



Celia, holding Tyler, and Tanisha, with Kaitlyn and Kiley, say providing for children is not enough. You have to be actively engaged.

Celia: Although we were legally married in Canada, New Jersey doesn't recognize same-sex marriage. Yet the state grants medical care and family medical leave for people in a civil union. We both have wills, living wills, powers of attorney and health care proxies, and we've identified legal guardians for the children.

ESSENCE: All parents want to protect their children. What lessons are you teaching yours about handling discrimination?

Celia: Kiley understands that there are family structures with a mom and dad, but she is very comfortable within her own family. It's hard to predict how it will play out, but we will continue to reassure all our children that our family structure is something to be proud of; we just have two mommies, instead of one.

ESSENCE: How do other parents respond upon initially meeting your family?

Tanisha: The first presumption is to ask about the father. Once we let them know there are two mommies, it's a nonissue.

ESSENCE: Tanisha, how do you keep the kids on schedule?

Tanisha: Schedules come from kids, so analyze your kids' moods. If you know they get hungry around 11 A.M. and cranky at 1 P.M., feed them at 11, let them relax, and, if they're tired, put them down for a nap.

ESSENCE: You have been a couple for about nine years. With three small children, how do you keep the romance alive?

Celia: We take minivacations to Atlantic City or New York City every six or eight weeks. Since we stay overnight, Tanisha's mother and a babysitter watch the kids.

ESSENCE: What's your best parenting tip for readers?

Tanisha: Incorporate an activity chart that rewards children when they reach a goal. It helped Kiley learn how to potty-train, pick up her toys, and make her bed.

Partners in Parenting

Attorney Celia Mitchell, 33, and her spouse, Tanisha, 32, rely on mother wit and synchronized schedules to keep their household running smoothly **BY AISHA I. JEFFERSON**

ESSENCE: Celia, you've worked at a law firm and two financial services firms as a securities corporate law attorney. With Tanisha at home, how do you deal with the sacrifice of being the working parent?

Celia: With young kids you can miss out, so I took a two-month paternity leave at law firm Sidley Austin when Kiley was born in 2006. The firm is proactive in

recognizing different family structures. In my new position at a financial services firm, the schedule is more flexible, so I can assist with breakfast and dinner, and read bedtime stories to Kiley.

ESSENCE: As same-sex parents of 3½-year-old Kiley and 15-month-old twins Kaitlyn and Tyler, what legal documents have you set up?

3 WAYS THEY BUILD FAMILY VALUES

1. GATHER SUPPORT. "Our kids have positive male and female role models in their grandparents," says Celia. "It's vital for our son, Tyler, because there are certain perspectives that men have that we as women don't."

2. INSTILL TRADITION. The brood eats tacos on Halloween and receives balloons on Valentine's Day. "Our traditions are quirky, but it's nice to have something to call our own," Tanisha explains.

3. MAKE TIME. Cooking together equals family fun. Try the Nintendo DSi XL gaming system (\$190, nintendo.com). The America's Test Kitchen software gets kids excited with age-appropriate tasks.



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