

Honoring all children's race, religion, culture, gender, physical ability and family structure

All children develop within and are influenced by their social and cultural experiences. Because cultural diversity is the norm in America, children must learn to function in and appreciate a diverse cultural society. Young children need to develop a positive sense of their own identity. This identity is shaped by many factors including their gender, race, cultural and family background, language, religion, abilities, life experiences and circumstances. They will need to develop respect and appreciation for other people with ideas and experiences that are different from their own. Classroom materials and equipment need to portray diverse, non-stereotyping images of cultural, ethnic, racial, linguistic, age, gender, family structures and other ability differences.

Note: *Quality child care programs create an understanding of and responsiveness to cultural and linguistic diversity by providing an anti-biased curriculum (Derman-Sparks & ABC Task Force, 1989). An anti-bias curriculum and program actively promote the elimination of unfair beliefs, attitudes, and actions.*

Providing a Culturally Relevant, Anti-Bias Program

Children start developing their attitudes about others and themselves by the age of two. You can have a powerful positive influence on those attitudes. In your activities and classroom you must provide multicultural, non-stereotyping materials and activities that will:

- ◆ Support each child's sense of self and family
- ◆ Teach children to accept and appreciate differences and similarities between people, and
- ◆ Help children better understand the ways of others in their community and around the world.

The following principles form the framework for multicultural programming:

- ◆ Everyone has a culture
- ◆ Know your own culture first
- ◆ Provide authentic unbiased images
- ◆ Foster concrete experiences at the child's level
- ◆ Make the culture climate of the classroom and the home consistent
- ◆ Support and value the home language
- ◆ Staff should reflect the families they serve
- ◆ Expose the children to a variety of cultures in accurate ways
- ◆ Examine and challenge institutional and personal biases, and
- ◆ All staff should be involved in this effort.

Not all materials produced for children are appropriate. You should be especially careful with materials that are more than ten years old. Be a selective consumer. Throw out negatively stereotyped images and stories. To expand children's understanding, look for materials that correctly and appropriately portray people from diverse backgrounds.

Young children do not understand concepts like "in the past" or "a long time ago," so make sure the images of people from various cultures are still accurate today. For example, children's introduction to pictures of people who are Native American should be contemporary, not pictures of a person dressed in the native clothing of 75 years ago.

There are many types of learning materials that can help children to become more aware of other people and celebrate their own heritage. When you are setting up your classroom, think of it as the "home away from home" for your children and families. Ask yourself, "How can I make this a warm and welcoming place for myself and for our families?"