



# LGBT+ Parents report



2024

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# Foreword

## **Being an LGBT+ parent is nothing new, but the landscape is changing.**

Whilst many barriers remain, it is increasingly accessible for LGBT+ people to become parents. There are 217,000 same-sex couple families in the UK as of 2022 (up 1256% from 16,000 in 1996). Roughly, that equates to six children from LGBT+ families in every nursery/school.

At the same time, the UK has fallen behind on progress to equality, dropping 17 places in the ILGA rankings since 2014. As more children grow up in LGBT+ families, discrimination and hate crime are on the rise again.

This report takes a preliminary look at the experiences of LGBT+ parents, and their children, in the UK. We look at the challenges they face when it comes to education, school communities, and how they feel about raising a family in Britain today.

While we looked at the varying experiences of parents across the LGBT+ spectrum, we found that the research shows particularly high levels of stigma placed on lesbian and gay parents. This may be because they are more immediately recognisable as not following a heteronormative family structure, whereas trans parents are more likely to be experiencing transphobic comments in their school communities.

We hope that school communities will find this a valuable resource in better understanding LGBT+ families and how to support them. As a LGBT+ parent myself, I particularly hope we can use these findings to advocate for a better future for our children.

**Amy Ashenden, Director of Comms and Engagement at Just Like Us**



## **A note from our CEO**

Just Like Us works with more than 7,000 schools, supporting them in their journey to becoming fully inclusive to both pupils who identify as LGBT+ and/or come from an LGBT+ family. Our work with primary schools focuses on celebrating diverse families, introducing LGBT+ inclusive children's stories, and helping young people understand allyship.

This important report sheds light on the vital challenges that remain for helping all educational settings become more inclusive to LGBT+ families and young people.

**Laura Mackay, CEO at Just Like Us**



# Key findings

1

## Negative comments about LGBT+ families are common

More than half (56%) of lesbian and gay parents face negative comments about their families. 42% of their children have experienced remarks about having LGBT+ parents

2

## More open conversations are needed in schools

Only one in five (19%) LGBT+ parents say their child's school openly discusses LGBT+ families with pupils

3

## Anti-trans rhetoric has spread to some school communities

A third (30%) of transgender parents have heard negative comments about trans people at school

4

## Lesbian mums face invasive questions

39% of lesbian mums have been asked invasive questions such as 'strangers asking about their child's sperm donor'

5

## School bullying is a huge worry for LGBT+ parents

Half of lesbian and gay parents (48%) worry their child will be bullied because they have LGBT+ parents

6

## Heterosexual, nuclear families are often still seen as the default

A third (35%) of all LGBT+ parents say their school refers to families as "mums and dads" by default



# School inclusion

When it comes to LGBT+ inclusion in UK schools, LGBT+ families have very mixed experiences – some of which are leaving families isolated and even discriminated against.

LGBT+ parents generally report a widespread lack of inclusion, impacting on their mental health and wellbeing as well as their child's ability to thrive.

Lesbian, gay and trans parents in particular are concerned their children's schools will not be accepting of their LGBT+ family. A third of lesbian and gay parents (32%) are worried about this, as are four in 10 (41%) trans parents and two fifths (17%) of bisexual parents.

Additionally, 15% of LGBT+ parents report having been treated differently by their child's school because of their LGBT+ identity. This increases to one in five lesbian (21%), gay (22%) and trans (18%) parents.

Concerningly, only one in five (19%) LGBT+ parents say their school would 'openly discuss LGBT+ families with pupils'. This is despite there being an estimated 217,000 same-sex couple families in the UK as of 2022 (up from 16,000 in 1996, according to [ONS](#)).

Only 12% of LGBT+ parents say their child's school has LGBT+ inclusive books for pupils to read.

More positively, a quarter (23%) say their child's school celebrates [School Diversity Week](#). This initiative was set up by Just Like Us, the LGBT+ young people's charity, in 2016 and is now celebrated by more than 7,000 schools with a large focus on diverse families in primary schools.

When it comes to language around LGBT+ families, processes could be improved. One in five trans and non-binary parents (20%) report school forms only having 'male' and 'female' on registration forms.

