



Identity and Belonging



Theme: Identity and Belonging

The theme of *Identity and Belonging* is about children developing a positive sense of who they are, and feeling that they are valued and respected as part of a family and community.

From birth, children develop a sense of who they are. Relationships with family members, other adults and children, friends and members of their community play a key role in building their identities. Children's sense of who they are is shaped by their characteristics, their behaviour, and their understanding of themselves, their family and others. Belonging is about having a secure relationship with or a connection with a particular group of people. When children feel a sense of belonging and sense of pride in their families, their peers, and their communities, they can be emotionally strong, self-assured, and able to deal with challenges and difficulties. This creates an important foundation for their learning and development.

Giving children messages of respect, love, approval, and encouragement enables them to develop a positive sense of who they are and a feeling that they have an important contribution to make wherever they are. Positive messages about their families, backgrounds, cultures, beliefs, and languages help children to develop pride in who they are. These messages also give them confidence to voice their views and opinions, to make choices, and to help shape their own learning.

By embracing difference, by exploring their own attitudes in relation to equality and diversity, and by realising that their attitudes and values influence children, adults can develop the insights, self-awareness and skills that are needed to help children develop a strong sense of identity and belonging. This helps to ensure that all children are respected and valued and that they can recognise and deal with discrimination and prejudice.



Table 2: Aims and learning goals for *Identity and Belonging*

| Identity and Belonging | |
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| Aims | Learning goals |
| <p>Aim 1 Children will have strong self-identities and will feel respected and affirmed as unique individuals with their own life stories.</p> | <p>In partnership with the adult, children will</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. build respectful relationships with others 2. appreciate the features that make a person special and unique (name, size, hair, hand and footprint, gender, birthday) 3. understand that as individuals they are separate from others with their own needs, interests and abilities 4. have a sense of 'who they are' and be able to describe their backgrounds, strengths and abilities 5. feel valued and see themselves and their interests reflected in the environment 6. express their own ideas, preferences and needs, and have these responded to with respect and consistency. |
| <p>Aim 2 Children will have a sense of group identity where links with their family and community are acknowledged and extended.</p> | <p>In partnership with the adult, children will</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. feel that they have a place and a right to belong to the group 2. know that members of their family and community are positively acknowledged and welcomed 3. be able to share personal experiences about their own families and cultures, and come to know that there is a diversity of family structures, cultures and backgrounds 4. understand and take part in routines, customs, festivals, and celebrations 5. see themselves as part of a wider community and know about their local area, including some of its places, features and people 6. understand the different roles of people in the community. |
| <p>Aim 3 Children will be able to express their rights and show an understanding and regard for the identity, rights and views of others.</p> | <p>In partnership with the adult, children will</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. express their views and help make decisions in matters that affect them 2. understand the rules and the boundaries of acceptable behaviour 3. interact, work co-operatively, and help others 4. be aware of and respect others' needs, rights, feelings, culture, language, background, and religious beliefs 5. have a sense of social justice and recognise and deal with unfair behaviour 6. demonstrate the skills of co-operation, responsibility, negotiation, and conflict resolution. |
| <p>Aim 4 Children will see themselves as capable learners.</p> | <p>In partnership with the adult, children will</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. develop a broad range of abilities and interests 2. show an awareness of their own unique strengths, abilities and learning styles, and be willing to share their skills and knowledge with others 3. show increasing confidence and self-assurance in directing their own learning 4. demonstrate dispositions like curiosity, persistence and responsibility 5. experience learning opportunities that are based on personal interests, and linked to their home, community and culture 6. be motivated, and begin to think about and recognise their own progress and achievements. |

Sample learning opportunities

Babies

The adult

- closely observes babies, knows their **personalities** well, respects and responds to their **individual needs and preferences**, and builds on **care practices** from home:
 - knows babies' natural rhythms, supports sleeping and feeding routines, and provides favourite comfort objects, for example blanket, teddy, soother
 - places photographs of parents near the sleeping area and knows at least a few words in the babies' home language when that language is neither English nor Irish
 - responds appropriately to babies' feelings, for example soothes them when upset, builds on their curiosity, provides positive physical contact such as cuddling, hugging, and holding on the lap
- supports babies' **emerging sense of identity**:
 - helps babies understand and use their physical capabilities, for example encouraging them to clap hands, to reach, to smile, to wave, to point, and to talk using gurgles and sounds
 - helps babies to distinguish themselves from others, for example says the babies' names and the names of family members, looks at and points to photographs
 - provides opportunities for babies to be with, to watch, and to listen to other children
 - provides low level mirrors and reflective toys, such as activity cubes with safety mirrors attached, and describes what babies see to enable them to recognise their own reflection
 - displays photos of babies and their work in the setting
 - shows the daily routine through photographs, makes portfolios of babies' constructions and paintings as they grow
 - helps babies to identify body parts by pointing to, touching, and naming them, for example pointing to toes, wriggling fingers, tapping heads, touching ears
- provides opportunities for **older siblings, peers and babies** to see one another and to be together at different times during the day, optimising opportunities that will enable them to interact and communicate:
 - plans activities and events when babies, siblings, and/or older children can be together, for example meal times, song-time, before going home
 - ensures babies and siblings have time outside to play together regularly
- provides babies with experiences of the **outside world**:
 - brings babies outside to explore and observe on a regular basis
 - gives babies opportunities to see the outdoors, for example positions babies near low level windows where they have a view outside when they are inside



