

CHAPTER 1

Anti-Bias Education and Why It Matters



We find these joys to be self-evident: That all children are created whole, endowed with innate intelligence, with dignity and wonder, worthy of respect. The embodiment of life, liberty and happiness, children are original blessings, here to learn their own song. Every [child] is entitled to love, to dream and belong to a loving “village.” And to pursue a life of purpose.

—Raffi Foundation for Child Honouring,
“A Covenant for Honouring Children”

Equal rights, fair play, justice, are all like the air; we all have it,
or none of us has it.

—Maya Angelou, Academy of Achievement interview

What Is Anti-Bias Education?

Anti-bias education (ABE) is an optimistic commitment to supporting children who live in a highly diverse and yet still inequitable world. Rather than a formula for a particular curriculum, it is an underpinning perspective and framework that permeates everything in early childhood education—including your interactions with children, families, and colleagues. ABE is based on the understanding that children are individuals with their own personalities and temperaments and with social group identities based on the families who birth and raise them and the way society views who they are.

These identities are both externally applied by the world around them and internally constructed within the child.

ABE has four goals for children that have developed from the need to identify and prevent, as much as possible, the harmful emotional and psychological impacts on children from societal prejudice and bias. The goals are designed to strengthen children’s sense of self and family (identity, Goal 1); to support their joy in human diversity (diversity, Goal 2); to enable them to gain the cognitive and social and emotional tools to recognize hurtful behavior (justice, Goal 3); and to develop the confidence and skills to work with others to build inclusive, fairer ways of being in a community (activism, Goal 4). The four core goals of ABE are described in detail on pages 15–19.

The Four Core Goals of Anti-Bias Education

Goal 1, Identity

- Teachers will nurture each child's construction of knowledgeable and confident personal and social identities.
- Children will demonstrate self-awareness, confidence, family pride, and positive social identities.

Goal 2, Diversity

- Teachers will promote each child's comfortable, empathic interaction with people from diverse backgrounds.
- Children will express comfort and joy with human diversity, use accurate language for human differences, and form deep, caring connections across all dimensions of human diversity.

Goal 3, Justice

- Teachers will foster each child's capacity to critically identify bias and will nurture each child's empathy for the hurt bias causes.
- Children will increasingly recognize unfairness (injustice), have language to describe unfairness, and understand that unfairness hurts.

Goal 4, Activism

- Teachers will cultivate each child's ability and confidence to stand up for oneself and for others in the face of bias.
- Children will demonstrate a sense of empowerment and the skills to act, with others or alone, against prejudice and/or discriminatory actions.

At the heart of anti-bias work is a vision of a world in which all children are able to blossom and each child's abilities and gifts are able to flourish:

- All children and families have a sense of belonging and experience affirmation of their personal and social identities and their cultural ways of being.
- All children have access to and participate in the education they need to become successful, contributing members of society.
- All children are engaged in joyful learning that supports their cognitive, physical, creative, and social development.
- Children and adults know how to respectfully and easily live, learn, and work together in diverse and inclusive environments. All families have the resources they need to fully nurture their children.
- All children and families live in safe, peaceful, healthy, comfortable housing and neighborhoods.

This vision of ABE also reflects the basic human rights described in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN OHCHR 1989):

- The right to *survival*
- The right to *develop to the fullest*

- The right to *protection* from harmful influences, abuse, and/or exploitation
- The right to *participate fully* in family, cultural, and social life

In order for children to receive these rights, their society, their families, and those responsible for their care and education must work together to provide what each child needs to flourish. A worldwide community of anti-bias educators shares this vision. They adapt its goals and principles to their particular settings as they work with children and their families to bring these rights into being.

Stop & Think: Imagine

Because of social inequities, too many children still do not have access to basic human rights. Imagine a world of justice, equal opportunity, and safety for all.

- What would that world look like for each of the children you work with?
- What would the world look like for the program you work in?
- What would you add to the vision of anti-bias education on this page?



Why Do We Need Anti-Bias Education?

Effective early childhood educators are committed to the principle that all children deserve to develop to their fullest potential. At the same time, the world is not yet a place where all children are equally responded to and have equal opportunity to become all they can be. Listen to the voices heard in early childhood programs:

A 10-month-old infant cries instead of eating when placed at a table with other classmates in his child care program. When the teacher talks with the infant's mother about it, she learns that the family still feeds the infant because in their culture, children do not begin eating by themselves until they are a little older. The teacher says rather indignantly, "Well, we do not have the staff to do that. You have to teach your child to feed himself."

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A preschool teacher announces that the children will make cards for Father's Day. "I don't want to!" defiantly states a 4-year-old from a family with a single mom. The teacher shrugs and says, "We're making cards today. So, you make a card too."

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A 4-year-old child newly arrived from Armenia starts his first day at a neighborhood preschool with an English-only policy. When he returns home, he tells his mother, "My teacher couldn't hear anything I said!" The next

day his mom asks the preschool director about this, and she suggests, "Perhaps your son wasn't paying attention."

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"This is supposed to be a happy painting. Why are you using all that black paint?" observes a teacher to a young child at an easel.

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"You're a baby, you can't play with us," a group of preschoolers tell a classmate who uses a wheelchair and who wants to join their play. "It's fun being the baby," the teacher says cheerfully, hoping to encourage the children play together.

Damage is done when children do not see their families reflected and respected in their early childhood programs and when they experience confusing expectations and messages about how to act that contradict those they get at home. Children are injured when they receive messages about themselves that say they are not fully capable, intelligent, or worthwhile.

Teachers become anti-bias educators when they recognize that it hurts children's development when adults do not actively support children's family identities or when adults remain silent when children tease or reject others because of who they are. Children need to feel good about themselves without developing a false sense of superiority based on who they are. Messages and actions that both directly and indirectly reinforce harmful ideas and stereotypes about people undermine children's sense of worth, especially when they come from someone as significant to them as a teacher. Lupe Cortes, a Head Start teacher, recalls,

I still remember that many adults put me down when I was a child, like saying, "Oh, she is just a little Mexican girl." These comments really affected how I felt about myself, and I vowed I wouldn't do the same to someone else. As a teacher, I wanted to break that cycle.

