

Creating a sense of place: Considering routine, ritual, and belonging

Important questions

A sense of place is something that cannot be purchased in a prepackaged curriculum or incorporated into the program in a single day. A sense of place takes time, thought, and reflection. A sense of place builds a sense of belonging. Most importantly, a sense of place begins with you. Take time to write down what you feel is special about your program; what sets you apart from other programs. Consider the following:

How is your place/program special or unique?

How did you create these special qualities?

What would you like to do to make your program even more special?

What steps would you need to take to make these ideas realistic goals?

Routines and rituals

Think about the routines and rituals you do daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly with the children and their families. Routines and rituals offer the opportunity to repeat experiences and gain familiarity. The routines and rituals of your program are important because they not only offer predictable experiences, they help create history in your program. You can look back and have fond memories of special events and interactions or remember the safe, predictable feeling of being well cared for.

Examples of routines and rituals may be:

Welcome letters/newsletters

Hello and good-bye songs

Clean-up routines (songs, jobs)

Predictable schedules

Special projects and explorations

Journals and portfolios

Community projects
(outside clean-up)

Annual celebrations

Special visitors

Annual family gatherings
(such as the family breakfast)

Special fun days (pajama day)



The term *sense of place* reflects why a place is special and unique. It also reflects how attachments are fostered within the group and how each person develops a sense of belonging. A major goal for both parents and child care educators is that the children form positive attachments with the people involved in a program and with the child care program itself. So, how do you create a positive *sense of place*?

More important questions

Consider the following:

How do you help children in your program form positive attachments?

What steps do you take to help children and parents feel a sense of belonging in your program?

“Growing” belonging

A sense of belonging doesn't just happen; it takes time and effort to grow. Focused, planned ideas are important. Growing with your families creates not only a positive sense of belonging, but also helps foster the circle of nurturing: “You've taken such good care of me; I want to take good care of you.” This adds to what is special and unique about your program.



A sense of belonging can grow in many ways:

- Get to know families; find out what they wish for; let them know they are important
- Welcome each family and child into your program (a welcome sign with everyone's name or picture)
- Make spaces for children and parents (personal cubbies, mailboxes, parent bulletin boards)
- Incorporate home-like atmospheres, such as pleasing wall colors, soft lighting, comfortable furniture
- Foster interactions; invite family members to participate, offer group project work, and set up spaces and materials that encourage exchanges
- Let the environment and curriculum reflect the work and ideas of the children
- Check in with your attitude; are you being positive, supportive, communicative?

Tip: Find out the special routines and rituals of the families you care for. Ask families to share their special routines and rituals: How they go about their days and any special family celebrations. This is a good way to get to know each family and their traditions.