- provides babies with natural items, pictures and books about nature, for example the weather, animals, and things that happen outside such as farming, travel, or buildings
- plans visits to places in the local community such as a park, a library, a playground, a market
- brings babies to the local parent-and-baby or parent-and-toddler group.

Toddlers

The adult

- **plays with and observes toddlers and takes account of their interests, needs, rights and wishes:**
 - observes and listens carefully to what toddlers do and say, rephrases emergent speech to support language development in a positive way, for example when the toddler says, *I want a t-poon*, the adult responds with, *Oh you want a spoon do you Amy?* – rather than saying, *don't say t-poon Amy.*
 - empathises with and responds to toddlers when they are concerned or afraid
 - respects and values things that are important to toddlers such as relationships, family, pets, objects, for example knows that the toddler loves tractors and extends his/her interest by having books about tractors, by having a farm set, or by visiting a real farm
- **spends one-to-one time with toddlers to make them feel special and valued:**
 - plays with toddlers and completes tasks or projects together with them, follows the toddlers' leads, allows plenty of opportunity for interaction and affirmation
 - reads favourite stories and introduces appropriate new stories
 - goes for walks and chats with toddlers along the way
 - provides opportunities for toddlers to be creative, for example making cards for special occasions, making and playing with different coloured play-dough, making a collage from junk materials
 - displays toddlers' work showing their names and dates, for example photographs, constructions, paintings, collages
 - gives toddlers an assigned space in which to put their things
 - invites toddlers to talk about their news, experiences and feelings
 - looks at toddlers' learning portfolios with them individually, and talks about what they have achieved
- **uses resources and materials which reflect toddlers' families, genders, abilities, backgrounds, and cultures:**
 - provides books and puzzles which represent a variety of family types, homes and



occupations, including those of the toddlers' parent/s, taking account of abilities, disabilities and cultures, beginning with who is in the setting and then extending it to the community

- plays with toddlers using dolls, including those with anatomically correct features that have a range of skin tones and hair types
 - plays and responds to culturally appropriate and relevant music
 - reads books about people of different appearances and abilities (including those with special needs), for example people who wear glasses or hearing aids, people who use wheelchairs, crutches or Zimmer frames, people who are on the autistic spectrum, or people with illnesses such as Alzheimer's or Parkinson's disease
 - provides a range of colours in crayons and paints, and encourages toddlers to show different skin tones in their pictures
 - plans the pretend play area to reflect the lifestyle of all toddlers attending, for example dress-up clothes, utensils, food, and cooking items in the pretend play area that are familiar to the toddlers, especially if they are from culturally diverse homes
 - provides objects and tools similar to those used by the toddlers' parent/s at work, in order to reflect the diverse nature of parental occupations
- **facilitates activities that encourage toddlers to interact and play with others:**
 - encourages children to learn each others' names and to use these in interactions such as greetings, singing happy birthday, playing together
 - supports peer mentoring, for example encouraging children to help each other, to work in pairs as appropriate, and to play together when they want to (as well as supporting parallel or solitary play)
 - plans small group co-operative games or activities such as floor jigsaws, building blocks, playing with teddy bears and dolls, doing creative group projects
- **supports toddlers in beginning to manage their behaviour appropriately and to know what behaviour is acceptable:**
 - responds to toddlers positively through verbal and non-verbal communication
 - uses predictable daily routines, sets rules and boundaries, and applies these consistently
 - anticipates conflicts and things that will upset and frustrate toddlers, and helps them to deal with these
 - empathises with toddlers and helps them understand what is and what is not acceptable through positive encouragement and reinforcement
 - observes toddlers' behaviour and provides comfort, feedback and support in times of need, such as when toddlers are upset, jealous, frightened, or stressed



- nurtures feelings of compassion and understanding in toddlers, for example affirming them when they offer the teddy to a sibling who is crying, talking to toddlers about how it feels when someone takes a toy away from them
- ensures that both **boys and girls** are encouraged to explore, take risks, enjoy challenge and to take on caring roles:
 - encourages non-stereotypical play, for example telling stories which support this, modelling non-stereotypical roles, displaying posters showing men and women participating in the same tasks in the home and at work
 - ensures that boys and girls have access to all areas and all toys and equipment, and encourages them to use these
 - provides challenging physical activities for boys and girls.

