

TO CELEBRATE OR NOT

Exploring diversity and multiculturalism through festivals and celebrations seems to be a very popular method used in child care. This looks like a good concrete and easy place to start and most ideas found in programming books are based on practical experiences featuring different festivals around the world.

As people living in a multicultural country, we have the opportunity to be aware of our own and of other cultures in Australia. Festivals and celebrations can be shared by all. Children can increase their knowledge of diverse practices in a positive and interesting way through celebrations. If celebrations are based on correct information and experiences are age appropriate, negative bias and stereotypes can be avoided. For this reason it is important to be aware of the meaning of the festival for that particular cultural group and the respectful protocol for others who join in.

In an early childhood setting, celebrations usually start on the surface level of culture, meaning a variety of art and craft activities, special foods and different music is introduced. However, in every day family life, cultural festivals usually have more profound meaning and link to life, such as celebrating religion, transition in the life cycle, building relationships or special family bonding. The challenge for programming is to include cultural information at a deeper level than just the fun activities, at this level real cultural understanding and tolerance takes place.

Diversity Directions encourages and support services to go a little deeper into this level of cultural understanding. Relying solely on the 'surface level' of culture should be avoided as it can:

- ◆ Unknowingly promote misinformation about a cultural group by disconnecting the meaning of the festival from their daily life
- ◆ Result in misusing the symbols or activities of a certain culture, some of which are only meant for members of a certain cultural group
- ◆ Create a stereotype by implying that all members of the cultural group celebrate in the exact same way or find the festival equally important as other members of the same group

These considerations should not discourage carers to celebrate festivals. Inclusion of festivals in your curriculum can be a source of richness and identity reinforcement. Creating a multicultural environment means retaining some aspects of cultural festivals and integrating them into the everyday experiences.

Some of the benefits of including celebrations for the program are:

- ◆ Demonstrating that different beliefs are valued and respected
- ◆ Validating a child's family's experiences, as well as connecting children's lives at home and in care
- ◆ Exploring family values
- ◆ Allowing thoughtful conversation between staff and families
- ◆ Providing opportunities for a child to feel special if he or she is the one in the group that celebrates this festival.

When thinking about celebrating future festivals and celebrations consider these points but above all enjoy.

For more ideas on multicultural programming and achieving high quality care ask to see our new '**Multicultural Programming = High Quality**' booklet (available for sale for only \$11).