

Let's talk about ... diversity
By Lois Gamble

Early childhood programs have been the forerunners in the multicultural movement, but they often fail to provide a clear picture of their endeavors to promote cultural respect and understanding with young children and their families. Multicultural books, clothing, dolls, pictures and puzzles are traditional responses to this effort. Dot Hill, Early Childhood Consultant and NAC Commissioner has suggested that additional positive contribution involves management, curriculum and family inclusion.

Management

- Are staff members introduced to cultural information? Is diversity discussed at staff meetings? Are cultural materials and resources discussed in order to generate ideas among staff members?
- Does the parent handbook include the program's goals for cultural respect?
- Are program policies flexible enough to meet the needs of diverse cultural and ethnic groups?

Curriculum

- Does staff introduce multicultural materials, games and music to ensure that children understand the purpose of the items being in the room?
- Are such items used to support intentional conversation with children about the language, traditions and customs of various ethnic groups?
- Are activities planned to talk about skin colors? Children are quite interested in this subject. Do pictures in the classroom depict people of all skin colors working in many professions?

Family Inclusion

- Are families surveyed to learn about their hobbies, customs, and traditions?
- Is this information integrated into learning activities for children?
- Are children given opportunity to share stories about themselves and their families?

NAC standards require that **respect is displayed for cultural, ethnic, linguistic, and religious diversity and ability or disability.**