When teachers and families integrate the four ABE goals into teaching and childrearing and engage children in positive, informative conversations about

human diversity, children develop the conviction that who they are is valued and important. When adults help children notice and address unfairness, even very young children are able to be strong and clear in standing up for themselves and others. Listen to the voices of children who have experienced ABE in their schools:

Several 3-year-olds (Asian, White, and Latinx) are at the art table playing with small mirrors while they paint on paper ovals. As they look at their eyes, Jesse starts crooning to himself, “Oh, pretty eyes, pretty eyes. Lots of different eyes, pretty eyes, pretty eyes. Brown and blue, pointy, round. Pretty eyes, pretty eyes.”

. . .

Some children are imitating the Native American characters they saw in a Peter Pan movie, running around the yard making whooping noises and pretending they have tomahawks. One of the children, Skyler, puts up her hand to stop them and says firmly, “That’s not what Indians sound like. They have words. Real words. And you’ll hurt teacher Claudia’s feelings—’cause she’s Cherokee.”

. . .

In a pre-K class where the teacher engages children in examining stereotypes and omissions in their classroom books, 5-year-old Walker writes in awkward printing, “This book is irregular. It doesn’t have any women in it.”

A Professional Responsibility to Advance Equity

In 2019 NAEYC released a groundbreaking position statement on advancing equity, which affirms that “all early childhood educators have a professional obligation to advance equity . . . and work to eliminate structural inequities that limit equitable learning opportunities” (NAEYC 2019, 1).

In addition, this position statement declares that “advancing equity requires a dedication to self-reflection, a willingness to respectfully listen

to others’ perspectives without interruption or defensiveness, and a commitment to continuous learning to improve practice” (5). It calls on everyone involved in any aspect of early childhood education to take on the following actions, which are also foundational to using an ABE approach.

- Build awareness and understanding of your culture, personal beliefs, values, and biases.
- Recognize the power and benefits of diversity and inclusivity.
- Take responsibility for biased actions, even if unintended, and actively work to repair the harm.
- Acknowledge and seek to understand structural inequities and their impact over time.
- View your commitment to cultural responsiveness as an ongoing process.
- Recognize that the professional knowledge base is changing. . . . Be willing to challenge the use of outdated or narrowly defined approaches—for example, in curriculum, assessment policies and practices, or early learning standards. (6)

The Profession’s Code of Ethics

As do all professional organizations, NAEYC has a Code of Ethical Conduct that describes the central ideals and principles of the early childhood education field. Many of these also support the vision and goals of ABE. Here are some specific examples (NAEYC 2016):

P-1.2—We shall care for and educate children in positive emotional and social environments that are cognitively stimulating and that support each *child’s culture, language, ethnicity, and family structure* [emphasis added].

P-1.3—We shall not participate in practices that discriminate against children by denying benefits, giving special advantages, or excluding them from programs or activities on the basis of their sex, race, national origin, immigration status, preferred home language, religious beliefs, medical condition, disability, or the marital status/family structure, sexual orientation, or religious beliefs or other affiliations of their families.

I-4.3—[We shall] work through education, research, and advocacy toward an environmentally safe world in which all children receive health care, food, and shelter; are nurtured; and live free from violence in their home and their communities.

I-4.4—[We shall] work through education, research, and advocacy toward a society in which all young children have access to high-quality early care and education programs.

I-4.7—[We shall] support policies and laws that promote the well-being of children and families, and work to change those that impair their well-being. To participate in developing policies and laws that are needed, and to cooperate with families and other individuals and groups in these efforts. (9, 19)

Stop & Think: NAEYC's Code of Ethical Conduct and You

- Which specific parts of the Code listed above speak to you most right now? Why? (See NAEYC.org/resources/position-statements/ethical-conduct.)
- Which parts, if any, are you not comfortable with? Why?
- Which parts of the Code do you see practiced in the program where you work, send your child, or hope to work in someday?

Inequity Is Built into the System

Early childhood teachers welcome children and show respect for their families so children feel powerful, competent, and a sense of belonging. However, beyond individual teachers' hopes, beliefs, and actions is a society that has built advantage and disadvantage into its institutions and systems. These dynamics of advantage and disadvantage are deeply rooted in history. They continue to shape the degree of access children have to education, health care, and security—the services necessary for children's healthy development. These dynamics also greatly affect the early childhood education system, despite whatever values individual teachers may have.

As the NAEYC position statement on advancing equity (2019) explains,

Advancing equity in early childhood education requires understanding . . . the ways in which historical and current inequities have shaped the profession, as they have shaped our nation. The biases we refer to here are based in race, class, culture, gender, sexual orientation, ability and disability, language, national origin, indigenous heritage, religion, and other identities. They are rooted in our nation's social, political, economic, and educational structures. Precisely because these biases are both individual and institutional, addressing structural inequities requires attention to both *interpersonal* dynamics—the day-to-day relationships and interactions at the core of early childhood education practice—and *systemic* influences—the uneven distribution of power and privilege ingrained in public and private systems nationwide, including in early childhood education. (4)

Teachers need to know how structural biases operate and affect their teaching and how these biases impact the development of children's identities and attitudes. This means understanding societal isms and explicit and implicit bias.

What Are Isms?

Ableism, classism, nativism, racism, and sexism are examples of an *ism*, a set of social beliefs, policies, and actions designed to keep power and privilege in the hands of one group at the expense of another. Isms are reflected in a society's institutions, such as education, health, housing, employment, and media. Institutional isms are often created through the laws or regulations of federal, state, and city governments and are expressed in organizational policies, regulations, cultural assumptions, and the thinking and actions of the people who carry out the policies (Rothstein 2017).

The structural advantages and disadvantages assigned to people based on isms depend on people's membership, or *perceived* membership, in specific social identity groups, such as citizenship, race, ethnicity, economic class, physical ability, gender, or sexual orientation. The biases that accompany the isms shape children's construction of their social identities and their attitudes toward others.

Direct and Indirect Effects of Isms

Many people equate the isms to blatant, easily identifiable ideas and actions—and sometimes isms do function directly and obviously. Historically, forbidding women to vote or own property was an example of direct sexism. So, too, were laws that created racial segregation in education (racism) or legally denied public education to children with disabilities (ableism). Laws prohibiting marriage to a same-sex partner, or prohibiting a same-sex partner from getting custody of a couple's children if the biological parent dies, are also direct consequences of a structural ism (heterosexism). The number of direct laws or regulations creating advantage for some groups and disadvantage to others has decreased over US history, usually as a result of years of many people working to end these direct forms of isms. The Civil Rights Act of 1968, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, and the 2015 ruling of the US Supreme Court guaranteeing same-sex couples the freedom to marry are examples of structural changes that have resulted in greater equality.

