



## The World is the Children

Raising young children's awareness, understanding and acceptance of diversity starts with exposure. The children and families participating in child care settings are an excellent reflection of the multicultural make-up of Canadian society. By involving children and families in recognizing and celebrating their heritage and identity, we can foster appreciation of the diversity of our world.

### Exposure

- Direct contact, food, pictures, implements, music, customs, and clothing can all reflect diversity.
- The key is to integrate this exposure rather than highlight it. For example, child care environments and resources can be set up to include diversity within everyday routines and learning activities, allowing all children to feel some familiarity and experience exposure to diversity within the environment.
- Celebrating different cultures' special occasions provides opportunities for exposure, but focusing on a specific culture or only showing its "exotic" aspects sets apart this culture and the children who identify with it.

### Identity

- Children's awareness of their own everyday and special occasions cultural practices develops a strong sense of identity and self-esteem.
- Self-esteem enhances children's abilities to understand and appreciate the cultures of their friends.

### Family members can help their children recognize and appreciate the home culture(s) and traditions by...

- explaining to them how and why things are done in a particular way
- telling stories about when the adults in the family were young
- reading and singing to them in the home language
- taking them to cultural events in the community

### Caregivers can show that they value each child's home culture by...

- talking to family members to find out what is important to them for their child's care and learning
- adding materials and activities to the program based on information from families and which reflect the various cultures within the community. Books, posters and play materials reflecting the diversity of cultural and ethnic backgrounds contribute to a welcoming and inclusive environment.
- learning and teaching words for greetings and goodbyes in various languages. Validating home language is an important part of respecting culture.

- providing familiar food and making routines such as nap time and toileting comfortable for each child
- celebrating occasions that are special for each family
- reflecting all home cultures in early childhood education programs helps majority culture children feel comfortable with minority cultures, helps children from minority backgrounds feel familiar and comfortable in more than one cultural setting, and promotes understanding, acceptance and respect for human diversity.

### It's easy to create an inclusive environment. Consider these points when choosing materials and resources:

**Cultural Diversity:** Show similar activities, items or concepts across cultures as an example of "many ways to be."

**Racial Balance:** Use photographs and other human images that represent children and families of diverse racial origins. Avoid cartoon-style images.

**Linguistic Diversity:** Label materials in more than one language and script.

**Family Diversity:** Reflect all the possibilities of family groupings such as single parent, extended, blended, gay, adoptive, bi-racial, etc.

**Gender Balance:** Avoid sex stereotypes. Be sure that girls and boys are represented in both traditional and gender-free roles and activities.

**Socio-economic Conditions:** Avoid comparing people in advantaged socio-economic circumstances with people in disadvantaged circumstances. Also avoid stereotyping any group as impoverished and poorly clothed.

**Special Needs:** Include children and adults with visible special needs, such as self and others, families and transportation.

**Variety of Settings:** Include city, small town, village and rural settings when depicting homes and communities. Depict Canadian settings wherever possible.

**Comparisons:** When making comparisons it is important to make them within the same context. For example, compare everyday with everyday (e.g. everyday dress in Canada with everyday in Kenya), traditional with traditional (e.g. traditional Canadian meal with a traditional Vietnamese meal), and exotic with exotic (e.g. rituals of the Haida with rituals of the Scots), rather than mixing them within one poster, book, or other visual material.

