




An Roinn Leanaí
agus Gnóthai Oige
Department of
Children and Youth Affairs



**DIVERSITY, EQUALITY
AND INCLUSION CHARTER**
AND
**GUIDELINES FOR
EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE
AND EDUCATION**



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Published by Government Publications

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FOREWORD

The immense value of high-quality early years care and education is well documented. The international evidence shows a wide range of benefits for children, families and society at large. However, we cannot drive quality without acknowledging inclusion. Inclusion and quality go hand in hand. An inclusive environment, where equality is upheld and diversity respected, is fundamental to supporting children to build positive identities, develop a sense of belonging and realise their full potential. This is why I am so pleased to publish a new Inclusion Charter for the Early Years sector, alongside updated Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Guidelines.

The charter invites all of us, at every level of the early childhood care and education system – from national policy-makers to frontline practitioners – to embrace, promote and embed principles of inclusion in our policies and everyday practice. Doing this involves an ongoing commitment, a continuous process of critically reflective practice with the aim of ensuring that all children and their families feel welcomed, valued and respected. The updated guidelines provide the map for this journey, helping and directing us in our shared mission to create rich, inclusive environments which will stimulate and nurture our very youngest citizens.

The charter and guidelines are also a core element of the new Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) for children with disabilities. This model is focused on empowering service providers to deliver an inclusive pre-school experience, ensuring that every child can fully participate in the ECCE programme and reap the benefits of quality early years care and education. AIM involves seven levels of progressive support, moving from the universal to the targeted, based on the needs of the child and the service provider. As a central plank of Level 1 of the model (Building an Inclusive Culture), the charter and guidelines represent the foundation on which all other levels of the model are built.

I would like to thank and commend all those involved in the production of the charter and the guidelines, particularly the working group chaired by Irene Cafferky, Childcare Committees Ireland, and the cross-sectoral project team and implementation group who oversaw the work.

Finally, I find it appropriate that this charter and guidelines are being published in Ireland's centenary year. It is a year where children from all over Ireland, from diverse backgrounds and cultures, have been invited to reflect on our country's past and to reimagine our future. The early years sector has a particularly privileged and powerful role to play in reimagining and reshaping Ireland's future. By ensuring that each child, from their earliest years, is cherished equally, that diversity is celebrated and a sense of belonging nurtured, the early years sector can contribute to building a more inclusive, tolerant and enriched society for the benefit of all, both old and young.

Minister Katherine Zappone, TD
June 2016

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

These Guidelines were first produced in 2006 by the Office of the Minister for Children and were reviewed and updated in 2016 by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs.

The original Guidelines were prepared by Colette Murray, Miranda Cooke and Annie O'Doherty, with assistance from Marian Hanrahan, on behalf of an Advisory Subgroup for Children with Special Requirements, Minority Ethnic Children and Traveller Children. This subgroup was established under the auspices of the National Childcare Coordinating Committee.¹

In 2016, the Equality and Diversity Guidelines were revised as part of the introduction of a new Access and Inclusion Model. This revision included the development of a new Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Charter and a National Inclusion Policy Template. Revision of the Guidelines was led by a task group, chaired by Irene Cafferky, Childcare Committees Ireland, and comprising the following members:

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The work of Colette Murray and Miranda Cooke in preparing the original Guidelines and contributing to their revision is acknowledged.

Learning story provided by:

Early Childhood Ireland (ECI)
Tots Creche and Daycare, Roseberry Hill,
Newbridge, Co Kildare
Curious Minds, Castlebar, Co Mayo

Photographs provided by:

Ann Halligan, Curious Minds, Castlebar, Co Mayo
The Preschool Education Initiative for Children from
Minority Groups (Department of Education and Skills
2011–2013)
Pavee Point, Dublin (*éist: Respecting Diversity in Early
Childhood Care, Education and Training*)

¹ Membership of the subgroup included representatives from: Children's Rights Alliance; Forbairt Naíonraí Teoranta; Forum for People with Disabilities; IPPA on behalf of the National Voluntary Childcare Organisations; Irish Refugee Council; Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children; Jack & Jill Foundation; National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism; OPEN - One Parent Exchange and Network; Pavee Point; Pobal (formerly ADM Ltd); Údarás na Gaeltachta.

DEFINITIONS

Terminology and definitions change over time. A variety of terms is in use today for naming diversity, equality and inclusion, and some of these terms have varying definitions. For the purposes of these Guidelines we use the following definitions:

‘early childhood care and education’ refers to the sector as a whole.

‘early childhood practitioners’ refers to those working with children in the sector.

‘early childhood services’ refers to all the places where children are cared for and educated, including the crèche, naíonraí, pre-schools and after-school programmes.

‘[persons with a] disability’ means those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which, in interaction with various barriers, may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.

‘diversity’ refers to the diverse nature of Irish society. Diversity is about all the ways in which people differ, and how they live their lives as individuals, within groups, and as part of a wider social group: for example, a person can be classified, or classify themselves, by their social class, gender, disability/ability, as a returned Irish emigrant, family status, as an inter-country adoptee, or from a different family structure, including foster care. They can be seen – or see themselves – as part of a minority group, a minority ethnic group or part of the majority/dominant group (adapted from Murray and Urban, 2012).

‘equality’ refers to the importance of recognising, respecting, and accepting the diversity of individuals and group needs, and of ensuring equality in terms of access, participation and benefits for all children and their families. It is therefore not about treating people ‘the same’. Equality of participation is particularly relevant when working with children and parents. Inequality can be instigated by an individual, or through policies at an early childhood service or broader institutional level (adapted from Murray and Urban, 2012).

‘inclusion’ refers to a process involving a programme, curriculum or educational environment where each child is welcomed and included on equal terms, can feel they belong, and can progress to his/her full potential in all areas of development. (*National Childcare Strategy 2006-2010*).

‘parents’ refers to a parent, guardian or carer.

‘minority group’ refers to but is not limited to:

- » People with a disability
- » The Traveller community
- » Economic migrants
- » Black Irish
- » Irish language speakers
- » Refugees
- » Asylum seekers
- » Children with gay or lesbian parents
- » Families of minority religious faith

The majority of the Gaeltacht population is bilingual. While the Irish language may be the dominant language used by the majority within the Gaeltacht area, Irish language speakers in general may be considered a minority grouping within the national context.

‘majority group’ refers to those who have more opportunities and more power to make choices in society. Majority is not necessarily a reflection of numerical strength. In the Irish context, the majority group has historically been white, middle class, Catholic and male.

THE EQUAL STATUS ACTS 2000–2012

Under the Equal Status Acts 2000–2012, discrimination in the supply of goods and provision of services is prohibited on nine grounds. These are:

Gender: You are entitled to equal treatment whether you are a man, a woman or a transgender person.

Civil status: You are entitled to equal treatment whether you are single, married, separated, divorced or widowed, in a civil partnership or previously in a civil partnership.

Family status: You are entitled to equal treatment if you are the parent or the person responsible for a child under 18 years. This ground also protects those who are the main carers or the parent of a person with a disability who is 18 years or over, where their disability requires care on an ongoing basis.

Sexual orientation: You are entitled to equal treatment whether you are gay, lesbian, bisexual or heterosexual (straight).

Religion: You are entitled to equal treatment no matter what your religious beliefs are or if you do not hold any religious beliefs.

Age: You are entitled to equal treatment if you are any age, so long as you are over 18. (The age ground only applies to young people under 18 if they hold a driver's licence and are buying car insurance.)

Race: You are entitled to equal treatment irrespective of your race, skin colour, nationality or ethnic origin.

Traveller community: You are entitled to equal treatment if you are a member of the Traveller community.

Disability: You are entitled to equal treatment if you have a disability. The Equal Status Acts 2000–2012 promote 'reasonable accommodation' of people with disabilities and allow for a broad range of positive measures.

There are different types of disability, such as a physical disability (e.g. unable to walk or to see), intellectual disability or learning disability (e.g. dyslexia). Certain mental health issues may be a form of disability. Disability could also mean that you suffer from a particular medical condition, which is potentially chronic, long term, debilitating, or which gets worse over time (Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission, 2015).

Disability terminology: Within the disability sector, appropriate terminology includes 'people with disabilities' or 'disabled people' (National Disability Authority, 2016). People have individual preferences, and may choose to use these terms interchangeably, or may have a preference for one over the other. In these Guidelines, we use 'child or children with a disability'.



AN OVERVIEW OF THE DIVERSITY, EQUALITY AND INCLUSION CHARTER AND GUIDELINES FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND EDUCATION

The purpose of the Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Charter and Guidelines for Early Childhood Care and Education is to support and empower those working in the sector to explore, understand and develop inclusive practices for the benefit of children, their families and wider society. The document is in two parts:

PART A – Early Childhood Care and Education National Inclusion Charter

Part A sets out the National Inclusion Charter which aims to promote the values of diversity, equality and inclusion for all children attending early childhood services. Simply put, it is the sector's commitment to diversity, equality and inclusion. All early childhood services are invited to sign up to the National Inclusion Charter by developing and implementing an inclusion policy for their own setting.

PART B – Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Guidelines

Part B contains Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Guidelines for the Early Childhood Care and Education sector. The guidelines are divided into five sections, with each section further subdivided for convenience. At the end of each section you will find links to *Stolta* (2006) and *Aistear* (2009) and the *Pillars of Practice* (2015). The guidelines are intended as a reference and working document which early childhood managers and practitioners can utilise on an ongoing basis.





PART A

**EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE
AND EDUCATION NATIONAL
INCLUSION CHARTER**

INTRODUCTION

All children have rights, no matter who they are, where they live, what their parents do, what language they speak, what their religion is, whether they are a boy or girl, what their culture is, whether they have a disability, whether they are rich or poor. No child should be treated unfairly on any basis.

High-quality childcare is a vital factor in a child's early experiences and holistic development. Participation in inclusive high-quality early childhood settings enhances all children's early learning experiences. In an inclusive setting there is an awareness and respect for each child's individual strengths and areas of difficulty. Inclusive settings engage in meaningful collaboration with parents and other professionals to ensure access, equality and full participation for all children.

With the introduction of the updated Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Guidelines and the Access and Inclusion Model for Children with Disabilities, early childhood care and education services are being asked to sign up to a National Inclusion Charter.

This Charter has been developed in line with international best practice and has drawn on the experiences of Europe and the USA, as well as Canada and Australia.

PRINCIPLES OF AN INCLUSIVE CULTURE IN THE EARLY CHILDHOOD SERVICE

An inclusive culture involves:

- » Working in partnership and openly communicating with the child's family.
- » Working in partnership with outside agencies that may be involved with the family. (Consent must be given by the child's parents.)
- » Actively promoting equal opportunities and anti-bias practices, so that all children and families feel included and valued. (Derman-Sparks and ABC Task Force, 1989)
- » Having robust policies and procedures - inclusion policy, equal opportunities policy.
- » Recognising and valuing that all children are unique and will develop and learn at their own rate.
- » Utilising the AIM programme to meet the needs of children and recognising that not all children with disabilities will require additional support.
- » Encouraging children to recognise their individual qualities and the characteristics they share with their peers.
- » Actively engaging children in making decisions about their own learning.
- » Respecting the diversity of the child, their family and community throughout the early childhood service.
- » Understanding that children have individual needs, views, cultures and beliefs, which need to be treated with respect and represented throughout the early childhood services.
- » Reflecting on your own attitudes and values (refer to Section 1 of the revised Guidelines).

CHARTER STATEMENT

This Inclusion Charter is the early years sector's commitment to promote the values of diversity, equality and inclusion throughout early childhood care and education settings, as well as through the work of all early years practitioners. The early childhood care and education sector will provide opportunities for all children to thrive in early education through the promotion of positive identities and abilities, the celebration of diversity and difference, and the provision of an inclusive, participative culture and environment.

Accordingly, the sector will strive to:

1. Respect all children equally, nurturing each child's cultural identity and sense of belonging.
2. Acknowledge that parents are the primary educators and experts on their child, and support the smooth transitioning from home to the early childhood care and education setting.
3. In line with the *Aistear/Síolta Practice Guide*, implement a curriculum that reflects the identities of all children and recognises their abilities and interests.
4. Ensure that service planning and provision embraces the needs of all children and works to deliver an inclusive and accessible environment for all.
5. Enable all children to meaningfully participate in all aspects of the curriculum, and extend learning to challenge and promote the individual child's abilities and development.
6. Ensure that children of all abilities have equal access to culturally and developmentally appropriate play-based educational activities, both indoors and outdoors, which develop their understanding, dispositions, skills and holistic development.
7. Support children to celebrate diversity and feel comfortable with difference.
8. Support children to enjoy their early childhood service in an environment free from bias, stereotypes and discrimination.
9. Empower children to stand up for themselves and others in difficult situations.
10. Guarantee the safety and well-being of all children as central to every aspect of children's learning, well-being, welfare and development.

What does inclusion in an early childhood service look like?





PART B

**DIVERSITY, EQUALITY AND
INCLUSION GUIDELINES FOR
EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE
AND EDUCATION**

INTRODUCTION

“Inclusion and participation are essential to human dignity and to the enjoyment and exercise of human rights. Within the field of education this is reflected in the development of strategies that seek to bring about a genuine equalisation of opportunity.”

The Salamanca World Statement (UNESCO 1994:11) – signed by 92 governments (*Special Educational Needs, Inclusion and Diversity* by N Frederickson and T Cline (2002, p. 64)).

WHY DIVERSITY, EQUALITY AND INCLUSION GUIDELINES?

From a very young age, children display both positive and negative attitudes and preferences (Connolly *et al*, 2002; Milner, 1983) with respect to diversity, including gender, disability and ethnicity. Supporting children’s positive individual and group identity development in early childhood care and education is fundamental to realising children’s rights, and is recognised in our national policy frameworks (*Síolta*, 2006 and *Aistear*, 2009). However, the development of a positive identity can be affected by adversity, social exclusion and discrimination (Brooker and Woodhead, 2008).

These Guidelines have been developed to support, guide and empower the early childhood care and education sector to deliver a diversity, equality and inclusion focus to practice and training. This means recognising gender, ability, culture, class, ethnicity, language, religion, sexuality and family structure as integral to society. Many of these aspects intersect: everybody has multiple identities, influencing how we practise and how children learn in the early childhood service.

Historically, in Ireland, the richness of diversity among the population has not always been valued; similarly, differences have not been equally cherished. As a result, Ireland has not always shown due regard for the diverse needs of all people. Research has also shown that, in early childhood care and education, we have an opportunity to make a meaningful difference to children’s lives through addressing diversity, equality and inclusion (Eurydice, 2009). With these Guidelines, we aim to orient practices and understanding across all levels of the early childhood care and education sector.

Embracing diversity, equality and inclusion has the potential to be a rich source of vital learning for our children. Research suggests that early childhood practitioners, inspectors, lecturers, trainers and others involved in the early childhood sector who critically explore their own attitudes and practices provide more inclusive environments. We have an obligation to ensure that each child has an inclusive and equitable experience in early childhood services. Ignoring difference is not the answer. Openly respecting and engaging with difference is beneficial and essential for all children and adults.

In order to be inclusive, services must be aware of and interested in children’s capabilities, interests, culture, language and background. Informed by this knowledge, early childhood practitioners can create a respectful climate, and build their curriculum and interactions to proactively promote principles of equality and inclusion in the context of their service. Respect for diversity and equality in the early childhood service is about validating and cherishing each child and, in so doing, helping to build a society which truly nurtures *all* of its children.



POLICY AND RESEARCH CONTEXT FOR THE GUIDELINES

Policy context: These Guidelines are informed by international agreements, Irish legislation and national and European policy. These include:

- » The Irish Constitution (1937) (Bunreacht na hÉireann)
- » United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (1963)
- » International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (1965)
- » The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989)
- » Child Care Act, 1991 (Early Years Services) Regulations 2016
- » Employment Equality Acts 1998, 2004 and 2011
- » Equal Status Acts 2000-2012
- » Children Act, 2001
- » Ombudsman for Children Act, 2002
- » Civil Registration Act 2004
- » The Official Languages Act 2003
- » Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act 2004
- » Disability Act 2005
- » Child Care (Pre-school Services) (No 2) Regulations 2006
- » *Stolta* (2006)
- » United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) (2006)
- » *Aistear* (2009)
- » *Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children* (2011)
- » Competence Requirements in Early Childhood Education and Care (CoRe) (2011) European Commission
- » *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* (2014-2020)
- » Proposal for key principles of a Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care (2014) European Commission
- » Children First Act 2015
- » Gender Recognition Act 2015
- » Marriage Act 2015
- » *Pillars of Practice* (2015)
- » *Supporting Access to the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme for Children with a Disability*. Report of the Inter-Departmental Group (September 2015)
- » Article 2 (UNCRC) in Child Friendly Language: <http://www.unicef.org/rightsite/files/uncrcchildfriendlylanguage.pdf>

By ratifying the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), Ireland committed to:

respect and ensure the rights set forth in the present Convention to each child within their jurisdiction without discrimination of any kind, irrespective of the child's or his or her parent's or legal guardian's race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status...

take all appropriate measures to ensure that the child is protected against all forms of discrimination or punishment on the basis of the status, activities, expressed opinion or beliefs of the child's parents, legal guardians, or family members.

Article 2 (UNCRC, 1989)



TALKING ABOUT CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

Curious Minds, Castlebar, Co Mayo

Laughlin (child): Now Lewis do you want to see this one? It's so cool. That boy is getting a wheelchair just like you. Isn't that cool?

Lewis (child): Oh yeah. Show me that one again.

Research context: The Guidelines are informed by national and international equality and anti-discriminatory educational approaches and practice. They draw heavily on the anti-bias approach developed by Louise Derman-Sparks in the USA, which has been widely adapted in international contexts, including Europe, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Canada and the USA, and the Diversity and Equality Early Education and Training (DECET) European network. The anti-bias approach was adapted to the Irish context by the *éist* project (2002-2010) in Pavee Point.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE GUIDELINES

These Guidelines aim to support and empower all those working in the early childhood care and education sector to explore, understand and develop practices and approaches that embrace diversity, equality and inclusion and, through this, to create an inclusive culture where all children can flourish and realise their potential. Specifically, the Guidelines have the following objectives:

- » Foster awareness about diversity, equality and inclusion.
- » Stimulate discussion about bias and discrimination, and how it affects children and families.
- » Challenge our thinking on attitudes and values and how they affect our practice.
- » Encourage and support those working in the sector to actively advocate for diversity, equality and inclusion for all children and their families.
- » Provide guidance for training and practice.
- » Help to introduce the anti-bias approach to early childhood services.
- » Provide early childhood practitioners with the tools to deal with challenging issues, including discrimination and bias.

WHO ARE THE GUIDELINES FOR?

