Title: Multicultural Principles in Early Intervention

Policy: Early Intervention services will be provided in a manner that shows awareness of and is responsive to the beliefs, interpersonal styles, attitudes, language and behavior of children and families who are referred for or are receiving services.

Definitions:

Culture: The framework that guides and binds life practices; not a rigidly prescribed set of behaviors of characteristics, but rather the framework through which actions are filtered or checked as individuals go about daily life. (Lynch & Hanson, 1992).

Cultural Competence: The ability to honor and respect those beliefs, interpersonal styles, attitudes, and behaviors both of families and multicultural staff. (Roberts, 1990)

Procedure:

1. Providers and agencies should develop and encourage staff development and training on multicultural principles and cultural competence. Some references and information are provided in this policy.

2. Elements of a culturally competent system include…
   - The ability to value diversity
   - The capacity for cultural self-assessment
   - A consciousness of the dynamic inherent when cultures interact
   - An organizational knowledge of culture and its issues
   - The ability to adapt to diversity
3. In early intervention, cultural issues affect almost everything we do with children and their families, from the first contact and evaluation, IFSP development and implementation, to how we measure progress and plan with families for their child’s transition at the age of 3.

- Language and communication differences can affect child performance.
- Child rearing expectations can deter or promote the development of skills and behaviors valued by the predominant culture.
- Families differ in a number of ways, including how the family is defined; who the family decision-makers are; beliefs about wellness and disability; and in childrearing practices.
- Social experiences valued by the family will have an affect on the interpersonal skills the child develops.
- Inaccurate assessment of a child strengths and needs can lead to mislabeling/misdiagnosis.
- Effective and culturally sensitive communication between the family and early intervention practitioners can lead to an intervention plan that is functional and one that honors the family’s vision and choices for their child.

Sources:
Anderson, M., & Goldberg, P. F. Cultural competence in screening and assessment: Implications for services to young children with special needs birth to age five; Chapel Hill, NC: National Early Childhood Technical Assistance System.

| Ideas for Improving Cross-Cultural Effectiveness |

Cross cultural effectiveness is characterized by positive attitudes about other cultures, openness to learning new beliefs and practices, and a willingness to try new ways of interacting and viewing the world. These key points may be used to enhance your work with all families in the community that your program serves.

1. Understand your own beliefs, values, attitudes, and practices, and how they are influenced by culture.
2. Gather culture specific information about individuals and groups whose culture is different from your own.
3. Use cultural guides (people who are bicultural and know the community) to help you learn and provide feedback on your interactions.
4. Participate in the life of other cultures in your community.
5. Learn some basic communications in the language of the families with whom you work.
6. Recognize differences in the communication styles of various cultures.
7. Learn to interpret nonverbal communication styles. Examine your own nonverbal communications to see if they offend or communicate something unintended.
8. Show respect and continue to try to understand the other person's perspective.

9. Be open to new learning – even those things with which you don't agree.

10. Be flexible and maintain a sense of humor and fallibility about your own performance.

11. Learn to tolerate ambiguity.


### Assessing the Culturally Diverse Individual/Family: From the Eye of the Eagle
#### Strategies for Cultural Assessment

1. Consider the child or family as a unique entity first, as members of diversity status next, and then as members of a specific ethnic group. This will help prevent over-generalizing and making erroneous assumptions.

2. Never assume that a person's ethnic identity tells you anything about the individual's or family's cultural values or patterns of behavior. Remember that within—culture differences are often substantial and that two families from the same culture may have vastly different life experiences. There is diversity within diversity.

3. Treat all "facts" you have ever heard or read about cultural values and traits as hypotheses, to be tested anew with each family/child. Turn "facts" into questions.

4. Remember that some aspects of a person's cultural history, values, and life-style are relevant to your work with the child. Others may be simply interesting to you as a professional.

5. Remember that all culturally diverse groups in this society are at least bicultural. That is, they all live in at least two cultures, their own and the majority cultures. The percentage may be 90 to 10 in either direction, but they still have had the task of integrating two value systems that are often in conflict.

6. Identify strengths in the family's cultural orientation you can build upon. Help the family to identify areas that create social, psychological, spiritual, or sociological conflict related to biculturalism, and seek to reduce dissonance in those areas.

7. Be aware of your own attitude about cultural pluralism.

8. Engage the family actively in the process of learning what cultural content should be considered.

9. Keep in mind that there are no substitutes for good clinical skills, empathy, caring, and a sense of humor.

Source: Adapted from Kirst-Ashman & Hull, 1993.

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