More than half of lesbian and gay parents face negative comments about their families

56%

# 12%

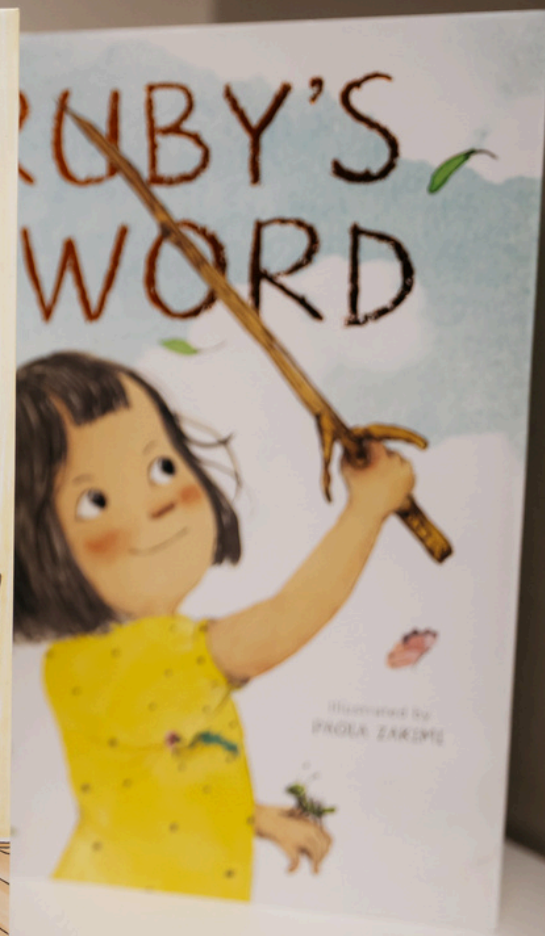
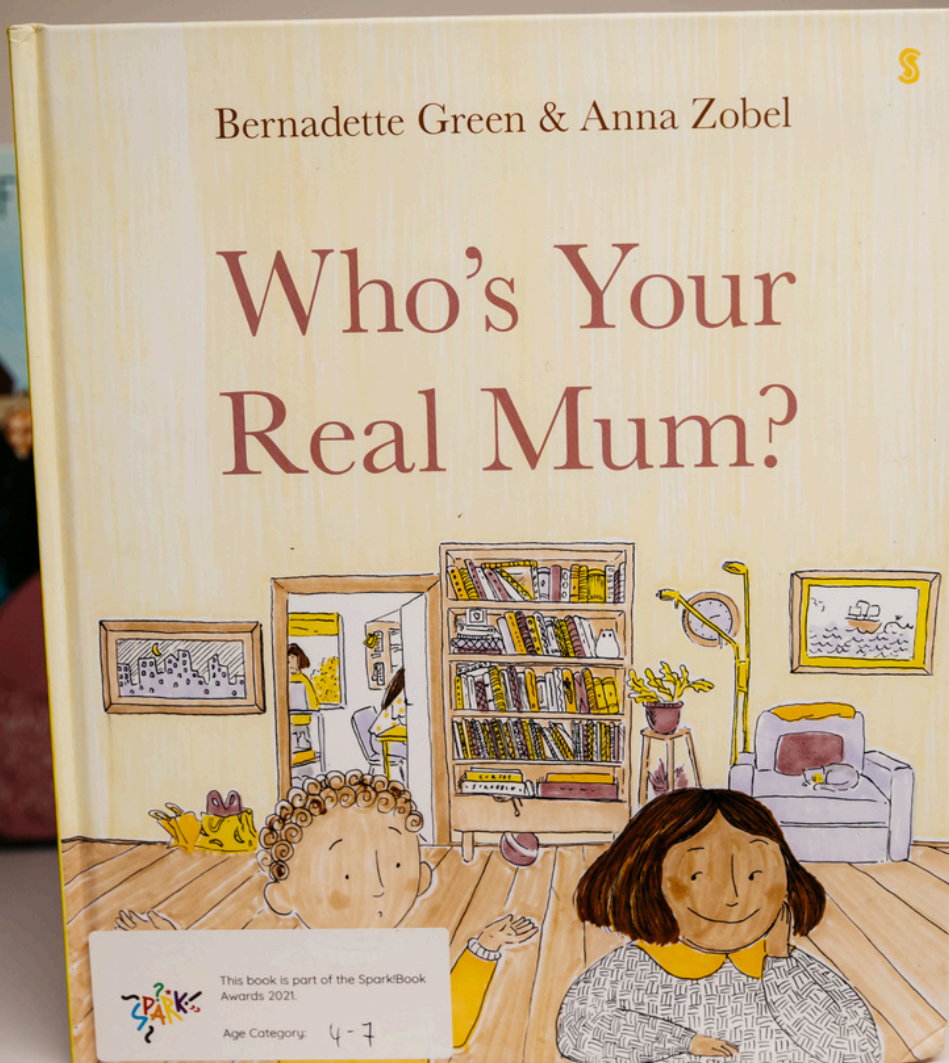
Only 1 in 10  
LGBT+ parents  
say their child's  
school has  
LGBT+ inclusive  
books