The Guidelines are for all those involved in the early childhood care and education sector. They apply to anyone involved in the provision of, inspection of, or delivery of early childhood care and education. They also apply to those providing mentoring, lecturing/training and other supports, as well as those representing and developing policy for the sector. This includes:

- » Managers/owners
- » Early childhood practitioners
- » Inclusion coordinators in early childhood services
- » Lecturers
- » Trainers
- » Primary teachers
- » Childcare committee teams
- » Policy-makers
- » Students, e.g. those studying early childhood care and education (ECCE) and primary school education
- » Tusla Early Years Inspectorate
- » Department of Education and Skills – Early Years Education-focused Inspection (EYEI)
- » Early years specialists – access and inclusion

The Guidelines complement the work of *Síolta: The National Quality Framework* (2006), *Aistear: The National Curriculum Framework* (2009), and the *Aistear/Síolta Practice Guide* (2015).

HOW TO USE THE GUIDELINES

The Guidelines are divided into five sections, with each section subdivided, in order to help you negotiate and work on particular areas. Each section and subsection can be read as a stand-alone guide; key points are reiterated throughout the document in order to facilitate this. However, we recommend that you begin by reading Section 1: Understanding Diversity, Equality and Inclusion and Section 2: Diversity, Equality and Inclusion - Developing an Anti-bias Approach.

These Guidelines can help to:

- » Create an awareness, knowledge and understanding of diversity, equality, inclusion and discrimination issues.
- » Stimulate ideas for discussion at team meetings, as well as support and supervision, and network meetings.
- » Support critical reflection on personal attitudes and values in relation to diversity, equality and inclusion.
- » Challenge thinking and assist critical reflection on stereotyping, prejudices and discrimination.
- » Assist in engaging with what it means to implement a diversity, equality and inclusion approach, as well as the development of related policies and procedures.
- » Assist in the development of skills to support your work in the early childhood care and education sector while implementing and promoting diversity, equality and inclusion with the children and families you work with.
- » Assist in assessing the physical environment to ensure that it supports inclusiveness and meaningful participation.
- » Create an awareness of the importance of recognising children's multiple identities, and provide ideas for supporting their individual and group identity in the early childhood service.
- » Promote equal access and meaningful participation for all children attending early childhood services.

Regard these Guidelines as a starting point, designed to provoke questions, challenge thinking and offer advice and support for change. Make connections with, and expand on, what you are already doing in *Aistear* (2009) and *Síolta* (2006) to support equitable and inclusive practice. In doing so, you will be helping to work towards a more inclusive society for all citizens, beginning with our youngest citizens.





SECTION

1

UNDERSTANDING DIVERSITY, EQUALITY AND INCLUSION



In this section we look at the importance of using the correct terminology when speaking about diversity, equality and inclusion. How and why it is important to examine our own values and attitudes, and how to perfect our interactions with children, in order to be critically reflective in everyday practice and also as an early childhood practitioner. In addition, this section contains practical reflection exercises to assist you in your work with families and children.

Also discussed in this section is the 'funds of knowledge' concept, i.e. that each child comes from a home which is an educational setting where knowledge is transmitted. This knowledge not only maintains the family culture but also enhances the child's well-being.

Have you ever asked yourself what 'multiple identities' means and what role it plays for the children you care for and educate every day in your early childhood service? Multiple identities is about respecting children's unique identity at birth and their role in constructing and reconstructing personal meaning within their cultural contexts. All children from all backgrounds undergo this process.

“It’s worth making the effort to find the right words.”

Philip Watt (2006)

TERMINOLOGY AND CONCEPTS

It is important that those working with children and families understand difference, and use appropriate, respectful language when working with children and families. An awareness of difference and diversity increases our ability to recognise challenges that families and children may experience, including stereotyping, prejudice and discrimination. Not only can this help to ensure an empathetic approach, it can also help to mitigate potential bias and stereotyping on the basis of gender, background, religion, ethnicity, ability/disability, and family structure.

It is not possible to discuss diversity, equality and inclusion without using specific words and understanding specific concepts. In particular, it is important that we develop an awareness of difference, and use appropriate language that is respectful in order to understand the implications for our work with children and families. Understanding concepts increases our ability to recognise the challenges that families and children experience, including stereotyping, prejudice and discrimination.

It is important to take the time to learn and understand appropriate diversity-related language. This will not only help you to relate to families but will also support discussions with colleagues in the early childhood service.

It is important to acknowledge that we have all learned stereotypes and prejudice, and sometimes we too are uncomfortable with differences. Therefore, it is our role as early childhood practitioners to become aware, unpack and address these issues for ourselves first, and then in the early childhood setting.



WHAT DO WE MEAN BY MULTIPLE IDENTITIES?

Identity formation is about respecting children’s unique identity at birth, and their role in constructing and reconstructing personal meaning within their cultural contexts. All children from all backgrounds go through this process. Children also negotiate *multiple* shifting identities and some competing identities, especially within complex social contexts.

Identity is much more than ‘an individual child’ developing, it is connected to larger societal issues and to the processes of social inclusion and exclusion. Individual identity formation is also linked to the child’s group identity, which is directly connected to family and community, e.g. Traveller, deaf communities. Awareness of identity is about forming a confident individual identity as well as becoming aware of differences in others. Meaningfully addressing and respecting diversity has implications for children’s ability to recognise and respect diversity. Parents, early childhood practitioners and society as a whole play a role here. Developing a positive identity is what we want for all children, but for some children this can be more of a challenge. Inclusive policies and practice acknowledge this and proactively work to ensure that challenging issues are not ignored, but are addressed by supporting children’s individual and group identity.

FUNDS OF KNOWLEDGE

The ‘funds of knowledge’ concept encapsulates the idea that each child comes from a home, which is an education setting where knowledge is transmitted. This knowledge not only maintains the family culture, but also enhances the child’s well-being and may even be important for survival (Moll, Amanti, Neff and Gonzalez, 1992). This knowledge is obtained by the children in their day-to-day life, and is not imposed by the adults. Culture is a dynamic entity, not simply a collection of things such as clothes, dance, foods, and festivals. It is a way of using resources from the social, economic and physical spaces and spiritual lives of families and communities, which are not always tangible, to make their way in the world. These funds of knowledge are very important; they matter to the family and to the community. We all have our funds of knowledge which we bring with us, often unconsciously, wherever we go. Drawing on the knowledge and skills that children and parents bring into the early childhood service, early childhood practitioners can enhance the curriculum and create meaningful experiences for those children attending the service.

This is particularly important for children whose background, culture and home life may be viewed as ‘poor’ in terms of the types and quality of experiences available to them. If you are not familiar with a family/ community’s funds of knowledge, it may be easy to miss or underestimate the wealth of experience or funds of knowledge available in individual families, particularly in minority groups, e.g. disability, family structures, class, ethnicity. We may also dismiss some of these funds as irrelevant in the context of the early childhood service and, as a consequence, we may unconsciously dismiss and undermine that which is important in the child’s life. In order to engage effectively with families, early childhood practitioners will first need to be open to, and learn how to engage with, families as the ‘experts’ that they are.



“As teachers we are cultural workers, whether we are aware of it or not.”

Darder (2002) in Mac Naughton (2003, p. 184)

VALUES AND ATTITUDES

“Changing attitudes and beliefs takes time. Remember that each individual needs ... to change at their own pace ... The overall message is one of valuing each individual for the skills and background they have. This includes their family background, ‘race’, beliefs, language and so on. Each individual sees the world through their own perspectives and with assistance through the perspectives of others.”

L Arthur, 1993

WHY DO WE NEED TO EXPLORE VALUES AND ATTITUDES?

As adults we are affected by our own values and attitudes, by our social conditions and by our identities. Our life conditions inform everything we do and inform what we think is important. Meaningful engagement with diversity concepts and terminology, multiple identities and funds of knowledge will be informed by our knowledge base, but most importantly by critically reflecting on our attitudes. This is a vital component in becoming a reflective and inclusive early childhood practitioner.

Research reveals that children are aware from age three or four years – and sometimes earlier than this age – of ethnic, race, gender, class, language and physical differences (Connolly *et al*, 2002; Van Ausdale and Feagin, 2001). They notice differences and similarities as part of their natural developmental process, and assimilate positive and negative, spoken and unspoken messages about difference. These influences are part of the child's development of self and group identity, as well as self-esteem. Children learn and have their views reinforced by attitudes they experience primarily through relationships with adults and the broader community.

Young children enter the early childhood service with a general awareness of difference. It is the early childhood practitioner's role to acknowledge this awareness, and to promote diversity and equality within their settings. We all live in a diverse society, and therefore embracing and working with a diversity, equality and inclusive approach is integral to the provision of high-quality early childhood practice.

THE ROLE OF THE ADULT

Adults play a vital role in empowering children in their daily lives as active learners, and in supporting children in their development as active citizens. Exploring your own attitudes is not easy, but it is essential to openly and effectively engage with diversity. We all have different experiences of, and attitudes to, diversity. Adults are not immune to negative thoughts about diversity and all of us have prejudices about something. This is all part of the learning process and how we engage with diversity in our own lives. Opening up space to explore our own attitudes to diversity can be revealing and empowering. This engagement can offer us pathways for embracing diversity in our work with children. How we address diversity has an impact on how children see and engage within their own world. Therefore, it may be necessary as part of the reflective process to change our own thinking before we begin supporting children in their thinking. Only then can we begin to support children to unlearn negative feelings towards difference.

Reflecting on our attitudes and values enables us to develop the awareness, insights and skills to implement a diversity, equality and inclusion programme. Our main objective is to ensure that all children and their families are recognised, respected and protected from any form of prejudice or discrimination. A further aim is to encourage all children to express their diversity in a welcoming environment.

Following an exploration of personal attitudes, it becomes easier to review and revise practice in the early childhood service. Changing practice in relation to diversity, equality and inclusion involves the following five actions:

1. Critically reflecting on your own attitudes and values and how they influence children.
2. Ongoing reflection on one's own and others' challenges in this area.
3. Creatively thinking of new ways to work, including exercises and activities with the team and with children.
4. Developing and actively implementing diversity, equality and inclusion policies and procedures, actions and practices.
5. Continually questioning and reviewing the process of equality and inclusion, and learning from our mistakes (critically reflective practice).

Taking a holistic approach enables early childhood practitioners to support each child towards achieving his/her full potential.

BEING A CRITICALLY REFLECTIVE EARLY CHILDHOOD PRACTITIONER

“A willingness to take risks, to be self-introspective, and learn from mistakes.”

Louise Derman-Sparks and Carol Brunson Phillips (1997)

Reflecting individually, or with your team, or as part of a supportive network, will support your work practices. Thinking about and discussing issues of diversity, equality and inclusion, and using the suggestions below, can help in understanding how your attitudes and values influence your work practices. They can also help you to generate ideas and actions for going forward.

EXERCISE

1

REFLECT ON EACH OF THE STATEMENTS BELOW. FOLLOW THIS UP BY CHOOSING INDIVIDUAL STATEMENTS AND DISCUSS THESE WITH COLLEAGUES.

General awareness:

1. Diversity is a majority issue, with relevance for all adults and children.
2. Everyone can learn to be comfortable with difference.
3. All adults and children are influenced by the prejudicial views that exist in society. Therefore, children as young as three years old can display negative comments and ideas about difference.
4. The education system, religion and the media have a strong influence on how our attitudes and values are formed.
5. Everyone has a culture. Culture is learned. We are all culture bearers.
6. Values differ across cultures, social classes, families and communities.
7. Discrimination hurts and influences how children and adults relate in the world.
8. Children pick up messages from adult behaviour: from the things that are said and not said, what is valued or not valued in terms of differences. Children hear how adults talk to and about others.
9. Sometimes, people say we don't have any diversity here, so we don't need to address diversity, equality or inclusion. This work is relevant for all early childhood services. There is diversity in every early childhood service (e.g. gender, ability/disability, family structure). Diversity is not just about culture.
10. Early childhood care and education training courses generally assume a universal understanding of child development, often overlooking cultural and class variations in attitudes to child development or different parenting traditions.
11. Barriers to inclusion in the early childhood service can be both internal and external.

Personal awareness as early childhood practitioners

- a) Being professional in the way you provide early childhood care and education requires critical awareness of one's own personal attitudes and values.
- b) All actors in the early childhood sector (management, staff, policy-makers, inspectors, trainers, researchers, support agencies) share responsibility for creating the systemic conditions that enable early childhood practitioners to become critically reflective.
- c) Expectations about the way children learn or behave; how successful they are likely to become; views about how families live their lives; what children have the ability to do, or not do, are all influenced by attitudes and values.

Awareness for work with families from minority groups

- a) Families may have a valid fear (because of their experience of discrimination in society) that they and their children may be treated differently and may not be able to participate equally in the early childhood service. Those who may fall into this 'fearful' category could include, for example, a Traveller child, a child with a disability, a child from a Muslim family, or a child who has a gay/lesbian parent.
- b) Families may have concerns that their child's home culture or language may become 'lost' or compromised if it is not supported in the service. Showing that the culture is valued does not mean teaching culture.
- c) Some families may say that they do not want their child to speak their home language in the early childhood service. It is the responsibility of the early childhood practitioner to support parents to understand the importance of maintaining the home language and the benefits for the child's development (see Section 4: Diversity, Equality and Inclusion – Supporting Families.)
- d) All families have different traditions and approaches to child-rearing. Some may clash with your own values, and in some cases seem very different to the 'majority' cultural views. They may seem strange and unfamiliar, and you may view them as 'wrong'. It is important to find out, understand and work with parents if you are unsure or uncomfortable. In the case of legislation, regulations must always be adhered to (see Section 4: Diversity, Equality and Inclusion – Supporting Families).
- e) Children with a disability have the same rights as other children to a child-centred pedagogy that meets the individual interests and needs of the child.
- f) The multiple identities of all families and children must be recognised and respected in delivering early childhood services. The term 'multiple identities' encompasses cultural background, religion, race, disability, language, gender, family structure, and class. Recognising and respecting multiple identities means working in partnership with families, improving your knowledge, understanding societal challenges, and reflecting on attitudes and values.

EXERCISE

2

REFLECT ON EACH OF THE STATEMENTS BELOW. FOLLOW THIS UP BY CHOOSING INDIVIDUAL STATEMENTS AND DISCUSS THESE WITH COLLEAGUES.

The following key questions will help you undertake an in-depth exploration of your own values and attitudes, both individually and within team or network discussions. To gain awareness, ask yourself:

Can I...

1. Stand back, examine and discuss objectively my own ethnicity and culture?
2. Be comfortable sharing feelings and experiences about my first awareness of difference?
3. Discuss my understanding of how stereotyping, prejudice and discrimination work in society?
4. Explain what stereotyping, prejudice, discrimination, racism, sexism and homophobia mean?
5. Stand up for myself if I am a target of stereotyping, prejudice or discrimination due to my gender, ability, physical appearance, ethnicity, sexuality, family status or class?
6. Identify unfair and untrue images, comments and behaviours made about people from minority backgrounds in discussions, on the TV or radio, in newspapers, or on social media?
7. Identify and empathise with adults and children affected by stereotyping, prejudice, discrimination and racism, sexism, or homophobia, and understand the impact of these?
8. Recognise, acknowledge and understand influences on children's attitudes and values from home, the early childhood service, community, media and the wider world?

(continued)

9. Identify and discuss what constitutes acceptable and non-acceptable behaviours in a professional context, e.g. discussion in a team situation regarding a family?
10. Recognise that there are unequal power relations within society?
11. Demonstrate and support children to understand stereotyping and prejudice in a meaningful and age-appropriate manner?
12. Demonstrate and support children to stand up for themselves in difficult situations, including prejudice and discrimination, in a meaningful way that is appropriate to their age and stages of development?
13. Recognise where messages about diversity came from in my life, and explore any misinformation, stereotypes, or prejudices that I have learned?
14. Explain how my beliefs affect my work with children and families?
15. Recognise excuses or objections in order to avoid working with diversity, equality and inclusion by myself or others?

Have I the skills to...

1. Gather background information on all the children in the setting, including information about their ethnicity, cultural heritage, language, class and ability?
2. Create an environment that reflects each child's identity in the early childhood service?
3. Support the home culture and the child's and family's funds of knowledge?
4. Empower children and others to stand up for themselves in difficult situations?
5. Use non-verbal forms of communication, along with verbal communication?
6. Recognise negative attitudes when they arise, and develop strategies to address them?
7. Reflect on everything the children experience in the service, in order to identify any bias from a gender, culture, disability, family structure or religious perspective?
8. Promote the involvement of the local community and address the positive impact that each person can make in the community and society?
9. Challenge bias, stereotyping, prejudice or any form of discrimination among staff, parents or children in the service?
10. Ensure that routine activities offer opportunities to reflect diversity of background, religion, skin colour, family structures, language, culture or disability in a positive way that will help all to become aware of and respectful of differences?
11. Create an inclusive environment that illuminates a climate of respect and recognition for all children in the service?
12. Support each child to achieve their full potential and ensure that learning experiences are suited to their holistic development, while recognising the diversity of children?

How to access supports:

Various supports are available to assist in developing an inclusive approach within early childhood services. Your local City/County Childcare Committee (CCC) offers training on developing and implementing the Early Childhood Care and Education Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Charter and the Early Childhood Care and Education Inclusion Policy Template.

Under the Access and Inclusion Model, a QQI Level 6 Higher Education Programme has been developed in relation to the inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream pre-school (the Leadership for Inclusion or LINC Programme).

In addition to the LINC Programme, QQI Level 5 and Level 6 diversity and equality modules are available. (Further information on such modules can be found at www.dcy.gov.ie/ecce)

The Equality and Diversity Early Childhood National Network (EDeNN) also provides advice and access to training and other supports. See www.edenn.org

Finally, networking can offer an invaluable, ongoing source of support. Learning together is the best method of developing awareness and knowledge on diversity, equality, inclusion and anti-discriminatory practice. Contact your local City/County Childcare Committee and/or set up your own discussion group with other early childhood practitioners in your area.

NETWORKING ON DIVERSITY, EQUALITY AND INCLUSION

Networking with other early childhood services or support agencies can be very valuable in helping early childhood practitioners to develop and maintain a diversity, equality and inclusion approach. Ongoing discussion and reflection on diversity and equality issues will create an opportunity to share successes and concerns, provide encouragement, and facilitate planning strategies.

