



# ‘What about the children?’

## Why marriage equality is good for kids

### Marriage and children

A couple’s ability to conceive is not a pre-requisite for marriage in Australia and shouldn’t be used as a reason to bar same-sex couples from marriage.

But marriage does have benefits for children, including those children being raised by same-sex couples.

About **25%** of female couples and **15%** of male couples are raising children.

The experts agree, these children are not disadvantaged by being raised by same-sex couples except insofar as their families are legally discriminated against.

For all these reasons, marriage equality is good for the children being raised by same-sex couples.

### Procreation and the right to marry

In Australian law the ability for a couple to conceive a child is not the basis for granting or withdrawing their right to marry.

This is why we allow heterosexual couples to marry if they are infertile or do not wish to have children. It is why couples remain legally married despite not having children.

In Australian law children are no longer legally disadvantaged if they are born outside wedlock. They and their families have the same legal entitlements as other families.

Marriage and child-rearing are not legally interlocked as they once were.

This is why it is a double standard to deny same-sex couples the right to marry because they cannot, themselves, conceive a child, or because the majority of same-sex couples are not raising children.

### The benefits of marriage (and equality) for children

However, there remains a cultural link between marriage and child-rearing.

### Benefits to children from marriage equality

- greater legal security
- greater sense of stability
- greater sense of legitimacy
- societal recognition & validation of their family
- improved interconnectedness with other family members
- greater sense of belonging & inclusion
- greater level of acceptance of their parents by society

This link is the common perception, backed up by a range of studies, that having married parents provides children with greater legal security and a stronger sense of stability, recognition and legitimacy.

These benefits flow equally to the children being raised by same-sex couples.

Furthermore, studies in countries that allow same-sex marriages have found that children of same-sex married parents benefit from having:

- a) a greater sense of legitimacy and recognition in the eyes of peers and the community generally;
- b) a greater sense of belonging and inclusion in extended families;
- c) parents who feel a greater level of acceptance for their relationship and their family.

### How many kids are disadvantaged by the ban on same-sex marriages?

Community surveys have found that about 25% of female couples and 15% of male couples are raising children.

It has been estimated by researchers such as Prof Jenni Millbank from the University of Technology Sydney that 50-70% of the children being raised by female couples are born into that relationship.

Based on information gathered in the Census (which the Bureau of Statistics says significantly under-estimates the number of same-sex couples in Australia), the children disadvantaged by laws which prohibit their parents from marrying numbers in the several tens of thousands.

### ‘Secure and protected’

“Our survey of American same-sex couples showed that the children in same-sex couples’ families gain when their parents can marry. Many parents reported that their children felt more secure and protected. Others noted that their children gained a sense of stability. A third common response was that marriage allowed children to see their families as being validated or legitimated by society or the government. Sometimes this feeling had a direct effect on children’s relationship to their parents, stepparents, or siblings by increasing the sense of being connected to those family members.

Parents also reported that marriage made it easier for other people to understand their families. The common social understanding of marriage gave children a way to describe their parents’ relationship to their friends and gave parents an understandable relationship to use in dealing with the institutions and people who affected their children’s daily life. The most notable situation mentioned concerned children’s schools, as well as other government agencies or family members.”

#### Professor Lee Badgett

Professor of Economics and Director, Center for Public Policy & Administration, University of Massachusetts and author of *When Gay People Get Married*, NYU Press, 2010.



**How do kids fare with same-sex parents?**

The American and Australian Psychological Associations agree that children raised by same-sex couples have the same level of intellectual, emotional, social and sexual adjustment as their peers.

This research has been outlined in AME's fact sheet: Outcomes for children of same-sex couples.

The only disadvantage experienced by all these children is that discrimination in the Marriage Act prevents them from having married parents.

**But don't children need to be raised by their biological parents?**

**No.** Some research shows that children fare best when they have continuity and stability in their up-bringing and may be disadvantaged by major disruptions, for example those caused by divorce or having multiple serial step-parents.

This has been interpreted as an endorsement of children being raised by their biological parents, including by Australian law professor, Patrick Parkinson, author of the "For Kids' Sake" report.

However, continuity and stability can be provided by same-sex couples to the same extent as biological parents.

**Isn't same-sex marriage selfishly putting the needs of adults before those of children?**

When a couple has their relationship officially recognised and affirmed, their children benefit.

Children also benefit when their parents are treated equally and respectfully in the law. In this respect, what is good for parents is also good for their children.

“ As one of the same-sex partners who will attend a special dinner with the Prime Minister to discuss marriage equality later this year, I intend to speak about my Christian faith.

As a Christian I believe it is important that all people are treated with dignity and compassion. Jesus taught us to walk in each other's shoes and not to judge each other.

I share a bond with my partner Louise and my two children that is a gift from God. I look forward to the day when we can celebrate and affirm that gift through the rite of legal marriage.”

**Sandy Miller**, Sydney

“ I want my mums to be able to get married because if my mums are happy I'm happy.”

**Dylan**,  
son of same-sex couple, Sandy Miller and Louise Bucke

**Support for equality higher among parents with young children**

According to a Galaxy poll of 1,050 people in October 2010, support for marriage equality is **higher** among Australians with young children than in the general population (see bar graph below).

This is because they understand the value of marriage for children. It also exposes the hollowness anti-equality advocates who say marriage equality is "anti-family" and "bad for kids".