"School has to be representative of the world we live in and it's still often not.

"Both our kids went to the same primary school. My partner talked with teachers about getting more LGBT picture books and they did do that. It would've been fantastic if things had been in place but I was really grateful that they were responsive to us.

"When my older child got to secondary school, she really worried about being bullied for having LGBT parents."

– Paula, a lesbian mum



# 22%

A quarter of lesbian and gay parents report their family being treated differently by their child's school

Additionally, a third (35%) of all LGBT+ parents say their school refers to families as "mums and dads" as the default, therefore excluding vast swathes of LGBT+ families.

Just 11% have been asked 'what your child prefers to call you (e.g. "mummy" and "muma", etc)'. And a quarter (25%) of LGBT+ parents have been assumed to be heterosexual or cisgender – this increases to 30% among trans parents. Given the context – where many schools avoid talking about diverse families – it is perhaps unsurprising that parents worry about their child's ability to thrive in school.

Many LGBT+ parents have fears around their children's peers not accepting them.

A third (32%) of LGBT+ parents worry their child will be bullied at school because they come from a diverse family.

One in 10 (12%) lesbian and gay parents – and 16% of trans parents – feel 'let down' by their child's school not being LGBT+ inclusive. This is more common with primary schools, who tend to be less likely to make efforts to be LGBT+ inclusive.

As a result, some LGBT+ parents have actively chosen to homeschool their children.

One in 10 trans parents (11%) have decided to homeschool their children 'to avoid anti-LGBT+ prejudice'. This is compared to one in 20 (5%) of lesbian and gay parents, and 4% of bisexual parents.

A quarter of LGBT+ parents have been assumed to be heterosexual or cisgender

# 25%

# Social stigma

Our report findings show some resistance to accepting diverse families both inside and outside the school gates.

More than half (56%) of lesbian and gay parents face negative comments about their families. Four in 10 (41%) LGBT+ parents overall have experienced negative comments about being part of a LGBT+ family, suggesting lesbian and gay parents face more stigma as their family structures may be more immediately recognisable as LGBT+.

Anti-trans rhetoric appears to be quite common in school communities. A third (30%) of transgender parents have heard negative comments about trans people at school. These anti-trans comments have been heard more broadly by a quarter (23%) of LGBT+ parents overall.

In addition to negative comments, LGBT+ families also face a unique level of questioning by people in their school communities and beyond.

A quarter (25%) of LGBT+ parents have experienced invasive questions, such as strangers asking about their child's sperm donor.

However, this is a much bigger problem faced by lesbian parents of whom 39% have been asked 'invasive questions' such as strangers asking about their child's sperm donor.

LGBT+ families face social stigma in their school communities and beyond.

A third of gay and lesbian (33%) and trans (34%) parents, as well as a quarter of bisexual parents (24%), report being worried about 'other parents accepting our LGBT+ family'.

In addition, four in 10 (41%) of trans parents and a third (27%) of lesbian and gay parents have been 'left out of parent social arrangements seemingly because I am LGBT+'. This has also affected 14% of bisexual parents.

Trans parents are the most likely to have been left out of social arrangements with other parents because they are LGBT+

41%



# 48%

Half of lesbian and gay parents (48%) worry their child will be bullied because of their family

"My daughter, 4, was threatened by older school pupils who came to our house, shouting homophobic abuse. They set a newspaper on fire and put it through our letterbox.

"I'm worried about when my children go to secondary school, I don't want them to be bullied for having same-sex parents.

I wish more schools would talk more openly about same-sex parents so it becomes the norm."