However, while some forms of systemic inequality are eliminated or weakened, aspects of them may arise again (Kendi 2016). An example is the weakening of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 by congressional and Supreme Court actions in the 2000s. This has led to several states passing legislation restricting the right to vote, particularly hurting people of color, people with low income, students, and senior citizens. Another example, occurring during the writing of this book (2017–2019), is the action taken by the federal government and some state legislatures to pass new immigration regulations directed at restricting people—particularly those from majority Muslim countries and from Mexico, the Caribbean, and Central and South America—from coming to the United States. Yet another disturbing indicator is the data about hate groups and hate crimes. In the United States, the number of hate groups rose to a record

high in 2018 (Beirich 2019b), and crimes against people of color, Jewish people, and LGBTQ people were the second highest in more than a decade (Levin & Nakashima 2019).

Economic statistics also illustrate the continuing impact of racism and classism. The percentage of African American (34 percent) and American Indian (34 percent) children living in poverty in the United States is almost three times the percentage of White children (12 percent). The percentage of Latino children (28 percent) living in poverty is twice that of White, non-Hispanic children (Annie E. Casey Foundation 2018; terms of race and origin used here are those used in the Casey report). There is also a growing body of research about the psychological and emotional effects of racism and other isms, including poverty, trauma, and stress (NAEYC 2019). For example, many Latinx children, whether they have been directly involved or not, experience trauma and psychological distress as a result of parental detention and deportations (Rojas-Flores et al. 2017).

Isms Impact the Early Childhood Profession Too

The early childhood profession exists as part of the larger society and is not immune to the biases that are built into its complex world. The field's professional commitment to children and to families has laid a foundation for equitable treatment of all, yet the field often fails to address implicit biases and barriers that are explored in the chapters ahead. Consider the following:

- One long-standing early childhood education principle requires that curriculum meet each child's individual needs. However, individualizing frequently relies on a single cultural perspective of development and does not include understanding the cultural and social influences on children's learning. This approach results in misunderstanding either the strengths or the learning needs of children who are not seen as members of the dominant culture (see page 13). In addition, many teachers still do not receive preservice and in-service training on using children's cultural strengths as part of individualizing learning. Another factor is that for the most part, standardized curriculum and assessment tools frequently reflect an implicit dominant cultural perspective

(NAEYC 2019). While some do address ways to individualize learning, they do not explicitly include discussions about social identity issues and considering children's cultural strengths.

- Another research-backed principle states that it is developmentally best for young children to continue to develop their home languages while also learning English (Castro 2014). However, teacher training and resources for working with dual language learners are not always available, and many early childhood teachers struggle to effectively support dual language learners. Moreover, the idea of dual language learning continues to be a contested social issue and is not accepted in many school districts around the country.
- The field of early childhood education still reflects the stratification of the larger society and “the historic marginalization of women’s social and economic roles—which has a particularly strong impact on women of color. Comprising primarily women, the early childhood workforce is typically characterized by low wages. It is also stratified, with fewer women of color and immigrant women having access to higher education opportunities that lead to the educational qualifications required for higher-paying roles. Systemic barriers limit upward mobility, even when degrees and qualifications are obtained” (NAEYC 2019, 14).

Biases Are Part of the System of Isms

Biases are beliefs that affect how individuals think, feel, and act toward others. They lead to acts of individual prejudice and discrimination. Starting in childhood, everyone absorbs and internalizes biases from larger societal attitudes (Bian, Leslie, & Cimpian 2017; Brown et al. 2017). As adults, early childhood teachers bring biased ideas, whether consciously or unintentionally, into their work (Yates & Marcelo 2014). This is why it is essential for teachers to understand how biases work—and uncover and get rid of their own.

For example, some teachers may assume that families are not interested in their children's education because they miss family conferences, meetings, or other events, without considering that families may be unable to attend due to such factors as the cost

of babysitting, lack of available transportation, or inflexible work hours, or that discussions with their child's teacher are not in the family's language. Or, some teachers might unquestioningly accept the disproportionate number of White early childhood educators who work as master teachers, program directors, university professors, and administrators, excusing this situation with the rationale that people of color lack sufficient qualifications or degrees or interest. They do not take into account societal factors such as the economic conditions that permit people to be full-time students or consider the far-reaching, negative results of attending underresourced and overcrowded schools prior to college.

Biases Are Explicit *and* Implicit

Sometimes a person's bias is obvious, or *explicit*. Explicit biases are undisguised statements. They are attitudes and beliefs about a group of people that are applied to all individuals in the group. Examples of explicit biases in US society include the sexual harassment of women by powerful men; violence against mosques, churches, and synagogues by angry, prejudiced people; and white nationalist demonstrators chanting anti-Semitic slogans used by the Nazis. Most early childhood teachers are sensitive to explicit bias and, for the most part, work hard to avoid and address such behavior. Still, the field is plagued by some explicit biases, such as the belief that children in some racial groups are genetically more intelligent than those in other racial groups, that boys are inherently more destructive than girls, and that adopted children carry lifelong emotional damage.

In other cases, a person's actions reflect bias that is not so obvious—even to the person acting on it. This is *implicit* bias. Implicit biases are “attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner” (Kirwan Institute 2015). Individuals may not be aware that they have these biases or that they act or fail to act because of them. For example, in our experience, White teachers who say that they are color blind (i.e., are not aware of racial or ethnic differences because “children are children”) tend to have classrooms in which White, urban, middle-class children are represented in the learning environment and curriculum while children of other backgrounds are not. Regardless of the teacher's conscious intentions, this kind of classroom sends all children the message that the “universal” child is White, middle class,

urban, able-bodied, and from a two-parent family, and therefore the one who matters. Children who do not fit in those categories are “less than,” “different,” “exotic,” not “regular.” These teachers may not express *explicit* biases that being White or middle class is better, but their implicit bias of what the universal child looks like turns into bias in practice and reinforces the societal inequities and injuries the child meets outside the classroom. This implicit bias is also evident in many college child development textbooks that have chapters of research about White, middle-class children and short segments at the end of the chapter, or in a separate chapter, about “diverse” children.