Young children

The adult

- supports children to **think about themselves, who they are and their strengths, interests and abilities**:
 - encourages children to make ‘all about me’ posters with photographs and/or drawings of the children, their families, homes, pets, and favourite toys and activities, and talk about these
 - provides art materials reflective of different skin tones
 - explores with children what makes them special, for example their own characteristics and what makes them different from their siblings and peers
 - discusses children’s individual strengths and interests, for example sport, animals, cars, dancing, singing, playing an instrument, computers, literacy, numeracy
 - uses drawings and early writings to help children create books, for example about their favourite sports team or their holidays (with the adult acting as a scribe for younger children)
 - acknowledges and, if appropriate, celebrates events such as birthdays, Chinese New Year, Christmas or Diwali, Ramadan, and Rosh Hashanah
 - displays children’s work where others can see it
 - takes photographs or video recordings of children taking part in music-making, creative activities, dance, drama, and pretend play, and shares them with children and their families
 - sources books or makes books that show the children’s backgrounds and cultures, including Travellers, lone parents, and people with disabilities
- creates multiple opportunities for young children to **talk, listen and be heard whenever possible with peers, with adults, or in small groups**:
 - sits with children during break-times, encouraging them to chat, to share



experiences, and to listen to others

- encourages discussions about children's work and play, for example what they are doing now and what they have seen and done
 - displays posters of people showing different emotions, occupations, and places, as a starting point for discussion
 - records sequences of events in personal or family histories, for example looking at their own baby and toddler photos, talking about toys their grandparents played with, clothes their parents wore, and music their parents listened to
 - encourages speaking and listening to others in a group, for example passes round a pretend microphone giving each child an opportunity to say something, as well as hearing what others have to say
- uses pretend play to encourage and support children to **empathise** with others and see things from **another's point of view**:
- uses props such as dressing-up clothes to help children take on new identities, or provides an assortment of small world figures and models to mirror life around them
 - encourages children to experience sensory impairment through playful activities, for example *Blindman's Buff*, wearing ear muffs, and empathising with people who have physical disabilities by using play resources, such as a doll-sized wheel chair, small world crutches, Zimmer frames, guide dogs
 - uses stories to discuss the actions, feelings and motivations of characters, saying, for example, *Sarah is sad because she can't find her blanket. How can we help her to feel better? How does John feel when you ...? How would you feel if ... How did the little pigs feel when the wolf was outside their door? How did Declan feel when he got lost in the shop?*
 - encourages children to compliment each other on their achievements
- adapts routines to cater for **individual needs, interests, preferences, and capabilities**:
- enables children to be involved in or to choose alternative activities
 - respects children's preferences, for example supports their preference to play alone, with a sibling or peer, or in a group
 - sets tasks for varying abilities so that everyone has a chance to be successful
 - encourages and affirms effort
- creates a **language environment** that reflects the languages of all the children and adults in the setting:
- labels regularly used objects and resources using pictures and different languages, for example coat hangers, shoe boxes, pigeon-holes for work, place mats for snacks, daily routines, different areas of the room
 - invites children to teach their peers words in the language of their home country, writes and displays these key words and phrases



- uses the correct spelling and pronunciation of children's names
- develops young children's awareness of the **community** in which they live:
 - helps children become aware of and be active in their setting (their micro-community)
 - helps ensure children know the name of the setting and that they recognise some of the other adults and children involved
 - includes the children in making decisions and in participating in community activities such as concerts, assemblies and displays
 - visits places in the community and facilitates visits from, and interactions with members of the community
 - encourages children to ask visitors questions
 - discusses the roles of people in the community such as a garda, a nurse, a social welfare officer, a librarian, a teacher, a lollipop person
 - works on projects such as 'Our Community' - involving where to go and what to do, making maps or posters of the local area with pictures of significant features such as a sculpture, a castle or a mountain, makes a community wall
 - uses ICT equipment, such as scanners, digital cameras, interactive white boards, or slide shows to collect and display information about their community
 - helps children to develop a sense of place and a responsibility to care for that place, for example looking after their place in the room, keeping their things tidy, having responsibility for a particular area such as tidying up the dress-up clothes, gathering up recyclables, planting and caring for flowers at the entrance to the setting, picking up litter.