Networking allows early childhood practitioners to increase knowledge, share approaches for adapting practice, source resources and generate ideas for developing new skills. It also provides a space for discussing issues or challenges, hearing different perspectives and exploring solutions.²

² For example, practitioners could use networking opportunities to consider critical questions such as (a) how have I come to do things this way in my work?; (b) how have I come to understand things this way?; (c) who benefits from how I do this and understand this?; (d) who is silenced in how I do this and understand this?; (e) how many other ways are there to do this and understand this?; and (f) which of those ways might lead to a more equitable and fair way of doing things and understanding things? (Mac Naughton, 2004)

STEPS IN SETTING UP A LOCAL NETWORK ON DIVERSITY, EQUALITY AND INCLUSION

1. Contact your local City/County Childcare Committee to explore the possibility of joining a network.
2. Make a note of any situations or incidents that arise for which you might need peer support from the network.
3. Allow time for the network to develop.
4. Source information on diversity, equality, inclusion and anti-discrimination issues, and legislation from statutory or voluntary organisations.
5. Create an action plan to encourage continued attendance. Select a topic to discuss at each meeting; source information on the topic and explore it. Ask colleagues to document and share any incidents or questions relating to issues that arise in their work: for example, work with families, communication, language, skin colour, ethnicity, disability, etc. (while simultaneously ensuring respect and confidentiality).
6. Allow time for knowledge and understanding to expand. Everyone will be at a different point in their learning. It is essential to have ample time, in order to inform, explore and understand these complex issues, and then find ways to support all children in achieving their full potential.
7. Members of minority groups are often asked to speak on behalf of their community. Seek support through a representative organisation. Be aware that if you ask any individuals from minority groups to inform your service, they may be speaking as individuals and may not be representative of their community's needs.



SECTION

2

DIVERSITY, EQUALITY AND INCLUSION – DEVELOPING AN ANTI-BIAS APPROACH



In order to ensure an inclusive practice, you must reflect on all elements of practice including how children relate to each other, how staff relate to minority and majority children, how language is used, how and what discussions take place, and what activities are undertaken.

In this context, consideration should also be given to the physical environment and policies and procedures of your early childhood services.

This section contains a discussion on the anti-bias approach, and explores in detail the four anti-bias goals and how you as an early childhood practitioner can implement the anti-bias approach in everyday practice. Also included in this section are practical ideas for supporting children's identity and sense of belonging.

WHAT IS A DIVERSITY, EQUALITY AND INCLUSION APPROACH?

“Early childhood education holds tremendous promise for raising a new generation, with each child not only proud of their own heritage and identity, but committed to standing up against bias in all its many forms.”

Margie Carter and Deb Curtis (1994)

Historically, a variety of education approaches have been implemented to address diversity, equality and inclusion. A multicultural education approach tends to focus on culture and ethnicity, including topics such as the festivals, ‘exotic’ foods, clothes and dance. While this approach can be interesting and fun for children, it also has its limitations.

A more in-depth and inclusive approach that respects and recognises all children is known as the anti-bias approach. The anti-bias approach has influenced practice internationally (Urban *et al.*, 2011; Smith, 2015; Souto-Manning, 2013; Wagner, 2014). It has also influenced practice nationally (CECDE, 2006; French, 2007; DES, 2011–2013; OECD, 2006; Murray and Urban, 2012), and was developed specifically for the early childhood care and education sector. The anti-bias approach not only celebrates difference but also challenges the effects of inequality on particular children, families and communities, and asks that those engaged in the early childhood care and education sector at all levels work proactively in order to support meaningful inclusion. It also recognises the importance of supporting majority children and families to be comfortable with difference and be aware of inequality in society.

ANTI-BIAS APPROACH AND ANTI-BIAS GOALS

A diversity, equality and inclusion approach involves creating an early childhood care and education service where each child feels a sense of belonging. Early childhood practitioners can observe and listen to children’s play and adult interactions, so as to identify any misinformation, prejudice or bias, and then develop methods to deal with issues that arise.

In order to develop an inclusive environment, all aspects of the setting must be considered. For example:

- » the children and families who attend the service
- » how children relate to each other
- » how staff relate to and interact with all children, including minority and majority children
- » the use of language and both verbal and non-verbal cues within the setting
- » the physical environment
- » policies and procedures
- » play materials and activities, e.g. songs, rhymes within the setting
- » how and what discussion take place
- » what activities are undertaken

The insights in this section are inspired by the anti-bias approach originally developed by Louise Derman-Sparks and the Anti-bias Task Force (USA), and further developed by DECET – the Diversity in Early Childhood Education and Training European Network (see <http://decet.org/>) – and in the Irish context by Murray, O’Doherty and Cooke (2004). The approach helps adults working with young children to critically reflect on their attitudes to difference (see Section 1: Understanding Diversity, Equality and Inclusion), and to proactively and consciously create an inclusive environment for all children (see Section 3: Diversity, Equality and Inclusion – Physical Environment). Derman-Sparks and ABC Task Force (1989) sets out initial steps for understanding the daily lives of all children in the setting, followed by ideas for changing programme activities. The approach, which complements existing programmes, was developed to help adults and children appreciate diversity and view its challenges in a positive light.

“The heart of anti-bias work is a vision of a world in which all children are able to blossom, and each child’s particular abilities and gifts are able to flourish.”

L Derman-Sparks and J Olsen Edwards (2010)

The anti-bias approach establishes four goals for adults and children. These are briefly outlined below, together with suggestions for realising the goals in practice. Each goal addresses a particular area of growth and builds on, and interacts with, the others.

GOALS FOR ADULTS	GOALS FOR CHILDREN
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To be conscious of one’s own culture, attitudes and values, and how they influence practice. 2. To be comfortable with difference, have empathy and engage effectively with families. 3. To critically think about diversity, bias and discrimination. 4. To confidently engage in dialogue about issues of diversity, bias and discrimination. Work to challenge individual and institutional forms of prejudice and discrimination. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To support each child’s identity (individual and group) and their sense of belonging. 2. To foster children’s empathy, and support them to be comfortable with difference. 3. To encourage each child to critically think about diversity and bias. 4. To empower children to stand up for themselves and others in difficult situations.

From these specific goals, an anti-bias approach to gender, race, ethnicity, disability, family structure and class can be built. For example, below is a set of goals for an anti-bias approach to disability (Derman-Sparks and ABC Task Force, 1989, p. 40). Similar goals can be devised for children from the Traveller and Roma communities and for children learning English as a second language. Early childhood practitioners play a crucial role in sparking children’s natural curiosity about differences and similarities in family life and community life.

GOALS FOR AN ANTI-BIAS APPROACH TO DISABILITY
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Provide an inclusive education environment in which all children can succeed. 2. Enable children with disabilities to develop autonomy, independence, confidence and pride. 3. Provide all children with accurate, appropriate information about their own and others’ disabilities, and foster understanding that a person with a disability is different in one respect, but similar in many other respects. 4. Enable all children to develop the ability to interact knowledgeably, comfortably and fairly with people who have various disabilities. 5. Show children with disabilities how to handle and challenge name-calling, stereotypical attitudes and physical barriers. 6. Show children how to resist and challenge stereotyping, name-calling and physical barriers directed against children or adults with disabilities.

GOAL 1: TO SUPPORT EACH CHILD'S IDENTITY AND THEIR SENSE OF BELONGING

"I want ye all to know I'm a Traveller because it's important to me that everyone is clear about my identity."

Chrissie O'Sullivan in Murray (2001)

Goal 1 helps children develop a strong sense of who they are at individual and group identity levels. Group identity is about the background or community that children come from (e.g. class, Traveller, Roma, ethnicity, religion, deaf). Along with personal awareness, children can build a comfortable and confident identity based on the multiple groups to which they belong (ethnicity, gender, nationality, etc.) without feeling superior or inferior to anybody else or any other group.

When undertaking this work, it is important to identify the backgrounds of all children in the early childhood service irrespective of whether these backgrounds are identified as being in a majority group category or in a mix of majority and minority group categories. Discuss with the team if all backgrounds and cultures are realistically reflected in the environment, and if imagery and materials require changes. The physical environment should reflect the children who are attending the service; physical changes are important, in order to maintain active engagement with the children on issues of diversity, and also in order create space for openness and discussion. Remember also that you need accurate information when discussing diversity issues. Working with parents will help in this process (see Section 4: Diversity, Equality and Inclusion – Supporting Families).

Developing positive identities touches on some fundamental questions facing every young child: 'Who am I?', 'Is it OK to be who I am?', 'What is my place in this world?' (Brooker and Woodhead, 2008). Other questions may include 'Who are you?' Those who feel valued and supported are more likely to be optimistic, feel good and happy about themselves and, consequently, more likely to learn well. It is important to recognise that family, home, culture, gender, language, ethnicity and ability are important to every child's developing sense of self (see Section 4: Diversity, Equality and Inclusion – Supporting Families). Early childhood practitioners must also be conscious of children who may have multiple identities; for example, a child of mixed cultural heritage, a disabled Traveller girl or a Black child from a new immigrant community and lone-parent home. Be cognisant of children from migrant backgrounds: they are crossing cultural boundaries and need to be supported to be part of Irish society without losing their cultural heritage.

IDEAS FOR SUPPORTING CHILDREN'S IDENTITY AND SENSE OF BELONGING

1. Ensure that you have explored your own feelings about diversity and have reflected on your own cultural context.
2. Respect names, how they are pronounced and spelled.
3. Complete an indoor and outdoor audit of your physical environment.
4. Consult with the children in your care in order to ascertain their viewpoints.
5. Enrich your environment with pictures and phrases that promote inclusion for children with disabilities as well as children who have English as a second language.
6. Ensure that the environment depicts all children and backgrounds in the setting. Reflect the everyday reality of each child's life (not out-of-context images), in order to support and validate his/her daily experiences.
7. Include or refer to aspects of all the children's identities in activities: casual conversations, stories told and read, food, art, music and dramatic play props and themes. For example, facilitate children by giving opportunities to talk about different types of families and family structures. Some children may live with one parent, or in both parents' homes, or with gay or lesbian parents, or with a foster family, or with a step-parent, or with an extended family.
8. Talk with the children, and devise activities around the ways in which people are the same as well as different.
9. Look for opportunities to recognise each child's individual skills, talents and abilities, in order to encourage pride in his or her personal and cultural identity. Find opportunities to tune into individual interests and strengths – for example, caring for animals, speaking Cant, knowledge of cars or horses.
10. Discourage any sense of superiority, whereby a child may express that their way of life is 'correct' or preferred.
11. Provide a wide range of positive role models in a variety of careers. This helps build a child's confidence and a sense of possibilities for the future. For a child, seeing negative images or no images of people sharing the child's particular background or ability can send negative messages, and therefore a child may reject his/her identity.
12. Be aware of the cultural and educational significance of the child's first language. For example, while assisting children in acquiring English/Irish as a second language, encourage parents to use their family's home language with children. Also encourage parents to support the child in the learning of the second language.

Refer to:

- » ***Aistear/Síolta Practice Guide (2015):***
Nurturing and Extending Interactions Pillar: Overview
- » ***Aistear: The National Curriculum Framework (2009):***
Principles and Themes: Identity and Belonging
- » ***Guidelines for Good Practice:***
p. 11, p. 18, p. 23: Scenarios for Supporting Identity and Belonging; p. 78: What information should I gather from parents?
- » ***Síolta: The National Quality Framework (2006):***
Standard 14: Identity and Belonging
- » **Child Care (Pre Child Care (Pre-School Services) (No 2) School Services) (No 2) Regulations 2006:**
Regulation 5

GOAL 2: TO FOSTER CHILDREN'S EMPATHY AND SUPPORT THEM TO BE COMFORTABLE WITH DIFFERENCE

“The way that you behave will have an impact on the children, and your outlook and attitudes will become visible to them through your words and actions.”

Jenny Lindon (1999)

Goal 2 aims to foster empathy, comfort with difference and resilience among all children. Early childhood practitioners can guide young children to learn respectfully about differences, as well as understand and adapt while accepting the common humanity shared by all. Even very young children can discover that others may have the same feelings as they do, despite having a different lifestyle, language, religion, social class, family structure, physical appearance or disability. We can support children's emotional development, appreciating that diversity makes life richer, and we can enhance their ability to communicate, cooperate and collaborate across difference. This ability to collaborate builds resilience and positive identities. Liz Brooker (in Woodhead and Brooker, 2008) talks about resilience as an important asset for children in maintaining positive identities. She suggests that programmes which have strong values around reciprocity, and a collaborative spirit that incorporates shared activities and peer contributions, can support children to develop resilience.

IDEAS TO HELP EARLY CHILDHOOD PRACTITIONERS SUPPORT CHILDREN TO BE COMFORTABLE WITH DIFFERENCE

Giving children opportunities to talk about differences and similarities in an informal way allows them to explore difference with natural curiosity. The way in which adults engage with that curiosity is vital in terms of supporting children's attitudinal development around diversity, equality and inclusion. Support can be delivered by providing diversity materials, both homemade and purchased, to enhance children's conversations and knowledge. The Family Wall (see Section 3: Diversity, Equality and Inclusion – Physical Environment) gives children the opportunity to talk about themselves, their families, extended families and anyone who is special to them. It is a natural way for children to explore similarities and differences. The key to the Family Wall is to build it into your daily practice. You can extend the wall to a community wall (for an example of how to use the Family Wall, see the DVD *Valuing Difference in ECCE: An Irish Perspective*).

Feelings matter:

1. Early childhood practitioners need to be aware of their own feelings and opinions regarding differences (see Section 1: Understanding Diversity, Equality and Inclusion).
2. Observe children's peer group interaction to see how well children are accepted as playmates. For instance, look out for incidents where children are included or excluded, and reflect on the reasons for this. Record such incidents and develop activities that deal with the issues in a sensitive way, to break down barriers and eliminate fear of difference.
3. Intervene to eliminate any notions of superiority or inferiority. At the same time, promote each child's status within the group in a sensitive way.
4. Explore feelings with all the children, and help them understand that words can hurt as well as being a wonderful resource to discuss any issues or challenges they may face. It is vital to deal with any unkind or inappropriate incidents when they happen and, if necessary, follow up through a later activity to reinforce the message of support. However, there may be times when issues cannot be dealt with immediately. Develop ways to explore these issues later. For example, a storybook can be a useful tool for dealing with fear or exclusion, without putting the spotlight on a particular child.
5. Where one child says or does something hurtful to another whom they perceive as different, you need to challenge the first child about what was said, giving accurate information and ensuring that the child understands the hurt caused. The child who was hurt must also be supported. This interaction should be sensitive to the feelings of both children. Telling a child it is 'not nice' to say a particular thing – without giving the child a proper explanation as to why that is the case – will not change the child's attitude, and could reinforce the notion that there is something wrong with difference.
6. Inform yourself of the effects of sustained teasing and bullying.

**Refer to:**

- » *Aistear/Síolta Practice Guide (2015):*
Nurturing and Extending Interactions
Creating and Using the Learning Environment
Planning and Assessing Using the Aistear Themes
- » *Aistear: The National Curriculum Framework (2009):*
Principles and Themes; Identity and Belonging; Communicating and Exploring and Thinking
- » *Síolta: The National Quality Framework (2006):*
Standard 1: Rights of the Child; Standard 2: Environments; Standard 3: Parents and Families; Standard 4: Consultation; Standard 6: Play; Standard 7: Curriculum; Standard 9: Health and Welfare; Standard 14: Identity and Belonging
- » **Child Care (Pre-School Services) (No 2) Regulations 2006:**
Regulation 5

GOAL 3: TO ENCOURAGE EACH CHILD TO THINK CRITICALLY ABOUT DIVERSITY AND BIAS

“One of the most powerful lessons that I have learned is that even young children are able to reflect on issues that impact on their identity and their lives. The world of children is governed by the same values and beliefs that govern the world of adults.”

A Segura-Mora (2002)

Goal 3 aims to help adults and children become critical thinkers about diversity, prejudice and bias. This gives them the skills to identify what images and behaviours are fair or unfair. Children and adults need to understand why names, images, certain phrases and behaviours are unkind, untrue or unfair. They also should begin to learn skills to resist biases and stereotypes that can influence them.

IDEAS TO SUPPORT THE DEVELOPMENT OF CRITICAL THINKING

1. Expand your knowledge on diversity issues, in order to communicate accurate information and provide new learning opportunities for the children. To do this, you need to connect with organisations that represent the needs of minority groups (e.g. National Disability Authority, Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre, Immigrant Council of Ireland, Gay and Lesbian Equality Network (GLEN)). In this way, you can be informed about the nature and challenges of individual family and community lives.
2. Stereotypical ideas or terms should be challenged on the spot. To do so, early childhood practitioners must be comfortable with difference and in dealing with challenge. Discussing difficult situations at team meetings helps to develop the necessary skills and confidence.
3. Finding out about appropriate terms when talking about difference can help in your communications. Some terms used in society are not appropriate (e.g. the term ‘Black’ is preferable to the term ‘coloured’).
4. Use books and display photographs that challenge stereotypes (e.g. a female carpenter, doctor). Invite guests to speak to the children about their occupations (e.g. a male nurse).
5. Use clear explanations and language when discussing discrimination or racism with adults and children. Use appropriate language when talking to children.
6. In team meetings and also in discussions with the children evaluate images in books, toys, television and DVDs to see if they are fair or unfair. Discuss what is missing as well as what is present. Provide accurate images for comparison (see Section 3: Diversity, Equality and Inclusion - Physical Environment).
7. Help children to express why an image is unfair and to understand how stereotyping can hurt people.



Refer to:

- » ***Aistear/Síolta Practice Guide (2015):***
Curriculum Foundations
Nurturing and Extending Interactions
Planning and Assessing Using the Aistear Themes
- » ***Aistear: The National Curriculum Framework (2009):***
Guidelines for Good Practice Learning and Developing through Interactions
Learning Experience 19: I don't want you to come to my birthday party
Themes and Aims: Identity and Belonging; Well-being; Communication and Exploring and Thinking
- » ***Síolta: The National Quality Framework (2006):***
Standard 1: Rights of the Child; Standard 2: Environments; Standard 3: Parents and Families; Standard 4: Consultation; Standard 6: Play; Standard 7: Curriculum; Standard 9: Health and Welfare; Standard 12: Communication; Standard 14: Identity and Belonging

GOAL 4: TO EMPOWER CHILDREN TO STAND UP FOR THEMSELVES AND OTHERS IN DIFFICULT SITUATIONS

“I remember when we were at school: we were powerless, subjected to subtle stereotypes and prejudices from teachers and peers.”

Doreen Reynolds in Murray (2001)

If children are beginning to understand fairness and unfairness, they will need the requisite tools to stand up for themselves and for others. Prejudice and discrimination is a reality in our society, and children benefit from growing up prepared to recognise it and learning to deal with it. By finding ways to express their feelings to other children and adults when they or someone else has been hurt, children learn the skills to support others. Early childhood practitioners also require this ability as they play a vital role in enabling children to protect themselves. Adults need to take children seriously when they are expressing concerns and trying to deal with a situation. As adults, we tend to shy away from challenging issues and conflict. This is why all goals for adults need to be addressed before we can empower children.

