

Helping children connect across cultures

“Would you like to come to my party?” Ella asked Sefra. “It’s on Sunday in two weeks.”
“Thanks Ella, I’ll ask my parents if I can come,” said Sefra.

Sefra wanted to go to Ella’s party, but it was at the same time as her weekly language class. Sefra’s parents always told her how important it was to keep up her culture and language. Would they let her miss the language class and go to Ella’s party instead? Sefra hoped they would.

Though she was excited about the party, Sefra also felt nervous. Not everyone who might be going was as good a friend as Ella. Some children in Sefra’s class teased her because she didn’t look or speak like they did. They stopped when Ella told them not to be mean, but it still hurt.

Sefra hoped the other children at the party would be friendly and play with her.

Being part of two cultures

Being part of two cultures can get complicated at times. Children may find there are differences in values and expectations. Sometimes there might be difficult choices. When different sets of expectations don’t match, it can make it hard for children to feel like they belong.

When cultural differences are respected and a sense of belonging develops, there are many benefits to mental health and wellbeing for children, families and schools. By working together, schools and families can help children from all cultural backgrounds to understand, respect and appreciate diversity in others. Helping children to understand difference encourages them to feel good about themselves, understand where they fit in the world, and appreciate diversity in others. When adults behave in ways that are open and accepting it can help to teach children to respect diversity and embrace individual differences.

Everybody needs to feel accepted, respected and included. Feeling welcome and at home in both cultures is very important for positive mental health and wellbeing.

Australia is home to people from many different cultural backgrounds. Creating a positive sense of community for everyone involves learning to understand and appreciate others’ values, experiences and beliefs so that together we can build a caring and accepting society that supports mental health and wellbeing.

Parenting is rarely easy

Being a parent in a new country has added challenges. Just as it can be difficult for children to learn to be part of two cultures, learning to parent ‘between’ cultures can be stressful for families too. Being open to adapt your parenting to suit your child’s individual needs, and your own, can be beneficial for all families.



How parents and carers can help

- Tell your children stories to help them to develop a strong cultural identity and share a sense of pride in your culture.
- Talk to children about the Australian cultural values you appreciate. This will help them see how they can be part of both cultures.
- Seek support and advice from people you trust. Talking with relatives and friends who understand your values can help you think through the different problems you might face as a parent.
- You can contact your child's school if you have any questions about your child or their education. Schools welcome questions from parents and carers.
- Take an active interest in activities at your child's school. Get to know your child's teacher and look for ways to get involved at school, for example, by helping in the classroom or by joining parent working groups.
- If children complain of being teased or bullied, be sure to tell your child's teacher so the school can take action to stop it.



Things schools can do

- Provide opportunities for students to express and listen to different people and their cultural perspectives to develop respect for and appreciation of diversity.
- Talk to parents, carers and families about their cultural values and needs.
- Respect individual differences – don't assume that membership of a cultural group means everyone has the same values and needs.
- Invite family members into the classroom to observe and participate.
- Promote and model inclusive behaviour, for instance, by providing information and school correspondence in a number of appropriate languages for parents and carers.
- Work with interpreters or multilingual aids to ensure accurate communication with parents or carers whose English language skills are limited.
- Encourage social opportunities for parents, carers and families to support and learn from each other.
- Link families with local services to provide culturally-appropriate support and assistance.

The following websites may be of interest

About diversity:

www.cyh.com

Translated materials on parenting:

www.kidscount.com.au

Raising children in a different culture:

www.raisingchildren.net.au

This resource is part of a range of KidsMatter Primary information sheets for families and school staff. View them all online at www.kidsmatter.edu.au



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