

A culturally inclusive family day care scheme recognises, values and celebrates the cultural differences that exist in its children, families, carers and coordination unit staff. Carers and coordination unit staff have an important role to play in creating an environment for children that assists them to acknowledge and value the similarities and differences in our community. They also have a responsibility to provide opportunities and experiences that will help children to develop the attitudes, knowledge and skills they will need to live in an increasingly complex and diverse world.

Why is it important?

All children have the right to have their culture acknowledged and respected. If this does not happen the child will not feel valued. By six months of age children are already beginning to notice similarities and differences in people. If they form positive attitudes towards difference they are more likely to grow up appreciating diversity as a normal part of their lives. Young children model the behaviour and attitudes they see and hear in adults and other children. For example, children who are fearful or uncomfortable with difference have usually learned these responses from people around them who display those feelings.

Children draw on their own experiences to form their understanding about things. Incorporating diversity into every aspect of the program allows children real opportunities to explore and discover the richness and complexity of the world around them. The care environment sends strong messages to children about what is valued and what is not. For example, if a child never hears his home language spoken in family day care he may come to think that only the English language is valued. Opportunities to explore differences and similarities between people can help to break down fear and negative stereotypes and contribute to a more just and cohesive society.

What strategies can be used to ensure a culturally diverse program?

Carers and coordination unit staff assess their own beliefs and attitudes by talking with each other about their own cultural differences. For example, discussing the ideas, customs and beliefs that have shaped their lives. Acknowledging and discussing the cultural differences that exist in the local community and in particular in the families using the scheme will also aid this process.

This can be done by:

- talking with families and children about their customs, values and beliefs
- asking families and children to bring along family photos
- asking families to share how they celebrate different occasions
- asking families and children what they call their grandparents and other relatives
- including questions about cultural background on the family day care scheme's enrolment form

Carers and coordination unit staff can reflect diversity in the family day care environment by using texts and items that represent different cultures and genders.

This could include:

- considering books, photographs, posters, puzzles and materials that reflect the cultural backgrounds of the children in care and the local and wider Australian community
- ensuring that images in books and other materials provide an 'everyday' rather than stereotypical view of other cultures. For example, urban indigenous adults and children engaged in a range of activities, and not just in traditional celebrations
- ensuring that images project a fair balance of men and women doing similar jobs and include people with disabilities engaged in work and recreational activities
- ensuring that dolls, dress ups and artefacts used in dramatic play represent both males and females and a fair balance of the cultural backgrounds of people in Australia
- ensuring that paints, crayons and other art materials can be used to represent a variety of skin tones from light brown to dark brown as well as flesh and peach colours
- ensuring that children are able to hear music and songs from a range of cultures
- accessing the family day care scheme's toy library or local multicultural resource library for suitable materials. Alternatively visiting the local op shop or markets for dress ups, books and artefacts or your newsagent for newspapers and magazines in languages other than English

Carers and coordination unit staff can plan experiences that provide opportunities to explore similarities and differences. This might include experiences such as



bathing dolls with different skin colours, introducing children to cooking experiences and foods from various cultures, or inviting family members to come along and teach songs and games from their own culture and childhood. It can also be beneficial to use picture books and stories that will provide an

opportunity to talk about similarities and differences. Carers and coordination unit staff use interactions with children to help them feel comfortable with difference and view diversity as a normal part of their lives.

This can include:

- modelling inclusive language that is gender and bias free. For example, police officer rather than policeman, person with a disability rather than disabled person
- responding to children's inappropriate or stereotypical comments about difference. Let the child know when a comment is unacceptable and explain why. Challenge the child to think differently. Ask the child 'is that fair?' and help them to find things that they have in common
- helping children to recognise and challenge stereotypes, prejudice and discriminatory practices in books, magazines, on television and in video games

Cultural celebrations

Singling out or focussing on a particular culture can reinforce stereotypes rather than help to break them down. A superficial collection of materials and experiences that are introduced for a brief period of time may only serve to highlight cultural differences and send confusing messages to the children in care. For example, introducing children to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities with experiences such as dot painting, decorating boomerangs and making didgeridoos focuses on what is 'different' about indigenous people and contributes very little to

reconciliation. It is more appropriate to integrate cultural diversity into every aspect of the child's experiences in care, so that differences are accepted as 'no big deal'.

Reflect on your values and practice, and consider the following:

- how comfortable do you feel interacting with people who are racially or culturally different from yourself, or those that have a physical or mental disability?
- how comfortable do you feel talking about differences in religious beliefs or child rearing practices?
- what do you know about the cultural backgrounds of the families and children in your family day care service? How can you find out more?
- what do you know about the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in your community? What do you know about people from other cultures around the world? How can you find out more?
- how do you reflect the cultural diversity in your local community in the environments and experiences you provide for children?
- how do you respond to children's questions about differences? For example, "why does that person have black skin?", "why does that lady have a long dress and a scarf on her head?" or "what does Muslim mean?"

Further Information

- Dau, E. (eds) (2001), *The Anti-Bias Approach in Early Childhood*, Pearson Education, Frenchs Forest, New South Wales.
- Derman-Sparks, L. and The ABC Task Force (1989), *Anti-Bias Curriculum: Tools for Empowering Young Children*, National Association for Education of Young Children, Washington DC.
- New South Wales Department of Community Services (2002), *NSW Curriculum Framework for Children's Services: The Practice of Relationships, Essential Provisions for Children's Services*, Office of Childcare, New South Wales.
- Stonehouse, A. (2004), *Dimensions: Excellence in Many Ways*, National Family Day Care Council of Australia, Gosford, New South Wales.

Useful Websites

- Diversity in Child Care Queensland - (www.sttar.org)
This site has detailed information about ways to respond to, and support, cultural diversity and issues of accessibility and inclusion with a focus on equity. The site also contains a comprehensive list of keywords and phrases from a variety of languages.
- National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education - (www.natsiew.nexus.edu.au)
This site contains many categories such as: a chronology of Aboriginal and Islander history; an extensive list of related resources and a resource directory concerning cultural issues, education organisations and resource types.
- Ethnic Child Care Resource Unit - (www.multicultural.online.wa.gov.au)
Listed under 'Community Organisations' on this Western Australian Government site, there are factsheets and resources as well as a regular newsletter.
- The Multicultural Resource Unit - (www.fka.com.au)
This site has books and resources that have been highlighted for use in family day care. The site also contains useful links to other organisations.

Children's Books

- **Our Granny** (Wild and Vivas, 1993) - This book explores issues of difference in relation to housing and individual relationships.
- **The Paper Bag Princess** (Munsch, 1980) - Covers issues of respecting individual choices, abilities and differences.
- **What Made Tiddalik Laugh** (Troughton, 1977) - This book is a dreamtime story from Australia that explores sharing.
- **Whoever You Are** (Fox, 1997) - This book focuses on and celebrates difference in the lives of individuals.
- **You And Me Murrawee** (Hashmi and Marshall, 1998) - This book encourages respect for cultural diversity and the environment.



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