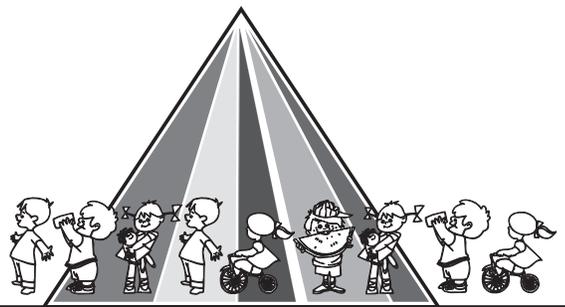


# Mealtime Memo

## FOR CHILD CARE



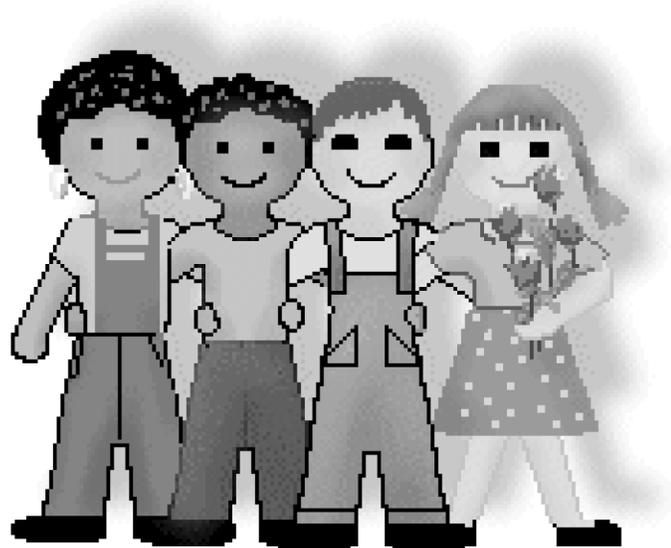
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## Celebrating Diversity, Nurturing Respect

### It's a world of differences

As our world becomes increasingly diverse, we must help children get along with others from different races, groups, and backgrounds.

“Diversity” means “variety,” the wide range of differences between and among individuals and cultures.



### Be a positive role model

Children become aware of the attitudes and bias of their family, friends, and caregivers at an early age.

- How comfortable do you feel with people of different races or cultures?
- How about people who have a handicap or disability?
- How comfortable do you feel talking about differences in religious beliefs or child rearing practices?
- What do you know about the cultural backgrounds of the families and children in your care? How could you find out more?

Awareness and knowledge are skills we can use to respect and appreciate diversity.

### Children are our best teachers

Children provide wonderful opportunities for discussing diversity because they forthrightly ask a lot of questions.

“Why is that girl’s hair so curly?” “Why does that boy have such dark skin?” “Why is that lady wearing that funny outfit?”

Noticing differences is natural; it only becomes a problem if a negative value is attached to the difference.

You can use the children’s questions and incidents that may happen during the day as an opening to talk about differences and about being fair and kind in their dealings with each other.

### How do you teach children about respect?

- Help children feel good about themselves. Children who have poor self-images are more likely to develop prejudices.
- Encourage them to see strengths in themselves and others.
- Talk about “stereotypes” – judgments made about another based on their physical appearance or cultural heritage. Talk about how unfair such judgments are.
- Discuss any hurtful incidents that happen. Let the child find solutions. Encourage the child to think about how the other person might be feeling.
- Make “no teasing and no name-calling” a firm rule. Often young children do not know the meaning of the words that they use, but they do know that certain words will get a reaction from others. Children need to learn that such language can hurt. Putting others down hurts the other’s feelings and does not help the child feel better about himself.



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## Provide a culturally diverse environment

One way to celebrate diversity is to literally make it the background for every day activities.

- Use wall-art and posters featuring different racial and cultural groups, sex, and physical abilities. Show people not just in traditional garb but also in everyday clothing.
  - Provide books that show a wide variety of people at work and play. Choose images that show a balance of men and women doing similar jobs, and include people with disabilities.
  - Provide dolls, particularly baby dolls to care for, of different skin and hair colors.
  - Provide dress-ups and items for dramatic play that depict both male and female and a balance of cultures.
  - Provide paints, crayons, and other art materials that can be used to show a wide range of skin tones.
  - Enjoy ethnic celebrations, art, food, and music from different cultures. Play music from many different cultures and let children dance and sing along.
- Make appreciating individual styles and cultural differences part of everyday routine.

## Celebrate diversity with the holidays!

Holidays are another way to learn about cultural differences. Different cultures celebrate in different ways. Within cultures, individual families frequently have their own unique traditions as well. Be sensitive to different customs and traditions children may have.

All cultures celebrate with food. Let the children help with planning the food and activities for special celebrations as much as possible. If the children have been actively involved in planning, it increases their excitement and enjoyment and they are more apt to try foods that are new for them.



## No big deal

When diversity is celebrated everyday in many different ways, children see differences as “no big deal.”

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USDA Cooperative Extension System's National Network for Child Care Web site at <http://www.nncc.org>

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