





Culturally Responsive  
Family Engagement

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Institute

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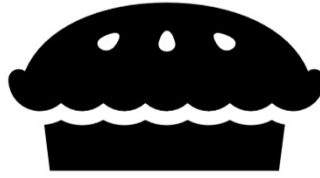
Who We  
Are



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## Ice Breaker

- Are you a cake or pie person?



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## Assumptions



We *all* believe that a student's skin color should not fate him or her to negative outcomes.



Discussing equity and race is uncomfortable.



Creating discomfort without providing effective strategies is not productive.



In discussing equity and taking steps, we will make mistakes.

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## Culturally Responsive Family Engagement Survey

As an early childhood professional working with families I:

1. Believe in the strength of families and the ultimate resilience of the family unit.
2. Tend to judge families' abilities to be involved with their child's education based on their backgrounds, degree of education, socioeconomic status, or family structure.
3. Understand how cultural differences and beliefs affect families' parenting practices and attitudes about their role in their child's education.
4. View families as true assets and respect the funds of knowledge that each family possess.
5. Empathize with the daily economic, personal, and psychological stresses in today's families.
6. Create a welcoming environment for **all** families.
7. Respect the decisions made by families concerning the academic future of their children.

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## Racially and Ethnically Diverse Families

Today's programs and classrooms are becoming increasingly diverse in family structure, culture, language, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, religion, and sexual orientation.



Because classrooms are increasingly diverse, educators are being called to develop the knowledge and skills to equitably and effectively partner with ALL families.

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## Educational System Rooted in Whiteness

- Critical Race Theory (CRT) assumes that racism is endemic in our institutions and structures; therefore, it is normalized (Ladson-Billings, 1998).
- The American educational system is rooted in White European -American culture (York, 2016) and concepts of diversity, equity, and inclusion are often lacking in the educational system, including early childhood education.
- White European American dominant culture, thus influence curriculum, instruction, policies, and practices, and the overall learning environment (Derman-Sparks, 2015).
- CRT provides a framework for understanding how racially and ethnically diverse families can feel marginalized from the educational system and challenges notions of whiteness and racism in education.

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## What is Whiteness?

- Whiteness is viewed as the norm, the standard for universal human values by which all others are viewed and to which they are compared (Roediger, 1991).
- "Authority of experience" vs. "oppression of experience"



Whiteness

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## Whiteness as Property

The phrase Whiteness as Property was coined by Cheryl Harris in 1993. The phrase has been used to capture the social and economic advantages of Whiteness.



The phrase captures the reality that being perceived as White carries more than a mere racial classification. It is a social and institutional status and identity with legal, political, economic, and social rights and privileges that are denied to others (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017).

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## False Narratives of Whiteness

- Whiteness places value on certain experiences within society, including social, educational, financial, etc.
- Whiteness tells us that superior education, wealth, and materialism are the gold standard of success in our society.
- Whiteness dictates dress, hairstyles, attractiveness, tone of voice, behavior, how to show respect, etc.
- Whiteness tells individuals what it means to be a boy/man or girl/woman within society.

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## False Narratives of Whiteness within Education

- Whiteness dictates how and what children are taught.
- Whiteness tells us what achievement looks like (e.g., early learning standards, grades, test scores).
- Whiteness determines what high-quality education looks like (i.e., teacher as purveyor of knowledge, child as recipient of knowledge).
- Whiteness does not allow for the acknowledgement of multiple intelligences.
- Whiteness dictates what behaviors are acceptable/not acceptable in school.
- Whiteness dictates what family engagement should look like.

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## Family Engagement efforts based on White Middle-Class standards

Typically the dominant white middle-class perspective of family engagement is usually seen as the norm.

Efforts such as fundraising, parent-teacher conferences, or volunteering have been more school centered rather than family centered.

