

PRACTICE

Anti Bias Curriculum in Early Care and Education

Anti bias is the practice of inclusion, which accepts that all people are of value and should be respected. Following an anti bias curriculum in early care and education settings has the outcome of creating secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships that value diversity among people.

At an early age, children have begun to construct a sense of self, of belonging, gender and racial identity. If children are exposed to stereotyping, prejudices and discriminatory practices they will absorb these and, unless guided otherwise, reflect and practice them in their world.

The goals of an anti bias curriculum include:

- Developing children's identities and self esteem.
- Helping children feel comfortable with difference.
- Creating awareness of bias and stereotypes.
- Providing children with the tools to respond appropriately to bias.

Anti bias is an active approach to the identification and challenging of prejudicial and discriminatory practices in relationships between people. Children are not born with prejudice, they develop it. The early care and education setting in collaboration with the home environment create a learning atmosphere in which children experience:

- valuing each other's knowledge and contributions.
- trusting each other.
- communicating freely and respectfully with each other.
- sharing insights and perspectives.
- engaging in shared decision making.

Where does bias come from?

Bias can occur when individuals have:

- incorrect or not enough information.
- emotional stress.
- time pressures.
- difficulty adapting to a new 'societal' culture.
- lack of established support systems.
- language and/or communication barriers.

Indicators of bias include:

- refusal to co-operate.
- discouraging others' involvement.
- acting on assumptions about people and groups.

Some guiding assumptions about working with children in an anti-bias environment:

- even very young children notice differences and begin to discriminate based upon them.
- it is ok for children to notice differences. The problem is the way society sees some differences as positive and others as negative, children absorb these attitudes and act according to them.
- we do not all experience bias in the same way.
- an anti-bias approach is important for everyone.
- adults are not always aware of their biases and potentially may model bias unintentionally.
- understanding bias and inequality is a long-term process of life-long exploring and challenging.
- it is important that we create environments for all in which we encourage participation and where it is ok to disagree.
- it is important to integrate anti-bias in all parts of the early care and education environment.

Ideas for implementing anti bias practice:

- **Talk about your own experiences.** Begin with yourself, tell a story of when you were discriminated against, how you felt, how you resolved the issue, and invite the children to make comments. You can guide them to imagine how they would have felt in such a situation, how they would have responded, what they would have expected the outcome to be.
- **Help put rejection in perspective.** Remind your child of times he or she has been angry with parents, friends, or siblings — how were these situations resolved?
- **Shed some light on social dynamics.** Acknowledge that people are often judged by the way a person looks, acts, or dresses. Explore why that is so, what impact it may have on an individual's feelings and behaviour and identify strategies that support the development of genuine relationships.
- **Find examples that children can relate to.** Many books, TV shows, and movies portray outsiders triumphing in the face of rejection and send strong messages about the importance of being true to your own nature and of the value of being authentic, even in the face of difficult social situations.
- **Foster friendships in a variety of settings.** Introduce the children in your care and education setting to any activity that gives them an opportunity to create another social group and learn new skills.
- **Model inclusive behaviour.** Have anti bias practices as standard practice in your workplace; expose the children to situations in which they can observe the educator practicing anti bias .

References and other articles on the subject:

1. *'Belonging, Being & Becoming'* The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia
2. NSW Department of Education and Training website: racismnoway.com.au
3. Neugebauer, Bonnie (Editor): *Alike and Different – Exploring Our Humanity With Young Children*, 1992, National Association for the education of young children, USA
4. Wolpert, Ellen, *Start Seeing Diversity – the Basic Guide to an Anti Bias Classroom*, 2005, Redleaf press, USA
5. *A World of Difference*, 2008, Anti-Defamation League –www.adl.org
6. *Encouraging Inclusive Behaviour*, Tracy Morrison, *Putting Children First Newsletter (NCAC)*, Issue 14 June, 2005, pp 8-9
7. Ireland, *National Child Care Strategy 2006 – 2010, Diversity and Equality Guidelines for Childcare Providers*