

Father's Day Every Day

GAYS WITH KIDS ACADEMY SUPPORTS GAY, BI, TRANS AND TO-BE DADS VIA DIGITAL MEDIA

Pop quiz: What makes a man a great father?

There's no one right answer, of course. But you could certainly make a case that a father is, when it all comes down to it, a teacher—someone with a steady hand to help guide you through life and its many questions.

By this definition, Brian Rosenberg might just be the world's greatest gay dad. (Put that on a coffee mug.) Sure, he's a loving parent to his own three children. More than that, though, as the cofounder of Gays with Kids, a digital media space he launched with his husband Ferd van Gameren in 2014, Rosenberg has fathered an entire movement of gay, bi, and trans dads and dads-to-be. By sharing personal stories from queer fathers around the world, as well as information about supportive social networks and family-building partners, Rosenberg's Boston-based services company ultimately became the largest hub of resources of its kind.

Now, though, it has spawned something new: GWK Academy, a web platform and mobile app that ushers users through every step toward becoming a father—from navigating fertility clinics to understanding fostering options—and connects them directly with other men who can mentor them along the way.

"My hope is that GWK Academy will become known as the first stop on any gay or queer man's journey to fatherhood," says Rosenberg. He came up with the concept after taking a video call with a fan of the Gays with Kids website who was considering starting a family. "He wanted to thank me. He said, 'You've inspired me and countless others.' I thanked him and asked, 'What are you going to do now?'"

"He scratched his head, shrugged his shoulders, looked

to the sky, and said, 'I guess I'll have to wing it.'"

That lack of direction sparked an epiphany for Rosenberg. "I realized that we'd been inspiring people, and changing hearts and minds—and I don't mean to downplay the significance of that. But I hadn't done what I originally set out to do, which is actually help gay men become dads."

GWK Academy, which launched just last year, is a highly practical tool for moving through that intimidating process. A roadmap to fatherhood, it starts with a free "Find Your Path" course with overviews of surrogacy and adoption; paying users can access super-detailed lesson series that walk them through either option, unpacking the unique considerations, costs, legal and insurance requirements, and much more. All the accompanying informational videos, blog posts, e-books and webinars are crafted specifically for gay and queer men, and



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dig into issues like adoption discrimination, sperm washing for HIV-positive dads, and other topics.

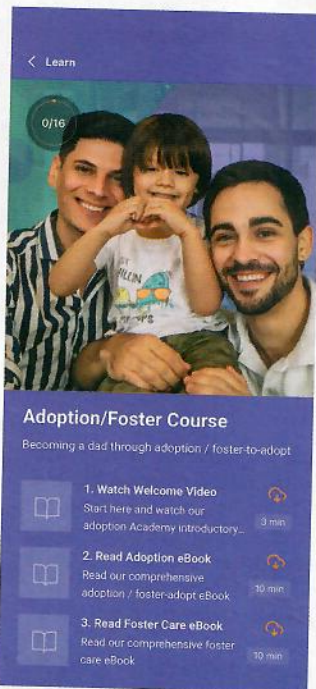
The platform also provides prospective parents with a network of vetted family-building partners—such as gay-friendly IVF clinics and adoption and foster agencies—as well as a community of mentors: single and coupled gay and queer dads in Los Angeles, London and everywhere in between who make themselves available for phone calls, emails and video chats about their experiences. In addition, GWK Academy learners enjoy personal coaching sessions with Rosenberg himself.

Perhaps even more than the exhaustive how-to courses, these personal connections make all the difference to future dads. Rosenberg wishes he'd had a mentor at various points, from figuring out surrogacy options as an HIV-positive man to recognizing red flags while adopting. At one point, for example, he missed a handful of subtle cues that the birth mother was starting to back out—which wound up costing him a lot of money and unnecessary heartbreak. "She was within her right to do that, but it still sucked for us. So I wish I'd had some kind of coach or neutral third party to talk to and say, 'This is what's going on. What do you think?'"

Now, with GWK Academy, Rosenberg and his network of industry professionals and average dads are playing the role of teacher to countless men—and there are more and more every day, he says, who are becoming eager students.

"When I was in my twenties and thirties living in the South End of Boston, I only knew two guys who were gay dads," Rosenberg says. "Today, every young person knows that being a dad is an option for them. It's a matter of getting the information. And who wouldn't want to have it at their fingertips?" [x]

gayswithkids.com



Gays with Kids screenshots