These methods are insufficient to adequately engage culturally diverse families

These traditional methods fail to take into consideration the beliefs, goals, interests, and life circumstances of racially and ethnically diverse families

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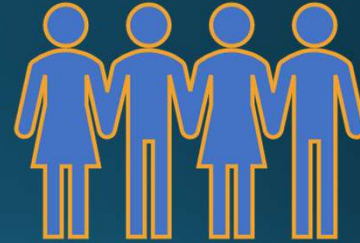
## Literature on Family Engagement with Racially and Ethnically Diverse Families

- Research shows that teachers are more likely to contact Black and Latino families when children have behavioral issues, rather than contacting families to report something positive about the child (Cherng, 2016).
- Racially and ethnically diverse families have been found to have equally high levels of parent engagement in education at home and in the community, but significantly lower levels of engagement in schools (Stacer & Perrucci, 2013).
- Families are sometime less engaged because of their own negative school experiences (York, 2016).
- Racially and ethnically diverse families practices of family engagement are often not respected and pathologized because they do not align with how schools believe families should be engaged (Kubota & Lin, 2009).
- Many racially and ethnically diverse families feel they are ignored/dismissed because they already have a label as being a "problem" when they mention concerns (Ishimaru, 2019).

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## Barriers to engaging with Racially and Ethnically Diverse Families

- Cultural disconnect between home and school
- Colorblindness
- Cultural deficit model
- Dominant Cultural Perspective
- Preconceived assumptions/ Implicit Biases
- Cultural Mistrust



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## Cultural Disconnect between home and school

The majority of educators especially in K-3 settings are:

Females from White European- American middle-class backgrounds

Monolingual

Lack experience and exposure to children from culturally diverse backgrounds

Have limited knowledge about the beliefs, values, and behaviors of children from cultures that are different from their own.

Are typically not comfortable discussing race and racism

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## We're not really Colorblind!

"I don't  
see race  
or color"!

"I believe  
we're all  
equal"!

"We live in a  
post racial  
society, race  
doesn't  
matter"!

"We are all  
one  
race...the  
human race!"

I don't care if children are black,  
white, green, polka dot, I treat all  
children the same!

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## Dangers of Colorblindness

Belief that there is no racial hierarchy

Failure to consider the permanence of race's role within our nation's  
institutions, including education

Sustains White as the norm and ensures this cultural frame of reference for  
all behaviors, interactions, and experiences *as well as the establishment  
of policies and practices*

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## The Problem with Colorblindness

- Colorblind ideology is a common response to reject racism and racial inequality. This approach fosters the idea of appreciating others, learning about similarities, differences, and reducing prejudices; however, it ignores the issues of institutional biases, racial discrimination, and prejudices in our society.
- Colorblindness actually leads to more biases.
- Colorblindness suggest acknowledging racial differences is racism
- Colorblindness actually prevents us from thinking critically about race.

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## Colorblindness perpetuates racism

Colorblindness impose whiteness on everyone – it is another way of saying, “I view everyone as if they were white”.

Colorblindness strips non-white people of their uniqueness, richness of their experiences, thus negating their experiences, traditions, and uniqueness.

Colorblindness assumes everyone has the same experience in America.

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## Colorblindness perpetuates racism

Colorblindness suppresses critically important narratives of oppression and discrimination (colonization, slavery, genocide, Jim Crow, housing segregation, mass incarceration, opportunity gaps in education, red lining, unfair employment practices, police brutality, and etc.)

Colorblindness promotes the idea that non-white races are inferior. Stripping people of a fundamental aspect of their identity by claiming not to see color is **dehumanizing**.

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## Cultural Deficient Model

A belief held by some educators that some families are lacking in resources, skills, or talents to support their children in their education (Grant & Ray, 2013).

This model also blames families and students of color for the student's poor academic performance. The problem with this model is that it fails to account for the institutional barriers that families of color have to contend with to support their children's learning and development.

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## The narrative of the Cultural Deficient Model

- Assumes that children of color are unwilling to learn, incapable of learning, children are not smart enough, are problem children
- Assumes that families are disinterested in supporting their children's learning and development, do not care about their child's education.
- Assumes that something is wrong with the child and the family, instead of acknowledging structural barriers and racial biases that marginalize and pathologize racially and ethnically diverse families. The child and family are often penalized for not conforming to an educational system that wasn't designed for them to begin.
- Educators often feel the need to "teach" families how to be engaged, rather than respecting and honoring the ways families are engaged.

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## Dominant Cultural Perspectives

The majority of teachers are white middle class European American and this dominant cultural perspective/worldview serves as the yard stick in which children and families of color are measured.



