

Cultural diversity: Suggestions for school staff

School staff have a significant role to play in supporting children and families of cultural and language diverse (CALD) backgrounds. When staff are welcoming and approachable it helps to build a sense of belonging and trust for students and their families. Cultivating a culture of respect, caring and inclusion of difference amongst the whole school community is very important for supporting positive mental health and reducing school-based risk factors for children from CALD backgrounds. Read on for specific suggestions on how to do this.

Get to know your community

Accurate knowledge about the diversity of families in your school community, and their needs and preferences for receiving information, will help guide school policies and practices around communication. Remember that there is also diversity within cultural groups. It is most important to connect with and understand individual families and their needs.

Communicate effectively

Ensuring that teaching staff have an understanding of the cultural backgrounds, preferred communication styles, and concerns of CALD students and families is very important for overcoming communication difficulties. Be mindful of school correspondence, displays and activities and ensure that they are geared to including and supporting the diverse cultural backgrounds of all families. Classroom practices may need to be adapted to enhance communication between teaching staff and students, and amongst students from different cultural backgrounds. When selecting social and emotional learning programmes for your school, it is important to consider their appropriateness for different cultural groups and to adapt them accordingly.

Engage parents and carers

When spoken or written English is a barrier, interpreters or translated material can help school staff and families communicate with one another. By providing materials in appropriate languages and offering professional interpreting services, schools and other organisations can help to break down communication barriers for families and encourage them to be involved with the school. Contacting parents and carers prior to, or early on during the new school year may also help to involve them. Having an 'open door' policy at designated times may help parents and carers to be more inclined to approach teachers about issues or questions they may have regarding their child.



Celebrate diversity

Teachers can encourage a positive school environment for children of CALD backgrounds by inviting diversity into the classroom. Provide a range of opportunities for children and their parents and carers, to share their cultural stories in an atmosphere of respect and acknowledgement. Mutual respect across cultures involves being open to learning different ideas and approaches and appreciating the enrichment this provides. Be mindful of differences in parenting styles between cultures and try to be sensitive to the issues faced by parents from newly emerging populations (eg refugee communities). In this way, clashes between the school and cultural values imposed by parents and carers may be minimised.

Build connections

Being safe and feeling safe can take time to achieve. Connecting with others who have been through a similar experience provides opportunities to talk about difficulties and can help to reduce isolation. Culture-specific community organisations may be especially well-placed to provide sensitive support during resettlement. Specialist services are also available in different states to provide assistance to families from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Counter racism and discrimination

Racism can be countered by identifying and challenging the kinds of practices that disadvantage or discriminate against those of different racial or cultural backgrounds, and promoting inclusive practices in their place. It is very important for schools to encourage and support children to take positive action against discrimination and bullying by speaking up and reporting incidents. Complaints about racism and harassment should be taken seriously and addressed promptly when they occur.

For further information on dealing with bullying at school see: www.bullyingnoway.com.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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