

## All children and families deserve respect

Your family is multiracial. Your mom is white and your dad is Asian. Your dad's birthday is today and you would like to have a birthday party for him in the dollhouse, but none of the "dad" dolls in the dollhouse look like your dad. How would you feel?

Your teacher announces that Mother's Day is next week and everyone will make a special picture to take home to give to his or her mother. You have two dads and no mother. How would you feel?

Your after-school club is starting a project to learn about parents' favorite childhood activities and compare them to favorite activities today. Everyone worked together to write a list of questions to take home to ask their dads and a separate list to ask their moms. Your dad is in jail and you rarely get to talk with him. How would you feel?

Your teacher reads a book about different types of families during group time today. The book has pictures and tells of many combinations of moms, dads, and children that make families. The book doesn't have pictures of families with grandparents. The people in your family are Grandma, Grandpa, you, and your dog. How would you feel?



Children's identities and sense of self are tied to their families. Research shows that children thrive when families are involved in their child care setting or school and when early childhood and after-school professionals have positive relationships with children's families. High quality professionals who work with children and youth understand that their work involves caring for each child and the child's family.



The ways that professionals react to children and their families impacts the ways that children think about themselves

and their families. It can be easy for professionals to make incorrect assumptions and let personal biases affect what they say and how they treat others.

Twenty years ago the answer to the question, "What is family?" would have been the definition of the traditional

or nuclear family: two biological parents of the same race and their children living together in the same household. The traditional nuclear family still exists, but only for approximately half of all families with children under age eighteen.

Times have changed and so has the definition of family. Families today may have one parent with children; two parents who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transsexual; one or two parents with adopted children or children in foster care; racially mixed parents and their children;



stepparents and stepchildren; unmarried parents with children; grandparents raising grandchildren; and other combinations of parents and children.

A professional's own beliefs, attitudes, and personal experiences of what makes a family can be challenged as she recognizes and accepts the wide range of nontraditional families. Beliefs and attitudes may need to stretch to get to know and fully accept all children from all types of families.

The end goal is to create a place where all children and families feel respected, welcomed, and where children and families are invited to build a community, instead of being asked to "fit in."

"Other things may change us, but we start and end with family." – Anthony Brandt

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