

Cultural Competency



Many children in our classrooms may come from other countries. It is not uncommon for families of other countries to immigrate to the United States in search of a better life. It is important as a professional to always stay culturally competent to best connect to these children and their families. Most importantly, it is important as teachers to make it a point to get to know and understand each individual family's cultural characteristics, practices, and household practices.

To increase a family's engagement in the learning process, it is important for staff to meet and discuss ongoing cultural awareness and responsiveness. By self-reflecting, staff can become self-aware of their own cultures and possible biases which may hinder culturally relevant and diverse programming. A good strategy to increasing cultural competence among staff is to have groups assigned to diverse cultural backgrounders to educate other members of the staff during meetings.

It is always important to encourage families to continue speaking their native languages at home, support families' customs, praise families' strengths, and form meaningful relationships with families. By doing so, bonds between providers and families will be strengthened, trust will be built, and families will become increasingly engaged in their children's learning.

For more information visit: <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/ways-use-cultural-backgrounders-eng.pdf>

Blowing Snake Bubbles

A great oral motor and proprioceptive activity!



Ingredients: dish soap, wash cloth, rubber band, empty plastic water bottle, and a small container

Directions:

1. Cut the bottom off an empty water bottle.
2. Place the wash cloth over the cut end of the water bottle and secure with a rubber band.
3. Mix approximately $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of water and $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of liquid dish soap in a shallow container.
4. Dip the wash cloth covered bottle into the soap mixture.
5. Remove and allow excess liquid to drop off.
6. Now let the fun begin! Remove the lid of the bottle and blow through the opening to create snake-like bubbles!

Increasing Multicultural Family Engagement: Connecting Cultural Competency and Early Education

Start Conversations with families to entice involvement and strengthen bonds:

- What school was like in their country of origin?
- What are some ways staff can learn more about your perspectives and needs?



Cultural Considerations:

- Although families may prefer child care from people of similar cultural backgrounds, educate them on being aware of childcare licensing requirements and restrictions.
- Since parents and caregivers with limited English will rely on word-of-mouth for information, providing information in their native tongue will increase accuracy with this information. They will also be appreciative of the effort made to provide this information in their understood language.
- Always respect families' religious and cultural customs, even if different from your own. Inadvertently violating these practices will cause distrust and decrease involvement in their children's educations.
- Make sure to educate parents of other countries on legal educational requirements, learning possibilities, and school options for their children, especially if they have a child with a disability.
- Be aware that respectful behaviors in other countries may seem like a lack of interest in the American culture. Do not be afraid to reach out and invite families to be involved in their children's educations. It is also important to educate these parents that family engagement will have a positive impact on their children's learning.

Main Take-Aways

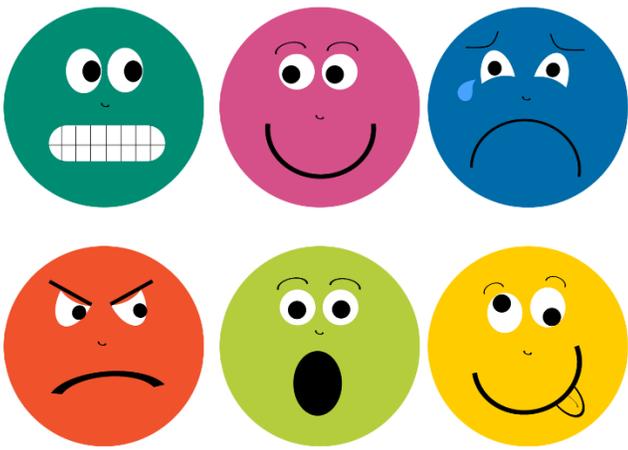
- Trusting relationships take time. However, by learning about each family's culture, values, and beliefs, bonds between families and providers can strengthen to ensure a positive learning environment for children.
- Encourage families to share their skills, cultures, and wisdom with the class and participate in activities that require decision-making by parents; involvement in a parent-teacher association is a great way for families to get involved.
- In situations where a language barrier may be present, provide translation and interpretation services to enhance understanding between families and providers.