IDEAS TO SUPPORT CHILDREN TO STAND UP FOR THEMSELVES AND OTHERS

1. Adults need to be alert. Sometimes, we do not notice when something that is hurtful to another person is happening. We may perhaps brush it off or even perceive it as unimportant. This may be because it is something we commonly witness, e.g. children giving each other nicknames or teasing other children.
2. Adults need to be visibly active against negativity in relation to difference, and they need to lead by example.
3. Children need to know how to say, ‘that’s not fair’, or ‘I don’t like what you are doing/saying’ when they are the target of prejudice or discrimination, or when another child is being targeted.
4. Children can actively learn the skills for standing up against bias if early childhood practitioners model appropriate responses and provide opportunities for children to build on their experiences.

“Achieving these goals is a developmental process that involves transformative changes in self-awareness and understanding of the power dynamics of systemic forms of prejudice and discrimination. It takes time – as do all developmental processes.”

L Derman-Sparks (2013, p. 19), *ChildLinks* magazine

POINTERS FOR IMPLEMENTING AN ANTI-BIAS APPROACH

“Working with this approach has opened up so many opportunities for us as practitioners and we feel what we offer to the children is more authentic, more real and gives them the space to be themselves and explore more possibilities. Our aim is to support children to see equality and diversity as a natural part of our setting and our world.”

Suzanne McDonald, owner/manager of playschool, Dublin,
ChildLinks magazine 3: 15 (2013)

CHILDREN

- » All activities, experiences and opportunities need to be inclusive, in order to ensure the participation of all children.
- » It is important that children from minority groups are supported and included and are not singled out in discussions about diversity and equality issues.
- » Be honest and accurate in answering children’s questions. For example, if children ask about a particular disability or how or why someone is Black, make sure you give accurate, age-appropriate information, and if you don’t know how to answer the question, tell the child you will find out and come back to them. Providing accurate information will help children work through particular issues that may arise.
- » Explore what children think about different groups in Irish society. You can do this using books and home-made images. Opportunities can then be created which may support the children to acquire accurate information and, where necessary, to challenge their thinking.
- » A child who finds that the way things are done at home is never mentioned, or who becomes aware that it is considered strange, may reject their home environment or what is taught at home. Some children may start to express concerns about being different. There are many examples of children who say they don’t want to speak their home language anymore. They silence their parents when they come to collect them from pre-school. This happens because their language identity is not being adequately affirmed. Both the home environment and the external world should be valued in recognising children’s diverse identities.
- » Learn about children’s understanding of issues, or their attitudes to individuals or groups, by talking with them in a direct way or by observing incidents that may arise during play. Document these issues and follow up with developed activities/experiences in order to improve their understanding. When developing activities, think in advance about the children’s possible reactions and how you might respond.

ADULTS

- » Adults need to be challenged for using stereotypical expressions relating to the appearance or behaviour of children and parents.
- » Adults should refuse to tolerate negative expressions that insult a child's or an adult's background or culture.
- » Support all adults working in, and using, the early childhood service to understand the Early Childhood Care and Education Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Charter, and the early childhood service's own inclusion policy.
- » Use team meetings/support and supervision sessions as well as parent meetings to explore issues of prejudice.

“I now feel that as workers in early childhood settings we have a responsibility to address comments, prejudices, discrimination and racist attacks. We have the power to instil in our young the importance of respecting everyone in our society: to empower our young to use their voice and to challenge those who are disrespectful to minority groups.”

Orla Fitzpatrick, early childhood worker, Co Clare in Murray and Urban (2012, p. 194)

IDEAS FOR SUPPORTING MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION IN THE EARLY CHILDHOOD SERVICE

1. Use visual and other non-verbal methods (such as pictures and gestures) to facilitate meaningful participation of children learning English or Irish as an additional language.
2. A child who is learning English as a second or additional language has the same intellectual, social, emotional and physical potential and needs as any other child.
3. Ensure that children with a hearing or visual impairment join in all activities such as storytelling, singing, art, music and movement.
4. Children who use a wheelchair may not have to remain in their wheelchair at all times. All learning activities/experiences should be accessible for all children.
5. Do not expect the child with the disability to adapt to a game. Develop ways to ensure that all children can take part in movement activities; this includes children with motor disabilities or poor/low muscle tone who may be able to exercise the parts of the body not affected by the particular condition.
6. Having first secured the consent of the child's family, link in with other professionals who are working with the family (e.g. an early years inclusion specialist, occupational therapist, physiotherapist, or family support workers who can offer advice on tailoring meaningful experiences for the child so that the child is included in all elements of the curriculum).
7. Be aware that finger rhymes can be confusing for children who use sign language as a way of communicating.



8. Include activities where speech is not required for full participation; such activities include art, drama, music and movement.
9. Predictable routines are needed for children with autism spectrum disorders.
10. Include picture routines, labelling areas with visuals for children who are non-verbal; children who are hard of hearing; children who are deaf; children with selective mutism; and children with autism spectrum disorders.
11. Ensure that all children, including those children with a disability, are given tasks with responsibility, and that all achievements are celebrated.
12. Find and use local opportunities to acquaint children with diversity. Such opportunities might include a trip to an art gallery, cultural heritage centre, specialised food shop, pet farm, local nursing home, community park, playground or museum.

Refer to:

- » ***Aistear/Síolta Practice Guide (2015):***
 - Curriculum Foundations
 - Nurturing and Extending Interactions
 - Planning and Assessing Using the Aistear Themes
- » ***Aistear: The National Curriculum Framework (2009):***
 - Themes and Aims: Identity and Belonging; Well-being; Communication and Exploring and Thinking; Guidelines for Good Practice Learning and Developing through Interactions
- » ***Síolta: The National Quality Framework (2006):***
 - Standard 1: Rights of the Child; Standard 2: Environments; Standard 3: Parents and Families; Standard 4: Consultation; Standard 6: Play; Standard 7: Curriculum; Standard 9: Health and Welfare; Standard 12: Communication; Standard 14: Identity and Belonging.

SECTION 3

DIVERSITY, EQUALITY AND INCLUSION – PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT



This section of the Guidelines looks at why we need to consider the environment, and the role it plays in everyday practice.

It also includes practical pointers on how to proof your environment and how to create an environment that is accessible, diverse and inclusive to all children, families and early childhood practitioners. In addition, it discusses what, as early childhood practitioners, we need to be mindful of if the environment structure/layout changes.

WHY DO WE NEED TO CONSIDER THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT?

“Imagery used in the setting gives messages to adults and children whether we are aware of it or not. Powerful messages about who is valued or not are also given by what is ‘not’ depicted – what is absent from the environment. Positive, visible depictions of diversity are vital to reassure and show respect for all children and families in the setting ... Imagery is broader than what is depicted on the walls ... It includes all visual information and messages available across the whole service: toys, art materials, books, dolls, dramatic play, musical instruments and linguistic representation.

C Murray and M Urban (2012, p. 204)

The physical environment plays a pivotal role within the early childhood setting. It provides a first impression to families and children, and it plays an important role in building each child’s individual and group identity. It can demonstrate to families that diversity is valued and respected. Imagery displays and labelling can promote awareness, support dialogue, and assist in constructively breaking down misinformation about difference. Creation of a physical environment that represents all the children attending the service at any given time makes it clear that it is an inclusive environment. It is important to acknowledge that the non-representation of diversity is as powerful in influencing children’s attitudes and understanding as what *is* represented. It is important to ensure that imagery is accurate in representation, and that negative stereotypes are not reflected in the material and imagery in the environment.

Providing a rich, diverse physical environment will not, on its own, change attitudes or support children to be comfortable with difference. It is the interaction and discussion associated with the materials that drives development and change. Every aspect of the programme should actively address diversity and inclusion issues, using the environment as a working tool.

POINTERS FOR CONSIDERING THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

1. The physical environment sets the scene for all children to be recognised, respected and valued, and for discussing diversity, equality and inclusion topics with children.
2. The materials should initially depict the children who are attending the early childhood service. Materials that represent the broader community should also be used.
3. Children from other countries should be represented accurately. For instance, many Black children are born Irish with, for example, Nigerian, Kenyan or other heritage. Therefore, materials need to support their identity appropriately.
4. A child with a disability should be able to see themselves represented in the materials in the environment.

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5. It is important to provide a rich, accurate, non-stereotypical environment with regard to gender, race, culture, ethnicity, including Travellers and those with a disability.
6. Responding to children's play comments while they are interacting with the materials can form the basis of the curriculum content regarding diversity, equality and inclusive practice.
7. A child whose background, language, ability or culture is not represented in the environment may feel less confident, less comfortable, and less able to participate. Children will not tell you 'I'm not here' when they are presented with accurate materials that represent their identity and background; instead, they will respond openly and positively.
8. A physical environment that depicts all children can offer reassurance to families that their child will be given due recognition and have equal status.
9. Draw on children's funds of knowledge to support an inclusive environment (for example, many Traveller children have rich knowledge of horses). This knowledge can inform the curriculum, enhance the material environment, and support the children to have pride in their lifestyle and their individual and group identity.
10. Bear in mind that early childhood services composed entirely of majority children also have diversity (for example, gender, ability, family structure), and this should be reflected in the physical environment. Children will come across difference in the wider world and need to be positively supported and aware of diversity in our society.
11. Children have multiple identities, thus enriching the environment with images that make up the diversity in the early childhood service. Broader society creates a space for open discussion and learning.
12. Children rely on adults to provide the necessary physical environment for development and learning. Early childhood practitioners are central to shaping these environments and the powerful messages and opportunities that they engender.

“Material that only depicts children from countries in Africa as living in poverty is an inaccurate depiction of all children from African countries. But it also misrepresents Black children from or living in Ireland. If you use such material to enhance children’s understanding of global inequality, it is important to counter it with accurate information about Black people living in other circumstances.”

Practitioner and trainer (2010) in Murray and Urban (2012, p. 207)

PROOFING THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

“I realised how much work I had to carry out and thought ‘Will I ever be able to do this?’... taking small steps is OK: we can’t change the entire world in one day.”

Orla Fitzpatrick, childcare worker, Co Clare, who completed the Ar an mBealach Diversity and Equality accredited training cited in Murray and Urban (2012, p. 191)

Proofing the environment means assessing all the materials and equipment in the setting, so as to ensure that they are appropriate to the make-up of the current group of children and families attending the early childhood setting. It also means checking to see if the imagery supports each child’s individual and group identity. Equality and inclusion proofing is a way of ensuring that the setting meets the needs of each child and family attending the service (Murray and Urban, 2012, p. 202).

As a first step, you should test the material in the physical environment for positive and accurate representation of the children; for non-representation of the children; for negative messages such as stereotypical images; and for inaccuracies with regard to gender, disability, skin colour, class, ethnicity, religion, family structure, living arrangements, home languages and culture.

WHAT IS AN INCLUSIVE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT?

In order to assist in proofing and creating an inclusive physical environment, this section begins with guidance on how to assess the existing environment. It then sets out ideas for developing an inclusive environment and concludes with advice on how to implement changes.

To assess the existing environment, consider:

- 1. Wall displays and signage as well as play materials, jigsaws, food, toys and books in the service.** What do they say about the children and families attending your service? Can you identify any tokenism or stereotypes that can be eliminated (e.g. gender, ability, family structure)?
- 2. Labelling the equipment and the environment with images and/or words (as appropriate).** Be mindful of language and literacy issues. Be mindful of how images of children displayed in the environment actively support the child’s developing identity.
- 3. Images, text and language in children’s books.** Which messages are present and which are absent? Are the messages primarily from the majority background, or are all children’s backgrounds and family structures represented?
- 4. General layout and accessibility of the environment for children with a disability and the need for possible environmental adaptations** (e.g. for sensory exploration).
- 5. Accessibility of information for families and children.** Keep in mind language and literacy issues, accessible formats such as audio or Braille, and availability of staff who can communicate through sign language.

6. **Storage and accessibility of materials for all children.** Placing ‘the best’ books on the top shelf means that children do not get the opportunity to explore the books independently.
7. **List additional materials or equipment that you think would improve the physical environment.**
8. **Find out where you can source equipment, materials, toys and books to represent and support children’s individual learning and group identities.**
9. **Find out if there are any bilingual staff or families willing to help develop materials in different home languages,** e.g. a recording of a story, song or rhyme in a different language, so that children can listen to a CD while looking at a book, or looking at words in other languages that have been pasted into scrapbooks.

If you need further advice, talk to your local City/County Childcare Committee, contact EDeNN, or consult with agencies in your area.

IDEAS TO SUPPORT PROOFING FOR AN INCLUSIVE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

The environment should contain numerous learning opportunities to support an inclusive culture. When developing some of the ideas below, anticipate children’s possible reactions, and consider responses to issues that may arise.

1. Ensure that materials, toys and images are familiar to an individual child and that they can foster a sense of belonging. Items which represent diversity (such as a child’s sari among the dressing-up clothes or a jigsaw of a child with a disability) may raise questions. Address children’s curious questions honestly and give accurate information.
2. Display CDs of children’s songs in a variety of languages, including the Irish and English language. Play the children CDs with music from different cultures. Make links to the children attending your service setting.
3. Ensure that art materials are accessible, so as to ensure opportunities for the children to draw, colour and talk about their images, using a range of skin tones in pencils, markers or paints. Mirrors are also very useful.
4. Display photographs of all the children and their families at child level, in order to prompt discussion with children about differences (e.g. physical appearance, family structures, clothes, homes, etc.). Early childhood practitioners can improvise and make their own resources to reflect the children in the service; for example, photographs of children can be laminated on cardboard and made into jigsaws.
5. Family walls should always be placed at the child’s level. Photographs can be laminated and the children should always have access to them. The Family Wall is an active tool as well as a form of identity support and comfort. It should be an ongoing feature of the curriculum and not just part of a theme. Children and parents should be able to add to it according as events unfold during the year. Learning stories can be used with the children in order to construct an inclusive environment. Visits from parents, children’s interests, children’s rights, ‘what is fair’ and ‘what is not fair’ emotions can all be explored through the use of learning stories. These stories can be available to the children to continue conversations about their ideas.
6. Have on hand children’s books that provide everyday images of diverse people and lives. Consider gender and the roles given to males and females in books. Look for books with children and families from minority groups that depict present-day reality in Ireland and other countries. Books should include parents from all backgrounds.
7. Build up a library of children’s dual-language books (including Braille/non-Braille) and books in the home language of the children attending the service.

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8. Provide musical instruments from different countries and cultures.
9. Provide pictures, equipment, everyday objects and resources that reflect children's and people's disabilities and also represent children's and adults' differing backgrounds and experience.
10. Ensure that minority group children are portrayed in the early childhood service as they live today, just as the majority culture is portrayed, and not in an old-fashioned or traditional way, or just at festival time. Everyday imagery should be authentic and real for each individual child.
11. Transform the home corner to represent the daily reality of the children in the group and the children of the local community (for example, the home corner can become a trailer on a halting site).
12. Provide props for dramatic play that reflect the reality of children's home backgrounds (for example, include disability aids, cooking utensils).
13. Remember to reflect diversity and equality even if the members of the group do not immediately appear to represent diverse backgrounds.
14. 'Learning stories' can be used to support children's understanding of diversity, equality and inclusion.
15. Sometimes, families say they do not want their background or culture represented. They want their children to 'fit in' and are concerned that reflecting their background will undermine their child in the service. Knowing why it is important to support the child's home heritage and background will support you to reassure parents. If parents have been informed of plans to represent their background, but do not wish their background to be represented, that is their right.
16. Early childhood practitioners are important role models, and children will actively learn from them how to behave and communicate respectfully towards others.

MAKING CHANGES

When making changes to the physical environment, it is worth anticipating the possible impact of these changes. Consult with and work with the children if reorganising the room, in order to ensure that they are involved and prepared, especially if you have children who use a wheelchair or a physical aid, children who are visually impaired; children who are deaf/hard of hearing, or children with autism spectrum disorders. For example, for children with a visual impairment, consistency of room layout is an important factor. In addition, such children may find reflective strips along the edges of furniture and padded corners helpful. Introduce one change at a time. Observe the children playing with the new equipment, take note of their responses, and also take note of areas that you might follow up on. Finally, take note of any comments, views or effects of the changes on staff, children or parents. If necessary, readjust your practice to support and enhance meaningful learning experiences for all involved.



Refer to:

- » *Aistear/Síolta Practice Guide (2015):*
Creating and Using the Learning Environment (3–6 years)
- » *Aistear: The National Curriculum Framework (2009):*
Principles and Themes: Identity and Belonging; Communicating; Identity and Belonging and Exploring and Thinking
- » *Síolta: The National Quality Framework (2006):*
Standard 2: Environments; Standard 4: Consultation;
Standard 6: Play; Standard 7: Curriculum; Standard 8:
Planning and Evaluation; Standard 14: Identity
and Belonging



SECTION

4

DIVERSITY, EQUALITY AND INCLUSION – SUPPORTING FAMILIES



This section deals with the importance of working in partnership with parents, and the role of the early childhood practitioner in this partnership. In addition, it deals with why the settling-in period is so important for both children and their parents.

The section also gives practical pointers on communicating with parents, and it sets out critical questions that you should consider when exploring the service's settling-in routine or when dealing with elements of child-rearing that may differ between cultures.

The remaining parts of this section offer a more detailed reflection on selected diversity issues and diverse family structures in the Irish context, including: children with disabilities; children who have English as a second language; diverse cultural backgrounds and heritage; gender, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender issues; religious and non-religious beliefs; and Traveller and Roma communities.

WELCOMING AND WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP WITH FAMILIES

“Although professionals in many fields have invaluable contributions to make ... the expert on the individual child is that child’s parents.”

Pre-school Learning Alliance (2002)

The Irish Constitution recognises the parent as the primary educator of the child. Talking openly and listening to the views and concerns of families and children is essential for promoting respect for diversity and inclusion practice. Establishing real dialogue with families will help bridge the gap between the home culture and the early childhood service.

Finding common ground can be difficult when there are different perspectives on issues, and when staff and families come from different backgrounds and experiences. Communication difficulties may arise due to language, cultural differences or unfamiliarity with the system. Some families may also find it difficult to divulge personal information; such families may include those seeking asylum, or parents who are gay or lesbian. Finally, there ‘may also be some unspoken issues of power and knowledge which can make it hard to collaborate in ethical and equitable ways’. (Mac Naughton and Hughes, 2011, p. viii).

Research highlights how early childhood practitioners and families may wish to engage with each other. There are often frustrations on both sides in terms of time, space and misunderstandings, but, with goodwill, it is possible to build respectful, trusting, meaningful and mutually supportive relationships (Mac Naughton and Hughes, 2011).

Early childhood practitioners have a key role to play in working with parents to support their children; this includes identifying learning needs and responding quickly to any concerns. With the consent of parents, early childhood practitioners, where appropriate, can work in partnership with professionals from other agencies that are involved with the family and the child to provide the best learning opportunities for the child.

Families may not wish the early childhood service to depict their child’s culture, background, religion, language, family structure or disability because they may feel that their child will be isolated or discriminated against if attention is drawn to these areas. It is useful to explain to parents the benefits of representation to the child’s developing identity. (Ultimately, however, the service should respect the wishes of the family in this regard.)

