



## CREATING A WELCOMING EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION PROGRAM

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A feeling of belonging is critical to every child's well-being. This is illustrated starting in infancy and throughout early childhood with the drive to attach and form bonds. These bonds help children fulfill their potential in all areas of development—physical, social, emotional and cognitive. Quality early childhood education expands children's experiences as the core of the curriculum and makes relationships to family and community central themes.

### GETTING STARTED!

One of the first steps to creating a Welcoming School is to assess your school's areas for growth. This checklist can be used for a self-assessment by teachers and administrators or to begin conversations with staff, parents and guardians.



### CENTER AND CLASSROOM FAMILY COMMUNICATIONS

- Are forms that families complete for application as well as other center record-keeping family-friendly to diverse families? Do they use language such as parent/parent or parent/guardian rather than mother/father? For example, "Please bring this letter home to your family" (rather than to your "mommy and daddy") or "Dear Families, welcome to our new program year..."
- Do forms allow parents/guardians to define their family relationships in ways that are authentic to them?
- Do all children and families see themselves represented in letters and announcements?
- Are communications translated into other languages when appropriate?

### ENVIRONMENTAL DESIGN AND FAMILY VISIBILITY

- Are there photos in common areas and in classrooms of families at work and at play that depict many ways that children and families interact and engage in the world?
- Do images show diversity of race, economic status, physical ability?
- Do posters, children's art, children's literature displays, photos of your real center families (including staff) depict the many ways that people work, play and live in families?
- Is there a place to house a "Families Gallery" that includes every family (including staff) in your center? Are these photos eye-level to children and part of ongoing day-to-day conversation?
- Are children and adults depicted playing, working, dressing and engaging in activities that are not limited by their gender or that do not conform to stereotypical gender roles?

### CURRICULUM – DAILY CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

#### IN THE BLOCK AREA:

- Do family and people figures represent different cultures, families, and gender roles and activities?
- Are there multiple sets of "family" figures so that children can select the grouping that most looks like their own families?
- Are figures stored in ways that welcome each child's individual selection rather than on a shelf and in a way that represents one kind of family or narrow definitions of gender?

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**IN THE DRAMATIC PLAY AREA:**

- Are there props that encourage multiple ways of playing family or any other imaginative play?
- Are children invited to engage in play that explores diverse occupations, roles and activities?
- Do children feel comfortable using all of the different props and dress-up materials?

**IN CIRCLE OR GROUP TIMES:**

- Do you matter of factly talk about and recognize a diversity of families, occupations, and recreation?
- Do you address name-calling and hurtful behaviors and teach pro-social interactions?
- Do staff members communicate with children about commonalities and differences?

**IN THE WRITING AREA:**

- Are there photos and prompts that encourage children to write (or dictate) stories about all kinds of people and families?
- Are children's stories shared with other children in ways that encourage respectful exploration of each other's experiences and ideas?

**IN THE ART AREA:**

- Are there materials and opportunities for children to express their ideas about themselves, their families and experiences?
- Are children encouraged to share their work and ideas with others in ways that invite conversation and exploration?

**IN MUSIC ACTIVITIES:**

- Is there a thoughtful selection of songs that represent diversity and broaden their experiences?
- Can children identify with the people and experiences that they sing about? Can they comfortably discover and discuss differences?
- Can lyrics to common children's songs be adjusted to be more inclusive?

**IN THE LIBRARY:**

- Does the children's literature that you display and read represent all different kinds of families?
- Do books represent children and grown-ups in ways that expand stereotypical notions of gender?
- Are books used for discussions with children that allow them to share their own experiences, ask questions and explore the many ways of being?
- Do you have bilingual children's literature and literature that portrays diverse cultures?
- Are children engaged in making their own books, especially "My Family" books? Are these displayed with the other literature in the library and sturdy enough to be handled regularly by children?

Comprehensive [bibliographies](#) can be found on the *Welcoming Schools* website.

**DAY-TO-DAY CONVERSATIONS AND STORYTELLING**

In all that we do with young children, we have opportunities to explore ideas and ask questions. Children have stories to tell every day. Seeing the world through their own lens and through the experiences of others prepares them to live in a diverse world and see themselves – and everyone else - as belonging. This is the gift of creating Welcoming Schools.

*Developed by Aimee Gelnow for Welcoming Schools*