The dominant cultural perspective/worldview sets the standard for how children should behave and how families should engage with schools. These worldviews are often not reflective nor inclusive of the beliefs, behaviors and practices of families of color.

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## Educators are prepared based on the European-American frame of reference

- Teachers/educators learn about children's development and are prepared to educate young children from a European-American White frame of reference.
- Child development theorist and psychologists (Erik Erikson, Jean Piaget, Lev Vygotsky, Lawrence Kohlberg, Albert Bandura, Urie Bronfenbrenner, etc).



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## Preconceived assumptions/Implicit biases



Because racism is deeply enmeshed in our society, we internalized both positive and negative racialized messages about other racial and ethnic groups. These internalized messages influence our perceptions and interactions with others.



Educators must examine how their identities show up when they are interacting with students and families of different cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic backgrounds.



Therefore, it's critical for educators and other school personnel to examine their own worldviews and sources of inequality and privilege (Darling-Hammond, French, and Garcia-Lopez, 2002).

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## Understanding Implicit bias

Pervasive and robust, activate involuntarily

Does not necessarily align with our declared beliefs

Develops early in life through socialization

Media reinforces negative stereotypes that influence our perceptions and beliefs of others

Malleable, but can be unlearned and replaced with new positive mental associations

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## Why does biases matter?

- Implicit Bias impacts EVERYTHING!
  - Attractiveness bias (Salter, Mixon, & King, 2012)
  - Height bias (Judge & Cable, 2004)
- Implicit bias predicts the extent to which..
  - Police officers use force when arresting Black children (Goff et al., 2014)
  - Pediatricians recommend less pain medication for Black children than White (Cooper et al., 2012; Sabin & Greenwald, 2012)

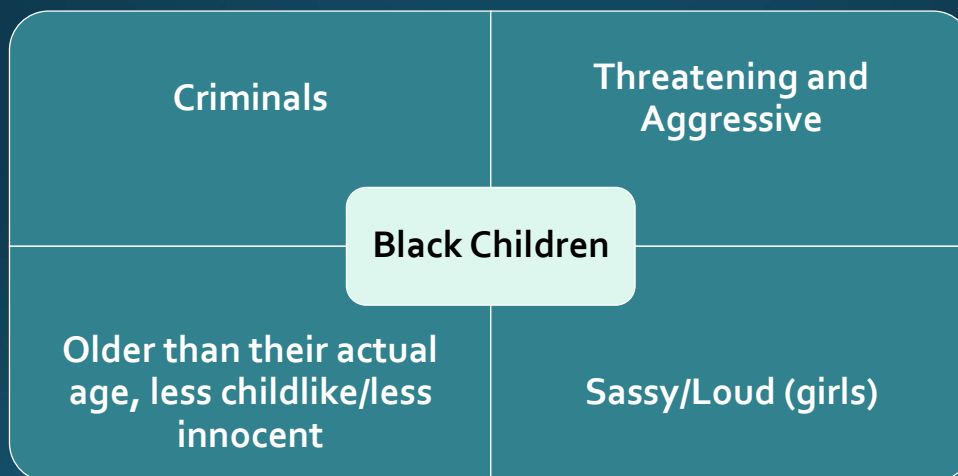
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# Implicit racial biases in education

- *Disproportionality in discipline*: Policies that appear racially neutral on their face but result in the over-representation of students of color -- particularly black boys -- in suspensions, expulsions, and referrals for subjective infractions like "defiance".
- *Disproportionality in special education*: Misguided placements that result in the over-representation of culturally and linguistically diverse students in special education programs
- *Teacher mindsets and beliefs*: Underestimating the intellectual capacity of culturally and linguistically diverse students, and often girls, inside the classroom
- *Tracking*: School policies that automatically place students of color in remedial or low-track courses
- *Dominant discourse*: Ways of thinking and talking about students and families that diminish, underestimate, or even pathologize them

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## Implicit Racial Bias and Black Children



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## Un-Learning Implicit Bias

We must be willing to accept that we do, in fact, have biases, and to make ourselves aware of them.

We must be determined not only to unearth our own stereotypes, but also to challenge them.

We need to learn how to exchange those automatic biases for different, more inclusive, notions.