Teachers of young children—like all people—are not immune to such bias. Even among teachers who do not believe they hold any explicit biases, implicit biases are associated with differential judgments about and treatment of children by race, gender, ability, body type, physical appearance, and social, economic, and language status—all of which limit children’s opportunities to reach their potential. Implicit biases also result in differential judgments of children’s play, aggressiveness, compliance, initiative, and abilities. (NAEYC 2019, 15)

Implicit Biases Impact Teachers’ Behavior and Children’s Well-Being

Consider how girls often receive feedback about the way they look and the way they are dressed rather than about their abilities, while boys are praised for their efforts and accomplishments. Bit by bit, many girls become convinced that their value rests mainly on their appearance, a belief that becomes increasingly toxic for teens and young adults and tends to shadow the adult lives of many women (OWH 2019).

Another deeply hurtful—and well-researched—example of implicit biases influencing teacher behavior is documentation that African American boys are disproportionately suspended from preschool programs for behavioral issues. Oscar Barbarin was one of the first to look at this disturbing



reality (Barbarin & Crawford 2006). Several years later, the US Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights reported that African American children “represent 18 percent of preschool enrollment, but 48 percent of preschool children receiving more than one out-of-school suspension” (2014, 1). And although the teachers and directors who suspend these boys may not be acting with the conscious intent of being racist, their unexamined implicit bias results in racism.

Here is an example of a preservice teacher in one of Julie’s college classes facing an important learning moment concerning how implicit bias resulted in an incorrect and unfair interpretation of children’s behavior:

A preservice teacher was recorded leading circle time. The activity had fallen apart, with children getting up, running away, and refusing to participate. That evening the college class discussed what had happened. The preservice teacher complained about the disruptive behavior of two African American boys who had “ruined” the circle. Then the instructor played the video recording. Everyone was shocked to see that the real disruption had come from two White boys, that one of the African American boys had joined in later, and that the second boy had been almost entirely a bystander. “But I remembered it as Alec and William!” the preservice teacher said in tears. “How could I have been so wrong?”

The following example shows Linda, a community college teacher, uncovering her own implicit biases and then changing the behavior that reflected that bias.

When I first started teaching adults, I was shocked and distressed by the poor level of writing skill by my college students. Some

part of me felt like the students just didn't care enough to proofread their papers or were unwilling to put in the time to learn appropriate grammar and spelling. As I got to know the students, I came to realize that few had been expected or supported to write well in high school. Many were dual language learners, fluent in conversational English, but with little experience in academic English. At my community college, almost all my students worked full time in addition to carrying 12 units. Some cared for families at home. My willingness to blame them for their lack of preparation was an outcome of buying into the classist idea that everyone had the same opportunities to learn and the same exposure to skill building in school. I still needed to help them learn to write an academic paper, but coming to terms with the classism in my thinking allowed me to stop seeing them as lazy and uninterested, "less-than." And once that happened, I began to see their intelligence, their eagerness to learn, and their incredible commitment to becoming educated despite the barriers they experienced.

Even organizations can discover implicit bias in their publications and address it. The evolution of the concept of developmentally appropriate practice (DAP), for example, illustrates a significant implicit bias evident in the first NAEYC publication on DAP, *Developmentally Appropriate Practice* (Bredekamp 1986), and then the important uncovering and revising of the bias in subsequent editions (Bredekamp 1987; Bredekamp & Copple 1997; Copple & Bredekamp 2009). The original definition of DAP reflected a perspective that all children's development is essentially the same, which—given the commonly acknowledged research of the time—meant that White children's patterns of development were considered the norm for all children. In 1996, "NAEYC revisited its position statement on developmentally appropriate practice in response to new knowledge, the changing context, and critiques from within and beyond the profession" (Copple & Bredekamp 2009, viii). One of the major issues was "expanding the basic definition of developmentally appropriate practice to include consideration of social and cultural context" (viii). With another revision of the NAEYC position statement on DAP in progress at the time of this writing, NAEYC is continuing to address this bias.

Walter Gilliam, a leading researcher on the subject of implicit bias and early childhood education, explains with his colleagues that "Fortunately, recent research suggests that implicit biases may be reduced through interventions designed to either address biases directly or increase teachers' empathy for children. Useful guiding principles by which early educators may explore and discover their own implicit biases and strive to deliver more equitable services may also prove helpful" (Gilliam et al. 2016, 15). Strategies include acknowledging differences while also identifying shared qualities and goals (e.g., "We are all the same. We are all different" is one of the key concepts of anti-bias work), increasing teachers' interactions and familiarity with people whose social identities are not the same as their own, and learning to speak out when encountering examples of explicit bias (Cooper 2016). Some early childhood education programs at higher education institutions are now including these skills in their courses.

Stop & Think: Everyone Learns Explicit and Implicit Biases

- Choose a specific social identity that you are *not* a part of; it could be related to race, culture, language, economic class, sexual orientation, gender, religion, ethnicity, or physical ability. Make a list of all the biases or stereotypes you have ever heard about this group of people. Don't censor yourself. Write them down regardless of whether you believe them. (You cannot change your thinking or gain new knowledge unless you first uncover and face the messages that have surrounded you throughout your life.)
- Choose two or three items from your list and think about how, where, and from whom you learned these biased messages. Share your thinking with a colleague.
- How much real contact did you or do you have with people who are members of the identity group you are thinking about?
- How do your own social identities influence the implicit biases you learned?

Microaggressions

A microaggression is another form of biased comment or action that inflicts injury or insult and damages people's sense of themselves. The casual comments, jokes, and statements that constitute microaggressions may seem small and unimportant to the microaggressor. Even though unintended, they act as sandpaper grinding down the recipient's sense of self and confidence. For example, "You speak English very well for someone named Mendoza." Racial microaggressions are "brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color. Perpetrators of microaggressions are often unaware that they engage in such communications when they interact with racial/ethnic minorities" (Sue et al. 2007, 271).

Dr. Chester Pierce (1980), a pioneer in the study of the social and psychological impacts of racism on identity development, compares the many racial microaggressions children experience over time to physically poisonous microcontaminants, suggesting that microaggressions build up and undermine children's evolving sense of who they are and their place in the world. For example, consider the impact on young children of hearing their names mispronounced every day or even being given another name because their teachers find it difficult to pronounce their real names and do not make the effort to learn the correct pronunciation. White children may also learn racism through regular doses of microaggressions witnessed in their families. For example, some of our White students remember times when their families closed their car windows and locked the doors as they drove through a neighborhood where a majority of residents were people of color.

