

Discussing cultural diversity



with your child

**For more information
see the Australian Human
Rights Commission's
website:**

[www.humanrights.gov.au/education/
early-childhood/building-belonging](http://www.humanrights.gov.au/education/early-childhood/building-belonging)

**Building belonging: A toolkit for early childhood educators
on cultural diversity and responding to prejudice (2016)**

Discussing cultural diversity with your child

Children are keen observers and are naturally interested in the different people and cultures they see in the world around them.

In Australia, we live in a highly diverse, multicultural society, with a population that identifies with over 270 different ancestries. Australia is also home to the world's oldest continuous cultures, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures.

Encouraging your child to understand and appreciate the different cultures they encounter as they grow up will help them build positive relationships and thrive in Australia's diverse society. Talking to your child about cultural diversity and difference also provides a great opportunity for them to develop empathy and respect for others.

Here are some things you can do with your child:

- ▶ **Explore similarities and differences between people**, emphasising how we are all special and unique in our own way, and also share many things in common. Encourage your child to explore friendships with children from different racial, cultural and religious backgrounds.
- ▶ **Discuss and challenge stereotypes**. Racial and cultural stereotypes can be found in many places, from the media to everyday interactions. If left unchecked, these messages can encourage prejudiced attitudes. Discuss and challenge stereotypes with your child and provide them with picture books, toys, games and films that show a range of culturally and racially diverse characters in positive, non-stereotypical roles.
- ▶ **Find out more about other cultures**. Discover new things about different cultures through art, music, stories, museums, libraries and festivals. Learn about different cultural celebrations and traditions, and explore the common beliefs and values that can be found across cultures.

Tips for tackling tricky questions:

Young children ask hundreds of questions every day. Knowing how to answer all of these questions can be hard, especially when they have to do with complex and sometimes sensitive topics around cultural diversity.

While there are no simple answers that will fit every situation, here are some general tips to help you have constructive conversations about cultural diversity with your child.

- ▶ **Be honest**. Answer questions simply and factually. You don't have to be an expert, but make sure to give the correct information. If you don't know the answer to a question, this is a great opportunity to share a learning experience and find out more together!
- ▶ **Be open**. It's important not to avoid or ignore tricky questions or comments. Instead, find out more about why your child is asking. Ask if there is something that they have seen or experienced that has prompted them to think about these issues. Share some of your own experiences as well. Discussing personal stories together is a great way to talk about values, share ideas and invite questions from your child.
- ▶ **Be a role model**. Children learn the most from our words and actions so it's important to lead by example. Talk about your own relationships with other people and the similarities and differences that bring value to these relationships.

