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Learning to Appreciate Diversity

Our world is rich with different people, traditions, languages, music, foods, weather, animals, plants, and architecture. Children who are provided the opportunity to explore diversity in a positive and respectful way will learn to value, appreciate, play, and work with others more cooperatively. Educators can support children in developing friendships and exploring diversity through the learning environment and materials, meaningful interactions, and by encouraging family involvement.



Start by creating an environment where every child feels welcomed, valued, and confident. You can use the book *Anti-Bias Education for Young Children and Ourselves* by Louise

Derman-Sparks and Julie Olsen Edwards (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2020) as a guide. Design the environment for daily individual and group exploration of diversity and friendship. You can create a large gathering area where children can form a drum circle, dance, or play music with instruments from around the world together. Children also need a cozy area to read books or reflect on their thoughts alone.

Small groups can explore friendship and social roles with pretend play. As children create their own stories, they learn about each other and start to develop friendships. Include multicultural dolls,

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EXPLORE OUR WORLD

Children can learn about stewardship, community, and the world around us by reading books that explore concepts of history and social science.

- **A Cool Drink of Water** by Barbara Kerley
- **A Place Called Home** by Kate Baker
- **Cleversticks** by Bernard Ashley
- **Everybody Bakes Bread** by Norah Dooley
- **Everybody Works** by Shelley Rotner and Ken Kreisler
- **It's Back To School We Go!** by Ellen Jackson
- **Lots of Grandparents** by Shelley Rotner and Sheila Kelly
- **Luna and Me** by Jenny Sue Kostecki-Shaw
- **We Are Grateful: Otsaliheliga** by Traci Sorell



Infant and Toddler Social Skills

Caregivers can help infants and toddlers make social connections and explore their identities by establishing consistent routines, responding to children's cues, creating a welcoming environment, and implementing a thoughtful curriculum based on observations. The following are some ideas for helping young children understand themselves and others.

- **Be respectful.** Instead of simply picking infants up, let them know what is going to happen. For example, "Is it time to change your diaper? May I carry you to the changing table?" Hold out your hands to give the infant an opportunity to respond by holding up their arms, or moving around. This teaches the infant about respectful social exchanges.
- **During personal care routines such as diapering, feeding, and hand washing, narrate what is happening and allow children to take part in their own care whenever possible.** This gives young children the opportunity to set personal boundaries, practice independence, and take pride in accomplishments.
- **Label people and feelings.** Use children's names during conversations, introduce people who enter the room ("Look! Ms. Erin and Luis are here to visit us. Let's say hello"), and identify feelings ("Do you hear Jenna crying? Maybe Jenna needs a hug").

- **Use mirrors.** Safety mirrors are a wonderful way for infants and toddlers to explore facial expressions and feelings. Securely hang a mirror on the wall low enough for infants and toddlers to see themselves. Choose toys or books that contain safety mirrors. Invite children to look in mirrors by holding them in your lap and asking them to copy your expressions and movements.
- **Make a Baby Faces book.** Use photos of the children in your care to make a photo album children can explore on their own, or together. Show children the book and greet each child and wave at them as you turn to their photo. For example, "Here's a picture of Sam. Hi Sam!"

Source: Charner, Kathy; Murphy, Maureen; Clark, Charlie (editors), *The Encyclopedia of Infant and Toddler Activities For Children Birth to 3.*, Gyphon House, Lewisville, NC (2006).



Preventing Heatstroke in Cars

Parents and caregivers transport children every day in cars. They use appropriate car seats and seatbelts, and they drive safely, but there is one item that is often overlooked, and that is leaving children unattended in a car. Children left unattended in a car can be seriously injured, or die, from heatstroke. This is completely preventable.

Temperatures inside a car can be 50° hotter than outside, even if the windows are rolled down. If it is only 70° outside, the inside of a car can be 90° within ten minutes, and 120° within one hour. Heatstroke usually occurs when the body's core temperature reaches 104° Fahrenheit, and a child's body will heat three to five times faster than an adult's body. For this reason, no child should be left unattended in a car; not even for a minute.

In more than half of the cases where death occurred, children were under the age of three and were forgotten

in the car. If you transport children, make sure all children are out of the car before locking it. You can also help parents remember not to forget children by suggesting they place their purse, briefcase, or cell phone on the floorboard directly under the car seat. It is easy for a parent who does not normally transport the child to accidentally leave them in the car. If a child does not arrive at your program by the scheduled time, immediately call parents to make sure the child is safe. If you see a child alone in a car, call 9-1-1 and report it. For more information, visit the websites noted below.

