

Celebrating Cultural Diversity in Early Childhood Services

'Educators who are culturally competent respect multiple cultural ways of knowing, seeing and living, celebrate the benefits of diversity and have an ability to understand and honour differences'

(EYLF: p.16)

The *Early Years Learning Framework* talks a lot about diversity of culture and emphasises the importance of cultural competency to support the development of every child's sense of '**belonging, being and becoming**'. Educators need to always be looking to learn more about other cultural practices and develop skills for communication, and interactions across cultures.

Things to consider

- Parents may come from different cultural backgrounds and may each be bi- or multi-lingual.
- Families can feel torn between cultures. It can be hard to find a balance so building strong connections to community support is important in times of transition.
- In some cultures it is inappropriate or challenging to have direct eye contact, so when you are speaking to someone they may have their eyes to the ground. Looking down may be a sign of respect so if you are unsure you may need to clarify this.
- In some cultures it is inappropriate to touch a child on the head, or anywhere.
- In some cultures it may be more appropriate to speak to the mother about the children than the father, however, keep in mind that the father may be the decision maker.
- In some cultures, men do not shake women's hands, and some find it inappropriate to meet alone in a room with someone from the opposite sex.
- Parents may not be accustomed to playing with or entertaining their children so don't assume that toys and books are readily available in the home or that this is something children are used to.
- Some cultures do not see play as important and may not be aware of the educational benefits of learning through play.

Things to remember



It is important to remember that every family is individual. They are not a culture. In contemporary Australia there are many cultural variations. We need to respect the diversity of families and communities and the aspirations they hold for their children.

We need to uphold all children's rights to have their culture, identities, abilities and strengths acknowledged and valued. We need to be particularly careful not to group cultures according to where they come from, or use stereotypes.

Most cultural groups have many different languages, dialects, sub-cultures and practices within each group.

If you are unsure about what to do, all you need to do is ask sensitively.

Tip Sheet 2

What you can do as an educator

- Educators need to develop a relationship with families to build trust. It is suggested that you begin this process at the first interview with the family and take this opportunity to find out information you will need to ensure a positive experience for the family (refer to **Tip Sheet 3** on *Enrolment*).
- It is our job as educators working with families from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds to find out about their culture/s, and to show respect by asking questions to avoid misunderstandings or offending the family.
- If English is a barrier, use a language identification chart, and then contact the **Telephone Interpreter Service (13 1450)**, access translated resources or there are even applications on iPhones that will translate for you (refer to **Tip Sheet 4** on *Using Interpreters*).
- Remember, English may be their 2nd, 3rd or 4th language, so be clear and avoid slang or jargon in verbal and written communication.
- Educators should present themselves politely, but positively assertive, particularly when dealing with issues that may conflict with their own cultural beliefs or practices.
- Educators first need to identify the cultural background of the family. If you are unsure, remember all you need to do is ask. If possible, before a family comes in to the service to enrol, familiarise yourself with the family's cultural background and have some pictures or resources available to show your interest and respect (refer to **Tip Sheet 7** for *Resources*).
- Show a sincere interest about a family's cultural background when asking about spoken languages, geography, politics, religions, festivals, holidays etc.
- Get to know each child's family. Encourage the family and extended family members of the child to be involved and participate in programs and activities.
- Help children and families to meet and socialise with other families.
- Encourage families to talk about cultural diversity with their children.

Support Services

Inclusion Support Agency (ISA) – Sydney North West

Provide childcare services staff with practical advice and support in including children with additional needs into a quality child care environment.

Phone: 02 4732 7843

Email: isa@penrithcity.nsw.gov.au

Calendar of Cultural and Religious Dates

The Calendar aims to raise awareness of key cultural and religious events, festivals and national days.

www.immi.gov.au/living-in-australia/a-diverse-australia/calendar-australia/index.htm

Community Information Summaries

These summaries describe the communities living in Australia by country of birth, and their descendants and present a broad range of demographic and socio-economic characteristics from the *2006 Census of Population and Housing*.

www.immi.gov.au/media/publications/statistics/comm-summ/index.htm

Refer to Tip Sheet 7 on *Services and Resources Guide* for more information.

Five Quick Programming Tips

- ▶ Make a point of acknowledging where all the children in the group come from by simply hanging a map of Australia in the middle of a wall and have the rest of the countries of the world positioned around it. You can put a tag with the child's name and country of origin attached to a string connected to the centre. This map can then be used for programming curriculum development.
- ▶ Showcase a country each week or month and take the opportunity to invite parents to share words or phrases from their language, songs, music, food, traditional dance and costumes.
- ▶ Celebrate culturally diverse calendar events regularly throughout the year.
- ▶ Display and make accessible multicultural and multilingual resources
- ▶ Use charts with simple explanations through pictures for daily routines or other regular activities.