



The Meeting House Inc

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Inclusive Practice

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Aim: To ensure that the preschool provides an inclusive program that: allows all children genuine opportunities to contribute and be part of the group; takes into account the differing abilities and skills of the children when planning and implementing the program; fosters the development of a feeling of belonging, being and becoming and, embraces and demonstrates the valuing of diversity. Inclusion fosters this diversity and helps overcome any barriers that may exist, ensuring that every child experiences a quality early childhood education and care.

Background Information: Children attending the Preschool, and their families, may come from a diverse spectrum of backgrounds, cultures and experiences. It is recognised that “True inclusion is the hallmark of High Quality Child Care”^{**} and that programs should promote the importance of fairness and equity in an unbiased and positive environment.

Resources: National Childcare Accreditation Council, QIAS Quality Practices Guild, 2005, Inclusion in a Quality Issue, Resources Unit for Children with Special Needs, Inc. Issue 4, 1999; What is Anti-Bias Education? The Anti-Defamation League, 1999; Ten Reasons for Inclusion, Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education: Gender Equity, Early Childhood Australia Inc., 2004; Teacher Diverse Learners – Culturally Relevant Teaching, The Education Alliance, Brown University; Engagement Checklist, University of Kansas, Circle of Inclusion Project, 2002; Guidelines for Challenging Racism and other forms of Oppression, Patti DeRosa of Cross-Cultural Consultation. Early Years Learning Framework, My Time Out Place Framework.

Note: In this policy “staff” refers to staff employed by The Meeting House Inc.

Practice:

Inclusive Practices generally refer to strategies for reducing bias and promoting values of fairness and equity. Positive inclusive practices may be demonstrated in the program that reflects:

- Gender equity
- Respect and awareness for diversity of abilities
- Respect and awareness for diversity of cultures
- Respect and awareness for diversity of religion
- Respect and awareness for diversity of experiences and backgrounds
- Awareness of personal bias, values and beliefs.

Staff Responsibilities

Staff are positive role models for children of all ages and therefore should:

- Reflect on their own values, beliefs, background and experiences and the impact of these on their interactions with children, staff and parents;
- Engender an atmosphere of acceptance;
- Interact with children and families without bias or prejudice;

- Support children to recognise and reject biased or unfair behaviour towards others;
- Ensure they are aware of attributes of children's cultures, backgrounds, and particular needs;
- Communicate with parents to understand their expectations, values and beliefs;
- Access training and professional development opportunities to increase their understanding and awareness of anti-bias and equity issues and strategies.

The Program

The program should:

- Provide for planned experiences that promote discussion and awareness of diversity, equality and acceptance;
- Encourage all children to have equal access to all activities in a way that is supportive of their developmental level, skills, knowledge and understanding;
- Reflect positive language;
- Be displayed in a manner that supports a variety of learning styles to enhance parent's understanding of the program;
- Encourage involvement from parents and the extended family.

The Physical Environment

Staff will ensure that:

- Images of people from diverse cultures and religions, and people of different ages and abilities are reflected in
 - Picture books
 - Play equipment such as home corner and puzzles
 - Picture displays such as posters, artwork, photographs and other media
 - Language used by staff and encouraged for use by the children
- Images that challenge traditional gendered identities and give positive messages about gender equity are reflected in
 - Picture books
 - Play equipment such as home corner and puzzles
 - Activities that all children are encouraged to participate in
 - Language used by staff and encouraged for use by the children
- Activities such as dramatic play and stories are included to encourage children to empathise with others and to challenge stereotypes and bias
- Discussions are held with children to allow them to explore their own thoughts, stereotypes and bias.

Parents and Families

Parents will be provided with information about how the program is supporting the development of anti-bias ethics amongst the children.

Parents are considered an important resource for staff to obtain information about a child's culture, religion, and other beliefs.

The parent, families and staff relationship should:

- Provide enthusiastic exchange of information relating to family values and culture
- Foster a sense of collaboration
- Develop a sense of group identity
- Provide opportunities for parents, families and staff to participate in the growth, development and well-being of the children's lives.

Staff will respectfully acknowledge that parents are the child's first teachers, therefore constant communication between parents and staff is identified as an important aspect in a child's ability to develop an awareness of fairness and equity.