



POSITION STATEMENT

ADOPTED: APRIL 2002

Responsiveness to Family Cultures, Values, and Languages

For optimal development and learning of all children, individuals who work with children must respect, value, and support the culture, values, and languages of each home and promote the active participation of all families.^a Legislation and recommended practices call for individualized approaches to serving infants, toddlers, and young children with special needs and their families. Individualized services begin with responsiveness to differences in race, ethnicity, culture, language, religion, education, income, family configuration, geographic location, ability, and other characteristics that contribute to human uniqueness.

Responsiveness grows from interpersonal relationships that reflect a mutual respect and appreciation for individual's culture, values, and language. Responsiveness must be both personal and organizational for optimal outcomes of development and intervention services. Responsive early childhood programs and professionals honor the values and practices within the families being served as well as among people providing the services.

Characteristics of responsive organizations include:

1. Respect for the values and practices of all members;
2. Encouragement of multiple viewpoints to enrich the whole organization;
3. Seeking ways to extend competence of the leadership as well as practitioners, with regard to differences in family cultures, values, and languages;
4. Development, implementation, and review of policies and procedures in recruitment and

leadership development at all levels of service to ensure meaningful local, state, national, and international representation and participation of people from different cultural, ethnic, and language backgrounds;

5. Encouragement and support of the development and dissemination of products that address family cultures, values, and languages; and
6. Meetings and conference presentations that incorporate the impact of family cultures, values, and languages in all early childhood activities and services.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Culture refers to "shared and learned ideas and products of a society. It is the shared way of life of a people, including their beliefs, their technology, their values and norms, all of which are transmitted down through the generations by learning and observation" (Small, 1998, p. 72).

Values refer to "emotionally laden beliefs about what is right or wrong, appropriate or inappropriate, desirable or offensive" (CLAS Early Childhood Research Institute, 1998, p. 9).

REFERENCES

CLAS Early Childhood Research Institute (1998). *CLAS Institute glossary*. Champaign, IL: University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

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Small, M. F. (1998). *Our babies, ourselves: How biology and culture shape the way we parent*. New York: Anchor Books.

^a The source of inspiration for this first sentence is NAEYC's *Position Statement on Responding to Linguistic and Cultural Diversity* (1995).

REAFFIRMED BY DEC EXECUTIVE BOARD: JUNE 14, 2005

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