– Shelley, a pansexual mum



# Mental health and wellbeing

Overall, many LGBT+ parents are feeling worried, anxious and depressed about the possibility of their families facing discrimination.

They are concerned about their children being impacted by this.

Worries include not fitting in, being treated unfairly and not feeling part of the school community.

Generally, a quarter of lesbian mums (22%), gay dads (25%) and trans parents (23%) have felt 'depressed or anxious about my LGBT+ family not fitting in or not being treated fairly'. This is followed by 13% of bisexual parents.

Additionally, many LGBT+ parents fear the social stigma faced by their families will impact their children's experience of school and friendships.

Half of lesbian and gay parents (52%) are worried their child will 'not be accepted' because they are part of a LGBT+ family. This is also felt by a third (29%) of bisexual parents and four in 10 (36%) trans parents.

These stressors result in a general feeling of loneliness and exclusion, felt by many LGBT+ families.

Trans parents are the most likely (34%) to be feeling isolated 'as a LGBT+ parent'. This is followed by gay dads (26%), lesbian mums (23%) and bisexual parents (15%).

A quarter of lesbian, gay and trans parents have felt 'depressed or anxious' about their family facing discrimination

23%





“As a trans mum, I have occasionally felt a little isolated.

“But our nursery experience has been remarkably positive. Their policies are well designed to accommodate different sorts of families, and that, to me, has been the most important thing.

“One of the first things we were asked is what our child calls us, and they have been absolutely consistent in using those terms.

“All that's really needed is acceptance, flexibility and a willingness to listen, and that helps all families – not just queer ones.”

– Lyra, a trans mum

# 34%

Trans parents are the most likely to feel isolated 'as a LGBT+ parent'

# Children of LGBT+ parents

While our survey did not ask young people directly, we surveyed their parents about the impact of school and social stigma that arises from them being part of a LGBT+ family.

We already know that many parents are worried about a lack of acceptance towards young people and that some children are being taken out of mainstream education to be homeschooled simply because of discrimination and stigma towards LGBT+ families in schools.

Many children face negative remarks in school and beyond about their family structure.

Four in 10 (42%) of lesbian and gay parents report that their children have faced negative comments 'about being part of a LGBT+ family'. This is also reported by trans (36%) and bisexual (19%) parents.

This stigma even impacts their friendships at school.

A quarter of gay and lesbian (23%) and a fifth of bisexual (18%) parents say their child has been left 'feeling upset or hurt by negative comments at school about LGBT+ people'.

In addition, a third (27%) of trans parents and a quarter of lesbian and gay parents (24%) report their children being 'left out of social arrangements seemingly because they are from a LGBT+ family'. 15% of bisexual parents said the same.

Anti-LGBT+ attitudes in school therefore not only affect LGBT+ young people but also all young people from diverse families.

A quarter of gay and lesbian parents report their children being left out of social arrangements because they're from a LGBT+ family

24%



# Conclusion

## Our report findings

We know from Just Like Us' *Growing up LGBT+* report that many LGBT+ young people feel unsafe in school. This report has shown that children of LGBT+ families, whether they themselves identify as part of the community or not, also face discrimination simply because of who their parents are.

Anti-LGBT+ attitudes among school communities are having a hugely detrimental impact on LGBT+ families' abilities to engage in mainstream education, leaving parents anxious and children hurt and isolated.

Lesbian, gay and trans parents are often the most visibly LGBT+ within school communities and face particularly acute worries and discrimination as a result. Also concerning is the level of LGBT+ parents feeling they need to remove their children from mainstream education due to anti-LGBT+ prejudice.

LGBT+ families deserve better. While many strides have been made in schools across the UK, there remains much work to be done to unpick norms around what constitutes a family and to embrace diversity.

LGBT+ families are eager for schools to embrace inclusion, and this can be as simple as not only referring to 'mums and dads' as the default, and having LGBT+ inclusive books in the classroom.

Making learning materials, language, anti-bullying policies, and school administration processes more inclusive are among the solutions that schools can embrace to ensure diverse families are not discriminated against, but instead, celebrated in their communities.

Just Like Us is here to support all schools on their journey to inclusion, so that the future can look brighter.

LGBT+ inclusion is vital so that all young people are able to thrive in school and beyond.