Source: Information for this article was acquired from <https://www.nhtsa.gov/campaign/heatstroke> and <https://www.nsc.org/road/safety-topics/child-passenger-safety/kids-in-hot-cars>, which were accessed in April 2025.



Learning to Appreciate Diversity

dress-up clothes, utensils like chopsticks, and empty food containers for culturally unique foods such as *masa de maíz* (Spanish for cornmeal dough) or panko (Japanese for bread crumbs). Add crayons, markers, pencils, and paints for different skin tones to the art area. Post pictures of the families in your program around the room. In the science area, add plants that children might see in their homes, such as lucky bamboo or aloe vera. Explore how plants and animals influence food, crafts, clothing, and buildings.

Reading books can introduce ideas that lead to rich discussions. Select books that introduce concepts about diversity and friendship for young children such as: *A Friend for Henry* by Jenn Bailey, *The Big Umbrella* by Amy June Bates and Juniper Bates, or *Strictly No Elephants* by Lisa Mantchev. School-age children might enjoy books such as: *Evelyn Del Rey Is Moving Away* by Meg Medina, *Save Me a Seat* by Sarah Weeks and Gita Varadarajan, *Stargirl* by Jerry Spinelli, *The Oldest Student: How Mary Walker Learned to Read* by Rita Lorraine Hubbard, or *The Kids' Book of Diversity: Empathy, Kindness and Respect for Differences* by Catherine Stephenson and Jenny Stephenson.

Use the environment and materials to create opportunities for meaningful conversations about diversity, friendship, empathy, and kindness. Be aware of your own biases as you model how to respectfully listen and speak to others. Because children develop their attitudes and beliefs from the adults in their lives, it is important to reach out to and include families. Ask them what elements of their culture they want to see in your program. Encourage parents to visit and speak about their work, traditions, or teach children traditional games from their childhood. When parents share what is special about their family, children experience a sense of pride and belonging.

As they grow and learn about themselves and each other, children will develop the skills they need to communicate effectively, cooperate, collaborate, and appreciate the diverse and unique qualities of their friends.

Source: *California Preschool Curriculum Framework, Volume III* by the California Department of Education (Sacramento, 2013).

REFLECTING ON ACCEPTANCE

Children feel welcome in environments that reflect their culture, appearance, and interests. Examine the books, dolls, music, art supplies, dress-up clothes, posters, and other learning materials in your program. Now, consider the children in your program. How do they speak to each other and play together?

A diverse environment not only supports each child's social and emotional development, it also promotes an atmosphere of acceptance by sparking conversations about the similarities and differences between people. Use the following questions to reflect on your current practices.

- Are children learning about people who are different from themselves in my program? How? Is there more I can do?
- How is my style of interacting with children reflected in the ways they interact with each other?
- How can I partner with families in my program to support children in developing attitudes of acceptance and inclusion?

Source: Adapted from the *California Preschool Curriculum Framework, Volume III* by the California Department of Education (Sacramento, 2013).

RECIPES

Breakfast Fruit Smoothies

Breakfast smoothies are easy to make and a good way to get a healthy start to the day. All that's needed is a blender and a few simple ingredients. Children can help choose which fruit to use, drop ingredients into the blender, and push the button to watch the fruit liquefy. The following recipe is for a blueberry or peach smoothie, but you can substitute any frozen fruit, or even add a banana.

Ingredients

- 1/2 cup old-fashioned oats
- 1 1/2 cups frozen blueberries or sliced frozen peaches
- 1 cup low-fat Greek vanilla yogurt or non-dairy yogurt
- 1/2 cup low-fat milk or dairy substitute
- 1 tablespoon honey or another sweetener
- 1/4 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
- 1/4 teaspoon ground cinnamon (increase it to 1/2 teaspoon for peaches)

Directions

Pour the oats into the blender first and blend them until they are a fine powder. Next, add the frozen fruit, yogurt, milk, honey, vanilla, and cinnamon. The amount of honey can be adjusted according to how tart the fruit tastes. Blend the mixture until it is completely smooth. Store it overnight in the refrigerator and stir it before serving, or serve it immediately.

Source: Adapted from the website <https://www.fivehearthome.com/healthy-oat-smoothies-recipe-blueberry-muffin-smoothie-peach-cobbler-smoothie/> in April 2025.



