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Coach's Corner



Traditions

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For many people, the month of December tends to be a time of reflection. The current year is ending, a new year is about to begin, and the holidays can bring about lots of emotions. This can lead to thinking of the past and feelings of nostalgia. One of the ways we connect with the past is by engaging in family, community, or cultural traditions. Most times we think in terms of family when it comes to traditions. However, most people engage in traditions outside of their familial unit as well. In fact, many of you may celebrate traditions within your early childhood education programs! Before we get into ways to incorporate different traditions in your programs, let's examine the significance of tradition in the human experience.



The Importance of Tradition

Merriam-Webster defines tradition as, “an inherited, established, or customary pattern of thought, action, or behavior.” Traditions are an important part of life for a variety of reasons. Traditions help us form connections. Participating in and passing down traditions, connects us to our past. Some examples of traditions could be stories, activities, or recipes passed down through generations. For some people, this also serves as a way to honor those that have gone before us. Traditions are also a way to connect with the people in our lives. Many traditions have social components which promote a sense of belonging.

Traditions often bring about feelings of comfort. They are things we can count on to remain the same. This predictability makes us feel safe. Even though some traditions will evolve over time, the foundation remains the same. Traditions also can become part of our identity. Many times, they are so deeply rooted in us that they almost feel a part of us.

Communication and Cultural Traditions

While many of us engage in traditions with our families, we also participate in traditions within our different communities. Think about different events, parades, music, and activities that you participate in or enjoy. These things are just as important as our family traditions because they help to bond us as a community. There are also cultural traditions that can connect people across the globe in addition to linking folks with their ancestors. For people living far from their native home, cultural traditions can be a way to “feel” home without actually being there.



Forming New Traditions

While most times we think of traditions as things that are passed down to us, we can also create new traditions. Creating new traditions can be a way to heal after the loss of a loved one or a difficult season in life. Sometimes we create new traditions because we are moving on from old traditions that no longer serve us in a positive way.

If you are thinking about starting a new tradition for you, your family, or community, begin by thinking about what brings you joy. Consider things such as, your favorite recipe, places you enjoy visiting, or fun activities. Are you looking to create a personal tradition or do you want to involve important people in your family or community? The best thing about starting a new tradition is that there is no wrong way to do it!

Traditions and Young Children

Creating and sustaining traditions in your early childhood education program, provides learning opportunities for children. If you are thinking about starting a new tradition in your program, involve children in the planning. Consider their interests. Below are a few ideas that would work during any time of year!

- Service project- Think about the organizations within your community. Raise money or collect donations. If this isn't possible, have children draw pictures or make cards for folks residing in nursing homes.
- Silly rituals- Create a classroom handshake! Encourage the children to make it fun and silly. The children will enjoy using this special "hello" with each other.
- Creative holidays- Create a made-up holiday for your classroom. An example would be "Backwards Day." Everyone can wear their clothes backwards. If possible, follow your daily schedule backwards!
- Family sharing- Invite families to come in and share their traditions. This could be in the form of an activity, a meal, or music. This is a great way to get families involved in your program and to give the kids a chance to share things that are important to them.

Most likely, you already have some traditions within your program. It could be a yearly family event or an end of school year celebration. These things are important and without realizing it, you are teaching children about the value of tradition!

******When planning classroom/program traditions, be mindful of the personal and cultural backgrounds of the children in your program. Be sure that whatever you decide to plan is inclusive of all children!

One thing to keep in mind when planning a new tradition with children is to make it stress-free. A tradition should be something that everyone can enjoy. With all the busyness in our lives, traditions provide us with an opportunity to slow down and reflect on what is important to us. I encourage you all to take some time during this busy month to do something that is meaningful to you. Spend time reflecting on the year. Allow yourself to feel proud of all the things you have accomplished. Most of all, reflect on all the little ones who have experienced joy, growth, and love throughout the year because of you.

Resources:

- [Rituals and Traditions in Programs That Serve Young Dual Language Learners](#)
- [10 Ways to Share \(Virtual\) Traditions with Babies and Toddlers- Zero to Three \(family resource\)](#)
- [That Was Then: Sharing Family Traditions with Your Grandchildren – Zero to Three](#)
- [Anti-Bias Education and Holidays: Making Thoughtful Decisions - NAEYC](#)