

## What is polyamory?

*Polyamory* refers to romantic love with more than one person, honestly, ethically, and with the full knowledge and consent of all concerned. Polyamory often involves multiple long-term committed relationships, either separately or together, but it can also come in many different forms. Some examples are:

- **Open polyamory** (committed open relationship or open marriage), in which the partners involved remain open to the possibility of additional loves and relationships;
- **Polyfidelity**, in which three or more people commit to having a closed relationship with each other and not getting involved with anyone outside the group;
- **Single polyamorists**, who may have several loves without a primary commitment to any one person, and who may or may not be looking for long-term partnership.

## What's the point of polyamory — sex with lots of people?

Not really. The point is love, romance, intimacy and affection with more than one person, openly and ethically by mutual agreement all around. Polyamory is about sex to the same degree that any romantic relationship is about sex. For some, sex is a driving factor in relationships. For others, romance and emotional or spiritual connection are more important. The term “polyamorous” does mean that the focus is on loving relationships.

## Is polyamory a fancy word for cheating?

No. Cheating involves deception and violation of an agreement. The point of polyamory is not secrecy but openness, communication, acting with caring and integrity, and sharing the love.

Most poly people agree with their partners to maintain certain boundaries — things they will or will not do — and to communicate honestly about who they are involved with. It's about disclosure, trust, and respect.

When cheating happens in a polyamorous relationship, and sometimes it does, it involves the same violations of trust and agreements, and the same likely dire consequences, as cheating in a monogamous relationship.

## What's the difference between polyamory and swinging?

Polyamory is focused on loving relationships, with the emphasis on connection and relationship building. Swinging is more about recreational sex. Swinging often involves a couple going together to a swing club or swing party to hook up with others strictly for sex.

Some swingers, however, find themselves forming long-term relationships with another couple they swing with, while some polyamorous people are happy to have casual sex at swing parties. The swinging and poly cultures tend to be quite different (and each has its stereotypes about the other), but in fact there's something of a continuous spectrum between them, and many people happily fall somewhere in between.

## **Are polyamorous people really just afraid of commitment?**

Actually, poly takes a whole lot of commitment if it's to work long-term for most people. Polyamory requires a commitment to honesty, to sexual safety, to facing one's own insecurities, to making difficult sacrifices when necessary, to the difficulty of standing up for oneself when necessary, and a willingness to be with a partner through some very strong emotions.

Most people in today's world carry a lot of emotional baggage, and relationships are one way we sort through these emotions. When a person loves and commits to more than one person, it requires a willingness to move through insecurities, to deal with our own and our partners' deep emotions, and to keep communications flowing. In some ways polyamory can require more commitment.

As in all relationships, however, there are people who hang out in polyamorous circles and situations to avoid intimacy and commitment.

## **Can you have *real* intimacy in polyamorous relationships?**

Some people feel they find deeper intimacy in polyamory as they explore deep emotions, challenges, and joys in their polyamorous relating. For many the necessary level of honesty, self-knowledge, and sensitivity to their partners' deepest desires brings more intimacy than they ever experienced in monogamy.

Others may find that involvement with more than one person takes away from the special bond or intimacy they feel being with just one. Polyamory can be a very intimate way of relating and loving, but it's certainly not the right choice for everyone.

## **Do people involved in open polyamory bring... umm... lovers right home while their partner is there?**

Some do, some don't. Some people enjoy the connection and companionship of everyone hanging out together. Others prefer not to hang out with a partner and his or her other lover. The basic rule: everyone has to communicate well enough to work out what works best for them.

## **Does everyone in a poly relationship have sex with each other?**

Some do, many don't. Some lovers form triads or quads — tight-knit groups of three, four, or more — sharing the love and connection all around. More often, some of the interlinks are merely friendships or acquaintances. Some polyamorous partners prefer to date as a couple, triad or group, and are looking for compatibility romantically and sexually among everyone. Others only have relationships one on one, though often those involved meet and are friends.

## Do you have to be bisexual?

No. Nor do you have to be bisexual even to have very close relationships within a group of lovers. In our sex-obsessed culture it's easy to forget that deep but nonsexual relationships between people of the same gender have been widely regarded as normal throughout history.

Even so, a Loving More survey of 1,010 self-identified polys found that about 40% called themselves bi, compared to 2% of the general American public age 18 to 44.

