



Montana Early Childhood Project



MAY 2011

NAEYC PATHWAYS TO CULTURAL COMPETENCE PROJECT

A Definition of Family

- We may be related by birth, adoption, or invitation.
- We may belong to the same race or we may be of different races.
- We may look like each other or different from each other.
- The important thing is, we belong to each other.
- We care about each other.
- We agree, disagree, love, fight, and work together.
- We belong to each other.

(Boston Children's Museum Exhibit on Family Diversity)

Does this define your family? The families you work with? Your school family?

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To foster good relationships among and with "family" members, good listening habits need to be developed.

Consider these three different kinds of listening:

- **Autobiographical Listening**—You hear things that relate only to your own experiences or perspective.
- **Merry-Go-Round Listening**—You are waiting or hiding your time until it's your turn to speak.
- **Deep Listening**—you are genuinely trying to understand and learn something new.

Source: *The Visionary Director*, Carter & Curtis, 1998

Which kind of listener would you like listening to you?



★ MAY MUSINGS ★

Stop & Think: What is your ideal for the family-teacher relationship?

- How do you want children to feel about their family's connection to you and your program?
- What worries you most about gathering information from families about their home cultures? What would help you to overcome you concerns?
- What strengths do you have for connecting and building partnerships with families? What traits might stand in your way? Who could help you overcome these obstacles?
- How might you benefit from having mutually respectful relationships with families in your program?

Adapted from *Anti-bias Education*, Derman-Sparks & Olsen Edwards 2010



Springtime and commercial greeting cards remind us that Mother's and Father's Day will soon be upon us. Both days provide an opportunity to carefully think how we include, honor and respect the diverse families we work with.

A Note on Mother's Day*

Parents are important to children. Acknowledging and honoring parents is also important. Mother's and Father's Days can be one way to celebrate and honor parents. However, not all children come from families with both a mother and a father. Some children come from families with two moms or two dads. Some may have a parent who died. Some children are raised by grandparents or other caring adults. When Mother's and Father's Days are celebrated at school, they can be anxiety provoking and painful for some children. Teachers need to consider the family configurations of the children in their class.

Mother's and Father's Days can be used as an opportunity to discuss honoring or appreciating your elders. They can also be used as an opportunity to discuss all adults who raise children and all kinds of families. When teachers acknowledge that children live in different kinds of families, students who don't have both a mother and a father will be more likely to feel included. When a child feels seen and understood at school, he or she will feel more connected to school and do better academically and emotionally. At school, teachers often acknowledge the holidays by reading books about mothers and fathers. These holidays can be an opportunity to discuss the many kinds of families and the many caring adults who are in children's lives. For some children this will be an opportunity to learn about diverse families. For some children it will be an opportunity to see that their families are acknowledged in the school.

As Mother's and Father's Days are always on the weekend, you can leave the making of cards and the celebrations for the children to do at home. Parents cherish all the drawings or other things their children have made that they have said were made especially for them. In fact, many parents are often more touched by gifts or cards that their children have made that were not just made at the prompting of a teacher for Mother's Day or Father's Day.

If you decide to make cards or gifts in your class, make sure that you talk about and model choices. For example, on Mother's Day, a child could make something for his or her mother, grandmother, aunt, guardian or another woman who is important to them. This option, however, is only a partial solution as a child without a mother in the home or a child with two mothers at home is still aware that most children in the class are making something for their mothers or just one mother.

Making something in the classroom will still present challenges to some children. The key is being sensitive to the issues and helping those children who need it, so that they do not have to handle the challenges presented to them alone. **Source: www.welcomingschools.org**

***Father's Day activities should consider the same points discussed in the article above**

ADDITIONAL RESOURCE:

Sudie Hofmann, "Framing the Family Tree: How Teachers Can Be Sensitive to Students' Family Situations," *Rethinking Schools*, Spring 2005 (p. 20). Available at: www.rethinkingschools.org.