

Best Practice Guidelines for Holiday Celebrations

Child care programs vary on how they approach holidays in their instruction and activities. Some don't include them at all, others create special program holidays, and still others choose a diverse range of holidays to engage children and families in. Child care professionals must make intentional decisions on how to celebrate holidays, just as they make decisions on what snacks to serve or what physical activities to include in their daily routines.

Here are a few recommendations from NAEYC:

Emphasize children learning about each other's family holidays, rather than celebrating them

Holiday celebrations are perfect opportunities for children to learn about our multicultural world and share traditions and values that are cherished parts of people's lives. ([Check out this video: Kids Talk About Holidays](#)) Learning about a holiday means teaching children about what the holiday means to different people and about the many different ways those families who honor the holiday celebrate it. The lesson that a friend celebrates different holidays, or the same holiday in a different way, and is still a friend, is the most important lesson for appreciating differences. It is the concept that difference does not mean better or worse.

Respect all families' holiday traditions and their specific ways of celebrating – or not celebrating

As children live and play with each other, they express ideas about each other. You may hear comments about different abilities or differences in ethnicity and culture. These observations are a valid starting point to important conversations. Using children's comments to introduce diversity allows for you to respond to children's thoughts and ideas as they occur.

Understanding the different ways people do and don't celebrate; learning accurate, respectful vocabulary about holidays; broadening children's worldview of what a holiday is are all powerful learning outcomes for children. Activities that foster these objectives prepare children to live in a diverse society with empathy and respect while cherishing their own beliefs.

Consider creating unique program celebrations

In addition to, or instead of, celebrating the holidays observed by children and their families, some programs create their own celebrations throughout the year. This approach makes it possible for every child to participate in shared special days with their friends. They also can build school–family connections and community within a program. Celebrations can be inclusive—for example, “Honoring Our Families” virtual get-togethers; “Thanking the People Who Make Our School Work” (cook, janitor, bus driver, etc.) days; or occasions for “Recognizing Family and Neighborhood Heroes.”

Celebrations can also be whimsical and playful—for example, “Bring Books Alive Day” (making and wearing costumes from books, eating foods from favorite books, acting out favorite stories); “Pajama Day” (wearing pjs and slippers to school, telling bedtime stories, sharing family bedtime rituals); or “Backwards Day” (wearing clothes backwards, doing things in reverse order of an ordinary day). They can also be used to mark the passing of the year with an annual end-of-year celebration. Some schools also have moving on ceremonies or “You're Off to Kindergarten” parties for children transitioning out of the programs.

Ensure that the activities continue to be developmentally appropriate

Children learn best by seeing, doing, and being a part of a new experience. Often our attempt at celebrating holidays with young children includes making crafts or artwork. When selecting art materials for a holiday celebration, look carefully at what the children are doing to ensure that the activities are developmentally appropriate and open-ended. Consider the following: Who really does the artwork? Are the crafts too hard for the children to complete themselves? Do the holiday crafts help children's creativity and use of materials or do they reflect an adult's idea of holiday decorations?

For adults, it is easy to become stressed over the many details of holiday celebrations and traditions. Instead, we can help children develop healthy behaviors and attitudes toward the holidays by giving them the opportunity to experience the true spirit of these special days.

Celebrating the Holidays During a Pandemic



The holidays are traditionally a time to come together with loved ones. For those who look forward to celebrating, this year might feel particularly hard. If children are having a tough time adjusting to changes in the program or in their family's plans, talk it out. Let them know you understand and that you feel disappointed, too. Encourage them to share their thoughts and feelings and help them understand why things may be a little different this year.

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Spend some time thinking about which holiday rituals are most meaningful to your program, and then come up with some ideas for how to continue those traditions in a new way. The idea is to think about recreating what you're used to doing in a way that's safer during the pandemic but still allows you to create special memories.

Here are a few ideas for creating new traditions to get you started:

Take turns hosting mini holiday celebrations

Spread out your holiday celebrations with several short, online celebrations. For example, one teacher could host a time to sing holiday songs, another could host a dance party, and another could host a time for storytelling.

([Diverse Holiday Children's Books](#) and [a few additional favorites](#))

Work together on a shared project

Start a crafting chain for a holiday-related project and share with other classrooms or child care programs. For example, you could make a holiday ornament or other holiday decoration, and send it to another classroom or program, and then have them add to it and send it on to the next classroom or program. Collectively working on a project can help us feel closer to one another when we're physically apart.

Document what you're doing

Whether you're creating new traditions or celebrating in the ways you always have, keep a journal or take photos or videos to document this year's experience. This will give you the chance to share your new traditions with others. Also, it might be nice to look back years from now and remember.

This year has been hard. This might be an opportunity to scale down and focus on the parts of the holiday that are most meaningful to you. Give yourself permission to take it easy this year. Instead, focus on staying connected and staying safe.