

Bo's story



Although they had only recently moved to Australia from China, Bo's parents were keen for her to start at the long day care centre right away to help her make friends and begin to learn English.

Bo's home language was Mandarin. At a staff meeting, Lucy, who worked in the baby's room, suggested that to help Bo feel welcome and understand routines, staff could learn a few key words in Mandarin. "We could use them along with their English equivalent throughout the day," said Lucy, "so that Bo can begin to learn some English words too".

Lucy then ran the idea past Bo's parents, who thought it was great.

Lucy also used photographs to help Bo and other children with some of the daily routines, for example, putting on an apron before painting. Bo's parents were relieved to see that Bo was happy and excited going to day care. Some of the children even learnt to say, "Nǐ hǎo" (hello) which always made Bo smile.

What is inclusion?

An inclusive service is one that understands, respects, welcomes, celebrates and honours the diversity of children, families and staff. Diversity comes in many different forms, for example culture, language, religion, lifestyle, family arrangements and circumstances, abilities and disabilities.

Respecting diversity is important in creating a sense of belonging. The different backgrounds of the children, families and staff enrich a service's character and identity. Early childhood services that are responsive to individual differences and respect diversity benefit everyone and help to build an inclusive environment.



Ben's story



Ben has lots of energy and is always on the go. Sometimes he rushes around, knocking over other children and finds it difficult to settle. When he gets upset he tends to throw toys or break them. Some children are a little wary of him.

Staff members Claire and Miah met to discuss how best to support Ben. They began by talking about his strengths. "I've noticed Ben enjoys running around in the outdoor area," said Claire. "That's right," agreed Miah, "and he can also settle for longer when he plays with the building toys". Claire and Miah came up with some ideas and discussed them with Ben's parents who were pleased they were trying to include Ben.

Now Ben is given some physical time when he arrives in the morning and Claire arranges some fun, active games for him to do outdoors with some of the other children. Ben really looks forward to these activities and Claire has noticed that it seems to help him settle into the morning routine. This time has also helped Ben develop friendships with other children.

What feeling included is all about

Inclusive services create opportunities for children, families and staff to feel that they belong. The offer of help and support is accessible and inviting for everyone connected to the service. Inclusive services build bridges to help everyone benefit from experiences and backgrounds that may differ from their own.

When children feel included they show more caring and compassion towards others and they feel safer and more secure. They also learn better and have better mental health. In an inclusive community, 'every face has a place', every voice is valued and everyone has something to contribute.

Care, compassion, respect, understanding and inclusion are important values for children to understand. These are things that children can learn about. The best learning happens when children see the adults around them putting values like these into practice, showing them how it can be done.



Feeling included is continued on the next page





Why is inclusion important to focus on in early childhood?

It is during early childhood that children begin to notice differences amongst people, and form opinions about what differences are viewed positively and negatively. Research has shown that children are capable of developing negative attitudes and prejudices from around 3 years of age. Importantly, the way that adults behave around children has a powerful influence on how children see and experience the world. Therefore it is vital that adults are mindful of how they approach issues of diversity around children.

Many positive outcomes have been shown in children who experience inclusive environments. For example, children are more likely to be accepting of others and be sensitive to others' needs. Inclusive services provide a rich and positive experience for young children, and these experiences will stay with them for life.



Inclusion is important for children's mental health and wellbeing

Inclusion is a protective factor for children's mental health and wellbeing. Conversely, children who experience exclusion are at increased risk of a variety of negative outcomes, such as poor mental health and low self esteem.

Creating an inclusive environment is also important for nurturing children's developing identities. Inclusion helps children develop a sense of pride in who they are, which helps build positive self esteem. It also helps children to appreciate and value differences in those around them.

Being included and learning to include others are very important for children's social and emotional development. Being included promotes belonging and connectedness, which are also key factors for supporting children's mental health.

What services might do

Early childhood services help staff, families and children to feel included in lots of ways, including:

- ✦ providing information in appropriate languages and via a range of means—verbally where possible, in written form through newsletters and emails, or visually, through photographs and pictures
- ✦ being aware of and catering for specific needs wherever possible (e.g. dietary, access, learning)
- ✦ setting up a 'buddy system' where families who have been at the service for a while support and welcome new families
- ✦ celebrating a range of cultural events, e.g. National Aboriginal and Islander Children's Day
- ✦ considering whether the community's diversity can be seen in the service.



What families can do

Families can also play a part in creating an inclusive early childhood service, by:

- ▶ getting to know other families—taking an interest in the different backgrounds of others as well as what you have in common
- ▶ looking out for new families joining the service and helping them to feel welcome
- ▶ talking about and encouraging your child to include and appreciate others
- ▶ sharing information about your culture with the service.

This resource and further information on the national KidsMatter Early Childhood initiative is available to download at www.kidsmatter.edu.au. The team at KidsMatter Early Childhood also welcomes your feedback which can be submitted through the website.



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