

Including Diversity in the Toddler and Twos Environment

A Practical Guide for ITERS-3 Classrooms

Reflecting the world children live in through books, displays, and materials.

Purpose

Infants and toddlers build their sense of identity and belonging through the people, images, and materials around them. A high-quality environment shows children that all people are valued, including themselves, their families, and those different from them. This tip sheet supports teachers in intentionally including five types of diversity throughout the classroom environment.

The Five Types of Diversity

1. Ethnic and Cultural Diversity

- Include books, dolls, photo's and materials showing people of many races and cultural backgrounds engaged in daily life, not just special events.
- Use real images (not cartoons) of families cooking, working, playing, and caring for one another.

2. Age Diversity

- Use books and photos that show people of different ages together: babies, children, adults, and elders.
- Include family photos that show grandparents, caregivers, and siblings of various ages.
- Offer pretend play materials that represent age diversity (e.g., adult and baby dolls, play glasses, canes).
- Talk about age differences naturally: "Your grandma is older than your mom, and she loves you too!"

3. Differing Abilities

- Display photos and books showing children and adults with a range of abilities (e.g., using wheelchairs, hearing aids, or prosthetics) doing everyday things.
- Offer materials that reflect diverse abilities.
- Use inclusive language: "Some people use their hands to talk," or "He moves in a wheelchair, let's make space for him."

4. Different Family Structures

- Include images and books showing many family forms: single parents, grandparents raising children, blended families, adoptive families, same-gender parents, foster families.
- Display family photos of each child at eye level: children love to see themselves and those they love.
- Use family language that fits each child ("Who helps you get ready in the morning?" instead of "What does your mom do?").
- Create a "Families and Friends" book or bulletin board with photos contributed by families.

5. Non-Traditional Gender Roles

- Provide materials that allow all children to explore all roles: boys nurturing dolls, girls building with blocks, everyone cooking or fixing.
- Display images and books showing men and women in a variety of jobs and family roles (e.g., female firefighters, male caregivers).

Books, Displays, and Materials Checklist

Books

- Feature real photos or diverse illustrations of children and families.
- Represent each of the five types of diversity across the collection.
- Include titles that reflect daily life, not just holidays or stereotypes.
- Rotate regularly so children see variety and freshness.

Displays

- Place photos and artwork at child's eye level (ITERS-3 indicator).
- Include each child's family photo and labeled images of familiar people.
- Ensure at least three types of diversity are visible at all times.
- Keep displays clean, current, and meaningful, not just decoration.

Materials

- Provide dolls, play people, and figures representing diverse skin tones, abilities, and ages.
- Include music, dress-up, and pretend play props that reflect a range of cultures and roles.