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## Cultural Mistrust

- The term was first described in William Grier and Price Cobb's book, *Black Rage*.
- **Cultural mistrust**- is an adaptive attitudinal response to historical and personal oppression in which people of color are skeptical of trusting whites in institutional, personal, and social contexts, especially whites in a position of authority (Terrell & Terrell, 1981).
- It's adaptive because it's a coping mechanism people of color use for survival and protection against racism and discrimination.

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## Cultural mistrust and family engagement



Past experiences



Assumptions,  
beliefs, & attitudes



Interactions with  
others

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In what ways can  
cultural mistrust  
impact family  
engagement?



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## Cultural mistrust impacts family engagement

Our past (personal, familial, and/or racial/ethnic group) experiences can impact how families engage or education professionals

Declining services/programs

Building rapport, Maintaining relationships, and Establishing authentic partnerships

Initial reaction towards education professionals

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## Move towards Culturally Responsive Family Engagement

According to Grant & Ray (2013) culturally responsive family engagement involves practices that respect and acknowledge the cultural uniqueness, life experiences, and viewpoints of families and draws on those experiences to establish respectful partnerships with families



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## Culturally Responsive Family Engagement

Educators, school leaders, and other EC professionals must go beyond traditional methods of family engagement to become culturally responsive and develop engagement strategies that are conducive to families' cultural and life circumstances.

Family engagement is more than parents attending parent-teacher conferences or back to school nights. It's about creating opportunities where ALL families are seen as equal partners and are integral in actively supporting the learning and development of their young children.

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# Culture, Families and Children

Culture influences how families raise their children; how children learn and communicate.

Culture is part and parcel of children's intellectual and social development

Understanding aspects of the family's culture can help educators understand children's learning and development and build partnerships with families

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## African American (Black) families

**Strengths and assets:** extended family support network, religious community, work and educational achievement, resiliency and racial identity

**Barriers to participation:** historical distrust of education, social, & medical institutions, cost, transportation, or perceived irrelevance of program (Ballard & Taylor, 2012).

**Resources:** The National Black Child Development Institute  
<https://www.nbcdi.org/>

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## Indigenous Families (American Indian)

**Strengths and assets:** resilience and extended family structure

**Barriers to participation:** time, weather, childcare, and transportation (Ballard & Taylor, 2012).

**Resources:** The National Indian Child Care Associations  
<https://www.nicca.us/>

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## LatinX (Latino) Families

**Strengths and Assets:** family, religion, gender roles, personal space and closeness

**Barriers to participation:** language, legal resident status, childcare, and transportation (Ballard & Taylor, 2012).

**Resources:** The National Latino Children's Institute  
<http://nlci.org/about-us/>

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## Middle Eastern Families

**Strengths and assets:** family commitment, roles and responsibilities, family interdependence, courtship and marriage & family harmony

**Barriers to participation:** language, cultural norms discussion of personal or family issues, and the historical legacy of colonization & Western politics in the Middle East may be a challenge in establishing alliance with certain families (Ballard & Taylor, 2012).

**Resources:** Arab American Family Support Center  
<https://www.aafscny.org/index.php?id=10>

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## Asian Families

**Strengths and assets:** close family ties, family interdependence and resiliency

**Barriers to participation:** language, cultural norms (discussion of family issues may be prohibited), distrust of affiliation w/government especially for refugee families.

Asian students are also perceived as the “model minority” based on stereotypes about Asian American success and work ethic. This perception lends itself to misunderstanding of the unique needs of children from different Asian American backgrounds (Ballard & Taylor, 2012).

**Resources:** Coalition of Asian American Children and Families <http://cacf.org/>

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## Questions to help educators reflect culturally responsive practices

Am I aware of my own cultural identity and history?

Am I aware of biases I may hold?

Do I view diversity and exceptionalities as strengths and that ALL children can succeed?

Does my classroom provide equal representation of images and materials of diverse groups, families, and cultures in a non-stereotypical manner?

Do I see and treat EACH child both as an individual and as a member of a different social and cultural group?

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## Strategies to build authentic partnerships with families

- Clearly express commitment to meaningful and culturally responsive family engagement by writing a mission statement and setting goals **(include parental voice)**.
- Survey families (conduct focus groups) about their concerns, perspectives and ideas. Sample questions could include:
  - What languages are spoken at home?
  - What are the family's cultural practices and traditions?
  - What are families' previous experiences with schools, schooling and teachers?

