



Why it's important to include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander resources at your service (and where to find them)

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Our children have the right to learn the full history of Australia and deserve to be able to engage in learning about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and cultures (*Walking Together*, p. 7). One of the ways we can engage children at a young age is through meaningful and culturally appropriate resources and content. This could be through connecting with your local Aboriginal community and exploring what resources are specific to the land and country you are on, or engaging with Aboriginal organisations such as the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated (VAEAI).

Education and care services are a place of belonging and first learnings, and also replicate the community where children engage in authentic learning, playing out important social roles and learning social responsibility (Hill 2006). These first years are a time for our children to absorb information that will carry them through their schooling years and community interactions. Therefore, it is crucial that we encourage children to be accepting of all cultures and treat each other with kindness and care. Introducing children to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture through meaningful resources and content will allow them to explore, learn, develop, gain knowledge and ask questions (Hill 2006). We want our children to be inquisitive and to have the starting blocks of being culturally accepting, curious and wanting to learn more.

We understand that some services might be further along than others when it comes to incorporating and embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures in their curriculum. This does not mean you can't start from the beginning or ask questions about how to be more culturally inclusive – we encourage you to ask these questions and receive the correct information so you can include culture and perspectives in your service while being culturally respectful.

You might also be asking how you can evaluate what resources and content are meaningful and appropriate. This is what VAEAI are here to assist with. We have numerous resources you can access, as well as our Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group who can assist and guide you, and give meaningful advice to your local area. Our website (vaeai.org.au) has many links to information that can help you explore and learn at your own pace.

It's important for all education and care services to have cultural representation, not only for the possible Aboriginal children who might attend your service, but for all children and families to see your service being inclusive of this nation's First Peoples.

This could be through your Acknowledgment of Country plaque at your reception, flying the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags out the front, cultural artwork from local artists hanging in your service or inviting local elders and community members to come and share stories.

In the beginning phases, toddlers like to explore by touch, feel, taste and smell, while also listening to words and stories and scribbling and drawing (Hill 2006). This is a great age for them to touch and smell gum leaves, learn about native plants, learn about connection to country and how we take care of the land, read books by Indigenous authors and learn about Indigenous stories. They could also learn about art and symbols from a local Aboriginal artist or even by looking at our Aboriginal flag and learning about what it represents. With some further research, you will come across many other educational and interactive resources that are available such as Aboriginal puzzles, ochre kits, children's songs and nursery rhymes sung in language and many more. These special activities will help enrich the children's young minds and make them excited to learn more.

We also encourage services to celebrate and acknowledge our significant dates with us such as NAIDOC Week (naidoc.org.au), Reconciliation Week (reconciliation.org.au/our-work/national-reconciliation-week) and National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Day (aboriginalchildrensday.com.au) to name a few. This could be an opportunity to learn why these dates are so important and how you can engage your service to be inclusive of these dates, acknowledgements, and celebrations.

Our children deserve to have many culturally diverse experiences that expand their knowledge and hearts and further their learnings about the world around them. It is through these experiences that our country and our little ones will grow strong while feeling a sense of belonging and being proud of the land they call home.

References

Walking Together – Inclusion support and protocols resource for education and care services: viac.com.au > Educator resources > Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander resources for educators > *Walking together – A guide*

Hill, S. (2006). *Developing Early Literacy Assessment and Teaching*. 2nd ed. South Yarra: Eleanor Curtain Publishing, pp. 3-7.