## How do you have *time* for more than one relationship?

This can be tough. Kids, jobs, and other obligations will put time-stress on one relationship, let alone two or more. As many polys say, "Love may be infinite but time is not." A needed skill in polyamory is time management — and learning what you really want so you can prioritize your time. You will indeed have to make more tough choices about where and how to spend your time.

## Is polyamory an innate orientation?

For some it seems to be, for others not. Some people, Loving More believes, are indeed polyamorous by nature. Despite good hearts and good intentions they repeatedly fail at monogamy, or live miserable lives if they do manage to stay romantically exclusive. For others, polyamory is a deliberate philosophical choice. While satisfied with a monogamous lifestyle, they conclude that having a wider view of love opens the way to a better way of life.

The evidence seems to be that some people are just not wired for monogamy and need more than one love to feel complete as a person. Others simply see monogamy not working very well and choose polyamory. Whether polyamory is an orientation or not, we should all have the right to choose how we love and conduct our relationships.

## Are polyamorous people simply promiscuous?

It depends on your definition of promiscuous. If it means having many sexual partners, then yes, some polyamorous people do have many partners, others go through life with few, but if you mean indiscriminate sex, then no. Most polyamorous people are very discriminating about who they get involved with. A big misconception about polyamory (and swinging) is that the people involved will have sex with anyone. It's simply not the case. If a person wants to have indiscriminate sex that's their business, but that's not what polyamory is about.

## Do polyamorous people get jealous?

Oh yes, many polys feel and deal with jealousy. However, unlike the mainstream norm, polys tend to see jealousy as something to master rather than be mastered by. They are willing to deal with it, talk about it, examine its causes, and see what they can learn from it.

Some poly people are low-jealousy by nature; they're lucky. Others find that they have no jealousy in one situation but get blindsided by it in another. In such cases, polys tend to regard jealousy as a useful warning sign that some undiscovered problem is buried in the particular situation.

Jealousy is a strong emotion, and in our culture most avoid facing it. In truth we can feel jealousy about all kinds of situations — work, friends, family, the new baby. What matters is how we choose to look at it and act or react. Often jealousy is nothing more than personal insecurity or a fear of loss, and we can overcome those fears. Many people find that the more they deal with and move through jealousies that come up, the easier it gets.

## What about AIDS and other STIs?

This is a crucial question. How you deal with the possibility of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and what levels of safer sex you practice and insist upon in others, are ultimately matters of personal choice. The more sexually active you are, the higher the risk and the more this is an issue in your life.

It's a myth that polyamorous people recklessly hop from bed to bed in disregard for STIs. In fact, it's hard to find any subculture that is more deliberate and conscientious about negotiating safer-sex agreements with potential partners well in advance of necessity. Loving More consistently teaches safer-sex communication and practices. Polys can and do practice safer sex with high reliability, and some undergo testing at regular intervals for the whole spectrum of STIs.

Although we know of no scientific studies, we see indications that the rate of STIs is lower in the self-identified poly community than in society at large — because of the emphasis on responsibility, concern for partners and for partners' partners, and less awkwardness about sharing our sexual histories. In ostensibly monogamous culture such talks are more difficult, and many people are not honest about who they have been, or are, sleeping with.

Moreover, people in poly networks gossip. If you get a reputation for being diligent about safer-sex practices, your desirability in the community will increase. You'll be seen as more of a hottie. If word gets around that you are careless about it you'll find yourself being avoided. A person in mainstream culture is not subject to this kind of intimate-community knowledge or pressure.

Loving More recommends yearly testing for people in any kind of open sexual relationship. We also recommend that you keep up to date on the latest research. We have informational links available on our [links](#) page.

With communication and honesty, it can be easier to discuss and hopefully come to agreement with how you and your partners are dealing with STIs and safety.

# What about family do polyamorous people marry, have kids, and all that?

As often as anyone. In polyamory you'll find many married couples — some who got married and came to polyamory later and some who married as polys in the first place. You'll also find many who choose a committed partnership with one or more without being legally married. There are groups who've had a commitment ceremony for three or more, but polygamy is not legal, so you will not find marriages of three or more on the books.

Still others form extended families with friends and lovers who may or may not live under one roof. Polyamorous families come in many shapes and sizes, and many want and are raising children.