Sue (2010) expanded on this work to include identifying microaggressions that target other social identities, such as gender, sexual orientation, and ability. For example, consider the message to children with disabilities when someone says, "Oh, let me help you," or "I'll do that for you," before giving children a chance to do it themselves. Over time, such a message teaches children with disabilities to think of themselves as frail, not capable, and dependent on



others. "I need some strong boys to help me move this table" sends the message that girls are not strong and that physical strength is valued in boys.

Learning to uncover and name microaggressions serves two purposes. First, it supports people who are the targets of microaggressions to better address what is going on. People may feel insulted or put down but not be sure exactly why or how they should respond, which makes it more difficult to resist the microaggression and stand up for themselves. Second, it helps people gain awareness of the microaggressions they are inflicting on others and the effects of these acts and statements, which is a first step toward changing their behaviors (DeAngelis 2009).

Dominant Culture and Cultural Diversity

The term *dominant culture* does not necessarily mean the culture of the majority. Rather, it is the culture of the people who hold social, political, and economic power in a society. The United States has had both a dominant culture and ethnic and cultural diversity from its earliest days as a nation. These two realities have played out in different ways throughout history and have created tension over how its residents can be one and many at the same time.

The implicit rules of a dominant culture set a norm and become the lens through which all other ways of living are judged. These judgments become the basis for information, stereotyping, and biases, which in turn justify the societal power of the dominant group.

The typical images of dominant culture in the United States include native English speaker; Christian; well dressed; slim (for women); well-furnished and equipped single-family home (always very neat); heterosexual married couple with one or two biological children, each of whom has a separate bedroom; well-resourced schools; professional or business management employment; reliable health care and internet service; and one or more new cars. The consistency of these images conveys the message that this is *the* ordinary and desirable way to live. The more a person's life looks like that described in dominant culture, the worthier that person is as a human being in the eyes of that culture.

The term *mainstream* rather than *dominant culture* is sometimes used to describe this cultural image. *Mainstream*, however, not only signals that it is the correct way to live but also implies that most people (the "main" stream) in the society actually live like this, which is not the reality. The mainstream image becomes the standard by which people, families, or groups are judged, and the degree to which they differ from it becomes the basis for prejudice against them. *Dominant culture* is more accurate and descriptive.

Stop & Think: How Did Your Family Fit the Image?

- In what ways did the family of your childhood match or not match the prevailing images of the dominant culture where you lived? How did that feel to you?
- In what ways does your current family match or not match the prevailing images of the dominant culture? How does that feel to you?
- How do the families you serve fit into or not fit into the dominant culture image?

The Long Shadow of History

The United States includes Native Americans, immigrants and their descendants, and the descendants of those who came not by choice but by force and chain. Throughout history, each ethnic group brought its own languages and cultural ways of life. These were often considered "inferior" and "non-civilized" by the existing dominant culture and language groups (Roediger 2005). Considerable

pressure was put on immigrant groups to "melt" into the dominant culture. Prejudices prevented some groups from doing so. Yet many immigrants forged blended cultures that kept alive beliefs, practices, and languages of their original cultures and incorporated some dominant cultural elements. The reality was more "salad bowl" than melting pot.

Once public schools were established in the 19th century, they intentionally played a key role in the process of assimilating children into the dominant culture. The assumption was that children must give up their home cultures and languages in order to learn how to be part of the dominant culture. One particularly brutal example of this assimilation policy is the boarding schools created for Native American children. First established in the 1800s, the schools lasted all the way through the 1970s (Churchill 2004). Children as young as 5 years old were forcibly taken from their homes and kept in these boarding schools for several years. The children were severely punished for speaking their home languages and practicing their cultural traditions. In 1978, Congress worked closely with American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) elected officials, child welfare experts, and families to pass the Indian Child Welfare Act. In particular, the act's intent was to stop the unnecessary separation of large numbers of children who had been removed from their homes, parents, extended families, and communities by state child welfare and private adoption agencies (National Indian Child Welfare Association 2015).

The call for a cultural diversity approach—in all aspects of education—was a component of the 1960s Civil Rights movement. Advocates argued for an educational approach that honored the importance of home culture to ensure that all children were fully supported in their learning while also teaching children how to live as part of one overall society. Advocates highlighted the value of cultural diversity to the building of a strong and democratic nation.

In Early Childhood Programs, Families Matter

One of the core values of the early childhood field is that "children are best understood and supported in the context of family, culture, community, and society" (NAEYC 2016, 4). The extent to which children's home cultures and languages are

made visible or invisible in a program's learning environment and curriculum is at the heart of whether the dominant culture perspective or cultural diversity perspective undergirds that program. The invisibility of some children and the visibility of other children in the classroom's environment and curriculum send this message: "Some people matter—some do not." This message sits at the heart of isms.

Stop & Think: Your Experiences with Schools and Your Family

- How visible were your family and families like yours in your schools when you were growing up? Did your school support your home language? Were the people you saw portrayed in books, classroom materials, and the curriculum of the same racial, ethnic, or religious group or economic class with which you identified?
- Were the holidays that mattered to your family acknowledged by your school? Celebrated in your school? If yes, were you aware that not all families celebrated those holidays? If no, how did that affect your feelings about yourself?
- Did the adults in your family feel comfortable coming to school and talking with your teachers? If not, why not? If so, what did the school do to make that happen?

The Four Core Goals of Anti-Bias Education

The vital and fundamental connections between cognitive development and social and emotional development is a foundational principle of early childhood education. Together, these connections are the "bricks and mortar" of human development (NIEER 2007, 5). ABE is part of the bricks and mortar necessary for children to healthfully and fully become all they can be. Four core goals provide a framework for its practice with children. Grounded in what is known about how children construct identity and attitudes (see Chapter 2), the goals help you create a safe, supportive learning community for every child.

The four core goals support the following: children's development of a confident sense of identity without needing to feel superior to others; an ease with human diversity; a sense of fairness and justice; and the ability to stand up for themselves or others (the skills of empowerment).

Goal 1, Identity

- Teachers will nurture each child's construction of knowledgeable and confident personal and social identities.
- Children will demonstrate self-awareness, confidence, family pride, and positive social identities.

This goal means supporting children to feel strong and proud of who they are without needing to feel superior to anyone else. It means children learn accurate, respectful language to describe who they and others are. Teachers support children to develop and be comfortable within their home culture and within the school culture. Goal 1 is the starting place for all children, in all settings.

