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## PERSPECTIVE Third-party reproduction for LGBT couples

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According to the 2000 census, roughly 60,000 male-couple households in America, and 96,000 female-couple households have children. But with biology working against them, parenting possibilities can be limited for LGBT couples.

Discriminatory adoption laws that favor heterosexual couples, and the various obstacles of finding surrogate mothers in gay-friendly states are among the long list of issues that these couples will face. So, for those who are considering the options of third-party reproduction—such as an anonymous egg donor or gestational surrogate—where should their search begin?

### Awareness and identifying resources

Education, awareness and appropriate resources are paramount for couples and individuals exploring the often-complicated options for infertile couples, particularly those within the LGBT community, since gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender couples, as well as single parents, face even greater challenges than heterosexual couples when considering third-party reproduction.

It is critical to assemble a team of multidisciplinary professionals—fertility centers, reproductive endocrinologists, mental health professionals, attorneys, financial consultants and estate planners—who can effectively address the issues uniquely associated with individual needs, as well as situations associated with discriminatory laws and regulations that can adversely affect same-sex couples.

For example, in the case of surrogacy with same-sex couples, it is essential to identify a surrogate who resides, and will give birth in, a “gay-friendly” surrogate state, plus surrogates who are willing to work with same-sex couples. Another important distinction to consider is a gestational surrogate or a traditional surrogate. A gestational surrogate is carrying a non-biological embryo, whereas a traditional surrogate is the definitive biological mother of the baby. This slight distinction can make a tremendous difference in the eyes of the law.

Because the laws vary from state to state, it is extremely important to work closely with a legal professional who is familiar with all the parameters of family building, and who has a thorough understanding of the various options for each situation, and the laws of the state where the birth will occur.

Illinois is an excellent state for gestational surrogacy because the biological or intended parents are deemed the parents, and named on the birth certificate at birth. However, many other “gay-friendly” surrogate states exist. It is the process of being named on the birth certificate that varies from state to state.

### Family and work life

As the numbers of LGBT couples with children reaches record levels, often there are increasing challenges associated with the demands of balancing family and work life. Large numbers of gay fathers are quitting work to stay home with kids, and many employers offer programs and benefits to gay employees to support their efforts.

According to the Human Rights Campaign (HRC), a Washington, D.C.-based organization that addresses LGBT issues, roughly 50 percent of Fortune 500 companies offer domestic-partner benefits, as non-traditional families are being increasingly recognized and supported by corporate America.

Today's talent and workforce are attracted not only by competitive salaries, but by benefits that translate to financial expenditures and security. Employee assistance programs (EAPs) have been established to help employees of forward-thinking large companies address work/life balances for their employees.

EAPs have offered many benefits not only to employees, but to their eligible dependents as well. Of the organizations that provide such benefits, 60 percent extend adoption assistance to the domestic partner, and 72 percent allow employees to take extended family leave to care for a domestic partner or their dependents.

### Exploring options

As with any life-stage decision, considering all of the options and being as informed as possible will ensure the best outcome relative to having children. With the numerous considerations of parenthood imminent for many, LGBT couples are no exception, and the answers you get are only as good as the questions you ask.

With the prospect of parenthood on the horizon, it will be increasingly important for LGBT couples to consider their many options in exploring alternative parenting possibilities.

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