“As ECEC early childhood practitioners, we usually live with children for a particular time of the day – the time they spend with us in the setting. Understanding children’s identity and belonging from a professional perspective requires curiosity, open mindedness and a constant question in mind: who are you?”

C Murray and M Urban (2012, p. 143)

POINTERS FOR COMMUNICATION WITH FAMILIES

- » Children, parents and other family members are the most knowledgeable about their background, culture, language, (dis)ability and needs. If you have identified family issues that you believe require further information in order to support the child and the family, seek the child's parents' input. For example, ask them how they believe their child's culture, background, religion, language, family structure or disability should be represented in the early childhood service.
- » Ask families if there is anything that should be altered in order to support communication or participation with them in the early childhood service. Remember, many parents may wish to engage with the service, but may feel uncomfortable or nervous about doing so. It takes time for some parents to build up trust.
- » Reflect on how communicating with families is working for your service. Communication works best when it is two-way. If you are informing rather than talking and listening, it may communicate the message that the family's view is not important. (Mac Naughton and Hughes, 2011)
- » If you are unsure how to address families, due to their ethnicity or background, then ask them, or research what terms are best to use. Early childhood practitioners can sometimes feel that they are intruding by asking questions of parents. Nonetheless, it is best to try to have the requisite conversation; parents will let you know if they do not wish to have that conversation. Representative organisations will happily advise you which terms are preferred in order to describe a minority group (e.g. deaf, Black, Traveller, etc.).
- » As part of your induction, provide accessible information to families on your inclusion policy and your curriculum approach.
- » Operate an open door policy whereby parents can come to you to discuss sensitive issues relating to their child/children.
- » Respond to any concerns identified by families and plan on how you might support their concerns.
- » Ensure that the language you use when talking or writing to families is accessible and inclusive of diverse family structures: two-parent, lone-parent, separated, gay or lesbian, adoptive, foster, extended or communal, inter-racial, or those with a disability.
- » Be creative in how you share information about the children's learning experiences with families who may have literacy difficulties; families who may be visually impaired; may be deaf/hard of hearing, or may have English language difficulties. Use photographs, Braille, sensorial evidence of their child's work, and signs in order to communicate with the families.
- » If a child has a disability, the parent is the person best placed to advise you of the child's needs. Some parents may have experienced huge challenges in accessing a place in early childhood care for their child. Their main concern will be that their child is happy. Ensure that disability is represented in the imagery and in the materials. Showing that you are genuinely interested in knowing how to support their child is the first step in supporting equality and inclusion.
- » Take care to explain the policy on dealing with illness and medical emergencies, using simple and non-medical language. Policy will need to be reviewed and updated in order to reflect all the children's medical/other conditions. Families need to know that they can share information within the bounds of confidentiality. Early years practitioners have to be open to input from families and to adapting policy.
- » Always maintain confidentiality in line with best practice and in line with the confidentiality policy and procedure.
- » If you are aware of any prejudicial or discriminatory issues arising for any family, it is important to implement the early childhood service's inclusion policy, and also ensure that you discuss with the particular family what their needs are.

Critical questions to consider

- » Are you genuine in your relationships with parents?
- » Do you value all parents equally?
- » Do some parents make you feel uncomfortable?
- » Do you consider parents' personal wishes and beliefs about early childhood care and education?
- » Do you honour and respect the wishes of parents in relation to their child's culture, background, religion, language, family structure or disability?
- » Do you welcome family input and perceive all parents as working in partnership with the early childhood service?
- » Do you ever dismiss a parent's view for any reason? Do you ever question why you might do this?

“When children feel a sense of belonging and a sense of pride in their families, their peers, and their communities, they can be emotionally strong, self-assured and able to deal with challenges and difficulties, and this creates an important foundation for their learning and development.”

National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (2009, p. 25), *Aistear*



SETTLING IN TO THE EARLY CHILDHOOD SERVICE

“For many ... [ethnic minority, child with a disability] children the experiences and skills that they bring to the new setting suddenly become irrelevant or are not valued.”

Kenise Murphy Kilbride (1997)

Every family can face challenges when settling in to a new service, as each child must adjust from their home culture to the culture of the service. But children from different backgrounds, a child with a disability, or minority groups may face an extra challenge as they undergo this process. Their families will be introduced to a new cultural and educational approach which will be based on the values and perspectives of the majority population. It is essential that such families feel confident that the settling-in process will support, and be appropriate to, their child's needs.

To help families and children from all communities to settle in easily, it is a good idea to examine current admission forms, settling-in procedures, and reflect on communication styles and the curriculum approach. Early childhood practitioners will need accurate personal information in order to support each child who is settling in. Showing respect and sensitivity when asking for such details

will set the scene for mutually supportive communication. Early childhood practitioners should explain how this information will help provide a better service for the child. However, families have a right to decide whether they feel comfortable sharing information.

When a new family or child is starting in the early childhood service, ask the family what they would like you to know about them.

For example:

- » The ethnic background of the family
- » The correct pronunciation of the child's name
- » The correct terms used to describe any different minority groups in the early years service
- » The language(s) spoken in the child's home
- » The family structure (e.g. separated, divorced, lone-parent, gay/lesbian parent(s), grandparents, foster carers)
- » The religious/non-religious beliefs of the family
- » The traditions/festivals, if any, that are important to the family
- » The skills that they might have which they might like to share with the children in the setting
- » If the child has a disability, then the type of disability and any relevant information associated with the child's needs
- » If the child must avoid particular foods for health, religious or lifestyle reasons
- » Their type of living accommodation (trailer/halting site/house/high-rise/flat/temporary/nomadic, etc.)
- » Find out what the child especially likes to do; also find out what are their favourite toys, their special relationships, their pets

POINTS TO KEEP IN MIND

- » First impressions are very important (see Section 3: Diversity, Equality and Inclusion – Physical Environment).
- » Treating children with equality does not mean treating all children the 'same'.
- » Some families face daily discrimination and may fear that their child will have a similar experience within the service. That is why understanding the social context of the children we are working with is so important.
- » It is not sufficient to consult with one member of a minority community in order to understand the needs of the whole community. Individual needs will be different.
- » Families bring a wealth of experience to the service, as do children. Recognising their experience and funds of knowledge will allow for open communication and engagement.
- » Communication barriers can affect the settling-in process for families and children. Non-verbal communication can mean different things in different cultures (see Working in Partnership with Families in this section). If the environment demonstrates diverse family backgrounds, family structures, representation of people with disabilities, languages and cultures, families will feel welcome, and the first steps in building trust will have been taken.

Critical questions to consider

- » How do you support the settling-in process? What do you consider important for settling in? Do you think you could reconsider some settling-in processes, and experiment with new ways?
- » Will the child see his or her background or minority group (e.g. culture, language, family structure, ethnicity, skin colour or disability represented visibly, i.e. in posters, pictures, books, etc.)?
- » Can all the staff pronounce (and spell) the child's and the family's names correctly?
- » Can you tell when you are welcome somewhere? Can you tell when you are not welcome? How does it feel? What makes the difference? Can you draw on your own experience to support families to feel welcome?
- » What funds of knowledge is the child bringing to the service? How do you identify and bring these funds of knowledge into the service?
- » Are there culturally different hygiene routines, times or ways of eating or sleeping that staff need to know about?
- » Do routine activities only reflect the majority culture, and can these be redesigned to reflect the new diversity in the group? Do you know what other home or cultural routines would help a child settle in?
- » Can the approach used in the service be adapted to accommodate the needs of a child with a culturally different learning style?
- » Can the approach used in the service be adapted to accommodate the needs of a child with a disability?
- » Have you thought about how your ethnic background and experience might affect your certainty about particular diversity issues? Might this affect your practice with children and families?
- » Do you feel confident that you can recognise stereotyping and prejudice in the setting on the part of adults or children?

REFLECTION

Information about the early childhood service (including posters and signs) and the progress of the child will need to be accessible to all families, with particular consideration given to families who have literacy difficulties. Translate information where possible; use pictures to initiate conversations and to provide information to families on the child's progress. Bilingual families, including Irish speakers, may be willing to help with translations; however, it is not appropriate to use children for translating information.

“Parents are the most important people in their children's early lives. Children learn about the world and their place in it through their conversations, play activities, and routines with parents and families.”

Aistear (2009)



While early childhood practitioners have an important role in the education and care of children, the parents/guardians are the primary carers, and early years practitioners need to take into account what they want for their children. By working in partnership with parents/guardians/carers, early childhood practitioners can consider the diverse backgrounds of all the children and their families, and can implement strategies that ensure equal access, equitable and meaningful participation and inclusion for all children.

The remaining parts of this section offer a more detailed reflection on selected diversity issues and diverse family structures in the Irish context. Building knowledge, understanding and competency in these areas and others enables early childhood practitioners to foster meaningful relationships with families, and provide an inclusive and safe environment for all families. Our goal as early childhood professionals is to ensure that *all* children and their families are welcomed. We have a responsibility to recognise, value, and include every child and family.

CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006) notes that ‘disability’ is an evolving concept and results from the interaction between a person’s impairment and the obstacles – such as physical barriers and prevailing attitudes – that prevent their participation in society. The more obstacles there are, the more disabled a person becomes. Persons with disabilities have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments such as blindness, deafness, impaired mobility or developmental impairments. Some people may have more than one form of disability and many, if not most people, will acquire a disability at some time in their life due to physical injury, disease or age.

When children with a disability are starting in the early childhood service, parents may need to be reassured that their child will be treated with respect and recognition. Accessible and inclusive early childhood settings support all children, particularly those with a disability. It can help to explain that you are working from a strengths-based anti-bias approach, which draws on the child’s abilities, funds of knowledge and multiple identities. An anti-bias approach will not only support the development of each child’s identity and sense of belonging, but also address issues of inclusion and exclusion. The approach is not about hiding difference or disability but about recognising and acknowledging the reality of that difference. Being open and making disability visible gives children an opportunity to discuss differences openly and to become comfortable with difference. Children can discuss the different ways they can do similar things, e.g. some children may require aids to assist them with speaking, eating or moving. This approach to disability can help to address children’s curiosities, questions or even fears they may have regarding some disabilities. It can also break down any stigma or developing prejudice around issues of disability.

The next step is to work with the parents to get to know their child; this will include learning about the child’s interests, joys, likes and dislikes, as well as necessary information related to their disability.

LEARNING STORY

EARLY CHILDHOOD IRELAND AND TOTS PRESCHOOL ROSEBERRY HILL, NEWBRIDGE, CO KILDARE

The Tots Creche and Daycare, in Roseberry Hill, Newbridge, Co Kildare, to which Nadia belongs, has been involved in *Aistear* training with Early Childhood Ireland and is committed to embracing the *Aistear* framework. The principles and themes of *Aistear*, particularly the principles of listening to children and every child's right to play, guide the educators' work and support them in the inclusion of children with additional needs. Melissa and Sinead, the educators, work together and with the children to ensure Nadia's inclusion.

'Look at Nadia's New Toy'

On our first day of preschool, all of the children were busy playing and exploring their new room. Melissa noticed that one boy, called Conor, was looking at Nadia as she came into the room using her walking frame. Nadia got settled and was playing with a toy when Conor went over to Melissa and asked, "How come she's allowed a toy today?" (Conor is in his second year of preschool). A few other children came over and asked, "Can we play with it?"

Nadia is a preschooler with cerebral palsy, and she uses a walking frame to assist her when walking.

Melissa explained to the class that what Nadia has is not toy. It is what she uses to help her to walk. Melissa gave some examples of things we use to help us, like our glasses to see. Isabelle said, "Yeah if I didn't have my glasses I can't see." Melissa praised Isabelle for sharing with the class. Then Noah joined in and said, "I need armbands for swimming, but my sister doesn't need them." There was a pause for thought in the room until Conor spoke and said, "My bike has stabilisers, I keep them on so I don't fall off, I don't want to fall." Isabelle said, "You would fall," and Noah said "You need stabilisers to keep you safe on the bike."

Circle time brought more fantastic discussion when Melissa introduced a mirror and encouraged all the children to take a look at themselves and say what made them different and unique. Nina said, "I've brown eyes"; Nadia pointed to her earrings and said "Kolczyki", then to her eyes, saying "oczy"; Ciara "I've medium lips"; Isabelle "I've got glasses"; Noah "I've got spikey hair, it's black like the telly"; Dara "My eyes look like a rainbow"; Aoibhinn "I have brown hair"; Julia "I have a big smile"; Daire "I've a bump on my nose". Melissa explained to the children that all of these things make us who we are, to which Conor added, "You have glasses Melissa and Nadia has a walking frame."



Every child is unique. Children may share the same type of disability, but be completely different from each other in every other respect. Communicating with parents to assist each child and meet their individual needs is the key to equitable participation.

Critical questions to consider

- » Do you have high expectations for all children, including those with a disability?
- » Do you promote independence and give support only when required?
- » Do you foster positive attitudes towards children with a disability in your early childhood service?
- » Do you build links between families, schools and services for children with a disability, so as to ensure smooth transitions?
- » Do you plan activities that adapt to the interests and enthusiasm of each child and take account of the likes, dislikes and specific needs of each child?
- » Do you make activities and play areas equality friendly and disability friendly, in order to ensure inclusion of children with a disability?
- » Do you ensure that the physical environment is equality friendly and disability friendly, accessible, and that it reflects the lives of children and adults with a disability as part of a wide representation of children’s differing cultures, backgrounds, religions, languages and family structures?
- » Do you follow a Universal Design for Learning approach to learning activity planning by considering options for representation so that all children can comprehend information presented to them; options for action and expression so that all children can express themselves; options for engagement so that all children can engage in learning in ways that suit them (see Section 2: Diversity, Equality and Inclusion – Developing an Anti-bias Approach, and Section 3: Diversity, Equality and Inclusion – Physical Environment.)
- » Do you have, or have you had, any fears or discomfort with disability issues? What would help you to address this?



Refer to:

- » *Aistear* (2009):
Identity and Belonging; Communicating; Well-being
- » *Síolta* (2006):
Standard 3: Parents and Families

DIVERSE CULTURAL BACKGROUNDS AND HERITAGE

“Learning the cultural attributes of one’s own ethnic identity takes time. Even more so does learning about someone else’s culture. Young children are just beginning their journey.”

L Derman-Sparks and ABC Task Force (1989, p. 66)



Moving to a new country means leaving behind your extended family and what is familiar to you. This can be challenging and sometimes lonely and isolating; many things are unfamiliar and conditions are not always favourable. Some communities also experience stereotyping, prejudice, discrimination and, in some cases, racism. Families, in particular those who did not leave their country of origin by choice, may have experienced trauma or be upset or depressed. Being dependent in an unfamiliar country and culture can be very difficult.

Early childhood practitioners are perfectly positioned to work intentionally to respect and recognise new communities and their contribution to the community. They can also work to challenge and overcome injustices, and to begin laying a strong foundation for children – and the adults they will become.

POINTS TO KEEP IN MIND

- » As part of the induction process, new families will need to be informed and assured of the importance of depicting all children in the early childhood service. Some parents may not wish their photographs to be displayed in the early childhood service for religious or other reasons. If you have a Family Wall, explain its purpose and have children draw or paint representations of their family, if their parents prefer not to share photographs. Explaining the purpose of the Family Wall is the role of the early childhood practitioner.
- » You may need interpreters. Be aware that if a family member acts as an interpreter, confidentiality may be an issue. It is not acceptable to use children as translators; it would be best to seek alternatives where possible.
- » Body language may mean different things in different cultures. Making eye contact, shaking hands or using your first name can have different connotations; eye contact can be considered rude, for example, in Nigerian families. Asking a child to ‘please look at me when I’m talking to you’ may clash with their learned norms at home. This can lead to confusion for the child, and sometimes judgement from an unaware early childhood practitioner.
- » Families, if asked, may be happy to inform staff of how their individual cultural background, religion or traditions can be depicted in the early childhood setting; it is important to ask, as some families may be concerned about how a tradition may be represented or celebrated. Some parents may also not wish a tradition to be celebrated in the early childhood service.
- » Families may have different beliefs and attitudes concerning causes of illness or injury, or language to describe body parts, illness, symptoms, pain or medical care.
- » Some cultures and backgrounds may have different standards and expectations concerning behaviour management. Early childhood practitioners need to explain that corporal punishment is not acceptable in Ireland and the law states that there is no distinction between children and adults in relation to the crime of assault.
- » It could be assumed that, because a family is not engaging with the service, they are not interested in their children’s education. In such a situation, it is important to reflect on how the service is engaging with parents, how welcome they feel, what they understand by education and so on. There are a multitude of reasons why parents may not participate, e.g. they might think it is your role to educate, they may not understand what you mean, or they may have had a different experience during their own education. Early years educators can reach out and try to bridge this gap between the setting and the home.
- » Stereotyping, prejudice and discrimination must be understood from the viewpoint of the person experiencing it. If we are unfamiliar with this type of experience it is easy to dismiss it. The cumulative effect of everyday prejudice and discrimination is very damaging to the self-esteem and well-being of families and children. Finding out about how these issues affect families and children will help in demonstrating empathy and supporting the family.

CHILD-REARING TRADITIONS AND CULTURAL CLASHES

“Now I feel more relaxed with them because they know that I am a Traveller and I don’t have to put posh talk on with them. They don’t judge me; they just respect me for what I am.”

Mary McDonagh in Murray (1995)



Early childhood practitioners can sometimes assume that their familiar way is the best – or the right – approach to childcare. There are times when it is important to stand back, take a more objective view and be aware that different child-rearing practices are equally valid. We learn our cultural norms through life experiences with our families and in our cultural context. What appears ‘normal’ to us may seem very strange to others. Ireland has become increasingly diverse, and this diversity brings with it the opportunity to develop our awareness of different cultures. Team discussion about early childhood practice or parenting styles is vital for raising awareness. The level of understanding about child-rearing traditions has important implications for children’s well-being, and may influence the approach taken with a particular child or minority group. The needs of the child within the family and their wider community will impact child-rearing styles and approaches.

Aspects of child-rearing that may differ between cultures

- » Children’s role and responsibility in the family
- » How families talk to and with children
- » Children’s attachment to, and separation from, a parent or family member
- » Gender identity and traditional gender roles
- » Expected developmental milestones
- » Discipline
- » How families show affection
- » Diet and mealtime routines
- » Toilet training
- » Acceptance of, meaning of and response to crying
- » Dress and hair care
- » Illness and remedies
- » Sleep patterns, bedtime routines, sleeping areas
- » Understanding of play and work
- » Academic expectations

Aspects of behaviour management that may differ between cultures

We are all complex individuals regardless of our cultural background. Despite a shared cultural background, individual experiences will not necessarily be the same, and cultural practices may vary considerably. Whereas broad trends in a culture may identify that culture specifically, individuals make their own choices, e.g. not all Irish people behave in the same way or have a common approach to a situation.

