



Early Childhood Development Series:

EVERY CHILD IS A UNIQUE AND SPECIAL PERSON

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“You are very special.” We say that to children to help them understand they are indeed unique and VERY SPECIAL. What else can we do to help children understand, enjoy, and appreciate their unique and special qualities, as well as the unique and special qualities of others?

Visiting a newborn nursery provides a snapshot view of the diversity within our country. Tiny newborns demonstrate their uniqueness to the world. While babies all look different in their individual features, most interesting is the remarkable differences in their behavior – when and how they cry, rest, eat, fuss, sleep, and respond to stimuli.

From birth onward, we have the opportunity to value diversity in young children and to help them feel pride in who they are and the special unique qualities they bring to the world. In addition, we can help children appreciate the different unique and special qualities of others. To assist children in their growth of valuing diversity try some fun ideas:

Family ethnic traditions

Start by sharing family ethnic traditions. Holidays and religious or ethnic festivities teach children about their past and provide warm, supportive, family memories for children.

1. Record oral histories. Talk with grandparents, aunts and uncles about their experiences and the recollections their parents told them. Use a tape recorder. Share the similarities and differences of a child’s life years ago and a child’s life today.
2. Keep a scrapbook of your family’s country of origin. Include photographs of family members still living there, newspaper clippings of the area today, stamps, and drawings.
3. Visit the library to learn more about the country your family came from. Share stories and pictures. Listen to older members of your family tell fables and legends that were told to them. Write them down to share with children.
4. Learn some of the language of your family’s country. Encourage children to learn special words and phrases.
5. Enjoy the music of your homeland and share these tunes with your children. Teach your children special songs to sing at holiday and other special times. Learn the dances and games.
6. Use traditional family recipes and other recipes from your country. Talk about where the foods came from and how

they were served. Attend traditional festivities with others who share your historic roots. If possible, go berry picking together and participate in other traditional food-gathering practices.

7. Explore maps and a globe together with other family members. Talk about how your family came to this country, and the neighboring countries that they or others have visited.

Unique qualities of each individual

While groups of people within a community may look similar in some of the ways they eat, work, play, live, and dress, vast differences exist in how people feel, believe, and act. Help children value the special unique qualities of each individual – even within a common cultural heritage, group of friends, or family.

1. Talk about learning styles. Some people learn best by listening, some by seeing, and others by experiencing. Talk about family members and the special ways they learn best.
2. Talk about favorites. People have favorite foods, activities and talents that make them special. Talk about family members and their special qualities.
3. Share books with children about different people: people from other lands, people who work in other occupations, and people who have other special interests and abilities.

4. Talk with young children about differences that come with growth. Discuss how different people of varying ages have distinct abilities and interests.
5. Share “first” stories with children. Talk about their first word, their first party, their first steps, their first solid food, something they did that made the family laugh, and their first pet experiences.
6. Share your special abilities with your family, friends, and others. Talk about the different abilities that exist within a family. Encourage hobbies that explore interests, favorite kinds of play, and special talents.
7. Explore the culture of your community with young children. Visit a museum, store, places of work, and community center. Look at things that people used long ago. Talk about relevant aspects of the village history and life today (such as, how did the community get water before the current water supply)? Attend the cultural festivities of the community with other family members.

Weaving a little respect of diversity into the fabric of ordinary life can be very rewarding. Not only will children grow in their understanding and appreciation for who they are, but also in their understanding and appreciation for one another. “Look, Mom, we both drew a picture – but his is red and mine’s blue!” takes on new and richer meaning.

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