

**Children’s Corner**

**Learning About Each Other’s December Holidays**

In our multicultural society, Christmas, although important to many people, is still not everyone’s holiday. For children and families from other groups—be they Jewish, Buddhist, Muslim, pagan, atheist, or anything else—Christmas can be a difficult time. For almost all families, the commercialization of the holiday, with its pressures to buy, decorate, and entertain, adds tremendous complication to already overloaded and busy lives. How can you address Christmas in your program in a way that is supportive and fair to all? (NAEYC)

Holiday celebrations can be wonderful opportunities for children to learn about the traditions and values that are cherished parts of people's lives. Children and their families celebrate holidays in many ways. The goal is to find ways to celebrate and respect the cultures represented by all the children. (NAEYC)

Begin by finding out from families and staff members which December holiday(s), if any, they celebrate, and what they might like to share about their personal tradition. If the people in your program are culturally diverse, this could mean you will be learning about a number of different December holidays. In a more culturally homogeneous class, it could mean learning about the fascinating variety of ways families all celebrate the same holiday.

Make a plan for how you will teach about the various traditions in your classroom. For example, have a school party with every family sharing a special holiday food, song, or ritual. If family members cannot come into the classroom, ask them for a story or song that you can share with the children yourself. Help the children explore the similarities and differences among family holiday celebrations—whether it is the same holiday or different holidays. The aim is for children to understand that “Families are different. Each family’s way of celebrating works for them.” (NAEYC)

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) believes that decisions about what holidays to celebrate are best made together by teachers, parents, and children. Families and staff are more comfortable when both have expressed their views and understand how a decision has been reached. Ask families what holidays they celebrate and what traditions to they follow.

**Here are suggestions for celebrating holidays in ways that are developmentally appropriate and respectful of everyone:**

* Find out first –
  + What do I know about what holidays my families celebrate?
  + What can each family share with us?
  + How can we celebrate together?
* When planning holiday activities, ask yourself –
  + Are the activities meaningful to the children?
  + Are their needs and interests being met?
  + Is the activity a valuable use of children's time?
  + Is this holiday important to children in the program?
* Be very sensitive to children who celebrate differently from the majority of the children. It is the teacher’s responsibility (not the child’s) to explain that all holidays are not the same.
* Activities are connected to specific children and families in the group. This helps children understand holiday activities in the context of people's daily lives. Children should have the chance to explore the meaning and significance of each holiday that families celebrate.
* Children are encouraged to share feelings and information about the holidays they celebrate. This will help them make the distinction between learning about another person's holiday rituals and celebrating one's own holidays. Children may participate as "guests" in holiday activities that are not part of their own cultures. Children should recognize that everyone's holidays are culturally significant and meaningful.
* Curriculum demonstrates respect for everyone's customs. If children are observing different holidays at the same time, the values and traditions of each child's culture should be acknowledged.
* Parents and teachers work together to plan strategies for children whose families' beliefs do not permit participation in holiday celebrations. Families should take part in creating satisfactory alternatives for the child within the classroom.
* Focus is on meaningful ways to celebrate holidays without spending money. Families may find certain holidays stressful due to the amount of commercialization and the media pressure to buy gifts. Teachers can help by showing children that homemade costumes and gifts are very special, and celebrating can be joyful without gifts.
* Consider doing less in your classroom and program. December is such a busy time. Children often are getting less sleep, are over stimulated from everything they are seeing and doing, and are eating more sweets. Calm days with you away from all the hurrying and doing may be more important to them than any art project or activity you could design.

**Resources:**

The National Association for the Education of Young Children

* Celebrating Holidays in Early Childhood
* December Holidays: The Anti-Bias Curriculum

Hunt, M. 1995. Let there be light! Lighting up the holidays for young children. Young Children 51(5): 79-81.

McCracken, J.B. 1993. Valuing diversity: The primary years. Washington, DC:NAEYC. #238/$7.

https://www.pbs.org/kcts/preciouschildren/diversity/read\_celebrating.html