

Anti Bias FAQs for Penn State Childcare Centers

What is Anti-Bias Education (ABE)?

ABE teaches children to recognize, affirm and celebrate the various social identities that make up our classroom and surrounding community. It is based on research demonstrating that children as young as 6 months old can begin to show signs of cultural bias if they are not taught to understand differences. ABE has four driving goals:

- Each child will demonstrate self-awareness, confidence, family pride and positive social identities.
- Each child will express comfort and joy with human diversity; accurate language for human differences; and deep, caring human connections.
- Each child will increasingly recognize unfairness, have language to describe unfairness, and understand that unfairness hurts.
- Each child will demonstrate empowerment and the skill to act, with others or alone, against prejudice and/or discriminatory actions.

This journey of discovery is a marathon and not a sprint. Time is needed to continue to grow an awareness of beliefs and biases that we hold and discover how they influence our practice and engagement with children, families and each other.

How does ABE relate to Penn State strategic imperatives?

Due to our affiliation with Penn State, we are responsible for upholding the university's statement on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. You can view the full statement [here](#). It says that "we value inclusion as a core strength" and that "we will foster and maintain a safe environment of respect and inclusion for faculty, staff, students, and members of the communities we serve."

What does ABE look like in the classroom?

Although individual classrooms with vary in their implementation of ABE, we start from the following illustration:

"Teachers call attention to the ways in which people are different and the ways in which people are the same, honoring individual and group identity. They intentionally introduce issues of fairness and unfairness, and coach children to think critically and to take action. Teachers learn about children's family and cultural identities and integrate those identities into the daily life of the classroom, at the same time as they acknowledge the ways in which their own cultural identities shape their teaching" (Ann Pelo, 2008).

In practice, this often involves working from children's interests to provide them with opportunities to gather information, think critically, and take action to make the world a better place. Especially with young children, ABE lessons often turn on the concept of understanding what is fair or unfair in the world around them.

What does it mean to advance equity and how does this apply to my role as a parent, educator or administrator?

As shared in our commitment to diversity statement, advancing equity through ABE means exposing children to both the visible and non-visible diversity present within our world. This includes developing self-awareness and positive social identity for each child as well as using concepts like fair/unfair or same/different to teach children to recognize diversity in the world around them. It is important to say that this curriculum does not teach children that there is one “right” way to live. Instead, its core value is diversity, both in terms of social identities as well as perspectives on the world. We want children to know that people see things differently and that this is not only okay but that it is an essential part of living in a multicultural democracy.

How does Antibias curriculum work with Emergent Curriculum approaches?

Early childhood educators often make decisions that shape student learning - in everything from the design of their classroom space, the materials available for student play and the books that we read during circle time. These decisions set the stage for conversation between educators and children. When teachers use ABE alongside the emergent curriculum approach, they are similarly “setting the stage” for discussions about diversity, fairness and social difference. Like emergent curriculum related to other topics (e.g., safety, sharing), the specific questions and conversations are driven by children’s questions, wondering, comments within the stage set by their teacher. As described in early education curriculum, teachers become attuned to listening to the topics that come up in children’s play and conversation and responding in a way that builds understanding of and empathy for their peers.

Does an anti-bias approach mean that my children will not celebrate holidays in their classroom?

Celebrating diversity is a core feature of ABE, and this translates to holiday celebrations. Holidays are an important time for families and communities to participate in shared culture and affirm their defining values. Traditionally, however, schools have elevated one type of celebration as the norm and/or have unintentionally reinforced social stereotypes in the way that they celebrate certain holidays (e.g., depictions of Native People on Thanksgiving). Instead, when we consider the word “celebrate,” we have re-framed our definition to ensure we are learning about a child and family in the classroom and inviting the other children, educators and families to learn from one another. We try to personalize the experience as much as possible so that children and families understand the differences and similarities in our community. In this way, holidays can be celebrated without communicating these norms and stereotypes to young children. This includes recognizing and celebrating various holidays that different families may celebrate during a particular time of year, and it includes discussion about how celebrations may inforce harmful stereotypes.

Overall, it is important to note that there are many different kinds of families in our school and surrounding community. A topic that concerns or upsets one family may be extremely important to another family. As a result, it is important to us to ensure that we are not privileging the concerns (or perceived concerns) of some parents over others. Consistent with the ABE approach in our classrooms, we aim to make room for the perspectives of all families and then to make classroom decisions that are guided by the core goals of ABE, as defined above.

Aren't preschoolers too young to talk about race and gender?

