



## Affirming Cultural Identity

### Caregivers will learn

- What healthy cultural identity is and why it is important.
- How children develop healthy cultural identity and as a caregiver how to foster it through everyday activities.
- How to be intentional about ways to affirm cultural identity in children.

### Key Messages

- Healthy cultural identity means having a positive connection to, understanding of, and respect of one's culture(s) and that of others. It relates to feeling a sense of belonging and pride about one's background. It is an important part of how a person views themselves, their family, and their values. Culture connects us to our history. Children can stay connected to their rich histories by developing their cultural identity. Culture is comprised of the arts, social interactions, and customs that include some of the following:
  - Food
  - Fashion
  - Gestures
  - Language
  - Knowledge and beliefs
  - Social activities and crafts
  - Norms, rituals, and traditions
- During the early years young children develop their sense of identity and belonging. It is important as a caregiver to help foster and affirm cultural identity so that the child can have a foundation that they can continue to develop throughout their life. Cultivating cultural identity early on and creating the link sooner is easier than connecting them to it later.
- There are many ways to affirm healthy cultural identity:
  - Eat and cook cultural foods together
  - Speak, read, and write in home language(s)
  - Read specific cultural books that relate to the child's background

### For more information click links below

[Celebrating Tradition and Cultural Awareness with Young Children](#)

### Children's Books

[Lee and Low Books](#)

[Mahogany Books](#)

[Social Justice Children's Books](#)

[We Need Diverse Books](#)

### Tools for Selecting Children's Books

[Guide for Selecting Anti-Bias Children's Books](#)

[Selecting and Rating Titles for Social Justice Books](#)

### Resources & Handouts in Kaleidoscope Play & Learn Lesson Guide

*Affirming Cultural Identity Expanded Book List*

### Cultural Considerations

As a facilitator, be respectful of the different cultural identities that caregivers want

- Listen to music and sing in home language(s)
- Immerse in different forms of age appropriate media (shows, films, radio, etc) in home language(s) and/or of the child’s background
- Engage the child in cultural toys, games, and dances like ones that the child’s caregivers enjoyed when they were young
- Talk about where the child and family come from and share photographs to help guide the conversation
- Wear and embrace cultural clothing and accessories
- Attend cultural gatherings and events among family, friends, and within the greater local community
- Participate in cultural holidays and traditions daily and year-round, including cultural norms and rituals such as indoor etiquette, cultural greetings, mourning, etc.
- As a caregiver, be a role model and cultivate a healthy cultural identity together with the child and participate alongside them
- Share personal experiences as a caregiver to show the child that others are connected to the culture as well
- Connect the child to other older adults and elders who can also share their stories to foster intergenerational bonding and the passing down of culture and stories from one generation to the next (oral story telling traditions)
- Create a book or box full of photographs of relatives; the child’s drawings of family and home; family cultural items like clothing and toys, etc. that the child can access to look at, think about, play with, and celebrate

to impart on the children that they care for and the ways that they want to foster it. Provide suggestions on how they might want to consider doing this but ultimately leave it up to them to decide what they want to do. Some families may be balancing fostering cultural identity with embracing American traditions and norms, specifically perhaps if they are resettling in the US. Be sensitive to this and understand that caregivers make decisions on what they think is best for their child.

**Other Tips**

Make a list with caregivers on ideas about how to affirm healthy cultural identity and hang it up on the wall.

**School-Readiness Connection**

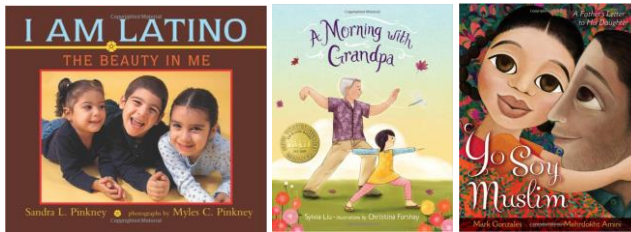
Having a healthy cultural identity and a sense of belonging helps children with their confidence and understanding of who they are at home, at school, and in society.

**Coordinated Group Activity**

**Story Time**

1. Share the Key Messages with caregivers and explain to all that you will be reading a book together that will help us think about our identities, culture, and our sense of belonging. Ask participants if they would like to describe what having a cultural identity means to them.
2. Read or tell the story. Choose from one of the books below or bring another book of your choice. See the *Affirming Cultural*

*Identity Expanded Book List* for more suggestions. Visit your local library for books in other languages and for more children’s literature written by authors of color. Another option is to offer an opportunity for anyone in the group who may want to share the story of how their family came to the United States or to the area that they currently live. Let participants know that sharing is optional and it is okay if they prefer not to.