## Looking to the future

This report provides a snapshot of the wide-ranging issues faced by LGBT+ families, and our case studies highlight deeper issues that deserve further exploration.

Just Like Us will be working in the coming years to research, address and help schools resolve these issues.

# 24%

A quarter of lesbian and gay parents report their children being 'left out of social arrangements seemingly because they are from a LGBT+ family'



**“Just thinking you should not be homophobic is not enough at all. There are tiny things that schools can do proactively, which make a huge difference.**

“There was a lot of misunderstanding about our family set up so we spoke to the school. At first, the teacher’s response was like ‘well I don’t need to know your personal life’ but actually it was really needed and important because my child had come home crying because of comments from other pupils.

“In the end, we suggested, and the school created, a sheet of paper that children and their carers could complete with info on their family set up, any languages they speak, who they live with, who is important in their lives, etc. It was so helpful.

“I remember giving out birthday party invites for my youngest daughter. One of the parents very pointedly said her child would not be coming, very clearly because we’re LGBT parents. That felt homophobic for sure.

“What helped was making a deliberate effort to get to know everyone, get to know the teachers. I also joined the PTA but that’s not possible for everyone.”

– Jayne, a lesbian mum

# Recommendations for nurseries and schools

## 1

### Make diversity the default

Openly talk about diverse families and don't assume every pupil's family structure looks the same.

Talk to staff/colleagues about making diversity the default and making language more inclusive.

Avoid referring only to parents as "mums and dads".

If you're not sure, it's better to ask parents. For example, rather than ask about 'mum and dad', you can ask 'what's your family set up at home for Dylan?' or 'It's really important to us that we are inclusive to all families and we know every family looks different, what would be useful for us to know about Harpreet's life at home?'

## 2

### Engage with LGBT+ parents

LGBT+ families are likely to have serious worries about their child's safety and ability to thrive in school. Invite them to discuss their worries, ask what might help their child thrive at school, and talk about what you're doing as a school to be inclusive. You might be very early on in your inclusion journey and you can be honest about this - most LGBT+ parents will be understanding providing that you show a willingness to improve on including and supporting diverse families.

You could also make sure you have a LGBT+ parent on the school's PTA. Invite LGBT+ families to apply if you don't have any representation of this kind - they may not be able to take up the role but it's worth trying, and word will spread that you are an inclusive school. Alternatively, if there are any out LGBT+ staff or governors at your school, invite them to be involved in your inclusion work.

You could also invite pupils who are LGBT+ or from LGBT+ families to help - it's a great way to nourish student voice, too.





# 42%

Four in 10 lesbian and gay parents report that their children have faced negative comments 'about being part of a LGBT+ family'.

"I feel like I had to come out for my parents in high school and then again in college – it's just difficult. I'm not going to be friends with people who are homophobic but I still have to be careful. I just say 'parents', I never say 'my mums' unless I know someone is safe to tell.

"It's helpful if the teachers all include something about LGBT people so I feel it's OK to say about my family.

"For example, in a Mandarin class, the teacher only mentioned straight families. I didn't feel I could say about my family because I thought I'd be seen as doing it wrong unless I explained I'd got two mums."

– Lola, an 18-year-old pupil



# 3

## Make LGBT+ people visible across the curriculum

LGBT+ families and young people exist all year round. That's why it's important to make sure LGBT+ people are featured across school life and the curriculum.

This can look like mentioning two dads in a maths problem scenario, or including how to describe LGBT+ families in languages lessons as not every pupil will be able to say they have a mum and dad.

This more casual way of speaking about LGBT+ people can be really beneficial as it avoids putting a spotlight on pupils but lets them know that they are included and thought of. It also helps other pupils to be allies. This approach is often referred to a 'usualising' LGBT+ people.

At primary level, this can also include preparing pupils for transitioning to secondary – something many LGBT+ families report being difficult for their children.

Just Like Us has LGBT+ inclusive lesson plans and curriculum resources for all key subjects and key stages – [sign up for School Diversity Week](#) for free access.

# 4

## LGBT+ inclusive books

Add LGBT+ inclusive books to your school library. If budgets are an issue, Just Like Us has free videos of authors reading LGBT+ stories and reading lists for EYFS through to KS5. [Sign up for School Diversity Week](#) to get access.

# 5

## Display posters

Positive messaging is linked to all pupils having better mental health and wellbeing ([Growing up LGBT+ report](#)).