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## Strategies to build authentic partnerships with families

Plan a series of family (caregiver)-teacher team building workshops based on the results of the survey and focus groups (ex: teacher-family communication)

Develop a school cultural resource binder in collaboration with families

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## Family Engagement efforts that are family centered

**Conduct a cultural audit** of your classroom. Grant and Ray (2013) suggest conducting a classroom cultural audit that involves reviewing classroom displays to ensure that there is diversity throughout the classroom environment (e.g., age, gender, ability, race, ethnic, religion, social class). The goal is to make all children and families feel both included and welcomed.

**Develop authentic, trusting relationships** with families by conducting regular home visits. Conducting home visits with families provides teachers the opportunity to see families in their natural environment and helps parents stay in their comfort zone. Visiting families at home also conveys the message that teachers are vested in the child's education and in collaborating with parents.

Alternative to home visits during COVID - using social media (Facebook groups, Apps such as Remind, Texting, Google Meet or Zoom).

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## Family Engagement efforts that are family centered

- **Host a virtual cultural night:** invite parents to share their family's cultural heritage and background. Families can share artifacts, stories, or other items representative of their culture.
- **Attend a neighborhood or community event** to gain a better and deeper understanding of the community. Children and families exist in the context of the communities in which they live. Having a better understanding of the family's neighborhood/community can help teachers make meaningful connections with families.
- **Replace parent-teacher conferences with family-teacher café conversations.** Many times, parents feel intimidated by parent-teacher conferences. Therefore, reframing the purpose of the meeting to be more conversational and less formal may increase parent engagement.

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## Diversity Informed Tenets

**Diversity informed tenets-** developed by the Irving Harris Foundations, are guiding principles that raise awareness about inequities and injustices embedded in our society.

The tenets empower individual practitioners, agencies and systems of care to identify and address the social justice issues intricately intertwined with all work with infants, children, and families.

The tenets are rooted in belief that self-awareness and intentional action are the cornerstones of principles of equity and inclusion.

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## 10 Diversity informed tenets

Self-awareness leads to better services for families

Champion Children's Rights Globally

Work to Acknowledge Privilege and Combat Discrimination

Recognize and Respect Non-Dominant Bodies of Knowledge

Honor Diverse Family Structures

Understand that Language can Hurt or Heal

Support Families in their Preferred Language

Allocate Resources to System Change

Make Space and Open Pathways

Advance Policy that Supports All Families

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## Applying the Diversity Informed Tenets to Support Culturally Responsive Relationships

- **Self-awareness leads to better services for families**
- Reflecting on our cultures, values, & beliefs and the impact that racism, classism, sexism, able-ism, homophobia, xenophobia, and other systems of oppression have had on our lives in order to provide diversity informed services
- **Work to acknowledge privilege and combat discrimination**
- Discriminatory policies/practices that harm adults, also harm their children. Privilege constitutes injustices. Diversity informed practitioners acknowledge privilege where we hold it and use it strategically and responsibly.

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## Applying the Diversity Informed Tenets to Support Culturally Responsive Relationships

- **Recognize and respect non dominant bodies of knowledge**
- Diversity informed practice recognize non-dominant ways of knowing, bodies of knowledge, sources of strength, and routes to healing within all families and communities.
- **Honor diverse family structures**
- Diversity informed practice recognizes and strives to counter the historical bias towards idealizing (and conversely blaming) biological mothers while overlooking the critical child-rearing contributions of others including fathers, extended family members, and educational providers.

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## Applying the Diversity Informed Tenets to Support Culturally Responsive Relationships



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## 4 key reminders for Culturally Responsive Family Engagement

Acknowledge  
family's assets  
and strengths

Respect family's  
funds of  
knowledge

Honor diverse  
family structures

Support families  
in their preferred  
language

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## What can programs and teachers do now?

Revise

Revise practices and programs to be culturally responsive



Transform

Transform assumptions, beliefs and biases about children, families, and the communities in which they live



Create

Create authentic relationships with families and communities based on mutual trust

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What barriers exist that prevents me or (my program) from being more inclusive and equitable?

# Contact Information

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