

## **PRACTICE**

### *Creating Environments that support the Feeling of Belonging*

In our experience, an environment that reflects those within it (children, staff, families and home communities), encourages contributions from and sharing with each other and creates a feeling of wellbeing and belonging. This information sheet aims to provide you with some ideas and strategies to create an environment in which children feel comfortable to explore, and to feel connected, valued and respected.

#### **This information is provided with the following underlying assumptions:**

- Every child has the right to retain and develop his or her own culture.
- The environment created in early care and education settings should support the development of self-esteem and identity in all children.
- Culture is not stagnant, but constantly evolving.
- Every child, person and community contributes to the culture of their environment.

#### **Collaborating with families:**

Families are children's first and most influential teachers. Having respectful and collaborative relationships with the child's family ensures that the environment you create as an educator allows the child to connect with your setting.

There are many ways in which you can encourage collaboration with families. Building a trusting and respectful relationship with families starts the moment the family steps into your environment.

How we share knowledge and acknowledge diversity at this point sets the scene for future collaboration with families and for how welcome and respected they feel.

Once a relationship has been developed there are many ways in which families can contribute to the creation of a welcoming environment.

Some of these are to:

- create a ritual that is distinct to the family, child and primary educator and signifies the 'handing' over of the care and education of the child to the educator, creating a bridge between the home and care and education setting.
- share items such as artefacts, materials, books and instruments with the care and education setting that are familiar to the child.
- take part in the exploration of their home culture within the care and education setting.

#### **Note:**

*Some parents may be happy to be involved with cultural activities. Some parents may choose not to be involved. Just because you have a family from a culturally and linguistically diverse or aboriginal background, you should not assume they know everything about their*

*culture. Families may not want to talk publicly about their culture, families, histories or issues.*

**Reflect the child's entire living and learning environments:**

Once children feel connected with their environment they will use this secure base to share, explore and expand their experiences, feelings and learning. A bridging of learning and living environments can support the connection with the early care and education setting. This can be achieved by:

- incorporating toys and props in displays and activities that reflect the environmental surroundings that children are living in as well as those that they may experience through their family, holidays and the media.
- using fabrics, cloth and material throughout the setting that are found in young children's surroundings. Ask for items from the home environment and use them in your setting as table coverings in home corners, blankets for outdoor play and as backgrounds for displays.
- complimenting 'commercial' toys/books/displays with natural materials from children's everyday contexts, such as rocks, sticks and leaves found in the outdoor play area and selected by the children as part of their exploratory play, or shells and sand from a family visit at the beach.
- displaying, sharing and exploring materials and artefacts that children, families and educators are familiar with and which reflect the diversity of your community. This can include books with different script, instruments used to make music in the family's home culture, clothing for different climates, paintings representing various styles of the visual arts and so on.

**Note:**

*An environment that reflects the home and living environments of children honours their diversity and respects traditions, practices and beliefs. Creating environments in which everybody contributes – families, children and educators - creates an atmosphere of respect, collaboration and ongoing learning. Settings developed in this way will always reflect those who are living and learning in them and evolve with those who create them.*

**References:**

1. Belonging, Being & Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia 2009 Department of Education, Employment and Workplace (DEEWR) , Australian Government
2. National Childcare Strategy 2006-2010: Diversity and Equity Guidelines for Childcare Providers Office of the Minister for Children; Ireland
3. Inviting Play Free Kindergarten association of Victoria
4. [http://www.education.vic.gov.au/ocecd/docs/ecs\\_supporting\\_koorie\\_children\\_in\\_kind er.pdf](http://www.education.vic.gov.au/ocecd/docs/ecs_supporting_koorie_children_in_kind er.pdf)
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