LGBTQ+ fertility factsheet



FERTILITY IN THE WORKPLACE
Expert workplace support from The IVFN

THE IVFN
Reproductive health & wellbeing for everybody

LGBTQ+ fertility

In the UK it is estimated there are over 2 million people who identify as LGB+, and 262,000 people whose gender is different to the one they were assigned at birth. For those who want to have a family with a biological connection either to themselves or their partner, they might need to have fertility treatment.

For those who are LGBTQ+, they might access fertility treatment to start their family either because they have a health-related fertility problem or because they need donor help to get pregnant. It's important to recognise that even if you don't have health-related fertility problems, fertility treatment can still be emotionally draining. It can be especially heart-breaking when they experience hurdles along the way, such as the devastation of treatment failures and pregnancy loss, as these can be unexpected without a diagnosed health-related fertility problem.

There are many different avenues to parenthood for this population, even within a fertility-treatment setting, as well as big decisions along the way such as choosing a donor. They might be doing this journey on their own; they might be the non-gestational carrier in a same sex female relationship; they might be undergoing fertility preservation; they might be using a surrogate. What we do know is the LGBTQ+ population are not a homogenous population, and as such their journey and experiences will differ too.

Repercussions in the workplace

We are often told by those we support that the process can be hard and time-consuming. For this population this can even be because they experience medical professionals and workplaces who are unsure of the LGBTQ+ pathway to parenthood and the support they should be providing. We are also told that often the language on forms and in policies is not inclusive. When this happens, we are told it can feel like they aren't being treated fairly.

We also need to be mindful that for some people they might not be 'out' at work. Stonewall report that more than a third of LGBT staff have hidden they are LGBT at work for fear of discrimination with almost one in five having been the target of negative comments of conduct from work colleagues. This can be particularly challenging when starting fertility treatment as an LGBTQ+ person and adds an additional layer of complexity in an already emotional journey. Furthermore, we are also told that often they can be the first employees requesting support or time off as an LGBTQ+ person undergoing fertility treatment. This can feel like they are an experiment in the policy updating process, and instead of receiving support, it can make LGBTQ+ people feel like they are instead educating their workplace.

Some helpful tips

- **Don't assume your colleague(s) haven't already experienced trauma and loss**. LGBTQ+ people we support often feel like they need to prove their infertility status in order to receive the support they need.
- **Don't over-enquire**. LGBTQ+ people we support often tell us people are nosey and over-interested in their journey as it is perceived to be 'different'. This can feel invasive.
- **Ensure your policies are inclusive.** LGBTQ+ people often tell us that policies and paperwork don't represent their relationship, family nor pathway to parenthood.

How you can help

Inclusive workplaces: Ensure your workplace is inclusive and its policies represent everyone. LGBTQ+ families aren't a new thing; don't wait for someone to request the support - update your policies, ensure LGBTQ+ families are included and represented, and provide training to staff now.

Signposting: The IVFN provides trusted information and support for people exploring different routes to parenthood, including LGBTQ+ family-building. Employees can access relevant expert information, education, community support and fertility specialists through the IVFN platform, helping them understand their options and find support throughout their journey.