

Cultural Awareness and Sensitivity

What is cultural awareness and sensitivity?

Some aspects of culture can be visible, like language, clothes, and food, but there are many other aspects that are less visible, such as children's play, eating habits, social behaviours, and families' beliefs about early childhood development,

assessments, health, and gender expectations, etc.

When you value the unique perspectives and experiences of children and their families, you are creating a practice of culturally sensitive and aware program and relationships.

Why is cultural awareness and sensitivity important?

Cultural awareness and sensitivity are integral to creating a safe and inclusive environment where everyone is welcome.

Cultural awareness and sensitivity practices are indicators of high-quality inclusive environments. Here are a few examples of a high-quality inclusive environment:

- Educators build and sustain positive relationships with children and their families, providing them with specific opportunities to share information about their culture.
- Interactions with family members and children demonstrate personal knowledge of and appreciation for their values, beliefs, and cultural norms as well as their individual and intersecting identities (i.e., intersections of gender and disability)

- Providing materials and learning activities that connect to children's experiences, funds of knowledge, and cultural/familial norms

How do I engage in culturally aware and sensitive practices?

Culturally Responsive practices begin with educators reflecting on personal biases and assumptions. The biases each of us hold are often implicit. Biases influence our perception of others and shape our interactions. When we reflect on our own implicit biases, we can train our brains to think differently. The National Center for Pyramid Model Innovations encourages educators to seek out Professional Development focused on improving their

own awareness of implicit and explicit biases.

Educators can also design a culturally aware

“Meaningfully involving family and community members is essential to offering culturally-relevant early learning experiences. Welcoming family and community members to engage with children will enrich the experience for all children, not just the children of specific cultural groups.”

- GOVERNMENT OF ALBERTA, 2009

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environment in collaboration with children and their families by:

- Displaying pictures of families in the environment
- Labelling your environment to reflect the languages of the children in your program
- Finding or making books in a child's home language
- Talking to children in the language the family and community members know best (i.e., the home language)
- Using visuals as prompts when talking with children in their home language
- Providing various opportunities for children to hear and use their first language at home and in the community (i.e., singing songs, reciting rhymes, telling stories, etc.)
- Playing games from various cultures
- Taking children to events where their home language is spoken

When children see their cultures represented and valued in their care environments, they develop a sense of belonging.



References

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- Gay, G. (2002). Preparing for culturally responsive teaching. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 53(2), 106-116. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0022487102053002003>
- Georgis, R., Brosinsky, L., Mejia, T., Kirova, A., Gokiart, R., and Knowledge Exchange Advisory (2017). *RAISED between Cultures: A Knowledge and Reflection Guidebook for Intercultural Practice in the Early Years*. Edmonton, AB: Community-University Partnership, University of Alberta.
- Government of Alberta. (2009). *Working with young children who are learning English as a new language*. <https://education.alberta.ca/media/1224523/working-with-young-children-who-are-learning-english-as-a-new-language.pdf>

Helpful Resources for Educators and Families:

Culturally Responsive Strategies to Support Young Children with Challenging Behavior

This article suggests five strategies, related to the Pyramid Model framework, that educators should implement: learning about children and families, developing and teaching expectations, taking the child's perspective, teaching and modelling empathy, and using group times to discuss conflict: <https://www.naeyc.org/resources/pubs/yc/nov2016/culturally-responsive-strategies>

RAISED Between Cultures: A Knowledge and Reflection Guidebook for Intercultural Practice in the Early Years

This guidebook is intended for educators to provide information about working with immigrant and refugee children and offer opportunities to reflect on intercultural practice: <https://www.ualberta.ca/community-university-partnership/media-library/community-university-partnership/resources/publications/finalraised-guidebook-08single-pages-2.pdf>

Physical Environment

Website discusses how the physical environment can be used to explore and share cultures and lived experiences: <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5f170b16bf7d977d587e43c4/t/612e4e2b9c75b359632509b0/1630424625916/ECCLC-teaching+tools-leading-2-21.pdf>

Play: The Cultural Context

An introduction to how play is influenced by culture: <https://galileo.org/earlylearning/play-learning/play-cultural-context/>