Exploring Diversity

Help children develop their social skills and awareness of the many different people who live in their communities. Exploring diversity will help children learn to understand themselves, accept others for who they are, and appreciate the uniqueness of all people.

Activity: Family Photo Song

Age group: Infants

What you need: Pictures of each child's family members, construction paper, hole-punch, glue, scissors, yarn, marker, and clear contact paper.

What you do: Prepare a Family Photo Book for each infant. Cut each sheet of construction paper in half to create pages. Then, glue pictures of their family members on each page. Write the name of the family member below the photo. Cover each page with clear contact paper (or lamination), punch holes down the left side, and use yarn to tie the pages together. Hold one infant in your lap with their back against you, and as you read their book together, point to each photo and sing this song to the tune of *Frère Jacques* (*Brother John*): "Here is mommy, here is mommy, mommy loves you, mommy loves you, every single day, every single way, mommy loves you, mommy loves you." Repeat the song for each family member's photo (daddy, grandma, uncle, etc.).

What they learn: Infants practice recognizing the faces of people who belong to their family, and learn the vocabulary needed to describe who they are. Extend this activity by placing pictures of you and the infants in your program on the wall. Sing the song with first names so they begin to identify each other.

Source: Adapted from page 187 of *The Encyclopedia of Infant and Toddler Activities for Children Birth to Three*, edited by Kathy Charner, Maureen Murphy, and Charlie Clark (Gryphon House, 2006).



Activity: Diverse Pretend Play

Age group: Toddlers

What you need: A variety of dramatic play materials that reflect other cultures, places, abilities, gender roles, and ages.

Items can include multicultural baby dolls, baby clothes, blankets, bottles, diapers, plastic food, cooking utensils, empty food containers, adaptive materials such as wheelchairs or crutches for dolls, and cultural artifacts (woven rugs, a tortilla press, or a clay teapot).

What you do: Invite toddlers to sit with you and play. Have conversations with children and extend their thinking by asking open-ended questions, or by letting them take the lead in play. Make baby dolls, baby clothes, bottles, blankets, and diapers available for play every day, but change other items to inspire interest.

What they learn: Through dramatic play, toddlers can explore culturally diverse materials, role-play, and develop empathy. As they nurture baby dolls by feeding and dressing them, they begin to understand that other people have needs and wants. This helps them develop empathy.

Activity: "Find Someone Who" Game

Age group: Preschool

What you need: Chart paper and a pencil or pen.



Exploring Diversity

What you do: In a group, discuss the words: same, different, and unique. Ask children to: "Find someone who has hair the same color as yours." Make a chart of different hair colors and list names under each color. Continue with: "Find someone who has the same eyes, height, or shoes." If there are twins in your group ask them to share how they are different. Close with the question, "Is anyone *exactly* like you?" Review the charts to illustrate what characteristics we share, which are different, and how that makes us all unique.

What they learn: Children explore how characteristics make up a person (how parts make a whole). They also learn that even when people appear to be similar they have differences that make them unique, and that similarities help create connections.

Source: Adapted from <http://www.brighthubeducation.com/elementary-school-activities/69159-find-someone-who-game-for-promoting-tolerance>

Activity: Who I Am Poems

Age group: School Age

What you need: Paper, pencils, crayons, and markers.

What you do: Ask children to write a poem about who they are. Each line should start with the phrase "I am..." For example: "*I am basketball. I am sunshine.*" The poems can be as long or short as they like. When they are done, they can draw illustrations around their poem. Hold a Poetry Reading event where children can share their poems.

What they learn: Children explore their own identity and learn about others. Extend learning by discussing the many characteristics people associate with themselves (physical traits, music preferences, clothing, language, etc.).

Source: Adapted from <http://www.edchange.org/multicultural/activities/poetry.html>

ABOUT CHS

For over 133 years, Children's Home Society of California (CHS) has adapted to the changing needs of children and families. Since 1891, CHS has worked diligently to protect our community's children and strengthen their families through diverse programs and services.

At CHS, we view a child not in isolation, but in the context of each family's health, stability, and resources. We believe that families are fundamentally strong and resilient. The mission of CHS is to reach out to children and families at risk with a range of services to ensure every child the opportunity to develop within a safe, healthy, and secure environment.

Therefore, CHS provides a variety of services to children and families in California and nationwide, working to improve their quality of life by offering vital information, education and resource services, and child care assistance.

CHS also serves as an expert resource for child care providers, other social service agencies, and government agencies at the local, state, and national level. To learn more about CHS and resources available to you, please visit our website at www.chs-ca.org.

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