# Planning for Holiday Activities and Celebrations

Educators often have questions and concerns about how to address holiday activities and celebrations in a way that is developmentally appropriate for preschoolers. It is important to consider the many different perspectives on holidays and what they mean to the communities, families, and children that we serve in our schools. These special occasions can have religious, cultural, and historical significance, as well as personal meaning. It's also important to consider the perspective that some families in our communities may not celebrate any holidays during the year.

It can easily become common practice to automatically celebrate holidays in our classrooms throughout the year without giving careful thought as to what is best practice for the students.

**There are some guiding questions that schools and teachers can use when considering the whole notion of how to approach holidays:**

* Does our practice make sense when thinking about the developmentally appropriate teaching practices that are aligned with our curriculum?
* Are our practices age-appropriate?
* Is what we do relevant to the individual children who are currently in our classrooms?
* Are we including commercialized products and holidays as part of our program without assessing the value or relevance towards the students that we serve?

# Some alternatives for approaching holiday activities and celebrations are:

Observe only holidays relevant to the cultures in the community with activities that accurately reflect what is celebrated at home and how it is celebrated at home.  At the same time, check to find out if, within your adopted curriculum, teachers are emphasizing children's learning about everyday routines of families based on the cultures represented in the local community. By valuing the cultural lives of children, teachers send a strong message to each child about his/her personal value as a member of the classroom community while simultaneously providing lessons about valuing cultural similarities and differences in the community.

To demonstrate respect and acknowledgement for all families, programs should not favor one celebration or holiday over another. Consider developing various celebrations throughout the school year that support intentionally planned classroom experiences. This not only acknowledges classrooms as independent learning communities, but it communicates to children and families that the daily classroom experiences are valued. Involving families in these celebrations can further strengthen relationships with families. Examples of these types of celebrations are *Family Day* (all families are invited and honored); *Celebrating our School* (school staff are discussed and spotlighted); and *Neighborhood Heroes* (neighborhood businesses and individuals share how they support the community). Celebrations can also be whimsical and playful. An example of this could be *Bring Books Alive Day* (making and wearing costumes from books, eating foods from favorite books, acting out favorite stories); and *Pajama Day* (wearing pajamas to school, telling bedtime stories, sharing family bedtime routines). Programs can also celebrate the end of the school year with an annual *End of the Year Celebration* where the year of learning is acknowledged.

The policy that you adopt should be guided by the goals of your adopted curriculum and the *New Jersey Preschool Teaching and Learning Standards, 2014*.  In addition, the policy should reflect the diversity present in your community and be inclusive of all families served by your preschool program through thoughtful, developmentally appropriate activities and celebrations that reflect overall classroom goals.

## References:

1. Bisson, Julie. *Celebrate! An Anti-Bias Guide to Including Holidays in Early Childhood Programs*, Second edition. St. Paul MN: Redleaf Press, 2017.
2. Louise Derman-Sparks and Julie Olsen Edwards, [*Anti-Bias Education and Holidays: Making Thoughtful Decisions*](https://www.naeyc.org/resources/blog/anti-bias-and-holidays). Washington DC: NAEYC, 2019.
3. National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), *Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children from Birth Through Age 8*, Fourth edition. Washington, DC: NAEYC, 2022.