

PRACTICE

Celebration of Events

Cultural and linguistic diversity is a feature of Australian life. We are one of the most diverse societies in the world. Regardless of ethnic background, family structure and religion every person has special days in his or her life.

Celebrations are a great way for children to connect with and contribute to their world. There are common events such as birthdays that are marked in lots of different traditions. The commencement of a New Year has a variety of names, dates and meanings. Sporting events can be celebrated in multiple ways. Religious proceedings are an opportunity to share different concepts with each other.

The role of early childhood educators is to create an environment in which children can explore and experience the diversity of events and the way people celebrate them.

A good place to start is to find out what celebrations, events and traditions are important to children, families and staff in your service. This can be done in a variety of ways such as:

- Including requests for information in your enrolment process with families and induction process with staff.
- Encouraging information sharing with families and staff via newsletters and displays in your service.
- Using informal chats with families to find out about their traditions.
- Having regular up-dates on events and celebrations as part of your interactions with children.

Having a calendar that reflects celebrations and events relevant to the families, children and staff in your service can be a good tool for everybody to know what is happening and plan towards it.

Some tips that will make the calendar meaningful:

- Create a variety of formats (e.g. as part of your newsletter, as part of children's planning process, as a display in your foyer, on your website).
- Review the calendar regularly and represent those events that are relevant to your services community.
- Make calendar activities interactive so children, staff and families have opportunities to add to it 'on the go'.

Your calendar represents a starting point providing you with the knowledge about when events occur and who celebrates them. The next step is the planning of how you will mark the event in your service or room. At this stage it is important that you consult with your community to ensure that the celebration is appropriate and respectful for all. Part of the discussion should be which events are to be celebrated and in what form. Consider including additional events that are of significance to your local community, Australia and the world.

These may represent sporting events, historical days of significance and the recognition of members of your community. Give opportunity for input by:

- Introducing and discussing upcoming events with the children
- Encouraging children to share their ideas on how to celebrate events
- Informing families and seeking their input of upcoming events via newsletters, displays, chats and information sessions
- Discussing upcoming events during staff meetings
- Connecting with relevant community groups to see how they celebrate the event and find out if you can collaborate

Now it is time to mark the event in an appropriate and respectful way that is relevant to your community. Taking all the information, ideas and feedback you have gathered into account you are now ready to celebrate and create traditions with the children, staff and families of your service.

Some basic principles to remember:

- Communication with and input from all concerned is essential – those for whom the event is of relevance, those who are sharing in its celebration and those who are being introduced to the event.
- The marking of an event is a community celebration and not the responsibility of a single person or a small group.
- Creating an inclusive and respectful environment is an ongoing process not a 'one off' occurrence.
- Encourage and provide feedback on events and use your experiences for the planning and celebration of future events.

References and other articles on the subject:

1. *'Belonging, Being & Becoming'* The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia
2. Linking Celebrations and Religious Diversity in Children Services publication by Melinda Chapman , FKA Children's Services
3. <http://www.psctas.org.au/pdf/Christmas%20and%20other%20celebrations.pdf> article by Pricilla Clarke, FKA Children's Services
4. <http://www.eccfcsc.org/content/article-celebrations> accessed article by ECCFCSC, NSW
5. http://www.cscentral.org.au/Resources/Exploring_Multiculturalism.pdf publication by Miriam Giugni
6. http://www.omc.gov.ie/documents/childcare/diversity_and_equality.pdf National Child Care Strategy Ireland – diversity and equality guidelines