Some cultural traditions may have different standards and expectations regarding acceptable behaviour. If there are any issues of physical punishment, it must be made clear to the parents that corporal punishment is not acceptable in Ireland. You will need to explain that the law has now changed regarding ‘reasonable chastisement’, and there is now no distinction between children and adults in relation to the crime of assault.

Different cultural approaches to managing behaviour often arise as an issue in the early childhood service. To this end, a child's apparent misbehaviour is best viewed in the context of his or her home culture. What you consider misbehaviour may be considered a minor issue at home. This can cause a cultural clash, which, unless handled appropriately by the early childhood service, could cause unnecessary conflict for the service and the family.

In terms of behaviour management, aim for consistency between the home and the early childhood service, so that the child does not have to cope with two different regimes. However, if the approach in the early childhood setting remains different from that in the home, this can be explained to the child in a way that does not undermine that child's cultural/family background: 'at home you can do X, but in here we do Y'. Discipline and behaviour management techniques must take into account child protection legislation with due regard for child protection.

Finally, respecting a child's cultural background does not necessarily translate into respecting all the practices of that culture, and the importance of child protection must never be compromised. Rules and laws may need to be explained to families, especially those not familiar with Irish legislation such as the Child Care Act, 1991 and the Children First Act 2015. The child's safety and well-being is always the priority.

Critical questions to consider

- » Have you thought about how you might speak to a parent from a different cultural context about managing a child's behaviour? What might you consider to be the challenges?
- » Do you think that each individual or group might have a valuable view or idea about managing a child's behaviour?
- » Do you think all families from a particular background manage children's behaviour in the same way? If so, do you think this is accurate and fair?
- » Do you avoid difficult conversations about managing a child's behaviour? If so, can you identify why and what you might need to do about it?

SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

“One of the greatest gifts we pass on to children is language. The first language, learned in the home, is extremely important and forms the foundation for all later language development. Parents, family members and early childhood professionals are the most significant influences on the development and maintenance of the first language.”

Clarke and Milne (1996) in Clarke (2009, p. 8)

When a child speaks a different language at home than the language spoken in the early childhood service, it is important to talk to the child's parents about their views and aspirations for their child's language development.

Families may need support in understanding the process of their child learning English as an additional language. Parents are concerned for their children's well-being, and sometimes think it is better not to speak their home language in order for their child to adapt and fit in. The early childhood

practitioner can alleviate anxiety and reassure them of the importance of continuing to support the development of the child's home language. Such information is vital, so that the child develops a positive self-concept and is not disadvantaged in any way.

“Maintaining the first language does not interfere with the learning of English. Research suggests the opposite – that knowing one language can help the child understand how other languages work. The maintenance of the first or home language is particularly important for the child’s development of a positive self-concept and well-being.”

P Clarke (2009, p. 8)

Although there are individual differences in the way children acquire a second language, there are consistent phases of second language acquisition:

1. Continued use of the home language in the new language context
2. Use of non-verbal communication
3. A period of silence
4. Use of repetition and language play
5. Use of single words, formulae and routines
6. Development of more complex English (Clarke, 1996)

POINTERS FOR SUPPORTING CHILDREN WITH ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

- » Acknowledge and show appreciation for the variety of languages the children in the pre-school may speak. All children are sensitive to learning language in early childhood. Early childhood practitioners can celebrate the richness that this variety in languages brings.
- » Try to develop a good sense of understanding of the child's linguistic and cultural background and work collaboratively with the family. Find out from the parents their understanding about the child's language development in their home language – just as you would for any child.
- » Recognise that the child is fluent in their home language and that their learning English as a second language gives support to the child and the family. Parents may need to be reassured that the child will learn English while maintaining their home language. It is the quality of communication in the home and in the early childhood service that is important.
- » Provide as many 'language bridges' as possible for the child acquiring a second language; for example, ask parents for some key words in their child's home language. Write them phonetically, in order to help with pronunciation.
- » Support the child to succeed in activities that do not rely on spoken language. Support them to join in with songs and rhymes by using actions. This will improve the child's confidence and encourage acceptance of the child by other children.
- » The child should feel comfortable speaking in their own language to other children or staff in the setting who speak the same language. Other children can be supported to recognise and acknowledge this and develop an interest in other languages, learn a few words or sing a song. There are benefits for all children in developing an interest in languages, especially those being spoken around them.

(continued)

- » Children learn language through interactions – encourage the child to play with other children. This is the best learning opportunity, as it is easier for the child to learn from their peers, who act as natural role models, than from an adult. Be careful not to leave a child alone too long; be the bridge to support children coming together.
- » Accept a child’s attempts to communicate, regardless of the language used. Focus on the child’s facial expressions and gestures, so that you can tune in to what the child is trying to tell you. Follow their lead to interpret what they are communicating.
- » Use visual strategies such as choice boards, visual timelines, photographs and drawings to support understanding and learning.
- » Model language for the child by focusing initially on vocabulary for concepts that are familiar to the child in his or her home language. The child will need lots of time to watch, listen and respond.
- » Children may mix the new language and their home language in one sentence. This is a normal part of bilingual development. Some children go through a ‘silent period’ – they may understand some of the language in the early childhood service but may not use it.
- » Children quickly learn which is the dominant and accepted language. Some children reject their home language and see it as ‘less than’. This comes from wanting to fit in and also from getting the message that their first language is not valued. If the children stop speaking their home language, they lose a rich resource and also the ability to communicate with their extended family.
- » Sometimes, children laugh at other children’s attempts to speak English. Explaining to children that the child speaks another language fluently supports that child and informs children of that child’s strengths. Family walls can also support children learning English as a second language; children often speak their home language when they are talking about their family, which empowers the child and enables the other children to actively engage with the child.
- » Sometimes, children isolate other children from play, saying “oh she can’t talk, so she can’t be part of the game”. It is important to use this as a ‘teachable moment’ and bring children together in a positive way. Not everyone needs to talk to be part of a game. Ensure that there are roles for non-verbal children who are learning English as a second language.

Critical questions to consider

- » Do you value the child’s home language and culture in the early childhood service? Do you ask a child to stop speaking their home language, or say ‘we only speak English here’? Do you prevent staff from speaking in their home language with children who speak their language in the setting?
- » Do you have an understanding that the child’s linguistic and cultural background is shaped by their family interactions?
- » Do you accept and support children’s attempts to communicate regardless of the language used?
- » Do you model language for the child by focusing initially on vocabulary for concepts that are familiar to the child in his or her home language?
- » Do you or have you ever felt resentful of having children who don’t speak English in the setting? How might that affect your work with these children and their families?

“Children who have the opportunity to maintain their first language can extend their cognitive development while learning English as a second language. Their level of competence in the second language will be related to the level of competence they have achieved in their first language.”

J Cummins (1984)

“Children with a sound knowledge of their first language will be able to transfer skills from one language to another.”

P Clarke (2009, p. 8)



GENDER

Children are influenced by the nature of the expectations placed on them to behave in particular ways as boys and girls. Their gender learning reflects the language they learn, the meanings of the words ‘boy’, ‘girl’, ‘male’, ‘female’, and the symbols they learn to associate with them through literature, songs and stories. Mac Naughton (2003, p. 47)

When we speak about gender, we mean the social differences between women and men that have been learned over time and may differ within and between cultures, rather than the biological characteristics that differentiate people as males or females.³ We are so used to accepting gender positions in society that we barely notice our own agency in maintaining these roles. Early childhood practitioners, through their interactions and observations, have a real opportunity to explore gender questions that emerge in the early childhood setting. As part of this process they can unpack their own subconscious gender position and address gender proactively in the early childhood care and education (ECCE) service (see Section 1: Understanding Diversity, Equality and Inclusion).

From an early age, children are keen to identify themselves as either a boy or a girl. Children model their behaviour on same-sex members of their family, their friends and the images they come across. They learn ways of relating to the world by observing how people act, and by being rewarded or punished for appropriate or inappropriate behaviour. By having access to non-stereotyped materials and role models and being encouraged to enter ‘opposite sex’ areas, young children will, by their own choice, adopt non-traditional attitudes and behaviours. Early years educators can also intervene directly in children’s interactions in order to help young children understand and question conventional gender roles.

³ Asking whether gender is a result of socialisation or biology is now generally thought to be unhelpful, because the two are closely interrelated. There is sufficient evidence to indicate that socialisation has a crucial role to play.

Children's concepts of gender are thought to change constantly, depending on the context; recent work suggests that young children's understanding of gender is shaped by social class, ethnicity, religion, age and culture. It is worth remembering that children gain information, which shapes these concepts of gender, from multiple sources, not least of which are parents, local communities and peer groups, early childhood practitioners and the media.

Adapted from *The Development of Gender Roles in Young Children: Research Findings* (November 2001), Equal Opportunities Commission's report.

As educators we have the responsibility to ensure that gender equity is not merely an attractively wrapped but ultimately empty box.

N Browne (2004, p. 158)

Critical questions to consider

- » Do you expect children to act differently because they are boys or girls, and do you have different expectations of their abilities or potential?
- » Do you offer children gender-specific activities? Do you think about the messages children get in terms of the day-to-day routines and experiences in the early childhood service?
- » Do you reflect on messages children are getting about how to be a 'proper' boy or girl from the toys they use, television or DVDs they watch, and books they read?
- » Do you keep gender roles in mind when you observe children's play activities and the images that boys and girls are acting out?
- » Do you observe where and how boys and girls play together and apart?
- » How do you respond when children say "you can't play here, you are a boy"? How might you counter what the children are saying about male and female roles?
- » Have you noticed if boys or girls resist or challenge gender stereotypes or practices in the setting?
- » Do you ever intervene in children's play to encourage them to question gender stereotypes and to recognise that there are numerous acceptable ways of being girls or boys?
- » Are you aware of the language you use when talking to boys and girls? Do you compliment boys on what they do and girls on how they look?
- » Have you thought about how you equality-proof your early childhood service for non-sexist messages and how you might alter the early childhood care and education physical environment? (See Section 3: Diversity, Equality and Inclusion - Physical Environment)
- » Do you have knowledge of the main theories and ideas that define your work with young children? Do these take account of gender and transgender issues?

“Research and anecdotal evidence shows that boys and girls play differently and are treated differently in their early years. Different types of play and experiences have an effect on skills and opportunities in later life. Children themselves will discriminate against each other if they cross the perceived gender lines. Our job ... is to ensure opportunities for children to develop a healthy gender identity.”

Barron in Murray and Urban (2012)

LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL AND TRANSGENDER

“The children who are in cots and buggies today, who will discover their sexual identity in twelve or so years’ time, have the right to grow into mentally healthy and well-adjusted teenagers. What we do now can help ensure that no bully and no homophobic, biphobic or transphobic culture will too easily deprive them of that right.”

Dr Mary McAleese, speaking at the launch of the *LGBTIreland* Report, March 2016

‘Children’s identities and sense of self are inextricably tied to their families. The experience of being welcome or unwelcome, visible or invisible begins in early childhood’ (Burt, Gelnaw and Lesser, 2010, p. 1). While attitudes have improved in Ireland in relation to gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) individuals and families (Mac Gréil, 2011), children continue to be surrounded by negative stereotypes. Stigma continues to silence or exclude families.

Early years practitioners may feel uncomfortable addressing these issues with children or other families because of their own belief system or because they have not engaged in discussing this topic before. An openness is required around different types of families generally, and specifically LGBT families. Children need to see their family valued, named and respected in every way in the early childhood service. We are also educating children who will interact with LGBT people in society. In talking openly with children, we are breaking down the stigma and are actively opening up spaces for conversations with children. We have a responsibility to make things better for all children.

TRANSGENDER

“There have always been transgender children. Most transgender people say they become aware of their gender identity between the ages of three and five, but lack the vocabulary to express how they feel.”

P McGuire (2015)

Transgender is an inclusive term describing people whose gender identity, or gender expression, is different from the sex listed on their birth certificate (i.e. their assigned birth sex). People under the transgender umbrella may describe themselves using one or more of a wide variety of terms, including transgender. It is always best to use an individual’s preferred adjective.

Some early childhood services may have transgender children enrolled in their services. Being aware of and sensitive to a child’s choices and their voice is important for the well-being of the child. Being alert to any ridicule from staff or children about gender preferences in toys, clothes or behaviour – and how that might be addressed – is something early childhood services need to be mindful of.

“One lunchtime, sitting at a table with a group of six children, one of the girls said to the group ‘when I grow up I am going to be a boy’. The other children laughed at the child and one child said ‘That’s silly. You’re a girl, you can’t be a boy’ and the children laughed again. As the child hung her head in what I thought was shame, I said to the group ‘Actually, if Lydia wants to be a boy when she grows up, she can. It might not be easy but she can, and people like doctors can help her.’ Lydia looked at me and smiled, and the rest of the group nodded their heads in agreement. The conversation went on, and the spaghetti they were eating for lunch dominated the discussion for the rest of lunch.”

Kylie Smith (2015)

POINTS TO KEEP IN MIND

- » Before you meaningfully discuss LGBT issues with staff, families and children, you need to ensure that the early childhood service is a safe space. Engaging in active discussions with staff will be an important starting point.
- » Positive and consistent messages about LGBT families will enable all children to understand the diversity of family types in Ireland.
- » When we are recognising and talking about different family structures, we are simply talking about families who love their children; this encompasses all types of family structures.
- » You can make a difference in a child’s self-esteem in simple ways by using inclusive language; ‘Family Day’ can be just as affirmative to children and parents as ‘Mother’s Day’ or ‘Father’s Day’.
- » Represent different kinds of family structures within materials, such as posters, photos, jigsaw puzzles and books. When children never see images that reflect their families, or hear words that represent them positively, they are invisible and silenced in the early childhood service. Silencing around LGBT issues in the ECCE setting can potentially have damaging outcomes for children.
- » Children and young people frequently hear ‘gay’ used negatively in society, at home, and in school. Homophobic language is not acceptable at any level of an early childhood service.
- » Some religious traditions hold that being LGBT is wrong. Fully including LGBT families and respecting differing religious viewpoints are both important.
- » Teachable moments can be used to discuss issues that arise from children’s curiosity or from negative behaviour that insults particular families.

Critical questions to consider

- » Do you assume that all the children in your early childhood service are or will be heterosexual?
- » Do you actively include images in photos, posters, books and jigsaw puzzles that make LGBT families and children visible and make your environment welcoming for them?
- » Are you aware that your beliefs or personal assumptions could unintentionally hurt a child or affect a child's developing identity?
- » Do you question the use of 'gay' as a negative term of abuse? Could you inform colleagues about why it is important not to use the word 'gay' to describe people or events negatively?
- » Does your language consistently include all children and their families?
- » How comfortable are you with using language around LGBT issues and discussing these issues with colleagues and families?
- » Are you prepared with responses to children's curious and sometimes tricky questions?
- » Do you know how to plan to discuss different family structures, including LGBT families, within the curriculum?
- » Do policies clearly state that LGBT (and other diverse) families are respected and recognised in the setting?

“It is clear from the available data that many children and young people will encounter bullying and, unfortunately, for a minority it will have a very negative impact on their lives.”

Department of Education and Skills (2013), *Action Plan on Bullying*

RELIGIOUS AND NON-RELIGIOUS BELIEFS

“The right of children of minority communities to practice their own religion is enshrined in Article 30 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.”

Article 30 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989)

Religious and non-religious beliefs are an important part of identity for many families. Related traditions are important in many children's lives and often feature in early childhood learning activities. Celebration of traditional festivals can be very enriching; however, it is best to consult with families before embarking on celebrations. Parents may have a view about whether their child participates in organised celebrations associated with religion generally, or with a religion to which they do not belong.



Outlining in your mission, philosophy and policies how your early childhood service addresses religious and non-religious practices will enable parents to make informed choices. Indeed, good inclusive practice could involve inviting families to provide their input into policy development on these issues (see Section 5: Developing and Implementing an Inclusion Policy). The admissions policy or a related information leaflet can state that your early childhood service is inclusive and respectful of all children, and that if families have concerns about religious practices or other issues they are welcome to discuss them with staff.

“A positive approach to understanding religious belief is part of good practice in work with children ... However, many workers are uncertain how to approach this area and are uneasy about a suitable balance between personal commitment and an open approach to children’s learning.”

Jenny Lindon (1999)

POINTS TO KEEP IN MIND

- » When enrolling children in the early childhood service, it is a good idea to talk to parents about religion. Discuss with families what they would like acknowledged in the early childhood service. Consult with families from minority religions, in order to ensure that festivals associated with their religions are celebrated accurately, if they so wish.
- » Inviting parents into the setting to help with the celebration of traditions or religious festivals makes these celebrations authentic and, more importantly, it makes their depiction accurate. Children feel pride when their parents share their traditions with the other children.
- » It is important that children never feel excluded because of their religious or non-religious beliefs; likewise, they should not be required to participate in activities associated with a religion to which they do not belong.
- » Find out about the religious or non-religious beliefs of the children’s families. Do not make assumptions about religious beliefs among indigenous or immigrant populations. Also, bear in mind that families practise the same religion in differing ways; some families are very traditional, whereas others are less so.
- » Families need to be told if a religious festival is going to be celebrated. An open approach will support families to be comfortable about approaching staff if they do not want their child to participate in an activity. Through consultation, satisfactory alternatives can be facilitated.
- » If parents do not wish to participate in festivals or traditions, this can be seen as a learning opportunity for all children. Appropriate discussion enables children to see differences in traditions and choices, and it also gives support to the child who is not participating.
- » Celebrate festivals that relate to the children in the early childhood service, so that they are more meaningful. Young children may not connect with or understand the significance of festivals. It is useful to think about *why* you are recognising festivals. Children need to know what type of festival and tradition they are celebrating, e.g. Christian, Muslim, Hindu, etc.
- » The everyday reality of people’s daily life also needs to be discussed so as to avoid children thinking this is how others live all the time. Therefore, we should not only celebrate the ‘exotic’ elements of different cultures, but also bring in the everyday.
- » Work with families, including the children, to create a calendar showing days of significance that are celebrated. Place it at an appropriate level for the children to explore.
- » Find books that reflect the particular religions of the children’s families.

(continued)

- » At general meetings, provide appropriate snacks for those with minority dietary requirements (ask families to help out).
- » Management must ensure that staff respect the food preferences and beliefs of families at all times. This may require in-service training on an ongoing basis, good working policies and procedures, and good relationships with parents.

Banning festivals or activities because one child cannot participate is not the answer; using the experience as a ‘teachable moment’ is a more positive approach. Whereas early childhood practitioners are not responsible for educating children about different religious or non-religious practices or beliefs, offering a brief exploration of a festival exposes children to a range of ideas and experiences that are relevant to different religions, while at all times supporting each child’s identity and promoting respect. The most meaningful approach is to invite families to share their traditions.

