

Let's Talk About ... Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion



Diversity. Equity. Inclusion. This tip sheet discusses these essential concepts and what they can mean in early childhood settings.

What is diversity?

Diversity is differences within a group. The children and families in a program may differ from each other in many ways. They may have a range of income levels, family structures, and racial or ethnic identities. They may have disabilities. They may speak languages other than English at home. They may have a variety of home cultures and religions.

Such diversity is a fact of life in the wider world. But some groups, such as people with disabilities or racial or ethnic minorities, have a history of being denied access to a good education. That exclusion is usually a result of bias.

Biased thinking favors a group of people over others. Biases are built on mistaken ideas about human differences. They lead us to expect bad things, or good things, based on those differences.

Often, we are unaware of our biases. We may even think we don't have any. But research has found that is unlikely. Anyone can hold biases that keep them from knowing and respecting other people. Even young children can develop biases that get in the way of good relationships with others.

We can learn to recognize our biases and limit their effects on our work with children and families. And we can help young children value and learn from the diversity in their classroom and their community.

What is equity?

Equity is related to fairness. It doesn't mean "treat everyone exactly alike." It means the adults focus on helping every child thrive—including those who need some sort of specialized support or attention. They understand and work with each child's specific needs and strengths so ALL children can make use of what the classroom offers.

What is inclusion?

Inclusion is an approach to education that goes beyond just accepting differences. It can be a way of creating equity. Inclusive programs focus on helping every child—and every family—feel welcome, respected, and valued. Inclusion affirms the right to full access to education for groups who have historically been excluded.

Inclusion is an ongoing process. It calls for teachers to value diversity and make adjustments that empower children and their families to be fully involved in learning activities.

Diverse preschool programs can, and should, be welcoming places for all children and their families. That works best when teachers strive to reduce the effects of bias and are committed to equity and inclusive practices that empower every child and family.

Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this tip sheet are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Illinois State Board of Education.



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