
Subject: Holiday and Party Activities

Source: Head Start Performance Standard 45 CFR Section 1304.21, 1304.21a(1)-(3), 1304.53b, 1304.4e

Policy

Holiday and party activities will reflect the needs of the population served. Celebrations will focus on providing opportunities for children to develop an appreciation for celebration while honoring cultural and religious differences of families. Activities will meet the individual differences and needs of each child and family, while respecting the priorities of the community in a manner to avoid stereotypes. Parents must be included in dialogue and discussion of planning and holiday and party activities.

Guidelines

1. Use the Anti-Bias curriculum goals as a guide.
2. Use holiday activities as part of many other kinds of activities about a cultural group. Ask yourself: What is the purpose of teaching about this holiday? Is it developmentally suitable to my group of children? Is it related to their lives? If not, why am I introducing it?
3. Set holiday activities in the context of people's daily life and beliefs by connecting them to specific children and families.
4. Honor every group that is represented in your classroom (children and staff). Do not treat some holidays as "exotic". Everyone is "ethnic", everyone's traditions come from specific ethnic or national groups (including national holidays such as Thanksgiving and Christmas).
5. Do not assume that everyone from the same ethnic group celebrates holidays the same way. Make sure that any differences in how each family celebrates are evident and respected.
6. Demonstrate respect for everyone's traditions throughout the curriculum.
7. Plan strategies for working with the children whose family beliefs do not permit participation in holiday celebrations. Include the child's parents in creating satisfactory alternatives for the child within the classroom. Plans should not result in exclusion of children from school.
8. Be sensitive to the possibility that families with very low incomes may find certain holidays stressful because of the enormous amount of commercialization and media pressure to purchase things. Stores advertising of Halloween costumes, media and store emphasis on eating special foods at Thanksgiving, and the commercial equation of love with expensive and numerous gifts at Christmas and Valentines are prominent examples. In the classroom, challenge these pressures by focusing on meaningful way to celebrate holidays without spending money. Emphasize that homemade costumes and gifts are very special because they are unique and made with each person's wonderful ideas and with love. Talk about the underlying meaning of holidays as times when your family and other people you care about, come together and enjoy each other. Critique the way TV and stores make it look like the important thing is to buy things.
9. There is a false assumption that all Americans celebrate holidays such as Halloween, Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Easter. In an anti-bias curriculum, activities about national holidays will challenge this inaccurate assumption. Early Head Start will avoid "promoting" one holiday over others, and because some holiday costumes incorporate stereotypes about other cultures.

10. Although parent input is important, Teachers must ensure the appropriateness of all activities and help parents modify their suggestions when needed: safety, health, nutrition, social-emotional appropriateness.

Frequently Asked Questions about Holiday and Other Celebrations

How do we deal with parents wanting to make gifts for Christmas or have Easter egg hunts?

Holiday celebrations quite often are the expression of parents wanting their children to have parties and celebrate.

1. We need to make the distinction between learning about another person's holiday rituals and celebrating ones own holiday.
2. We do not promote one holiday over others at the risk of making some feel inferior or excluded.
3. Find "common ground" issues to celebrate about: seasons changing, children's achievements both individually and collectively, children, developmental milestones...the list is endless.
4. Set the stage and/or boundaries for parents at the beginning of the year...teachers should decide early on how they will celebrate every child's birthday (and have it approved by the center coordinator), telling parents they do not need to spend their resources on treats for the class...especially if teachers can decide what recipe they will make in class for every child's birthday, maybe once a month for all birthdays in that month and tell parents how we want them to save their money for the special party they want to have at home for their child with their own family and friends.
5. Be sure to assess if you have any parents who do not celebrate any events...find out what the boundaries are about that belief/practice to determine if celebrating things like developmental milestones are problems.
6. Help parents and children to be creative and come up with your own things to celebrate that go way beyond the commercialism of Halloween, Christmas, etc. Things like friendship, cooperation, solving a problem, reaching a goal, long awaited change in weather.

If you follow an Anti-Bias curriculum you will reach the goal of all children and parents feeling included, appreciated, part of the Head Start family, and all will learn from each other about their own families' cultures.

What to do if parents send valentines, candy, and/or cupcakes on the child's birthday?

1. Explain to parents that you want them to save their personal resources to provide these things for their child's use at home and you will provide all they need at school so every child has the same opportunities and resources to work with. If parents do provide candy or cupcakes we will send it home with the children at the end of the day in individual storage bags.
2. Tell parents, early on in the year, how your team will celebrate each child's birthday and while some of the activities will be the same (making a crown, singing a song, special chair, etc.) each child's day will be unique...they get to choose the color of play dough, the transition game, etc.

Are costumes allowed in our classrooms?

- Children are allowed to bring a costume on the day of the fall party. Teachers will assist the children in putting on their costumes. If child is unable to bring a costume the teachers will assist the child in creating one.

What exactly is allowed to be celebrated in our classrooms?

- We really do not have hard, fast rules for what is allowed or disallowed. What we have are guidelines for decision making and we've provided training, resource materials, articles, etc about what is best for children and families to help you make good decisions and set appropriate boundaries for everyone. All celebrations must be approved by the Center Coordinator and the PED Manager.