



# *Inclusion is unique contributions of each child and family*

**Children, families and educators each bring different knowledge, skills, experiences and strengths to children's services. Together they form a community, unique in time, history and context. Recognising and drawing on the unique contributions of each individual creates a sense of belonging, builds respect and enriches lives.**

To truly value and utilise the unique contributions of children and families, educators are required to think beyond the usual way of doing things. Reviewing current practices can be as simple as asking 'Why do we do things in this way and what other fairer and more equitable ways are possible?' It requires educators to think critically about when their practice is about ticking boxes to meet accreditation standards and when it is based on a genuine desire to work with families for the benefit of all involved.

To increase the likelihood that families will want to be involved in the program, educators must think beyond traditional and tokenistic understandings of 'involvement' and create meaningful, relevant and realistic opportunities for families to participate. This means not having a preconceived idea about what this will look like and not making assumptions and judgements about families who choose not to contribute.

Some of the ways in which families can contribute to the program:

- Having regular opportunities to share their knowledge and insights about their child and family
- Sharing special knowledge, skills, expertise and interests. For example, drawing with children, playing an instrument, reading a story in their home language
- Sharing significant cultural days or special family events and occasions
- Participating in informal gatherings such as information sessions and social events
- Having opportunities to give feedback on policy development and review in meaningful ways
- Accessing information in ways that acknowledge their communication needs and preferences

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As well as finding ways to have families contribute, it is equally important to find ways that children can contribute to the program in meaningful ways.

## **Some questions to consider:**

- How do you provide a space for children's, families' and educators' ideas and interests?
- How do you ensure your program fosters for all a sense of belonging?
- What is one thing you can do to build on and improve your current practice?

Just as each community is made up of people from diverse backgrounds, histories and experiences, so too will each program be unique. What is required is a commitment to make connections and partnerships with all families in order to provide richer experiences and promote better outcomes for everyone.

## **In genuine partnerships, families and educators:**

- Value each other's knowledge of each child
- Value each other's contributions and distinct roles in each child's life
- Have confidence in and trust each other
- Communicate freely and respectfully with each other
- Share insights and perspectives about each child
- Engage in shared decision making about each child (Belonging, Being and Becoming, 2009)

## **Key Points**

- Recognise and embrace the diversity of children, families and educators
- Find meaningful ways to engage with all children and families in the program
- Reflect on your current practice to unpack the beliefs and values behind what you do
- Acknowledge that there are different ways to participate and be involved

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](mailto:inclusion@commsatwork.org)**

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