

FOCUS

on Early Childhood Mental Health



*Pennsylvania Key
Early Childhood Mental
Health Consultation
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Factsheet #28, 7/11

Teaching Children to Understand and Value Diversity

Do you think of cultural, racial and ethnic diversity as a melting pot, a mosaic or tapestry, tossed salad, vegetable soup, or some other equally picturesque description? All of these descriptions are pleasant and colorful reminders of the richness that comes from differences. Unfortunately, the differences among people also spark name-calling, bullying and violence, even by young children. How can we teach children to understand and genuinely value people who look, sound and act different?

To help people who work with young children and their families in early learning centers, the National Center for Cultural Competence developed a self-assessment checklist that gives specific examples of things you can do to create an environment where diversity is valued, modeled and taught. A few examples:

- Display pictures, posters and other materials that reflect the cultures and ethnic backgrounds of children and families in your center
- Select books, movies and other media that reflect diverse cultures; screen all media for negative cultural or ethnic stereotypes
- Include props for dramatic play and housekeeping that are culturally diverse (dolls, clothing, furniture)
- Provide opportunities for children to cook or sample a variety of foods served by different ethnic groups
- For children and families who speak languages other than English, learn and use key words in their language
- Recognize that "family" is defined differently in different cultures
- Recognize that families of different cultures may have different expectations about developmental milestones (walking, toilet-training, feeding, etc.) and different approaches to discipline
- Remind children that certain words hurt others and don't allow them to use racial and ethnic slurs
- Consider celebrating not only traditional holidays but also ones that are unique to specific children in your setting
- Even if all the children in your center are from the same cultural or ethnic group, create an environment and plan activities that reflect the diversity in the larger society

Resources

- "Promoting Cultural and Linguistic Competency," Self-Assessment Checklist for Personnel Providing Services and Supports in Early Intervention and Early Childhood Settings, National Center for Cultural Competence, Georgetown University; <http://www11.georgetown.edu/research/gucchd/nccc/documents/ChecklistEIEC.pdf>
- "Preparing Children for a Multicultural World," Children's Advocate; <http://tinyurl.com/444gck9>
- Related FOCUS on ECMH factsheets: "Bullying in Preschool" (#25) and "Moral Development: Raising Caring Kids" (#27)

FOCUS on Early Childhood Mental Health

Factsheet # 28, July 2011

TEACHING CHILDREN TO UNDERSTAND AND VALUE DIVERSITY



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Pennsylvania Early Childhood Mental Health Advisory Committee

Ensuring that coordinated and effective mental health services are available for all young children across the commonwealth

FOCUS on Early Childhood Mental Health factsheets: www.parecovery.org
Pyramid Model graphic courtesy of the Center for the Social and Emotional Foundations of Early Learning