

Affirmation of Family Diversity

The Affirmation of Family Diversity has been signed by over 1,800 experts, authors, therapists, religious leaders, community leaders, and citizens, with additional people signing every day. It was released in June 2000.

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We believe that all families should be valued, that the well-being of children is critical to our nation's future, and that people who care for one another should be supported in their efforts to build healthy, happy relationships. One of America's strengths is its diversity, which includes not only a wide range of races, ethnicities, creeds, abilities, genders, and sexual orientations, but also a range of family forms. One family form is marriage, and we agree with the newly-formed "Marriage Movement" that marriages should be supported.

What worries us is the mistaken notion that marriage is the only acceptable relationship or family structure.

More than one in three American adults is currently unmarried. Policies that benefit only married relationships routinely exclude this considerable percentage of ordinary people, whose lives and families do not fit the married ideal upheld by the marriage movement.

The family diversity that exists in America today includes people who have chosen not to marry and those who are prevented from marrying, such as same-sex couples. It includes people who have chosen to live together before marriage (the majority of marriages today are preceded by cohabitation) and those who are single. It includes older people and disabled people, who may risk losing needed benefits if they get married. And it includes children, half of whom live in a family structure other than their two married parents.

We believe it is essential to recognize, embrace, and support the family diversity that exists today. Stigmatizing people who are divorced, punishing single parents, casting stepfamilies as less-than-perfect, shaming unmarried couples, and ignoring the needs of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people are not positive approaches for supporting families. Many opponents of diverse families misrepresent and oversimplify both the history and research on which they base their claims. The picture that is painted by these opponents is bleak. In reality, however, there are millions of happy, healthy unmarried families. The challenge is to find effective approaches to supporting these successful families, as well as the ones who are having difficult times.

We believe:

- that discrimination on the basis of marital status should be prohibited
- that policies designed to help children should focus on supporting all the types of families in which children live
- that laws and policies should be changed to allow for the full range of families to be recognized (this includes domestic partner benefits, family and medical leave, hospital visitation, and survivors' benefits)
- that more research is needed on unmarried relationships and families, so that we can address their needs directly
- that same-sex couples should be able to choose marriage as an option
- that there is much we can learn from the countries around the world that have already taken steps to recognize diverse families
- that the challenge that lies before us as a nation is how to support ALL relationships and families, not just married ones.

Let us not forget how many people were oppressed, humiliated, and stigmatized during historical eras in which it was considered unacceptable to be single, divorced, or gay. We celebrate the strides we have taken in recent decades towards making the world more supportive of the vibrant diversity of families that exist. We support principles that work toward creating happy, healthy, loving relationships and families for all people, married and unmarried.

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