

Suggestions for families

Parenting across cultures can sometimes be challenging, especially when the values and expectations of one culture are different to those from another. This can make it difficult for families to feel a sense of belonging to any community. However, when parents and carers find a way of parenting that feels right for them, it helps the whole family to develop a cultural identity and a sense of belonging. This is particularly important for children, because a sense of belonging and a strong cultural identity supports their mental health and wellbeing. There are lots of things that can help families to develop a sense of belonging, including:

Identifying your own culture

Developing a sense of cultural identity supports the development of your child's identity and self-esteem, as well as their feeling of belonging to their community. These are all protective factors for mental health and wellbeing in early childhood. Children's cultural identity develops through language, storytelling, relationships, and traditions and routines. You can help your children to connect with their heritage by sharing cultural stories and practices.

Getting to know your child's ECEC service

Becoming involved in your child's ECEC service is a great way to develop connections and a sense of belonging to your community. There are often opportunities to participate in activities at the ECEC service that will help you to meet educators and other families. Forming relationships with educators at the ECEC service can also help your family to feel like you belong. Having a good relationship with educators allows you to ask them questions about the service and your child's experiences there and to share your cultural background. When families and educators develop relationships, they are more able to understand each other's perspective, talk through concerns and support children together.

Building social networks

Friendships and social networks are important both for children and their families, because they help you to feel part of the community. Making connections with other families can help you feel welcome and that you belong. You might build connections across many different social and cultural groups. Your children's ECEC service is often a great meeting point for parents and carers that can lead to long-term friendships.

Developing a sense of cultural identity supports the development of your child's identity and self-esteem



Seek support

Getting help at times of stress is important for everyone. It might be useful to have assistance in your own language when trying to manage complex issues. Sometimes it can take time to find the right person or organisation to help you and your family. Help and support is available in many places, like government agencies (e.g., parenting and family support services), community organisations (e.g., neighbourhood centres and ECEC services) and English language programs.

Remember that it takes time to adjust

Adjusting to a new life after migration can have lots of challenges for families and children. Adults and children often need different things to help them adjust to their new community. For example, young children often need extra time and support to help them adjust to all of the changes. In this case, strong relationships and secure, caring environments at home and at an ECEC service can help to provide a sense of stability and belonging. Adults can sometimes need support themselves to help their children adjust after migration. Finding people who understand what your family is experiencing and who can support you through those changes is really important. Your ECEC service is one place that might be able to assist.

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Suggestions for educators

Culture and the context of family are central to children's sense of identity, belonging and success in lifelong learning. Educators have a very significant role to play in supporting children and families from culturally diverse backgrounds. When educators are welcoming and approachable, accepting of difference and able to respect multiple ways of being, it helps children and their families to build a sense of belonging and trust. There are many ways ECEC services can support the mental health and wellbeing of children from culturally diverse backgrounds. Some ideas that might assist educators to support culturally diverse families include:

Get to know families at your ECEC service

Every family is different. Getting to know all of the families at your ECEC service means there is less chance of assumptions being made about backgrounds, cultures or practices. Asking families about their lives and culture is the best way to get to know them and what is important to them. When educators understand the experiences of families and their cultures, they are better able to support children with their development and learning.

Be open to different types of families

Families from culturally diverse backgrounds can also be unique in their composition. Families can be small or large, may or may not be biologically related and may include several generations. When educators are able to include all families, it helps families to feel more welcome in the ECEC service.

Work to develop positive relationships with families

Relationships help people understand each other and work together. Coming to an ECEC service might be a new experience for some families, so developing positive relationships can help build a sense of belonging and inclusion. A positive relationship with an ECEC service also means a family is likely to be more comfortable about approaching educators. Families are an important source of information and insight about their children and the hopes or concerns they might hold for them. Educators can ask families what is important to them and invite them to participate in the ECEC service. An orientation session can assist new families develop positive relationships with their ECEC service. Positive relationships support families, convey respect for diversity and foster children's social and emotional wellbeing.

Be thoughtful about communication

When spoken or written English is a barrier, interpreters or translated material can help educators and families communicate with one another. When working face to face with interpreters, always remember to talk to the family not to the interpreter. Ask questions to ensure families understand what has been said. It can be helpful to provide additional time to listen to families and allow them to ask questions too. Respect for diversity is also communicated by the environment and resources at an ECEC service; so it is helpful to be mindful of the messages your environment sends about diversity.

Mutual respect for diversity

Educators can encourage a positive environment by inviting diversity into the service. For example, providing a range of opportunities for children and their families to share their personal stories creates an atmosphere of cultural respect and acknowledgement of diversity. Mutual respect across cultures involves being open to different ideas and approaches and appreciating the enrichment this provides. When educators are aware of cultural differences in parenting, sensitive to the issues faced by families and conscious of power differences, this supports good relationships with families.

When early childhood educators respect the diversity of families and communities, and the aspirations they hold for children, they are able to foster children's motivation to learn and reinforce their sense of themselves as competent learners.¹



¹(Belonging, being and becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2009, p. 13).

Create community connections

Being safe and feeling safe can take time to achieve. Some families may have experienced significant trauma and disruption in the process of moving to or settling in Australia. These experiences can have ongoing effects on families. It can be helpful for families to have opportunities to talk about their experiences and to receive sensitive support when required. Families are better able to support their children when they are informed about and are connected to their community (e.g., support services and social networks). Specialist services are available in different states to provide assistance to families from culturally diverse backgrounds.

Counter racism and discrimination

Race-based discrimination is any behaviours or practices that result in avoidable and unfair disadvantage for minority racial/ethnic/cultural groups and privilege majority groups. It can occur at both individual and organisational levels. Racism can be countered 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.

Steps educators and ECEC services can take to support families who have experienced racism include:

- ▶ 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
- ▶ providing information about support services.



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This resource and further information on the national KidsMatter Early Childhood initiative is available to download at www.kidsmatter.edu.au.

The KidsMatter Early Childhood team also welcomes your feedback which can be submitted through the website.



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