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My experiences of working with children and families from diverse cultural backgrounds stem from directing EC services in Sydney, Darwin and Cairns as well as years of experience in various roles working with Indigenous EC services. Some immigrant and refugee families come from countries that don't have formal EC services like we have in Australia. Generally, when families are not familiar with EC settings it may mean they are less likely to engage with educators about their child's learning. For example, language barriers may prevent some parents from seeking the information and supports they need. Things get more complicated when vulnerable families present with complex issues and require special supports both within and outside the EC setting.

Another issue, while not exclusive to culturally diverse families, is that of engaging fathers. In many cultures it is still women who are seen in that traditional role of looking after children. Getting dads more involved in their child's learning is often best tackled by letting mums know that dad is welcome and his role is equally valid and valued by the service. It is good for dads to see representations of men in the service, so I always encourage families to bring in photos of fathers and their children engaged at home and put them up. It's good to try and make fathers feel more comfortable participating in the service by asking them how they would like to be better involved with their children's learning and education.

Working well with culturally diverse families also has benefits for everyone. If you run a service that is capable of encouraging all children to be tolerant and develop positive attitudes towards people of any origin or background, then that in itself is a very good thing long-term. After all, today's children in EC settings will grow up to live, go to school and work with people from diverse cultures; respecting each other's identities is the foundation of a harmonious multicultural society.

EC leaders wanting to work better with culturally diverse families may like to consider the following:

- *Train all staff to be culturally competent.* Children and families will have a better experience if all educators are equipped with appropriate knowledge and understanding of how to work in respectful and culturally inclusive ways.
- *Address families' language barriers.* The strategies you choose are context dependent. In some settings, I've found employing bilingual staff to be hugely beneficial. Making resources available to families in their language is also something parents truly appreciate. In Indigenous settings, I simply could not get by without the contribution of the community's cultural support workers.
- *Place a high value on creating a sense of belonging.* When you go out of your way to ensure that a child's culture is respected and celebrated, the service's relationship with the family will grow. There's a lot you can do to make sure children and families feel welcome and that they belong at your service. For example, make sure the program is flexible in meeting a family's unique needs. Ensure the links are there to community services and agencies that can assist families and make things easier, and ensure the child's culture is encouraged and represented within the service.