



# Supporting cultural diversity

As an educator, you will care for and teach children and young people from different backgrounds and cultures by fostering belonging and inclusion.

## Respecting diversity

Early childhood is the time when children first become aware of differences among people and start to form opinions and attitudes about these differences.

### Young children are naturally curious about differences

One of the ways they make sense of their world is to sort things into different categories and focus on one thing at a time – for example, whether another child has the same or different skin colour to them. Children do this to organise their experiences.

Awareness of differences also means young children are sensitive to experiences of racism and prejudice. This can impact on their social and emotional wellbeing, their learning and their social relationships. Their ideas about and responses to diversity are influenced by what they see and hear around them.

Helping all children and young people understand difference encourages them to feel good about who they are, where they fit in the world and appreciate diversity in others. It helps to build strong, inclusive communities where everyone enjoys a sense of

being valued and belonging, which supports positive mental health.

Learn more about [cultural diversity and mental health](#).

## How can you promote respect for diversity with children?

### Babies and young children learn and develop through their early experiences and relationships.

When children develop positive relationships with other children and educators, it helps them to feel that they belong. This early learning about themselves and others lays the foundation for their future health and wellbeing.

### In your early learning service or primary school, you can:

- provide opportunities for children to listen to people from a range of backgrounds and their perspectives
- respect individual differences and acknowledge that membership of a particular group doesn't mean everyone from that group has the same values, beliefs, rituals and needs

- promote and model inclusive behaviour – such as having notices or information available in a number of relevant languages for families
- expand children’s awareness of difference through social events, books, songs or play materials
- research biographical stories of local people and people from around the world and introduce these stories to children
- encourage children to recognise and appreciate people for the things that make them unique and special
- encourage children to view differences as something that makes a person interesting
- support children to understand that just because somebody looks or sounds different, or does things in a different way, doesn’t mean that this person is any less worthy of respect or friendship
- support all children to develop the skills necessary to form positive friendships regardless of differences in practices, languages and ethnic backgrounds.
- respect individual differences and acknowledge that membership of a particular group doesn’t mean everyone from that group has the same values, beliefs, rituals and needs
- encourage young people to recognise and appreciate people for the things that make them unique and special
- teach young people about multicultural role models from various ethnicities, genders and fields
- discuss the positives of differences and the way they can complement and enhance each other
- role-model inclusive and respectful behaviour
- support all young people to develop the social and emotional skills necessary to form positive friendships regardless of differences in practices, languages and ethnic backgrounds
- be prepared to discuss diversity any time.

## How can you promote respect for diversity with young people?

### If you work in a secondary school, you can:

- provide opportunities for young people to listen to people from a range of backgrounds and their perspectives
- promote and model inclusive behaviour – such as having notices or information available in a number of relevant languages for families
- expand young people’s awareness of differences through curriculum material – this can provide young people with evidence that people who look or sound different to them are, at their core, really just like them
- encourage discussion through such curriculum material
- respect and understand that young people come from diverse backgrounds and have different cultural identities (including specific expectations of behaviour and communication)

### Be You Professional Learning

Check out tips for building mentally healthy learning communities in the module [Understand](#), and how to promote inclusion and diversity within your learning community in the module [Include](#).

## How can I support culturally diverse families?

**There are many things you can do to ensure that individuals from diverse backgrounds are included and respected.**

You can also promote a whole-service or whole-school culture of appreciation for difference in all children and young people, regardless of their cultural background.

Every family is different – you can ask families what’s important to them. Getting to know families at your service or school means there’s less chance of assumptions being made about backgrounds, cultures or practices. When you understand the experiences of families and their cultures, you’re better able to support children and young people’s development and learning.

**You can support children, young people and families from culturally diverse backgrounds by:**

- being welcoming and approachable

- being accepting of differences and able to respect multiple ways of being
  - developing positive relationships with families – which can help you understand each other and work together and can help families build a sense of belonging and inclusion.
  - being open to different types of families – they can be small or large, may or may not be biologically related, and may include several generations.
  - encouraging opportunities for families and educators to develop connections with each other and opportunities to observe each other's strengths and contributions
  - inviting diversity into the service or school and encouraging everyone to contribute their skills and interests to the service or school.
  - providing a range of opportunities for children, young people and their families to share their personal stories – to create an atmosphere of cultural respect and acknowledgement of diversity
  - creating community connections – families are better able to support their children and young people when they're informed about and are connected to their community (for example, support services and social networks).
  - linking families with appropriate local services to provide support and assistance – some families may have experienced significant trauma and disruption in the process of moving to or settling in Australia
  - discussing possible differences in parenting with families, to avoid misunderstandings between families and educators, and confusion for children.
- Ask questions to ensure families understand what's been said. Be mindful of the messages your environment sends about diversity. Respect for diversity is also communicated by what you have on display and the resources you have available.

### **Actively counter racism and discrimination**

You can do this by promoting positive attitudes and practices regarding diversity among individuals and organisations. This includes identifying and challenging the kinds of practices that disadvantage or discriminate against those of different racial or cultural backgrounds and promoting inclusive practices in their place.

You can also support families who have experienced racism by engaging in thoughtful conversations, demonstrating empathy and support, challenging prejudices, stereotypes and discriminatory behaviour, reviewing policies and practices to promote inclusion, increasing knowledge of accurate information to counter or dispel false beliefs regarding minority groups, and providing information about support services.

### **References**

Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) (2017). Media release: Census reveals a fast changing, culturally diverse nation. Canberra: ABS. Retrieved from <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs%40.nsf/lookup/Media%20Release3>.

Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) (2018). Valuing multiculturalism. Canberra: AHRC.

### **When communicating with families from diverse backgrounds, you might like to consider the following:**

- When spoken or written English is a barrier, interpreters or translated material can help you communicate with families.
- When working face-to-face with interpreters, always remember to talk with the family not to the interpreter.