Displaying posters with affirming messages about diverse families signals to pupils that school is a safe place.

Free posters are available from Just Like Us by [signing up for School Diversity Week](#).

# 6

## 'About me' sheet

One way you can open up conversations about LGBT+ families and make sure all pupils are supported is to create an 'about me' sheet.

This can be a document that pupils and/or their families fill out so that your nursery, school or college can better understand your pupils.

It can also include things like faith, which languages are spoken at home, and other information about family life that pupils feel are important for their teachers to know.

At nursery and primary level, you could also make a display as a class about each pupil's family life at home. This can be a good visual reminder to staff and pupils that not everyone has a mum and dad at home, too.



# 23%

A quarter of gay and lesbian (23%) parents say their child has been left 'feeling upset or hurt by negative comments at school about LGBT+ people'.

"In his first school, some older children teased my son about having two dads. We were horrified when we heard because he loves having two dads so we didn't want him to suddenly be ashamed of this. Fortunately, the school dealt with it well.

"I do worry about when he moves up to secondary school because he will almost have to 'come out' again about having two dads at an age where fitting in will feel crucial to him. I hate that he will have to go through this. He will definitely need support when transitioning to secondary school."

– Chris, a gay dad

# 7

## Update registration forms

Registration forms are often an immediate signal to LGBT+ families that a nursery or school is inclusive or not.

Updating forms to include a non-binary option under gender of parents, and making sure parents don't just have a 'mother and father' section to fill out, are both quick changes that will have a lot of positive impact for LGBT+ families.

This can also be a great opportunity to ask parents/carers what the child likes to call them – for example, mum and mumma.

# 8

## Celebrate School Diversity Week

More than 7,000 primary and secondary schools take part in School Diversity Week every year to show pupils that being LGBT+ is something to be celebrated.

From assemblies and inclusive subject lessons to Rainbow Friday dress up days and fundraisers, schools can celebrate in a variety of ways.

Sign up to take part in the annual event and you'll receive access to hundreds of free resources as well as a guide to celebrating.

# 9

## Update your anti-bullying policy

Make sure your anti-bullying policy and the ways you deal with homophobic and transphobic language and incidents as a school are inclusive of not just LGBT+ young people but also pupils from LGBT+ families.

Many LGBT+ parents worry about their children being bullied because of their family structure so this will provide security for both families and school staff on how to deal with any incidents.

# 10

## Set up a Pride Group and/or book a school talk

A Pride Group is a regular lunchtime or after school club for LGBT+ and ally pupils to come together and learn while making friends in a safe space.

Hundreds of secondary schools run Pride Groups with support from Just Like Us' Pride Groups programme, and these are a great way for pupils from LGBT+ families to feel safer in school.

You can also book Just Like Us speakers to talk in secondary schools about their experiences growing up LGBT+ and how to be an ally.

# Methodology

This research was carried out independently by Research Without Barriers (RWB) on behalf of Just Like Us in May 2024.

The sample comprised of 1,012 UK LGBT+ parents.

LGBT+ parents included the following groupings of respondents: lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and 'Other LGBT+' parents. The latter category includes other LGBT+ identities such as asexuality and pansexuality. References made to 'gay parents' refer to gay men.

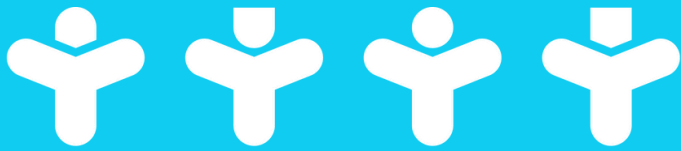
Transgender and non-binary parents were grouped under the same umbrella of trans parents.

Written quotes from LGBT+ parents and pupils from LGBT+ families in the UK are from case studies collected by Just Like Us – separately to the statistics presented – in June 2024.

Stock images of LGBT+ families and first names only have been used to protect the safety of our case studies.



# Thank you for supporting LGBT+ families



**just like us**  
THE LGBT+ YOUNG PEOPLE'S CHARITY

## Acknowledgements

This report would not have been possible without the contributions of many LGBT+ parents, several of whom gave their time to sharing very personal experiences of school and family life.

**To learn more about Just Like Us' work:**

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**Just Like Us is the LGBT+  
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