

Helping kids connect across cultures

“Would you like to come to my party?” Ella asked Sefra. “It’s on Sunday in two weeks.”

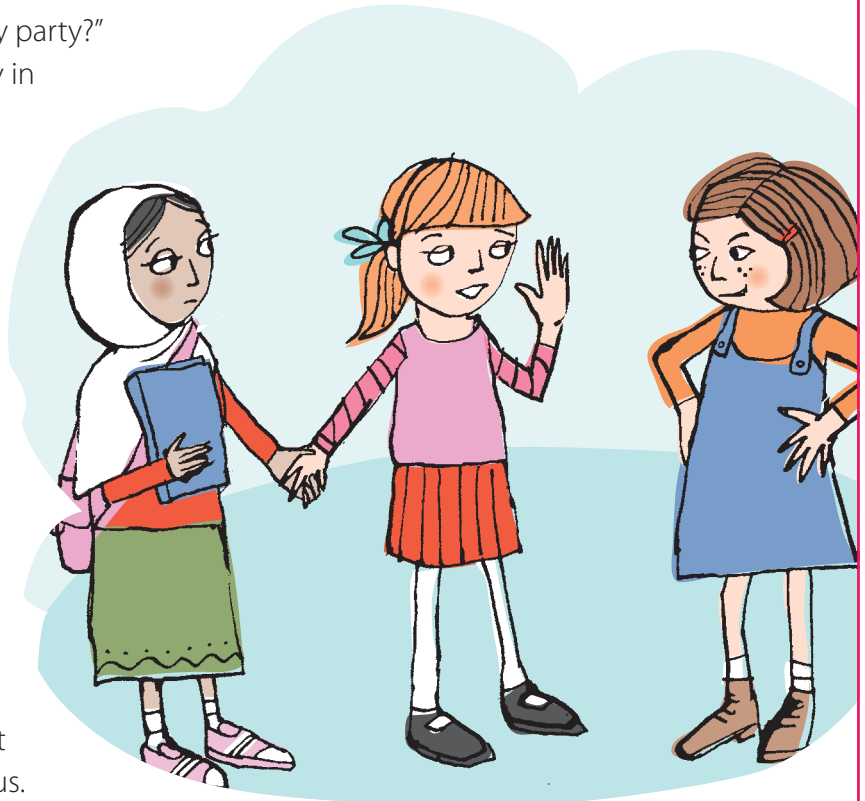
“Thanks Ella, I’ll ask my parents if I can come,” said Sefra.

Sefra wanted to go to Ella’s party, but it was at the same time as her weekly language class. Sefra’s parents always told her how important it was to keep up her culture and language. Would they let her miss the language class and go to Ella’s party instead? Sefra hoped they would.

Though she was excited about the party, Sefra also felt nervous.

Not everyone who might be going was as good a friend as Ella. Some children in Sefra’s class teased her because she didn’t look or speak like they did. They stopped when Ella told them not to be mean, but it still hurt.

Sefra hoped the other children at the party would be friendly and play with her.



Being part of two cultures

Being part of two cultures can get complicated at times. Children may find there are differences in values and expectations. Sometimes there might be difficult choices. When different sets of expectations don’t match, it can make it hard for children to feel like they fit in.

In addition, children who are seen as different are sometimes not respected by others. Being teased or bullied for being different makes ‘fitting in’ especially difficult. When this occurs it can lead children to feel anxious and isolated. This can have very negative mental health effects.

By working together, schools and families can help children from all cultural backgrounds to understand, respect and appreciate cultural differences. When

adults behave in ways that are open and accepting it can help to teach children to respect and embrace cultural differences.

Everybody needs to feel accepted, respected and included. Feeling welcome and at home in both cultures is very important for positive mental health.

Parenting is rarely easy.

Being a parent in a new country has added challenges. Just as it can be difficult for children to learn to be part of two cultures, learning to parent 'between' cultures can be stressful for families too. Taking a 'best of both' approach can help you work out ways to adapt your parenting to suit your child's needs, and your own.



Things parents and carers can do

- Tell your children stories that help to share a sense of pride in your culture.
- Talk to children about the Australian cultural values you appreciate. This will help them see how they can be part of both cultures.
- Seek support and advice from people you trust. Talking with relatives and friends who understand your values can help you think through the different problems you might face as a parent.
- You can contact your child's school if you have any questions about your child or their education. Schools welcome questions from parents and carers.
- Take an active interest in activities at your child's school. Get to know your child's teacher and look for ways to get involved at school, for example, by helping in the classroom or by joining parent working groups.
- If children complain of being teased or bullied be sure to tell your child's teacher so the school can take action to stop it.

Things schools can do

- Provide opportunities for students to express and listen to different cultural perspectives.
- Ensure students know that racist comments and behaviour are not acceptable.
- Talk to parents, carers and families about their cultural values and needs.
- Respect individual differences - don't assume that membership of a cultural group means everyone has the same values and needs.
- Invite family members into the classroom to observe and participate.
- Provide information and school correspondence in appropriate languages for parents and carers.
- Work with interpreters or multilingual aids to ensure accurate communication with parents or carers whose English language skills are limited.
- Encourage social opportunities for parents, carers and families to support and learn from each other.
- Link with local agencies who can provide culturally appropriate support and assistance.

For further information about children with cultural diversity and children's mental health problems see the accompanying KidsMatter list *Cultural diversity and children's wellbeing – Other resources*. For information about teaching children how to include and respect others see the KidsMatter Information sheet titled *Learning to value others*.

The following web pages may also be of interest:

www.cyh.com/HealthTopics/HealthTopicDetailsKids.aspx?p=335&np=286&id=2345#1

www.kidscount.com.au/website/default.asp

http://raisingchildren.net.au/articles/raising_a_child_in_a_different_culture.html?highlight=culture

This resource is part of the KidsMatter Primary initiative. The team at KidsMatter welcomes your feedback at www.kidsmatter.edu.au



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