Specific Tips for Communicating Concerns with Parents

Here are some suggestions for talking to parents about your concerns for a child's development:

- **Choose a time and place where you can talk alone.** Share your thoughts in person; this is not a conversation to have on the phone. If you are still responsible for children during this time, ask another adult to supervise them.
- **Make sure both you and the parents have enough time to talk.** This should not be done in a hurry as a parent is rushing out the door to work. You may want to **schedule this conversation** ahead of time.
- **Be prepared for strong emotions.** Parents often sense there may be a problem but have been afraid to talk about it. Often they may not know how to put their concerns into words. Sometimes they are not familiar with typical ages and stages and do not realize that some of their child's behavior is not typical. This is especially true for young parents who may not have other children. Parents also may be worried that if their child does have a special need, you will no longer want to provide child care for their child.
- **Be caring, supportive, and respectful.** Some parents may be relieved to visit with you, but others may be defensive or scared. Showing warmth and respect will help parents trust and listen to what you have to share. **Professional should be careful not to judge a family when the family does not want to do things the way the professionals think is best.**
- **Begin by saying something positive about the child.** You might point out several things you really like about the child — his smile, curiosity, love of puzzles. Say something positive about the child's relationship with the parent. When things go wrong, parents sometimes tend to blame themselves. Pointing out the positives helps reassure them that they are good parents.
- **Ask if parents have concerns or questions about how the child seems to be developing.** Quietly and respectfully ask the parents to share what they have noticed. Who, what, when, where, how questions will help you gather more information and help parents focus on the issue. You might say, *"I wonder if you have had any concerns about Jason being able to understand what you say?"* Or *"Have you noticed if Sara seems to be having a hard time hearing loud noises or people talking? Tell me what you have noticed."*
- **Share your own observations and concerns.** Do this only after the parents have had a chance to talk. Share information on typical developmental milestones or other developmental checklists so parents will have something to look at. If it makes you feel more comfortable, practice what you will say beforehand.
- **Choose your words carefully.** Rather than say, *"I think Sara might be deaf,"* give specific examples and describe what you have seen. You might say, *"I noticed the other day a gust of wind blew the door shut. It made a loud bang and scared all of us, but Sara didn't even flinch. And last week, I kept calling her to come to the lunch table and she didn't seem to hear me."*
- **Avoid using labels or technical terms.** **Remember you are not trying to present yourself as an expert. It is not your job to identify the specific disability.** It is a very scary thing for parents to hear that someone may think their child has a developmental delay. Keep it simple. Use words that describe only what you have seen.
- **Support the parent.** Your goal is to encourage the parents to get a professional evaluation for their child so that any concerns can be checked out but it is the parent's decision. You might say, *"It never hurts to check things out. Think about how relieved you will be to find out for sure. And if it does turn out that he is eligible for services... that can make a big difference at this age...but it is your decision."*



Social-Emotional Learning Starts Early

Children are intelligent and highly receptive to their environment. Learning to cope with feelings is a foundational skill that needs to be learned to increase success developmentally and as the child gets older. Strategies to encourage social-emotional learning in the classroom include:

1. Label emotions

Naming feelings is the first step in helping children understand what they are feeling. Validating these feelings in appropriate situations and helping children appropriately cope with their emotions is the foundation to social-emotional learning.

2. Do Not Fear Feelings

Encourage children to calmly and appropriately share what they are feeling. By listening and acknowledging these feelings, teachers let the children know that they are valued and respected.

3. Avoid Minimizing Emotions

“Do not be angry, we will come back to the park tomorrow.”- By trying to rationalize the child out of their emotion, we are not validating their emotions or helping them emotionally cope. Children, and adults alike, cannot help how they feel, and trying to talk them out of their feelings will only leave them feeling overlooked and internally displaced. Instead, acknowledge these feelings, help the child understand these emotions, and teach them how to cope with their emotions.

4. Teach Emotional Coping Skills

Educate children that life is full of good and bad feelings and situations, however what is important is how they react and cope with these events. Support understanding of emotions and teach strategies such as deep breathing and other relaxation techniques to promote healthy emotional regulation.