Adding to early childhood education's long-term commitment to nurturing each child's individual, personal identity, ABE emphasizes the importance of nurturing children's social, or group, identities. Social identities relate to the significant group categorizations of the society in which children grow up and live and which they share with many others. Social identities include but are not limited to gender, racial, ethnic, cultural, religious, and economic class groups. (Social identity is described in detail in Chapter 2.) A strong sense of both individual and group identities is the foundation for the three other anti-bias core goals.

Goal 2, Diversity

- Teachers will promote each child's comfortable, empathic interaction with people from diverse backgrounds.
- Children will express comfort and joy with human diversity, use accurate language for human differences, and form deep, caring human connections across all dimensions of human diversity.



This goal means guiding children to be able to think about and have words for how people are the same and how they are different. It includes helping children feel and behave respectfully, warmly, and confidently with people who are different from themselves. It includes encouraging children to learn both about how they are different from other children and about how they are similar. These are never either/or realities because people are *simultaneously* the same in some ways and different from one another in some ways. This goal is the heart of learning how to treat all people fairly and in caring ways.

Some early childhood teachers and families are not sure they should encourage children to pay attention to and learn about differences among people. They may think it is best to teach only about how people are the same, worrying that talking about differences causes prejudice. While well intentioned, this concern arises from a mistaken notion about the sources of bias. Differences do not create bias. *Children learn prejudice from prejudice*—not from learning about human diversity. It is how people respond to differences that can teach bias and fear.

Another misconception about Goal 2 is that exploring differences among people ignores appreciating the similarities. Goal 2 calls for creating a balance

between exploring differences and similarities. All human beings share similar biological attributes, needs, and rights (e.g., the need for food, shelter, and love; the commonalities of language, families, and feelings) and people live and meet these shared needs and rights in many different ways. A basic premise in ABE is “We are all the same. We are all different. Isn’t that wonderful!”

Goal 3, Justice

- Teachers will foster each child’s capacity to critically identify bias and will nurture each child’s empathy for the hurt bias causes.
- Children will increasingly recognize unfairness (injustice), have language to describe unfairness, and understand that unfairness hurts.

This goal is about building children’s innate, budding capacities for empathy and fairness as well as their cognitive skills for thinking critically about what is happening around them. It is about building a sense of safety—the sense that everyone can and will be treated fairly.

Learning experiences include opportunities for children to understand and practice using skills for identifying unfair and untrue images (stereotypes), comments (teasing, name calling), and behaviors (isolation, discrimination) directed at themselves or at others. This includes issues of race, disability, economic class, ethnicity, language, gender, body shape, age, and so on. These are early lessons in critical thinking for children, giving them ways to identify what they see and hear and testing it against the notions of kindness and fairness.

These lessons build on young children’s implicit interest in what is fair and not fair. As children come to identify unfair experiences and learn that unfair situations can be made more fair, they gain an increased sense of their own power in the world. Children cannot construct a strong self-concept, or develop respect for others, if they do not know how to identify and resist hurtful, stereotypical, and inaccurate messages or actions directed toward themselves or others. Developing the ability to think critically strengthens children’s sense of self as well as their capacity to form caring relationships with others.

Goal 4, Activism

- Teachers will cultivate each child's ability and confidence to stand up for oneself and for others in the face of bias.
- Children will demonstrate a sense of empowerment and the skills to act, with others or alone, against prejudice and/or discriminatory actions.

Goal 4 is about giving children tools for learning how to stand up to hurtful and unfair biased behavior based on any aspect of social identity. Biased behavior may be directed at oneself or another. It may come from another child or an adult, children's books, or television and films. This goal strengthens children's ability to consider other perspectives, interact in positive ways with others, and engage in conflict resolution.

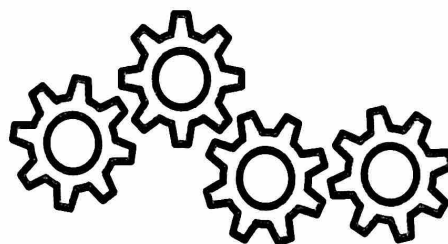
Actions of teasing, rejection, and exclusion because of some aspect of a child's social identities are forms of aggressive behavior. They are just as serious as physical aggression. The old saying "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me" is false. Children's developing sense of self is hurt by name calling, teasing, and exclusion based on identity. And children who engage in such hurtful behaviors are learning it is acceptable to hurt others, the earliest form of bullying. An anti-bias approach calls on teachers to intervene gently but firmly to support the child who is the target of the biased behavior and help both children learn other ways of interacting.

Children's growth on Goal 4 strengthens their growth on the other three goals. If children are the target of prejudice or discrimination, they need tools to resist and to know that they have worth (Goal 1). When a child speaks up for another child, it reinforces—for the children involved and for any bystanders—the importance of understanding other people's unique feelings (Goal 2). When children are helped to act, it broadens their understanding of unfairness and fairness (Goal 3).

Implementing All Four Core Anti-Bias Education Goals

Each Gear Moves Another

At a conference on early childhood anti-bias work in Berlin, Germany, in 2010 (Kinderwelten), teachers from 31 child care programs displayed storyboards documenting the work. One center had a wonderful way to show the relationship among the four ABE goals. They made four wooden, interlocking gears, each representing one goal. Moving any one of the gears moved all the others.



Goal 1 → Goal 2 → Goal 3 → Goal 4

Even though the four ABE core goals interconnect and build on each other, some programs choose to work on only some of them. Some teachers bypass Goal 1 to focus on Goal 2, because they think it is more important for the children to learn about diversity than about their own social identities. This tends to happen in programs primarily serving children from the dominant culture, where their social identities are seen as the norm. While it is very important for children from the dominant culture to develop an understanding and appreciation of diversity (Goal 2), it is also necessary for them to develop a positive sense of their social identities *without* learning to feel superior to others (Goal 1).

In contrast, other teachers primarily focus on Goal 1, because the children they teach—for example, children of color or children with disabilities—are targets of systemic oppression and harmful biases. Goal 1 is key to children's development of resilience and resistance to the harmful undermining of their social identities. At the same time, children who experience systemic oppression and biases also need

to develop an understanding and appreciation of all the many ways people live (e.g., family structure, ability, culture, economic class).