- *I Am Latino: The Beauty in Me* by Sandra L. Pinkney
- *A Morning with Grandpa* by Sylvia Liu
- *Yo Soy Muslim: A Father's Letter to His Daughter* by Mark Gonzales
- *Last Stop on Market Street* by Matt de la Pena
- *My Mother's Sari* by Sandhya Rao

3. Discuss: Talk about how this is important for everyone, no matter where they come from. Ask the whole group if anyone wants to share their background like family traditions they have, languages they speak, foods they like to eat. Open it up to everyone to share and do not single out anyone. Be clear that it is okay if people prefer not to share as it is an optional activity. Some may not feel comfortable doing so. Let caregivers know that developing affirming cultural identity among children can be done in small ways through everyday activities (see Key Messages). Inform them that small efforts like simply saying hello or goodnight in their home language everyday has an impact.

### Craft



Materials: Magazines; small pieces of fabric (all colors and patterns); popsicle sticks (or sticks from outside); construction paper; yarn; scissors; glue; color crayons or markers.

Ask caregivers and children to work together on this activity. Ask them to create something that represents who they are, who their family is,

or a representation of them. Encourage them to talk to others about what they are creating. Spread out the materials and encourage them to ask others to pass materials and engage in conversations.

Discuss: Ask participants if anyone wants to share what they created.

Virtual tip: if you are facilitating a live virtual group, invite participants to create something at home to represent who they are and to bring it to the group to share. Encourage them to use supplies they already have at home to make something (they can use whatever they like and have). Have participants share their creations with everyone on their screens.

### Welcome Book Activity



Materials: A binder; sheet protectors; paper; crayons; a camera.

Create cutout faces on a piece of paper. Invite participants to draw something from home that represents them on the cut-outs. Have each child take two photos, one with the mask on and one with it off. Print the photos. Take a blank piece of paper and paste the photo on each side. Underneath the picture of the child with the mask, write "Guess Who?" On the photo of them without the mask, write the child's name underneath it. Insert it into the sheet protector. Each time a new visitor enters the learning environment, invite them to do the same to create a visitor's book to demonstrate the various faces and people from different cultures who come to visit them over the course of the year. Facilitators can use this book as a tool for supporting children to be open and welcoming to all people from all walks of life.

Discuss: What are the items you drew? What are parts of people's culture such as cooking and instruments that are part of people's cultural identity?

### Portrait Activity



Materials: Variety of different drawing instruments (clay, crayons, finger painting, pencils, charcoal, chalk, oils, etc.)

Over the course of weeks, have children draw self-portraits of themselves and eventually of each other using different tools and instruments noted above. Use art to deepen children's understanding of the distinctive nature and richness of racial identity through the use

of different instruments that belong to different cultures and time periods. After each session, invite a conversation to study different features of the human face from wrinkles, expressions, hairlines, freckles and dive deeper after each session. In addition, gradually incorporate self-portraits of other artists from other cultures. Finally, invite families in to conduct portraits of each other to engage with them. This self-portrait study using different materials is an opportunity for children to express various aspects of themselves and their identities beyond the surface of their physical appearance. This is an opportunity for children to appreciate the broad spectrum of beauty in our diverse and multi-ethnic world.

Discuss: What did you notice about yourself and your friends around you during this activity? Why do you think this activity is important? What colors did you have to mix to get your skin color?

### **Child-Directed Play Activity**

#### **Infant to Pre-K**

Materials: items participants bring in.

Offer to participants the option to bring in games or toys related to their cultural identity to share with the group. This can be informal by placing these items at a station so children can enjoy unstructured play with them. If participants are interested, it can be a more formal show and tell during circle time. Invite them to share anything they would like—food, a piece of clothing, a photograph, a toy, a lesson on how to do a specific dance, a song, etc. Encourage caregivers to include their child in deciding what to share and presenting to the group about it.

Discuss: How do these items help their child affirm their cultural identity? Talk about the variety of items or information participants shared and how it is relevant to the many ways caregivers can approach building their child’s cultural identity.

### **Caregiver Relationship-Building**

Invite caregivers to share what they do to help build their child’s cultural identity. What do they do daily? What works well and what does not?

### **Caregiver Leadership**

Invite a caregiver volunteer to read the book during today’s Kaleidoscope Play and Learn session to the group and lead a discussion on tips to affirm healthy cultural identity.

### **Home Activity**

Encourage caregivers to implement one activity in their daily life related to exploring cultural identity.

**Check in for the Following Week**

Ask caregivers to share some stories about ways they have tried to affirm their child’s cultural identity.

**We are grateful for CiKeithia Pugh, Lupita Torrez, and Mike Browne for their anti-racist and anti-bias child development expertise and suggestions for this lesson guide. We also appreciate the children’s book recommendations contributed by Maren Ostergard and Susan Anderson-Newham.**