



A Diverse Community That Values Everyone

4Cs of Alameda County | www.4calameda.org

California child care programs are likely to include families from a variety of home countries and communities, with different ethnicities and languages and a variety of family types. We want all children to:

- feel at home in child care,
- feel positive about themselves, their families, and their communities, and
- learn to be comfortable with people who are different from themselves.

We often try to honor a variety of cultures by celebrating special occasions – Cinco de Mayo, Chinese New Year, Black History Month. That’s fine, but it’s more important to open our day-to-day environment to including the experiences and values of the children’s families.



CREATE AN INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENT

- Choose books and pictures that show a variety of ethnicities, family types, and abilities. Most should show children and families like those in the US, not “exotic” people in “native dress.”
- Check for stereotypes: Are daring characters always boys? Are people of some cultures shown as objects (i.e. “I” is for “Indian”)?
- Display photos and objects from the children’s families.
- Choose dolls and little “people” figures of different colors, genders, abilities.
- Provide art materials that include a range of shades of brown and black.
- In the dramatic play area, include foods and household items from a variety of cultures.
- Play and sing music from a variety of cultures.
- Include the children’s home languages, even if you don’t speak them. Learn a few key words and songs in those languages, provide books in different languages, label classroom items in English and other languages.

LEARN ABOUT OTHER CULTURES

Reading or discussions about the cultures of families in your program may be helpful. But don’t assume that you know what someone is like just by knowing their ethnicity – that’s stereotyping. The best way to learn about the families in your program is to ask them questions. **Don’t say:** Tell me about your culture. **Do ask:** What are your goals for your child? How do you handle feeding, sleeping, challenging behavior, etc? What do you want us to know about your child and your family?

EVERYONE HAS A CULTURE

The way we do things doesn't feel like a "culture" – it just feels like the right way to do things. We only notice a "culture" when it's different from our own. But all of us have beliefs and practices we learned in our families and communities. Other people's ways of doing things – even if they're very different from our own – feel just as "right" and "normal" to them.

KEEP IN MIND:

- Differences don't mean someone is wrong.
- Different cultures have different communication styles: gestures, body language, whether people make eye contact, whether they touch, how close they stand, whether they "get to the point" or speak indirectly to avoid giving offense.
- Different cultures have different childrearing practices: feeding, sleeping, holding, disciplining, toileting. Some of these differences reflect differences in what parents value most: independence, cooperation, learning, empathy, self-expression, etc.



TALK ABOUT IT

Even very young children notice physical and cultural differences – before they're three they start showing preference for others similar to themselves. So it's important to respond openly and factually to their questions and comments. Shushing them or changing the subject tells children that differences are bad or shameful. Instead, support them in exploring differences: "Yes, Alana's skin is dark brown and yours is light brown. Let's see how many different skin colors we have in our group." "Eric uses a wheelchair to help him move around because his legs work differently from yours. Let's make sure we don't leave things in the way so his chair can get through." Challenge inaccurate comments: "Actually, some kids *do* have two mommies – Shawn's family has two mommies." Children are not naturally free from bias. It's our job to teach them that everyone is a valued part of our community.

ASK YOURSELF:

- What do I know about each family's childrearing practices?
- Are there ways I could – without violating my own values – adapt my work with each child to be a little closer to what they're familiar with?

ASK PARENTS FOR HELP

- Ask parents to teach you words in their language, suggest songs and books, and contribute materials to the classroom.
- Invite parents to come in and read to children in their own language or lead activities such as cooking a traditional food or learning a song from their culture.

DISCUSS DIFFERENCES WITH PARENTS

In our multicultural environment, parents and child care providers often disagree. Children benefit when you respectfully discuss these disagreements:

- Ask the parents about their views so you can understand where they're coming from, and explain the reasons for your own views.
- Avoid judging the person; even if you disagree with their opinion, remember that everyone wants the best for the children.
- Communicate friendliness and respect with your tone of voice, body language, and choice of words. Avoid intimidating jargon. **Don't say:** "Research shows that inhibiting gross motor activity impairs cognitive development." **Do say:** "We've noticed that kids are happier and learn better when they get to move around a lot."
- Be aware of your own biases and try not to be defensive.
- Try to work out a solution that works for everyone.

For more ideas:
See 4Cs Provider Tip Sheet
"Parents as Partners"