Another problematic choice is to focus on Goals 1 and 2 while disregarding Goals 3 and 4. This is a watered-down approach to ABE. Goals 3 and 4 provide children with the critical thinking and behavioral skills that build their sense of “we all belong here, and we are all safe here.” Children need the dispositions and skills engendered by Goals 3 and 4 to live competently and in caring ways in a diverse and complex world.

Fostering children’s sense of empowerment—that they will recognize when something is wrong and know how to improve it—strengthens their sense of empathy and builds a sense that they will be safe and cared for. The best antidote to children’s hurt, sadness, or worry is to help them develop a conviction that they can do something to make the situation better and that there are adults who also care and who do things to change unfair situations to fair, to shift feelings of hurt to safe. Naming unfairness and not liking it (Goal 3) are the first steps to learning how to act *for* fairness. And unless children feel they and others are working to make their world fair (Goal 4), they cannot truly feel safe.

Talking with Children About Identity, Diversity, Justice, and Activism

Here are some simple concepts related to the four ABE goals to share with preschoolers and kindergartners.

- Everyone wants a world that is fair, where all people are treated with kindness and no one is hurtful or mean to others. You can help make that happen!
- Sometimes children quarrel or want the same toy or don’t want to play with each other. That happens to everyone. Teachers and families help children learn how to work kindly and fairly with other people.
- Sometimes people are treated badly because of the color of their skin or where their family came from, or how they talk, or because they are experiencing homelessness or because they have a disability. That is never okay.
- Saying someone can’t cry because he is a boy is not okay (and it’s not true—boys *do* cry). Saying someone can’t run fast because she is a girl is not okay (and it’s not true—girls *do* run fast). Saying someone can’t play with you because their skin is a different color is hurtful and mean, and it’s not okay. Saying someone can’t sit next to you because they say words differently than you do, or because they use a wheelchair, is not okay. These things are hurtful and mean, and you miss out on making a new friend.
- When someone treats another person badly because of who they are, it’s called injustice. That means it’s hurtful and not fair.
- If someone is mean or unfair to you or to someone else, you can do something. You can help turn unfair into fair. You can tell people to stop! You can explain that unfairness hurts. You can be a friend to someone whose feelings are hurt. You can ask a grownup to help you. There are lots of things you can do.
- Sometimes hurtful, unfair things happen in our world. But there are always people who will do something about it. Sometimes they talk to the person who is doing the unjust thing. Sometimes they write letters or sign petitions (that’s a letter signed by lots and lots of people who send it to people who could help make something fair). Sometimes they march in the streets carrying signs saying what should happen to make the world fair. Sometimes they go to meetings and talk to lots of other people to get ideas to fix the thing that’s unfair and change it to fair. Sometimes they vote for people who want to make laws more fair.
- What kinds of things can you do or what we can do together to help make things fair in our class?

The Four Anti-Bias Education Goals Are for Adults Too

One of the great gifts of teaching is the ongoing learning that it requires. Quality ABE relies on teachers who embrace the four core goals as tools for their own growth. Understanding who you are—and how you came to be the person you now are—gives you a deeper understanding of how children develop and what shaped them. This is a lifelong process. Teachers are on a continual journey of self-discovery as they work with children, families, and staff, who sometimes reflect their own experiences and sometimes challenge them.

ABE goals for teachers parallel the four core goals for working with children:

Adult Goal 1, Identity: Increase your awareness and understanding of your own individual and social identity in its many facets (race, ethnicity, gender, ability, sexual orientation, family structure, economic class) and your own cultural contexts, both in your childhood and currently.

Adult Goal 2, Diversity: Examine what you have learned about differences, connection, and what you enjoy or fear across all aspects of human diversity.

Adult Goal 3, Justice: Identify how you have been advantaged or disadvantaged by the isms (ableism, classism, heterosexism, racism, sexism) and the stereotypes or prejudices you have absorbed about yourself or others.

Adult Goal 4, Activism: Explore your ideas, feelings, and experiences of social justice activism. Open up dialogue with colleagues and families about all these goals. Develop the courage and commitment to model for young children that you stand for fairness and to be an activist voice for children.

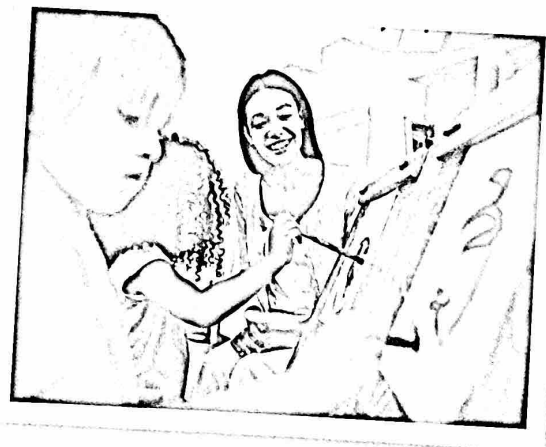
Stop & Think: Your Own Expectations for ABE

- What do you hope ABE could do for the children you teach? For their families? If your hopes are realized, how will it benefit them?
- What anxieties and concerns might you have about doing ABE in your particular setting or community?
- Where could you find support for doing ABE within or outside your program?
- What seems most interesting and inviting about becoming an anti-bias teacher? Which anti-bias goal interests you most right now?

• • •

You Have Already Begun

Whether you are an experienced teacher or a beginning student, ABE offers the opportunity to expand your understanding of how the social forces of systemic oppression and biases shape children. Deepening your knowledge of the dynamics of bias, fear of differences, and institutional inequity in the society at large and in your own life provides insight into your role as an early childhood educator in countering prejudice and discrimination. So too does coming to fully understand the four core goals of ABE as they apply to children and educators. This is urgent work that calls on all the best hopes you have for children, for the world, and for yourself. It is work that matters. Keep reading and learning! There's more to come.



SPECIAL FOCUS

Young Children and Their Families in Crisis: Immigrants and Refugees

Above all, we shall not harm children. We shall not participate in practices that are emotionally damaging, physically harmful, disrespectful, degrading, dangerous, exploitative, or intimidating to children. *This principle has precedence over all others in this Code.*

—NAEYC, *Code of Ethical Conduct and Statement of Commitment*

Early childhood education programs are not immune to debates, policies, and actions regarding diversity and equality in the larger society. Regardless of your opinion on immigration policy, your job as an early childhood educator is to consider the needs of the children you work with. As we write this book, many children of refugee and immigrant families seeking to enter the United States are facing traumatic separation from one or more of their parents or family members as they seek asylum at the US–Mexico border and in raids by the federal government to remove undocumented individuals from their homes and communities (Jordan 2019). Even children who are citizens or are in the country on official visas live with the anxiety of being removed from their loved ones. They may hear stories or see terrible images of other children being taken away from their families at the borders of the country in which they are living.

