

Children's Corner

Celebrating Thanksgiving With Children

Thanksgiving is a wonderful holiday. Families and friends come together for good company and a feast of our favorite holiday dishes. We take time to think about the things in our lives for which we are thankful.

However, November can be a month where children of all ages are kept very busy doing all kinds of projects that do not teach anything meaningful about the holiday. What does a handprint turkey teach us about turkeys? Where is the creativity when all of the children's projects look the same? And turkey may not have even been eaten at the first Thanksgiving dinner.

We also must think about that many Thanksgiving projects give children "disrespectful and stereotypical messages about Native Americans." Click here to read the "Anti-Bias Thanksgiving" - <http://bit.ly/11RhOTd>.

If Thanksgiving is not about gluing feathers on paper turkeys and "Indians," then what can we do with children to help them to learn about the holiday?

The first question to ask yourself is what can children at each age understand about Thanksgiving. Then ask yourself what is the best way to teach that. Lastly, ask yourself is Thanksgiving about turkeys or something else much more important. Then focus on that. Don't think it is your responsibility to teach even the youngest child all about the holiday. Each year, as they grow, there will be another opportunity to learn more.

Try focusing on these areas.

Gratitude – when we focus on all the good around us – Every day is a day to give thanks.

- ❖ Say "thank you" all the time to children and the adults in your program. This is how
- ❖ When children are enjoying an activity, point out that they could be thank you for paint, play dough, blocks, etc.
- ❖ Point out how thank you everyone is to have a delicious snack or meal.
- ❖ Tell children and their parents that you are thankful they came to the program that day.
- ❖ For preschool age children create a "Gratitude Chart." Every time a child or adult says they are thankful for anything, write it on the chart. Every so often read the growing list to the children.

The food – Thanksgiving is a celebration of food unique to the Americas.

- ❖ Make applesauce (sugar-free).
- ❖ Take apart a pumpkin and roast the seeds (Be careful – seeds can be a choking hazard). If they are too young to eat the seeds, children can feel the change from very gooey wet to very dry.
- ❖ Plant popcorn and grow your own corn plants (Hint – soak the kernels overnight to soften them.)
- ❖ Ask families to share their special family recipes. Have a family pot-luck dinner and share what everyone's culture brings to the feast.

The story

- ❖ For older children, the Thanksgiving story is about one group of people helping another who had big problems. The Pilgrims would not have survived without the help of the local Wampanoag tribe.
- ❖ For younger children, it is a time for us to think about how thankful we are and to come together with families and friends to celebrate this.
- ❖ **DO NOT** have children dress up as Native Americans or build a teepee in which the Wampanoags did not live.
- ❖ Today's story - Many early childhood programs serve increasing numbers of recent immigrant children and families. Since Thanksgiving honors the Pilgrims (European immigrants who settled in what is now New England), the holiday is a good time to counter misinformation and negative attitudes children may have about today's "pilgrims."