

# Identity and Belonging in Out of School Care

The research clearly indicates that creating an inclusive environment and fostering empathy, which supports the development of positive peer relations, has a profound impact on children's sense of belonging and overall well-being.

(GORDON & BAYRAYMI, 2018)



## What does it mean to foster identity and belonging?

Embracing identity means that educators promote acceptance and appreciation of each child, regardless of ability, focusing on each child's unique background, strengths, and contributions to their environment.

Promoting belonging means that children and their families feel they have a place in their childcare environment. Children are welcomed and have strong connections with their educators and peers.

## Why is it important?

The children that attend out of school care programs represent diverse cultures and have different early childhood experiences, home languages, and belief systems. When children see themselves and their families represented in their environment, they feel valued and respected. It conveys the message that the children and their families are important and belong in this space. Family plays an important role in all cultures, including Indigenous cultures where “families are often extended groupings in which traditional clan members, Elders, or close friends take on a trusted familial role” (Toulouse, 2018). When children and families feel a sense of belonging, it has a positive effect on mental health.

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## What can educators do to support identity and belonging?

- Greet children individually as they enter the space, or when you pick them up. Show genuine excitement when you see them and ensure that they know you are glad that they are there.
- Take time to say goodbye as children leave and ensure that even if the child has had a difficult day, they know that tomorrow is a new day and they will be welcome, accepted, and supported.
- Display photos of the children, their families, and their artwork and/or projects around the room.
- Hold group meetings on early school-dismissal days to teach new skills and concepts and discuss issues that arise.
- Ask families about their culture, what is important to them, and what their values are.
- Learn a few words (i.e., hello, thank you, goodbye) in the first languages of your children.
- Ensure communication and printed materials are accessible and include the first languages of your families (i.e., greetings).
- Have materials in the room that represent the cultural identity of the children and educators (i.e., authors, artists, equipment or materials, images, etc.).
- Share your family photo and details about your life so the children and their families feel like they know who you are.
- Partner with parents/guardians and community members (i.e., Elders) in planning activities both for the centre and the larger community.



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## References

- Gordon, Mary & Lisa, Bayrami. (2018). The Power of Positive Relationships. In *Think, Feel, Act: Empowering Children in the Middle Years* (pp. 37-46). Queen's Printer for Ontario.
- Rozon, Paulette. (2018). Cultivating a Francophone identity in French-Language Before-and-After-School Programs. In *Think, Feel, Act: Empowering Children in the Middle Years* (pp. 58-69). Queen's Printer for Ontario.
- Toulouse, Pamela Rose. (2018). Each Child Brings a Special Gift: Nurturing Indigenous Identity and Belonging. In *Think, Feel, Act: Empowering Children in the Middle Years* (pp. 15-24). Queen's Printer for Ontario.

## Helpful Resources for Educators and Families

### **Creating a Sense of Place: Considering Routine, Ritual, and Belonging**

<http://bkc-od-media.vmlhost.psu.edu/documents/tips1110.pdf>

### **Fostering a Sense of Belonging in Children - Advice from a Team Leader**

<https://thesector.com.au/2020/09/23/fostering-a-sense-of-belonging-in-children-advice-from-a-team-leader/>

### **Promoting Family Engagement in School-Age Children**

<https://www.virtuallabschool.org/taxonomy/term/11761>

### **Self and Cultural Understanding in School-Age Children**

<https://www.virtuallabschool.org/taxonomy/term/11856>

### **Tips and Ideas for Fostering a Sense of Belonging**

<https://ascy.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Appendix-3-Suggestions-for-Fostering-a-Sense-of-Belonging.pdf>