other than a child's first family—who take children into their homes and take care of them for as long as their family needs help. Sometimes children will return to their first family, sometimes foster parents go on to become adoptive parents or permanent guardians and sometimes children will be adopted by other families.

GUARDIAN: A person who has responsibility by law to care for a child; a person other than the biological parent who takes care of a child. The person may be biologically related to the child, such as a grandparent.

INTERFAITH FAMILY: When people of different religious backgrounds are part of the same family. Some families choose to raise their children primarily in one faith, some choose to teach their children both faiths and others practice multiple faiths.

HALF-SISTER or HALF-BROTHER: When siblings have one biological parent in common.

LGBTQ FAMILY: A family in which some people are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, non-binary or queer. This could include parents, guardians, foster parents, children, chosen family, siblings or grandparents who are LGBTQ.

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- **LESBIAN:** People who love people of the same gender—two women.
 - **GAY:** People who love people of the same gender.
 - **BISEXUAL:** People who love people of any two genders.
 - **PANSEXUAL:** People who love people of any gender.
 - **TRANSGENDER:** When your gender identity (how you feel) is different than what doctors/midwives assigned to you when you were born (girl/boy or sex assigned at birth).
 - **NON-BINARY:** People who do not feel like the words “girl” or “boy” fits. They may feel like both or neither. They sometimes use pronouns such as they, them, theirs.
 - **QUEER:** People use this word as a way to identify with and celebrate people of all gender identities and all the ways people love each other. When used in a mean way, it is a word that hurts.

MIXED FAMILY: When people of different racial and cultural backgrounds are part of the same family. People of different ethnic, religious or national backgrounds can also form families who are “mixed” in terms of culture, skin color, language and/or religious practices.

MULTIGENERATIONAL FAMILY: When more than one generation of a family lives together.

MULTIRACIAL FAMILY: When people of different racial backgrounds are part of the same family.

MULTILINGUAL FAMILY: When people within a family speak more than one language.

SIBLING: Children or adults who share a parent.

SINGLE-PARENT FAMILY OR SOLO-PARENT FAMILY: A family in which one parent cares for the child or children.

STEP-SIBLINGS: If a divorced or solo parent forms a family with a new person and that person already has children, those children can become step-siblings to their children.

STEPPARENT: When a divorced or solo parent forms a family with a new person, the new partner might become a stepparent to their children.

Remember to ask your students and families to share how they talk about their families.

WHO'S IN YOUR FAMILY?