



Anti-Bias Education: The December Holidays



Many early childhood educators have questions about how to approach the holidays. *Anti-Bias Education for Young Children and Ourselves* offers useful information and tools for teachers as they consider the specific families in their program. The following text is excerpted from the chapter titled “Learning About Holidays & Fairness.”

Christmas

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?

Learning about each other’s December holidays

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.”

If you use this approach, be very sensitive to children who celebrate differently from the majority of the children. Otherwise, it is easy for their holiday to sound like just a variation on the dominant culture’s event. It is the teacher’s responsibility (not the child’s) to clarify the distinctions. For example, in one school, most of the children told stories about their Christmas holiday customs; the one Jewish child talked about

Chanukah. Later, several of the children (and some adults) wished the child's family a "happy Jewish Christmas."