LEARNING STORY

ANN HALLIGAN, CURIOUS MINDS, CASTLEBAR, CO MAYO

Celebrating Eid al-Adha

At greeting time we were talking about celebrating festivals like Halloween, and Rayan’s and Al-Aksha’s mam explained that they would be celebrating Eid al-Adha on Tuesday, 15 October. We asked them to tell us about Eid.

Ann: Do you see Al-Aksha’s and Rayan’s new clothes for Eid? Do your mammy and daddy have special clothes to wear for Eid?

Al-Aksha: Yeah, my mom got new clothes on Saturday. My dad wear white and my mom wear pink! Me blue!

Rayan: Me too.

Niamh: My mam has a wedding dress for her special clothes.



Critical questions to consider

- » Is the activity relevant and meaningful for the children in the group? Are there children in the group celebrating the festival at home?
- » Why are you doing this activity and who will it benefit?
- » What learning experiences will the children gain from this activity?
- » Is the activity authentic and respectful?
- » How do families feel about the activity?
- » Are there differing views among the staff about exploring religion or new religions with young children? How might you address this?
- » People who practise certain religions do not eat certain foods. Have you ever thought that denying children sausages is not fair if all the other children are having them and it really doesn’t matter anyway? These critical issues sometimes arise. How might you address this in your setting?
- » Do you support the parents to come in and demonstrate aspects of their festival in age-appropriate ways?

TRAVELLER AND ROMA COMMUNITIES

“The Government acknowledges the continuing need to combat discrimination against Travellers and Roma and is committed to maintaining and, as far as possible, improving the range of positive action measures already in place to support them. The Government supports the participation of Travellers in mainstream social and economic life, while continuing to acknowledge and respect the legitimate expression of Traveller culture and identity.”

*Ireland’s National Traveller/Roma Integration Strategy,
Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform (2011)*

Irish Travellers and Roma are not linked by origin. However, the Roma and Traveller communities have much in common, including the importance of extended family, beliefs and values associated with family culture and traditions. Traditionally, Traveller and Roma children have been fully part of their adult community, speaking readily and frankly within adult company. Space for work, home and children is not segregated in Traveller and Roma culture, and gender roles are clearly defined. From the earliest age, children are integrated into the family work unit, learning skills in the homemaking, childminding and economic domains (Murray, 2002, p. 58). This way of life in their culture is less about the individual and more about the collective, working together for the family and community.

Negative and racist representations of Traveller and Roma families can have a very detrimental effect on children from these communities. As a result of these influences, children who are formulating their own self-identities can, from a very early age, transfer negative and inaccurate attributes onto themselves.

Therefore, we need to support children’s understanding of difference in a proactive way. Traveller and Roma children need to acquire positive social identities and self-esteem. They also need their peers to respect them, and vice versa. Finding ways of making the unfamiliar familiar, and building real bridges between the early childhood service and the children’s home culture, will help to shape the views of both the Traveller and Roma children and the settled children. Getting the message that you are either inferior or superior is not healthy for either group of children (Murray and Urban, 2012).



“If you have a teacher that doesn’t like Travellers it can affect how she speaks to the child and how she acts with the child ... the [other] children then pick up on how the teacher is approaching this child.”

*Equality and Dialogue in the Involvement of Traveller Parents
in the Preschool Education of Their Children, Anne Boyle (2006)*

POINTS TO KEEP IN MIND

- » Questioning your own knowledge and attitude towards Traveller and Roma communities is a prerequisite for working with Traveller and Roma families (See Section 1: Understanding Diversity, Equality and Inclusion).
- » Traveller and Roma families often try to attend the same early childhood service, especially if they find they are welcomed there. This gives a sense of security to families that their children will be warmly cared for.
- » Traveller and Roma families are sometimes reluctant to place their children in early childhood services. This can arise from a fear that their children may be treated differently or may be at a disadvantage because of their cultural background.
- » Sometimes, Traveller and Roma families do not want their children's Traveller identity known in the setting. This is usually because they fear their children will be discriminated against. Our role as early childhood practitioners is to take the time to explore and support families' understanding of why embracing a child's identity within the setting is useful. Sometimes this takes a lot of time and reassurance.
- » When Traveller and Roma children attend an early childhood service it may be the first time that they find out they are different. They may also realise that this difference is sometimes seen as negative; the way they do things, dress, speak and play is different. They might get the message that their family is 'not as good as' other families. This message may not be overt, but children pick up on the values and norms in the early childhood service that are different from those at home. We know that messages are conveyed both consciously and unconsciously and that children know when their way of behaving, of being, is not accepted (Murray and Urban, 2012).
- » Traveller and Roma children may find the early childhood service bewildering when they come into it at first. Early childhood practitioners may also be uncertain about the child's interaction and behaviour, and may even see it as inappropriate. Cultural clashes are common when people from different cultural contexts come together. Recognising this and exploring your own belief system while acknowledging another belief system will help in engaging positively with children and parents.
- » Traveller and Roma children bring their own funds of knowledge to the early childhood service. Recognising and valuing this knowledge will support children's sense of pride, their individual and community identity, and their sense of belonging. For example, Traveller and Roma children may know a lot about communicating with adults, homemaking, working with horses, cars, music and trading.
- » Accessing accurate information about Traveller and Roma communities improves your knowledge base and enables you to speak accurately with children. Seek this information from Traveller and Roma organisations and parents.

Critical questions to consider

“We have a strong tendency to affirm that what is different from us is inferior. We start from the belief that our way of being is not only good but better than that of others who are different from us. This is intolerance.”

Paulo Freire (2005)

- » Do you value Traveller and Roma children’s culture in your early childhood service?
- » Do you value the funds of knowledge that Traveller and Roma children bring?
- » Have you questioned your own knowledge and attitudes towards Traveller and Roma communities?
- » Do you foster positive attitudes towards Traveller and Roma cultural differences in your early childhood service?
- » Do you immediately address negative responses to Traveller and Roma cultural differences from staff, parents, and children?
- » Have you accessed accurate information about Traveller and Roma communities?
- » Do you support Traveller/Roma children when they identify that they are different from other children?

“There are many challenges for Irish society at national, regional and local levels to ensure that Traveller children have equality of access, participation and outcomes in order that they have opportunities to achieve their full potential. Recognition of their ethnicity and distinct cultural identity is a prerequisite to the Traveller child being fully respected and included...”

Barnardos Training & Resource Service (2002), *Information Pack: Diversity*

SECTION 5

DEVELOPING AND IMPLEMENTING AN INCLUSION POLICY



The last section of the Guidelines discusses the importance of management and leadership in the early childhood service.

In addition, it discusses the importance of having - and implementing - an inclusion policy that suits the needs of your early childhood service. It outlines steps on how to develop an inclusion policy for your early childhood service, and it contains an inclusion policy template.

It also contains a section on equal opportunities recruitment and on the development of an inclusive enrolment policy.

MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP IN THE EARLY CHILDHOOD SERVICE

“Program leaders are central to building the anti-bias education programs that can make this commitment to social justice a reality for all young children and their families.”

L Derman-Sparks, D Leekeenan and J Nimmo (2015, p. 9)

Management and leadership is a process that inspires people to work towards building confidence and supporting inclusive practice within early childhood services.

Managing an early childhood care and education service can be challenging. There are responsibilities not only in relation to your early childhood team, but also to the children availing of your service and their parents and families. Managing will sometimes entail networking and liaising in partnership with a range of stakeholders, including the broader community where you operate your early childhood service.

As a manager working in the early childhood care and education sector there is no doubt that you will take on the role of both manager and leader. The questions worth reflecting on are what each of these roles entails, when do you lead, and when do you manage?

THE ROLE OF MANAGEMENT

A manager can be defined as a person who has the authority and accountability for directing the work of others.

With regard to diversity, equality and inclusion, the role of management is to support and promote an inclusive culture; provide leadership for the development and implementation of early childhood services policies and procedures, including the Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Charter; support staff to access the National Training Programme for Diversity, Equality and Inclusion; provide support for the Inclusion Coordinator (where applicable); and support staff in addressing any issues of concern and in delivering an inclusive service.

LEADERSHIP WITHIN THE EARLY CHILDHOOD SERVICE

“Leaders play a vital role in organisational activities and creating a shared vision among all staff members. Leaders exist at all levels of an organisation. Being an effective leader can be both rewarding and challenging.”

A Murphy, T Murphy and G Smith (2011, p. 79)

Leadership in early childhood services entails crafting and implementing the vision of the early childhood service and then leading a team culture which reflects that vision, strives for high performance, and embodies inclusive practice. Aligned with this, it involves setting clear goals and targets for achieving positive outcomes for all children.

The promotion of effective leadership is vital to nurturing an inclusive culture. To this end, the Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) provides for a higher education programme in the inclusion of children with a disability in mainstream pre-school. The new programme, Leadership for Inclusion (LINC), will support up to 900 practitioners per year in taking on the role of Inclusion Coordinator within their respective pre-school settings. This role will support management by providing leadership in the area of inclusion of children with a disability in the pre-school setting.

“Leadership and management are two distinctly different functions but have some similarities. Moreover, what is also evident is that organisations need both managers and leaders to be successful and if both are effective, the organisation has an increased chance of achieving its goals.”

I Cafferky (2013), unpublished MA thesis in early childhood care and education

WHY SUPPORT AND SUPERVISION IN THE EARLY CHILDHOOD SERVICE?

Support and supervision is a means of ensuring that early childhood managers, leaders and practitioners have access to support, mentoring if required, and continual professional development to further enhance their knowledge, which will then make a positive contribution to the children’s learning and development. Supervision enables managers and early childhood practitioners to reflect on their everyday practice with the children they care for and educate.

Support and supervision should be viewed as a positive opportunity for early childhood practitioners to raise any concerns they might have about any of the children they care for and educate on a daily basis, or any other difficulties they may be experiencing within the team, and to discuss possible solutions to their concerns. Support and supervision meetings should be scheduled for at least once a term, depending on the needs of your early childhood service and the size of your staff team.

Support and supervision should be viewed by all early childhood educators as an opportunity to discuss concerns or achievements within their role in a safe, secure and confidential manner.

TEAMWORK IN THE EARLY CHILDHOOD SERVICE

“The manager’s role in building a team is an on-going one ... Your most important asset is the people working for you, as how well they work together has a huge impact on the atmosphere of the setting.”

S Newstead and E Isles-Buck (2012, p. 71)

Teamwork is working together, compromising and discussing any difficulties that arise. It is about how you use your area of expertise, skills and qualities to complement those of other team members. Good communication and planning is the secret to good teamwork, with everyone understanding their role, when they are required to do things, and why and how they are expected to do things.

Staff meetings are important in facilitating good teamwork. They provide a forum to discuss and review all policies and procedures, including the early childhood services inclusion policy. It is everyone's responsibility, including the early childhood service's management and staff, to ensure the safety, protection and well-being of all children, so that they are nurtured as part of an inclusive environment.

“Getting things done effectively in any setting requires that everybody is prepared to work together in a co-operative way and to share effort, information and skills in a professional manner, for the good of each and every child in the setting.”

E McPartland (2012, p. 145)

WHY AN INCLUSION POLICY?

“An inclusive approach to education is not just a matter of making minor (or major) adjustments; inclusion is a process, which has to run through the whole curriculum, if it is to be genuine.”

Pre-school Learning Alliance

Having a written policy on diversity, equality and inclusion sets the context for the implementation of procedures and for high-quality inclusive practice. The process of developing a policy on inclusion will assist the staff team to recognise, appreciate and understand diversity and equality issues, and how discrimination can occur in childcare settings. Implementing an anti-bias curriculum and approach in the ECCE setting has the outcome of creating secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships that value diversity between children and their peers, the staff team and their families, as well as among the staff team itself. It gives clarity and support to managers, staff, children and their families, and is essential in ensuring that your practice is inclusive and fair, and that discriminatory incidents will be appropriately addressed. Practitioners have a duty not to discriminate on the grounds of disability, marital status, race, family status, membership of the Travelling community, sexual orientation, religious belief, age or gender (Equal Status Acts 2000–2012).

A successful inclusion policy should:

- » Provide a framework for addressing diversity and equality issues at all levels of service provision
- » Help to regulate how discriminatory situations are dealt with, avoid misunderstandings and ensure that procedures for inclusion are followed
- » Provide evidence of the commitment to comply with the Equal Status Acts 2000–2012 and the Employment Equality Acts 1998, 2004 and 2011
- » Be clearly linked to a complaints policy and procedure
- » Be a living document that provides a basis for critically reflective practice and is subject to regular review

STEPS TO FOLLOW IN DEVELOPING YOUR INCLUSION POLICY

Step One

- » Discuss and outline your policy needs with your staff team and families.
- » Study the *Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Charter and Guidelines for Early Childhood Care and Education*, and provide opportunities for the staff team to engage in the critical reflection exercise set out in the Guidelines.
- » Use the National Inclusion Policy Template as a guide to help with policy development.
- » If necessary, seek specialist advice and training about diversity, equality and inclusion.
- » Develop an action and implementation plan with timelines.

Step Two

- » Ensure that all those who use, or work in, the service are involved to the greatest extent possible (include families, children, management, all staff and groups in the local community). The policy needs to be understood and owned by all those who will use it.
- » Ensure that all children's views are heard and considered through a consultative and participative process. In order for children to contribute, this process must be carried out in a meaningful and age-appropriate manner.
- » Ensure that information is available to participants and that the relevance of legislation is understood, e.g. definitions of terms and anti-discrimination legislation (Employment Equality Acts 1998, 2004 and 2011; Equal Status Acts 2000–2012; Disability Act 2005; the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2006).
- » Allow time for discussion and clarification for all parties.

Step Three

- » Ensure that everyone working in the setting is committed to the implementation of the inclusion policy.
- » Ensure that everyone, including staff and parents, are aware of how to make a complaint, in the event that, in their opinion, the policy is not being implemented correctly.
- » Use staff meetings to review the implementation of the action plan and the effectiveness of the evolving policy.
- » Use and document these discussions; this will be a useful record, charting the workability of the policy.
- » There should be broad consultation the first time the early childhood service develops the policy. Thereafter, review the policy at an annual meeting to discuss what can be improved. Circulate the document to all parties involved for consideration (translated, where possible, into home languages and with literacy support for families who need it).

Developing your own inclusion policy ensures that everyone involved will understand and own the policy. When people are involved in policy development, a policy is more likely to be implemented and cascaded through the service. The inclusion policy should be actively used in practice, and referred to in team discussions about diversity. Ensure that new staff read and become familiar with the inclusion policy. A policy template has been included for guidance. However, it is important that staff have the opportunity to discuss the design of the service's own inclusion policy and have access to training for effective implementation.

Finally, a well-intentioned policy document is not sufficient when dealing with discrimination. Action must be taken to address discrimination and minimise its impact on children in the setting.

EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND EDUCATION NATIONAL INCLUSION POLICY TEMPLATE

This policy development resource is designed to support early childhood services to develop and implement an inclusion policy in line with the National Inclusion Charter.

CONTEXT

This resource will provide early childhood services with a policy template for the development of a robust and comprehensive inclusion policy.

Through a suite of supports, including this policy development resource, training programmes and mentoring, the early childhood service will be provided with assistance that will enable engagement with the Access and Inclusion Model (AIM), supported by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA).

THE PURPOSE OF THIS RESOURCE

Supporting inclusion in an early childhood service is fundamental to supporting children of all abilities, and the development of robust inclusion policies and procedures is key to achieving this goal. The purpose of this policy guidance document is to assist early childhood services in the development and implementation of an inclusion policy.

WHO IS THIS RESOURCE FOR?

1. Pre-school services
2. Sessional services
3. Full-day care services
4. After-school services

It is recommended that this resource is used in conjunction with the following:

1. Child Care Act, 1991
2. Child Care Act, 1991 (Early Years Services) Regulations 2016
3. Disability Act 2005
4. Equal Status Acts 2000–2012
5. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, with particular attention to Articles 29 and 30
6. Children First Act 2015
7. *Síolta: The National Quality Framework* (2006)
8. *Aistear: The National Curriculum Framework* (2009)

STEPS TO DEVELOPING YOUR EARLY CHILDHOOD SERVICE INCLUSION POLICY:

STEP 1	Decide who will develop this policy	The manager, service owner, voluntary management committee or a working group comprising stakeholders? Who needs to be consulted?
STEP 2	Assess your current policy	If you already have an inclusion policy, review your policy using the information in this resource. What needs to be updated to align with your current practice as well as current legislation and national policy?
STEP 3	Draft the policy	Use the checklist to ensure that you have included all the relevant information.
STEP 4	Ensure that you consult your stakeholders	Share your draft policy with staff, volunteers, parents, and management or the voluntary management committee (as relevant to your service).
STEP 5	Ratify the policy	This policy should be formally adopted by senior management or the voluntary management committee, as appropriate.
STEP 6	Implement the policy	Ensure that you have an implementation plan.
STEP 7	Review your policy	Policy documents are not static and should be reviewed at regular intervals, or as things change within your service or new scenarios arise. At a minimum, this policy should be reviewed every year.

The steps above were adapted from the following resource: *Developing a Child Protection and Welfare Policy: A Resource for Early Years Services* (National Early Years Children First Committee, 2015, p. 6).

I will know that this policy is being implemented when:

1. The inclusion policy is publicly displayed in the setting and is part of the induction process for the services management committee, early childhood team and volunteers.
2. The management, early childhood team, parents and volunteers understand the policy.
3. The management, early childhood team and volunteers have read and signed the policy.
4. The inclusion policy is included in the handbook for parents as part of the early childhood service.
5. Where applicable, information about the Inclusion Coordinator is displayed in the early childhood service.
6. Training needs have been identified, and training and development opportunities are available for all staff.
7. Discriminatory incidents are recorded and dealt with in line with the policy.
8. An equality and inclusion proof has been carried out on the physical environment and a plan is in place to purchase, source or make new resources available.

EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND EDUCATION NATIONAL INCLUSION POLICY TEMPLATE

Mission statement of _____

Our mission is to value the ability, individuality and cultural background of all children by providing each child with the opportunities they need to reach their full potential as active learners within an inclusive ethos/culture.

At _____, we achieve care and inclusion in education by continually reviewing an anti-bias approach that is implemented by the early childhood service, and by working in partnership with families, children and the early childhood team, both individually through reflective practice, and in consultation with children and their families, so as to ensure that the education and care provided is fully inclusive of all children, families and agencies that attend and use our service.

Ethos of the service

_____ will ensure an inclusive culture, recognising that every child is an individual and has their own learning style.

_____ believes that all children are unique, but share many similarities, thus promoting equality and diversity throughout the early childhood service.

_____ will promote and nurture the identity of each child attending the service and ensure that their emotional and physical well-being is of paramount importance at all times.

