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Court: Lesbians can adopt partner's kids

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Arel Jarus-Hakak already knew Avital, his biological parent Tal's lesbian partner, was also his mother. But it was nice to hear the Ramat Gan Family Court say so just the same. "It's a very good feeling," said the 15-year-old, whom Avital was allowed to officially adopt Sunday after a nine-year legal battle. It was the first time in Israel a same-sex couple was allowed to adopt each other's children. "We were waiting for this for a very long time and now we are recognized as a family by the government," he said. Tal and Avital Jarus-Hakak have lived together for as long as Arel has been alive. Using in-vitro fertilization, Avital gave birth to Yahel in 1994 and Tal gave birth to a third son, Yuval, in 1997. Lower courts originally turned down their adoption request on the grounds that there is no legal basis for it in the Adoption Law. But last year, the Supreme Court ruled that the law allows a single person - rather than a husband and wife - to adopt a child in exceptional circumstances, and that the best interest of the child must dictate when to recognize special cases. The justices, in a 7-2 decision, told the family court to determine whether the adoption was in the Jarus-Hakak children's best interest. On Sunday, after hearing from social workers who interviewed the family, the court decided that it was. The adoption, according to lawyer Ira Hadar, helps the children in case something happens to either partner and gives the couple legal and insurance benefits enjoyed by other parents. She said the status also provides the children with a more stable home environment. But the victory has implications beyond the Jarus-Hakak household. Hadar estimated that hundreds or even thousands of gay and lesbian couples in Israel have children they wish to adopt. "Many people are very happy about this verdict," she said, seconds after receiving a delivery of flowers in honor of the decision. Not everyone was pleased by the outcome of the case, however. A Shas spokesman said the party condemned the move as "damaging the Jewish image of the State of Israel." He attacked the court for "cooperating in cases that harm the Jewish nature of the state." But Avital Jarus-Hakak said the decision actually resulted from, and affirmed Jewish values. Though the case took nine years to resolve, she pointed out that Israel still reached this landmark decision sooner than many European countries. "For Jews the family is very important," she said. "In Israel children are very important."

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