## Does polyamory harm the children?

This question is asked often, and honestly, there is no definitive current research one way or another. The most that can be said is that, from observation, good poly families are very good for children, and dysfunctional ones are as bad for children as bad monogamous households. This was also the conclusion of the last serious research into the question that we know about (Constantine and Constantine, 1973). There is a need for more research in this area.

Families of all kinds face the challenges and emotional scars that the adults bring to them. A good household of three or more responsible adults can raise kids well more easily than a household of two. Finances are likely to be more stable with more working adults, and full-time home child care becomes more possible, not to mention taxi service to soccer practices and the like.

On the downside, when poly families face financial, job, or relationship stress, it can be amplified because of the multiple people involved and because of mainstream hostility to the family structure.

Another upside: Most successful polyamorous people have great communication skills and the ability to negotiate and work out problems without yelling and throwing things. Such skills are modeled to the children. So, many kids raised in these families are unusually good at communicating their needs and fears to their parents. And spreading parental duties among three, four, or more adults can offer kids not only more support and love, but a bigger collection of parenting skills, than kids often get in the modern (and historically unnatural) nuclear family of two adults only.

Parents in polyamorous families do need to keep the children's emotional and physical needs at the fore when bringing in any new partners. It is also important that parents be aware of how being in a "different" family affects their kids in school and away from home. As with gay and lesbian parents, kids of polyamorous parents can suffer discrimination and prejudice.

Overall, most children from polyamorous homes seem to be outgoing and well-adjusted.

## Do, or should, children know about their parents' polyamory lovestyle?

Every parent knows their kid best and needs to decide what's best. As a general rule, however, Loving More always recommends that parents be honest with their kids, in an age-appropriate way.

Children are perceptive and will pick up emotional nuances between you and others that even you are barely aware of. We find that when parents finally decide to tell their kids after delaying, the kids usually figured it out long ago. Not telling kids can bring them great insecurity if they think one or both parents are having an affair that means the parents are separating. If we want honesty from our kids, we need to model honesty to our kids.

This does not mean detailing your sex life. What goes on in the adults' bedroom is not the kids' business in any household, poly or mono.

**Exception to disclosure:** If you face a custody dispute with a potentially hostile ex, the ex should not be privy to your love life — and kids will talk. Evidence of having another sexual relationship will be used against you in a custody dispute. Judges often rule against polyamorous parents in such cases as a matter of course, regardless of the best interest of the child.

Loving More and other organizations are working to change this through awareness and education of lawyers, judges and therapists, but it is still dicey. If you find yourself facing custody issues stemming from polyamory, please contact us and we will do all we can to direct you to legal help.

## How do kids feel about their parents and polyamory?

We find that most kids raised in polyamory families don't really think about it. Polyamory is normal in their world. For others it is just their parents being weird.

## Do kids raised by poly parents grow up to be polyamorous?

Some do, some don't. Many kids raised in polyamory grow up to be monogamous. What is different is they are *choosing* monogamy, not defaulting to it because they don't know that they have an ethical, workable choice. One challenge expressed by some young adults raised in poly families is facing a monogamy-oriented world, despite knowing of other possibilities for relationships. Often their peers do not see relationship possibilities as they do, and this it can make it a challenge at times to date, especially as teens.

# What is the future of polyamory?

Continued growth and increasing acceptance.

In the last 25 years, thanks in part to the internet, the polyamory community has accumulated a large, hard-won body of knowledge about what works and what doesn't. This is the distilled wisdom from tens of thousands of poly relationships that have succeeded and failed in nearly all possible ways. Books, websites, chat communities, local poly organizations, national poly conferences, and word of mouth are spreading this knowledge, so that many of the wheels do not have to be re-invented.

Most of all, Loving More and others have been reaching people who were doing polyamory all along — or were hoping to, or imagining that it might be possible — and letting them know that they're not alone. We are committed to supporting the polyamory community spreading the knowledge that this new model of relationships is possible and workable — for the right people, if they're serious about working through the difficulties and learning how to make it function happily.

As more people learn that ethical, honest, happy polyamory is indeed possible, at least for some, we hope that more people will put deliberate thought into whether they want life relationships that are open or closed, polyamorous or monogamous, and that they will know to seek out partners who have also thought this through and are compatible with themselves in this respect. In this way vast numbers of failed relationships might be avoided — and for some, new options for love, joy, and wonder will open.