Policy Statement

This policy represents the agreed principles and commitments for inclusion, in line with the Early Childhood Care and Education National Inclusion Charter. The _____ early childhood service will implement this policy to support and develop an inclusive environment for children and adults within our early childhood service.

'Inclusion' refers to:

A process involving a programme, curriculum or education environment where each child is welcomed and included on equal terms, can feel they belong, and can progress to his/her full potential in all areas of development (National Childcare Strategy 2006-2010).

Role of Inclusion Coordinator

The Inclusion Coordinator within our service is _____.

Core principles

_____ actively seeks to support learning and participation that does not hinder or exclude individual children or groups of children. This means that equality of opportunity must be a reality for all children attending the service. This is achieved by using a child-centred equality and diversity approach to create an inclusive learning environment.

Core principles of this strategy are:

- » Work in partnership with parents.
- » Support children's ability, identity, cultural background and sense of belonging.
- » Support children to become respectful of difference.
- » Foster each child's critical thinking in order to confront bias and discrimination.
- » Implement a curriculum that meets the individual needs and emerging interests of the child under *Síolta: The National Quality Framework* (2006) and *Aistear: The National Curriculum Framework* (2009).
- » Respond to children's diverse and individual learning needs and styles through an emerging curriculum.
- » Support continual development for all early childhood practitioners, so as to ensure that they are trained in an equality and diversity approach to providing care and education to all.

Early childhood practitioners work to ensure the following:

- » Children feel secure and know that their contributions are valued.
- » Children know they belong and are valued as unique individuals.
- » All children's cultural backgrounds are respected and valued.
- » Children feel strong and confident about their identity.
- » Children are taught in groupings that allow them all to experience success.
- » Children use materials that reflect a range of social and cultural backgrounds.
- » Children have a common curriculum experience that allows for a range of different learning styles.
- » Children are encouraged to participate fully, having particular regard for and being cognisant of children with a variety of abilities.
- » If a child uses an aid or assistive technology to communicate, that the device is used solely for this purpose.

Responsibilities of management and early childhood practitioners at _____

All families and children are encouraged to participate, accessing learning experiences through the curriculum on offer.

At _____ service, we promote children's individual learning according to their stage of development in line with the Child Care Act, 1991; Child Care (Pre-school Services) (No. 2) Regulations 2016; Disability Act 2005; Equal Status Acts 2000-2012; the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, with particular attention to Articles 29 and 30; and Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children, 2011.

Admissions Policy

Please see the _____ Admissions Policy, included in your handbook for parents which contains all policies and procedures for the admissions to/enrolment in the service.

Working in partnership with parents

As children and families are the most knowledgeable about their background, culture, language, and physical and developmental needs, _____ will ensure that families are consulted when developing and implementing policy.

An effective diversity and equality approach will ensure that ability and diversity are recognised and celebrated, and that discrimination, inequality and exclusion are addressed.

Dealing with discriminatory incidents

- » The first step in handling incidents involving discrimination is to recognise and acknowledge what is happening.
- » All children need to know that name-calling or physically hurting someone is unacceptable.
- » Discuss with the children in a democratic and sensitive manner that name-calling or physically hurting someone is unacceptable.
- » When an incident occurs (hurtful remarks made by one child to another), both children learn from the incident. Refer back to the rules of the service where appropriate.
- » Always determine the real reason for incidents involving exclusion or conflict. It may not be a discriminatory incident, so be careful not to make assumptions.
- » Some issues may be brought into the early childhood service by the child, arising from comments made by adults outside the setting. Recognise when it is an adult issue, and identify appropriate actions for addressing the issue with the child's parents or guardians.
- » An incident should be considered from the perspective of all individuals involved as well as those who witnessed it. Appropriate actions need to be taken, at circle time or in group discussion, in order to address incidents witnessed by children who were not involved. This does not mean singling out children in the group.
- » By showing empathy and expressing our feelings, we help children to express their feelings.
- » It is important to be aware of how our own attitudes can shape how we respond to a given situation. Be mindful that early childhood practitioners are role models for the children and the early childhood service. Children will do as we do (see the *éist* manual - Murray and O'Doherty (2010)).

Actions to be followed if the policy is not implemented

If you, as a staff member or a parent, feel that this policy is not being implemented, you can follow the _____ Complaints Policy and Procedure to make a complaint.

Monitoring and reviewing the policy

The above policy will be re-evaluated at regular intervals throughout the year. We at _____ service value your input.

If you have any queries in relation to the policy, please contact the Inclusion Coordinator:

Management: _____ (name of service)

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES RECRUITMENT

“Will children have the opportunity to form attachments with adults in our centres who reflect the diversity of the community?”

Kenise Murphy Kilbride (1997)

WHY DO WE NEED EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES RECRUITMENT?

Every early childhood service should have an equal opportunities recruitment policy, in order to create inclusive and supportive practice. Early childhood practitioners have a legal responsibility to ensure that their recruitment procedures and conditions of employment do not discriminate on nine distinct grounds, as set out in the Employment Equality Acts 1998, 2004 and 2011. These grounds include gender, marital status, family status, sexual orientation, religious belief, age, disability, race, membership of the Travelling community.

POINTS TO CONSIDER WHEN LOOKING AT EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES RECRUITMENT

- » The diversity of people in Irish society is not represented at all levels of the labour force and many groups have difficulty gaining entry to employment.
- » Early childhood services should contribute to making society more inclusive. Equal opportunities recruitment is part of that process.
- » It is important to recognise the importance of children interacting with men in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) environment and to promote early childhood care and education as a career option for both women and men.

STAFF MEMBERS SHARING SIMILAR MINORITY GROUPS TO CHILDREN

The benefits

- » Children from different backgrounds and minority groups will be supported when a member of staff who shares their background, language, dialect, disability or circumstances is employed in the service.
- » When children from more disadvantaged backgrounds, minority ethnic children, Traveller children, or those with a disability see adults from their background in a position of leadership, they receive the message that people from their community can and do succeed.
- » Having a diverse staff helps the entire team to work across cultural boundaries, and promotes understanding of daily customs in each other’s culture (foods, music, infant care, nomadic lifestyle, comparisons with the majority culture).
- » Other staff and children gain a first-hand awareness and understanding of how discrimination works and how policy is formed.
- » Fluency in a child’s home language can facilitate communication with children and families. A bilingual staff member can help to foster a child’s home language and promote their identity throughout the service.
- » A staff member who, for example, is a Traveller will share insights on language, culture and discrimination, and will support Traveller children and families.

Steps you can take in developing an equal opportunities recruitment policy

1. Contact your local City/County Childcare Committee and or other relevant agencies or organisations about the process of equal opportunities recruitment.
2. Proof your early childhood services recruitment shortlisting and interviewing processes, in order to ensure that discrimination or bias does not occur.
3. Carefully look at the recruitment process. How are vacancies advertised? Are there creative ways to make job information more accessible to people from different backgrounds, genders and minority groups? Explore the benefits of diversity among the early childhood staff team. For example, explore advertising approaches that encourage male participation, people from different backgrounds, people with disabilities, and other minority groups, including new immigrants and Travellers.
4. Management and staff should discuss how bias can arise at all stages of the recruitment process, and how stereotyping can influence attitudes about people's abilities to perform a given job.
5. Ensure that your equal opportunities recruitment policy is available on request.
6. Inform staff about the legal responsibility under the Employment Equality Acts 1998, 2004 and 2011.

POINTS TO CONSIDER WHEN DEVELOPING AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES RECRUITMENT POLICY

- » Understanding the benefits of diversity within the team is not the same as saying that we should select people simply because of their background or gender. Applicants must have the professional skills and relevant experience required for the position.
- » Job descriptions should require employees to be committed to the implementation of the Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Charter and the early childhood services inclusion policy.
- » Affirmative action to ensure full equality in practice between employees is permitted under the Employment Equality Acts 1998, 2004 and 2011. Such action can include measures to prevent or compensate for disadvantages linked to discriminatory grounds, including measures to help an under-represented sex to pursue a vocational activity.

Access to early childhood services

“Equality of access and participation as a value asserts that early childhood services need to be inclusive. There should be no barriers to access and participation in ECEC services for any child on any grounds. Equal participation includes planning and monitoring of programme activities and ensures that all children receive adequate support to participate fully.”

C Murray and M Urban (2012)

Why are access issues important?

In order to ensure that all children have equal access to a service, policies on access must be developed and agreed by the management, staff and families.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 2, states that all families have the right to equal access to services.

POINTS TO CONSIDER WHEN LOOKING AT ACCESS TO THE SERVICE

- » Both the management team in early childhood services and early childhood practitioners have a duty to ensure that they do not discriminate against people on the grounds of disability, marital status, race, family status, membership of the Travelling community, sexual orientation, religious belief, age and gender, Equal Status Acts 2000–2012.
- » When implementing an inclusive approach, every service needs to examine its enrolment policy. It also needs to identify barriers or difficulties that may affect families from minority groups or backgrounds.
- » You may need to explain your enrolment policy to families or staff who oppose access to families from minority groups. Clear, documented policies are therefore very important, and an awareness of children’s rights, legislation and access to relevant support organisations is invaluable in these circumstances.

How to develop an inclusive enrolment policy, so as to ensure access

The questions below provide a thorough checklist for early childhood practitioners wishing to develop an inclusive enrolment policy:

Knowledge of diversity in the community

- » Are you aware of the diversity in the community and is this reflected in the children and families attending the early childhood service?

Accessing information about the early childhood service

- » How do families obtain information about the service?
- » How would families who speak little or no English access information about the service?
- » Is information about the service translated into other languages?
- » How will families with literacy difficulties access information about the service? Are any supports available to them?
- » Do you have a family handbook containing policies and procedures that are either clearly written, or displayed in pictorial form, so that families can easily obtain information about the service?

Obtaining a place in the service

- » Is there a waiting list?
- » Do you have a first come, first served policy? Could this procedure discriminate or exclude some families (e.g. Traveller, asylum seeker, other families recently moved into the area, families who have a child with a disability)?
- » When demand exceeds supply, on what basis do you decide which child is offered a place?
- » Does the enrolment policy state the basis or the criteria you use for giving priority when offering places?
- » Is the policy available/on display to families, and is it easy to read and understand?

Enrolment forms

- » Does the enrolment form require information that may cause difficulty or embarrassment for separated/divorced/lone-parent families/blended families, gay or lesbian parents, for refugee or asylum seeker parents, or for parents who have children with disabilities?

Access for children with a disability

- » Is the early childhood service wheelchair accessible?
- » Can children access the materials and equipment in the early childhood service?
- » Can you cater for children with visual, hearing or other physical, intellectual or emotional disabilities?

Refer to:

- » *Aistear/Síolta Practice Guide (2015):*
Pillars – Building Partnerships with Parents; Creating and Using the Learning Environment; Learning through Play; Nurturing and Extending Interactions; Planning and Assessing Using Aistear’s Themes and Supporting Transitions
- » *Aistear: The National Curriculum Framework (2009):*
Principles and Themes: Identity and Belonging; Communicating
- » *Síolta: The National Quality Framework (2006):*
Standard 2: Environments; Standard 4: Consultation; Standard 6: Play; Standard 7: Curriculum; Standard 8: Planning and Evaluation; and Standard 14: Identity and Belonging



**USEFUL
TERMINOLOGY**

This glossary has been prepared with particular reference to the early childhood care and education sector.

Activism: For adults, activism involves recognising injustice and working to create positive change. For children, it involves learning to take action against unfair behaviours.

Anti-racism: An activist approach or policy that aims to challenge and combat racism in all its forms: institutional, individual, behavioural and attitudinal.

Assimilation: Assimilationist approaches are based on the assumption that it is natural and/or desirable for the minority group or subordinate group to adjust to the values and norms of the majority or dominant group. The culture of the minority/subordinate group is denied and is viewed as inferior (Platform against Racism: Glossary of terms).

Asylum seeker: An asylum seeker is an immigrant who has applied for refugee status on the grounds that they fear persecution in their country of origin, or because their life and liberty is threatened by armed conflict or violence. Asylum seeker status is temporary while a claim for refugee status is being processed. Asylum seekers have limited rights. They are not illegal immigrants.

Bias: Having a preferred point of view, attitude or feeling about a person or group. Can be positive or negative.

Bigot: Person who is prejudiced in their views and is intolerant of the opinions of others.

Black: A term chosen by people from many African, African-Caribbean, and Asian/South-Asian people to describe and distinguish themselves in terms of solidarity against racism. (The term 'people of color' is used in the US to refer to people who experience discrimination and racism on the basis of visible skin colour.)

Black Irish: Someone who may be born in Ireland/have Irish citizenship/hold an Irish passport, and is also visually black and could experience discrimination on the grounds of skin colour.

'Coloured': 'Coloured' is an outdated term that should be avoided as it is generally viewed as offensive to many Black people. The terms Black or mixed heritage, where appropriate, are preferred.

Culture: Everybody has a culture. It involves a sense of belonging, a shared understanding and identity. Culture is the way we learn to think, communicate and behave. While we are born into a culture, it is nevertheless learned rather than given.

Culturally appropriate: Describes a childcare practice/approach, or materials/resources that are designed or used to minimise exclusion, support individual children's identity, promote respect and foster inclusive practice.

Discrimination: Policy, practice or behaviour that leads to unfair treatment of individuals or groups on the basis of their identity or perceived identity. It can be intentional or unintentional, and may be direct or indirect.

Diversity: Describes the diverse nature of society. It includes, for example, social class, gender, family status, returned Irish emigrants, the many minority groups as well as the majority group.

Diversity education: A range of educational approaches that address the issue of diversity and equality.

Emigrant: Person who has left their country of origin (e.g. Ireland) to live and work abroad.

Equality: The importance of recognising different individual needs and ensuring equity in terms of access, participation and outcomes for all children and their families. It is not about treating all children the same.

Equal opportunity: The right of access for every child and family to full participation in early childhood services and equitable outcomes between groups.

Equity: Equity refers to fairness both institutionally and individually. In the Irish context, the term 'equality' is usually used.

Ethnic: This term is used to describe minority ethnic people or things (e.g. in the context of traditional dress, food, shops, hair products, etc.) and when used in this context, it may fail to acknowledge that we all have ethnicity.

Ethnic group: "An involuntary group which shares a common ancestry, culture, history, tradition and sense of belonging or peoplehood and that is a political and economic interest group. Ethnicity is a way of categorising people on the basis of self-identification and ascription by others." (Platform against Racism: Glossary of terms). The term 'ethnic group' may refer to those from minority or majority groups in society.

Gender bias: Attitudes, opinions, messages, encouragement, organised activities, or design of play materials, that, being unequal for boys and girls, influences unequal preferences, use or participation between boys and girls.

Identity: An internal concept of who you are, how you regard yourself and how others see you. It involves what you have in common with others and what makes you different.

Immigrant: Describes someone who has left their home country and arrived in another country to live or work.

Inclusion: A process involving a programme, curriculum or educational environment where each child is welcomed and included on equal terms, can feel they belong, and can progress to achieve his/her full potential in all areas of development.

Indigenous: Describes people who are native to the country in which they are living (e.g. Aborigines in Australia; Native American Indians in the USA).

Institutional racism: Racial discrimination which has been incorporated into the structures, processes or procedures of organisations, either because of racial prejudice or due to a failure to take into account the particular needs of Black and minority ethnic people. Institutions have the power to sustain and promote racial injustice by providing opportunities for some people and not others, by providing career advancement, training, influence, promoting self-respect, etc. Institutional racism occurs where the activities, practices, policies or laws of an institution lead, intentionally or unintentionally, to less favourable outcomes for minority ethnic groups.

Majority group: The predominant culture in society (e.g. white, settled, Catholic, able-bodied, etc.)

Minority ethnic: Groups who are identifiably different from the ethnic majority. May be long established in Ireland or newly arrived. See definition of 'ethnic group', which refers to those from both minority and majority groups.

Minority group: Any minority community or culture within society, such as Traveller, Chinese, Jewish, disabled, etc.

Mixed heritage: Refers to a person whose parents or family identify with more than one cultural heritage.

Multicultural: A recognition of the many minority cultures within a society. Also refers to an educational approach that includes looking at minority cultural experience.

Negro: An outdated term with racist and colonialist connotations and refers to Black people.

Participation: Being involved at all levels of a process, and at all stages, from inception to evaluation. Being consulted as to your views, and ensuring that all views are heard and given due consideration. Effective participation is a process through which stakeholders influence initiatives, resources and decisions that will affect them.

Proofing: Screening of policies, procedures, information and materials, as well as the physical environment and curriculum activities, to ensure that every child can participate on equal terms, thus eliminating bias, stereotyping and discrimination, and giving priority to equality considerations.

Race: A socio-political concept which categorises people into biologically distinct, superior or inferior species or races, and has been used to justify cruelty, exploitation and discrimination, but in fact has no scientific basis. There is only one human race.

Racism: “Any theory which involves the claim that racial or ethnic groups are inherently superior or inferior, thus implying that some would be entitled to dominate or eliminate others presumed to be inferior, or which bases value judgements on racial differentiation, has no scientific foundation and is contrary to the moral and ethical principles of humanity.” (UNESCO General Conference, 27 November 1978, Declaration on race and racial prejudice)

Refugee: A person outside of his or her country of origin, who, on the basis of personal circumstances, including fear of persecution, has attained the legal status ‘refugee’ as stipulated in the 1951 Geneva Convention.

Sexism: Any attitude, action or institutional practice that oppresses or undermines people because of their gender.

Special educational needs: A child has special educational needs (SENs) if he or she has a learning difficulty that calls for special educational provision to be made for him or her. A child has a learning difficulty if he/she has a significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of children of the same age, or has a condition or impairment that prevents or hinders the child from using educational facilities or materials.

Stereotype: An oversimplified generalisation about a particular group, race or sex, based on widely held assumptions, presenting a rigid view that can be difficult to change.

Traveller: Member of the Traveller community, which is a minority group with a shared language, heritage and nomadic culture. ‘Membership of the Traveller community’ is one of the nine grounds upon which it is illegal to discriminate under the Equal Status Acts 2000–2004. This Act defines ‘Traveller community’ as “the community of people who are commonly called Travellers and who are identified (both by themselves and others) as people with a shared history, culture and traditions including, historically, a nomadic way of life on the island of Ireland.”

Values: Qualities that an individual or group believes to be important and worthwhile for themselves and for others. Values guide your goals, choices and how you live and work. Values are personal; you acquire your values growing up within your home culture, and they will be different depending on that culture.

Visible minority: Term increasingly used to describe groups or individuals with visible characteristics (including skin colour) that identify them, within a context, as belonging to a group other than the majority group.

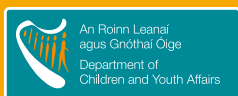
Xenophobia: Describes extreme feelings of fear or hostility towards outsiders, expressed through attitudes, views or actions in response to individuals or groups from a different national, ethnic, religious or cultural background.



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