How do early childhood educators hold true to the ethics of their profession and to the goals of ABE when societal policies and actions challenge them? Rhian Evans Allvin, CEO of NAEYC, makes it clear in this excerpt from a letter to NAEYC members on February 3, 2017:

In this country, there are 5.8 million children under age 5 with at least one immigrant parent. They are in our classrooms and homes. Some of them already live in fear and anxiety that their parents will be taken away from them. As a result of [recent] policies . . . these

fears are made worse, and the most essential relationships between these children and the caring adults in their lives are put at risk. The impact, which could deepen children's stress, disrupt their brain development, and negatively impact their short- and long-term health outcomes, will make the jobs of early childhood educators and parents—who already bear enormous responsibility to promote the development and learning of each child—that much harder.

Know the Context

During your career as an early childhood educator, it is highly likely that you will work with children from families who are immigrants and refugees. Consider the following facts (NAEYC & CLASP 2018):

1 in 4 children under age 6 in the United States is a member of an immigrant family.

94 percent of these children are US citizens. This is a right granted by the 14th Amendment to the Bill of Rights, which states that “All persons born or naturalized in the United States, . . . are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside. No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States. . . .”

5.9 million citizen children under the age of 18 are living with a parent or family member who is undocumented.

1.6 million children under age 5 have an undocumented parent(s).

Families immigrate to the United States for many different reasons. Some come from wealth and privilege in their home countries; some are escaping poverty and violence. Some are in the country on student or work visas, some are on a path to citizenship, and some come undocumented seeking refugee status. Regardless of their legal status, their children experience the impact of heightened prejudice and discrimination directed against their families.

When the constant dread of arrest, detention, or deportation of parents culminates in actual family separation—whether short-lived or permanent—the results are particularly detrimental and far-reaching for child well-being. Children of detained and deported immigrants suffer the consequences of economic instability, emotional distress, changes in daily routines, . . . family separation, long-term financial instability, and finally, in some cases, family dissolution. (Rojas-Flores 2017, 12)

Children of immigrant families need intensified and sensitive support from teachers to help them deal with their anxieties and fears of possible or actual separation from or loss of family members and friends. Very real fears of being taken from one's family and detained for a long time or deported are also keeping many undocumented families from seeking help for their children, such as medical care, or even allowing them to go to school. Moreover, even children in families who are citizens of the United States—especially in Latinx and Muslim families—are experiencing the tension of not knowing if they can be safe in their communities.

What Early Childhood Programs Can Do

Early childhood programs are not only important bridges between children's families and the larger society, they can be emotional sanctuaries for families and children who are immigrants. NAEYC and the Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP) outline the following responsibilities for early childhood educators working with children in immigrant families (NAEYC & CLASP 2018):

Let families know that your program and you will do all you can to keep them and their children safe. Explain the policies and procedures you have put in place to families and staff. Also explain to families how you address hurtful comments by other children, should these occur.

Have information about immigrants' rights and make these public and available to all families in their home languages. Make sure that all staff members know what these are as well.

Understand your right as an early childhood program to refuse entry to immigration agents without a warrant. (See "Keep Current with Federal, State, and Local Policies" on page 22.) Establish a safety plan in case of illegal attempts by immigration agents to enter your program without a warrant. This should include identifying which staff will be responsible for speaking with the agent, which staff members need to be notified about a potential danger to their children, and how you will handle such situations when other children see or hear the interchanges.

Create a clear confidentiality policy about the privacy of family information. NAEYC accreditation standards require that programs have clear written policies concerning confidentiality of families' information. Make sure that your confidentiality policy includes assurance that immigration data aren't recorded or released. Share confidentiality protections with *all* families and all staff.

Connect new families who are immigrants with families in your program who will act as allies to them.

Keep Current with Federal, State, and Local Policies

The US Department of Homeland Security has changing policies regarding *sensitive locations*, where immigration agents are restricted in carrying out arrests, apprehensions, or other enforcement actions. At the time of this writing, licensed center-based and home-based early childhood programs, schools, places of worship, K–12 schools, and colleges are sometimes designated as sensitive locations. To know what your responsibilities are, it is essential to know the policies in your own state and city. In addition to information provided by the National Education Association (NEA) and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), look for current information about designated sensitive locations on the CLASP website (www.clasp.org).

Resources for Families and Staff

Almost all communities have advocacy and legal organizations, as well as faith-based groups, dedicated to providing support and legal help to refugee, immigrant, and/or undocumented families. Create a list of these organizations and groups and help families who need services connect to the appropriate resources. Other families may be willing to accompany undocumented families to safe community services, or staff members may do so.

People working in early childhood programs—perhaps you yourself—may also be personally living with the impact of bias and fear toward immigrants. At the same time, there may be staff members who have anti-immigrant feelings. Creating a work atmosphere of respect and safety among the staff is essential for educators to effectively work with the program's families and children.

A PROMISE TO ALL CHILDREN

We wrote the following commitment statement during a period of sweeping arrests by US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and heightened police violence against African Americans. We see it as one way to affirm our professional principles to teach, nurture, and protect all children. We also see it as a way to let families and colleagues know where we stand and to connect with those who stand with us.



We are in this together—working for a world where every child is protected and honored, exactly as they are.

All Children Belong Here

OUR PROMISE TO YOU

- We will build an open, safe, and mutually respectful school community in which each child and each family is an important and equal member.
- We will never allow differences of any kind to be an excuse to make fun of, exclude, or hurt you.
- We will listen carefully and lovingly to what worries you and give you thoughtful, age-appropriate information and support.
- We will nurture you to feel strong and proud about yourself and your family.
- We will facilitate your skills to be friends with classmates who are alike and different from you.
- We will honor your family's importance to you by building respectful partnerships with them.
- We will provide support to you and your family when they feel stress, anxiety, or fear because of current events or acts of prejudice or hate.
- We will learn about and help your family use legal and community resources to keep you safe.
- We will work to uproot our own personal biases as adults and will speak out against prejudice and bias wherever we encounter it.
- We will mobilize our courage and become active with others to resist and change any policies and practices that threaten to hurt you or your family.

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