

# **The Complete Lesbian and Gay Parenting Guide**

*By Arlene Istar Lev, CSW*

*Reviewed by Dave Parker*

“The first thing to understand about parenting is that there is no way to prepare for it,” Lev states at one point. “All the preparedness in the world still leaves parents emotionally raw and psychologically blindsided to the realities of parenting.”

Moreover, this is in spite of the fact that most first time LGBT parents are far better prepared than most heterosexual parents. Only adoptive hetero parents can have any concept of the effort and dedication required for LGBT couples to become parents. The paperwork and agency involvement required for adoption, however, usually does not include the serious questions about “life style” and its possible impact on the child.

The Complete Lesbian and Gay Parenting Guide is both an informative read for prospective LGBT parents and an excellent reference after parenting becomes fact. It covers various ways of acquiring the child – through surrogacy, adoption, or partnering with and individual with an existing child. Lev discusses relationships with surrogates, sperm donors, extended families, and the ubiquitous child welfare agencies.

The book has four major sections: becoming a parent, building healthy families, break-ups and separation, and ongoing family life. There is an excellent mix of advice and discussion about relationships, medical procedures, and adoption, and the legal, emotional, and practical issues of LGBT parenting. Real life examples and stories are used copiously to demonstrate the points Lev makes throughout.

There is constant, repetitive emphasis on the lifetime responsibilities of parenting. Once a child becomes part of the family, ALL actions must be considered in light of what is best for the child.

The challenges of gay parenting include all the challenges of non-gay parenting, with the added complication that our current society constantly tries to judge LGBT parents far more severely than their non-gay counterparts.

Lev writes with humor, yet thoroughly covers the serious subject of parenting. The book is based on Lev’s twenty-plus years of family counseling and her perspective as a lesbian mom. All LGBT prospective parents should have this book. To me, this book joins her earlier “Transgender Emergence” as an outstanding contribution to the serious resources for those dealing with gender variance in any form.