

## **Promoting equality and diversity in the early years**

In order to offer equality of opportunity we need to recognise that we are all individual and different. Celebrating our differences and culture provides us with the opportunity to recognise the rich experiences that can enhance all our lives. Diversity is not only linked to race, it includes disability, sexuality, age, colour, creed, marital status, ethnic or national origin, political belief, class gender and religion. However, the past few weeks has seen protests across the world against racism faced by the black community.

### **Spotlight on... Black lives matter**

The early years is where we can make a lasting difference to children's views of the world, the people and the communities within it. In order that the next generation does not experience racism and so that early years educators effectively and confidently challenge racism, we need to take time to actively listen and reflect. Recognising our own prejudices and privileges as early educators through ongoing dialogues, respectful and honest conversations with colleagues, is a starting point and can help to support a change in policy and practice.

Points to consider to support reflective practice:

- How often do you have honest and respectful conversations with colleagues focusing on diversity but in particular race?
- How do you gather cultural information on every child on entry so that you can ensure you are ready and truly welcoming to each individual and their family?
- How do you welcome, value and include all children and their families?
- How do you support new families who come to your setting?
- How do you communicate effectively with all children and their families?
- How do you recruit committee members and staff to promote a diverse representation?
- What strategies do you employ to demonstrate a proactive approach to identifying and removing barriers?
- How do you encourage children to think about difference positively?
- How do you plan and offer activities that encourage children to see themselves as unique?
- How do you use ethnically diverse artefacts meaningfully in everyday ways that represent the culture and backgrounds of the children attending your setting?
- How do you share books to stimulate conversation about children's own experiences so that this is not a tokenistic gesture?
- How are different events and festivals celebrated in your setting?

It is important that we can have open conversations to support children's thinking and discussion about racism, race, identity and prejudice. Children's books can be a powerful way to talk about these. 'Own voices' books/narratives are particularly important so that children of colour see themselves represented in books and learn that people who look like them matter and that they are seen. These type of stories can help all children gain a truly accurate and authentic understanding of identities, perspectives and experiences that are different from their own.

## Want to know more?

### Further reading:

- Borkett, P. (2018) Cultural diversity and inclusion in early years education Routledge
- Actually, it does matter- Laura Henry-Allain (Nursery World article 8 June 2020)
- Kate Moxley has written an article about Anti-Racism in the early years, to find out more visit the [wellness for all website](#).

## Resources and ideas

These suggestions below will help you talk with young children about race and to promote diversity in the early years:

- Black stories matter is a list of children books for all ages by Black authors and illustrators and about incredible Black people in history on the [Seven Stories website](#)
- [The National Literacy Trust website](#) have brought together a series of book lists for children and young people of all ages to share black stories and promote black voices. All books featured in the book lists are by black authors and/or illustrators and exemplify the principles of the Black Lives Matter movement. The age-appropriate book lists have been curated to help children, young people, families and teachers explore race, identity, family and community.
- Hair love is a book by Matthew A Cherry and can be viewed as a short animated film on the [YouTube website](#) made by Sony pictures. The book is also on the UK Penguin website featuring the author and illustrator. This book tells the story of a father learning to do his daughter's hair while her mother is away. Illustrated by Vashti Harrison, it's a delightful tribute to dads and daughters and encourages children to embrace their natural hair and feel confident in who they are.
- The [Laura Henry Consultancy website](#) introduces a series of books called Jo-Jo and Gran-Gran written by Laura Henry-Allain based on a pre-school child and her grandmother. Laura Henry- Allain is one of the vice presidents of Early Education. This series of books is also now being shown on the [BBC iPlayer CBeebies website](#).
- On the [Tata Storytime website](#) watch stories authored and read by African, Caribbean and African American authors. Tata Storytime is an online children's TV programme created by actor/producer Okezie Morro.

- The [Persona Dolls website](#) offers training and resources to support you to raise equality and inclusion matters in your classroom or group. Using the Persona Doll Approach; the focus is on fairness, equality and inclusion. Children's communication and listening skills are developed, the Persona Doll stories encourage empathy, critical thinking and problem solving. The Dolls are tools for implementing 'British' values and the Prevent Duty.
- [Tinkergarten website](#) recommends 24 books broken down by age with black protagonists by black authors.
- Invite children to bring in a Family book made up of photographs of their family and some explanations of the ways that they live and the children grow up.
- Opportunities for paint mixing with the use of mirrors to prompt discussion about skin/hair colour/facial features/clothing in order to celebrate similarities and differences.