



Inclusion is respecting and responding

'There are many ways of living, being and of knowing. Children are born belonging to a culture, which is not only influenced by traditional practices, heritage and ancestral knowledge, but also by the experiences, values and beliefs of individual families and communities.' (Belonging, Being and Becoming, 2009, p13).

Australia is a country rich in diversity in its many forms. The children and families who come through our programs will come from a range of cultural backgrounds, family types and structures, with varying abilities and different life experiences. A useful starting point in working with diversity is being aware of our own attitudes, values and beliefs, and the impact, positive or negative, this can have on others.

Thinking critically about how and where ideas and understandings come from ensures educators don't privilege some 'differences' over others. It also means remaining open to different ways of knowing, understanding and behaving. When we do this we are more able to appreciate that ideas different from our own are equally valid and worthy of consideration.

Central to everything we do are our relationships with others. Building relationships with families based on respect,

trust, open communication and shared decision making just doesn't happen. Nor is there one way to forge such a partnership. Establishing and maintaining partnerships with families requires an investment of time, care and attention, and a genuine desire to work together to ensure the best outcomes for children and families. It also requires an understanding of the considerable strengths and resources that families bring to the partnership.

Families come into children's services with histories and life experiences that we do not yet know and understand. For some families this may include previous experiences of discrimination and prejudice. Care needs to be taken to ensure that we do not label families who may be hesitant and cautious as a consequence of their experiences as being difficult or unhelpful, especially when relationships are being established.

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Questions to consider:

What is your knowledge and understanding of diversity issues? What has informed this knowledge?

Are there some families you feel more comfortable approaching and getting to know than others?

Are there some families you overlook in the daily events and experiences of the centre?

How can you, in a fair and just way, build positive partnerships with all families?

You can foster positive partnerships with families and an appreciation of their diverse backgrounds, histories and experiences by:

- Taking time to critically reflect on your own culture and the impact this has on your practice
- Investing time in developing and maintaining meaningful relationships with all families
- Exchanging information with families as part of your orientation to clarify expectations, share information and support the family's transition into the centre

- Inviting families to share significant events with the centre and the children
- Including resources and materials to promote positive images of diversity that exist within the centre and wider community
- Developing and implementing policies and procedures that address diversity and equity issues, in consultation with families, staff and other stakeholders

Key Points

- Start by reflecting on your own values, attitudes and beliefs about diversity and difference
- Avoid making assumptions or generalisations based on misinformation and stereotypes
- Use a range of strategies to communicate with families in a respectful and meaningful way
- Remain committed to ongoing learning about diversity issues and inclusive practice

If teams are unsure or have any further questions they can contact the *ACT Inclusion Support Agency (ISA)* for further assistance on **6287 3330** or via email **inclusion@commsatwork.org**

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