We know from previous research that racial attitudes – whether accepting or otherwise – begin to take shape at the earliest stages of human social and cognitive development. For example, Kelly and colleagues found that babies as young as 3 months-old look more at faces that match the race of their caregivers. Meanwhile, other studies have found that children 24-30 months-old use race to interpret observed behavior and to choose playmates. Particularly important for the ABE curriculum, research has found that expressions of racial prejudice can peak at pre-school age. Dunham and colleagues, for example, found that white children as young as 5 years-old can be strongly biased in favor of whiteness. Again, as noted by influential early childhood educators, children will inevitably have questions about things like race and social differences. Without the support from skilled educators, they may be left to make sense of these questions on their own and, potentially, absorbing common negative beliefs about people from different racial backgrounds or different ways of being in the world.

Are these conversations developmentally appropriate for young children?

It can be difficult to talk about topics like race and social identity at any age. However, there are many resources available to help early childhood educators to discuss these topics with young children. These resources greatly inform our work, and we make regular efforts - through informal discussions and professional development events - to ensure that our language and curriculum is developmentally appropriate. For example, ABE topics can be discussed in terms of concepts that are extremely important to young children, such as the difference between fair and unfair. In fact, this is an important developmental window in which children begin to develop implicit bias because of what they see around them. Finally, choosing not to talk about topics like race or other identity areas that children are trying to make sense of sends a message to children that there is something taboo about these topics instead of providing a safe space for their exploration and learning. Encouraging discussion is essential towards making children comfortable with diversity of all types, and to make observations and take action when they witness acts that are unfair or reflect another's prejudice.

Do teachers use anti-bias approaches when there aren't diverse families in my class?

Absolutely! While one anti-bias goal speaks to the importance of helping children develop a positive identity and see that reflected in classroom materials and discussion, several of the anti-bias goals talk about the importance of children recognizing diversity, understanding justice, and working for a more just and fair society beyond their classroom. This can take shape in

reading books with characters who come from different backgrounds, to talking about how issues of fairness/unfairness play out in the State College community, to writing letters to raise awareness about an issue that the children care about.

Do other early education centers implement anti-bias instruction?

Yes! In fact, the [National Association for the Education of Young Children](#) has developed a second draft position statement on Advancing Equity in Early Childhood Education. Because we are a NAEYC-accredited center, this statement will directly impact us and require us to continue our work to advance equity and our anti-bias curriculum work within our child care centers. Children will have a right to equitable learning opportunities and environments that reflect principles of fairness and justice that incorporate the goals of anti-bias education including-

- Children being supported in demonstrating self awareness, confidence and family pride in demonstrating their social identities
- Children will be educated in all areas of human diversity and demonstrate comfort and joy in human diversity, use appropriate language to describe differences and form deep, caring relationships.
- Children will demonstrate increased recognition and have words to describe unfairness, understand that unfairness hurts and will have skills to act on their own or with others to oppose prejudice or discriminatory actions.

The role of educators and administrators at the child care centers will require dedications “to self reflection, willingness to respectfully listen to others’ perspectives without interruption or defensiveness, and a commitment to continuous learning.”

If I have more questions, who can I contact?

We encourage you to ask questions as you see this work become more visible in the center and classrooms and hope you will partner with us to “work for a world where every child and family is protected and honored, exactly as they are”. If you have any suggestions, questions, feedback or concerns about this work, please email:

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For further reading:

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Dunham, Y., Baron, A. S., & Banaji, M. R. (2008). The development of implicit intergroup cognition. *Trends in cognitive sciences*, 12(7), 248-253.

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Katz, P. A., & Kofkin, J. A. (1997). Race, gender, and young children. *Developmental psychopathology: Perspectives on adjustment, risk, and disorder*, 21, 51-74.

Kelly, D. J., Quinn, P. C., Slater, A. M., Lee, K., Gibson, A., Smith, M., & Pascalis, O. (2005). Three-month-olds, but not newborns, prefer own-race faces. *Developmental science*, 8(6), F31-F36.

Kinzler, K. (2016, October 21). How Kids Learn Prejudice, *New York Times*. Retrieved from: <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/23/opinion/sunday/how-kids-learn-prejudice.html>

Pelo, A. (2008). Introduction: Embracing Social Justice in Early Childhood Education. *Rethinking Early Education*. Rethinking Schools: Milwaukee, WI.

ABE Identity Area Definitions

- Racial identity: How one is classified by other people and by social institutions. In addition, it includes how one comes to understand and feel about one's racial group membership.
- Gender identity: The awareness and acceptance of one's own gender.
- Social and Economic Class: The social and economic conditions in which a person lives, which determine access to schools and social institutions and can impact financial security.
- Ability/Disability: A physical, cognitive, or emotional traits that shape the way a person interacts with the world around them.
- Sexual orientation: The direction of one's sexual interest.
- Family structure: Includes the following types of family structures- Blended family; Conditionally separated family; Extended family; Foster; Nuclear family; Share-custody family; Transnational family; and Transracial adoptive family.
- Miscellaneous family differences, including religion and differences in holiday celebrations: While the above refers to differences in family structure, this identity category refers to differences in family traditions or celebrations. For example, two nuclear families could have very different beliefs about celebrating Halloween.