

Bicultural support for newly enrolling families



Identity and belonging

Children's sense of belonging to different places and with different people is critical to building a strong sense of self. Belonging is central to being and becoming in that it shapes who children are and who they can become (Educators' Guide to the Framework for School Age Care in Australia, p27). How children feel about themselves and their identities forms the basis for their ongoing wellbeing and what they can and want to go on to achieve in life. Central to a child's sense of identity is a feeling of being recognised and respected for who they are (Framework for School Age Care in Australia, p22).

As educators, we are professionally obligated to ensure that educational experiences respect every child's identity and promote their wellbeing to afford the same opportunities for being in the present and becoming into the future.

Enrolling families

All families come with their own unique backgrounds, practices and beliefs that influence how their child feels about who they are and where they belong (Educators' Guide to the Framework for School Age Care in Australia, p57). These are the elements that form every family's individual culture. All families regardless of their background need support to experience a sense of belonging when first enrolling at an early childhood service. Cultural competence has its roots in understanding, respecting and valuing all the aspects that shape cultural identity through a process of finding out about and working together with individual families.

Reflecting on culture

As culture is so unique and personal, there are important things to consider when reflecting on attitudes and approaches to enrolling all families:

- What are the aspects that make up the culture of any family, regardless of who they are and where they are from? How does this differ to a traditional concept of 'culture'?
- How do we avoid stereotypes and labels when finding out about and supporting families' cultures?

Inviting collaboration

Finding out about each family's background, current circumstances and future goals is important for any new enrolment. Building a sense of belonging can only be achieved through working together with families as their child's first and most influential educators to incorporate valued and familiar aspects of the child's life and identity into the service.

- What procedures are in place for newly enrolling families to share information about their backgrounds, world views, perspectives on education and aspirations for their child?
- What types of practices and resources meaningfully reflect the cultures of families at the service? Who is consulted about choosing these and assessing their appropriateness? Who else could be involved?
- What supports are available to families who have difficulty communicating in English?
- How are families supported to understand the importance of their role in their child's language and literacy development?

Relationships

Relationships are the foundation for children's construction of identity (Framework for School Age Care in Australia, p19) and are fundamental to cultural competence (Educators' Guide to the Framework for School Age Care in Australia, p58). Cultural competence is a process that can only occur through building trusting and reciprocal relationships, and using the learning from these relationships to reflect on and apply to practice.

- What do trust and reciprocity mean to you in a relationship? How do these expectations differ among educators and families? How could this impact on the ways the service supports relationship building in the initial stages?
- How are strong and reciprocal relationships with families demonstrated and visible to new families entering the service?
- Are there individuals, groups or organisations in the local community who can support and enhance new relationships at the service?

Further considerations

A key step in building cultural competence is taking time to reflect on our own beliefs and practices (Educators' Guide to the Framework for School Age Care in Australia, p58). This enables critical reflection on how our own individual cultures influence



how we receive, recognise and support families and their needs. Respect for diversity means recognising bias so that we can be open to different perspectives.

- What support strategies are available to educators to ensure that bias is recognised and addressed?
- Are there common issues or concerns in the service that could arise from bias? How could this be resolved?

Practice tips

- There is a safe and quiet space for families to meet with educators, pray, talk with other families and be relaxed and secure in the service.
- Families are asked how they would like to receive and share information about the service and their child's learning (for example, written or conversations).
- Family members are encouraged and supported to participate in the service.
- Siblings, even of different ages, are able to spend time together at the service.
- Child settling policies and procedures are unhurried and flexible to meet the needs of each child and family
- One or two primary educators are assigned to children and consistently available in order to support attachment and establish trusting relationships.
- Routines, including the experience of arriving at and leaving the service, are consistent and predictable.
- Transitions are managed in small groups rather than the whole group moving at once.
- Home routines, such as eating, are replicated at the service where possible.
- Families are asked about familiar foods and recipes for their child and these are incorporated into the menu.
- Children and families are supported to use their home languages at the service.
- There is a clear process for sharing information with and from the family, colleagues and support staff, such as the Bilingual Worker or Inclusion Support Facilitator
- An educator is appointed to coordinate collaboration with relevant community and support agencies.

How we can help

Bicultural Support is provided by FKA Children's Services throughout Victoria. We offer access to skilled and experienced professionals who provide specific language and cultural assistance to help enrol and settle children. The Bicultural Support Team can be reached on 03 9428 4471 or by contacting fkacs@fka.org.au.

FKA offers a range of professional learning opportunities for services, which are customised according to individual needs. Check our website for upcoming opportunities, or contact the Professional Learning Team by calling the office or emailing training@fka.org.au.

Research and frameworks

Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *Educators' Guide to the Framework for School Age Care in Australia*

Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations for the Council of Australian Governments 2011, *My Time, Our Place. The Framework for School Age Care in Australia*.

Further information

Government schools are able to access free, qualified and accredited interpreters and translators years through the Department of Education's contract with the Victorian Interpreting and Translating Service (VITS). For guidelines and further information visit:

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/principals/management/Pages/translateservice.aspx>.

