

Engaging with multilingual families

How to engage and communicate with families about kindergarten programs and create strong relationships from the start of Three-Year-Old Kindergarten



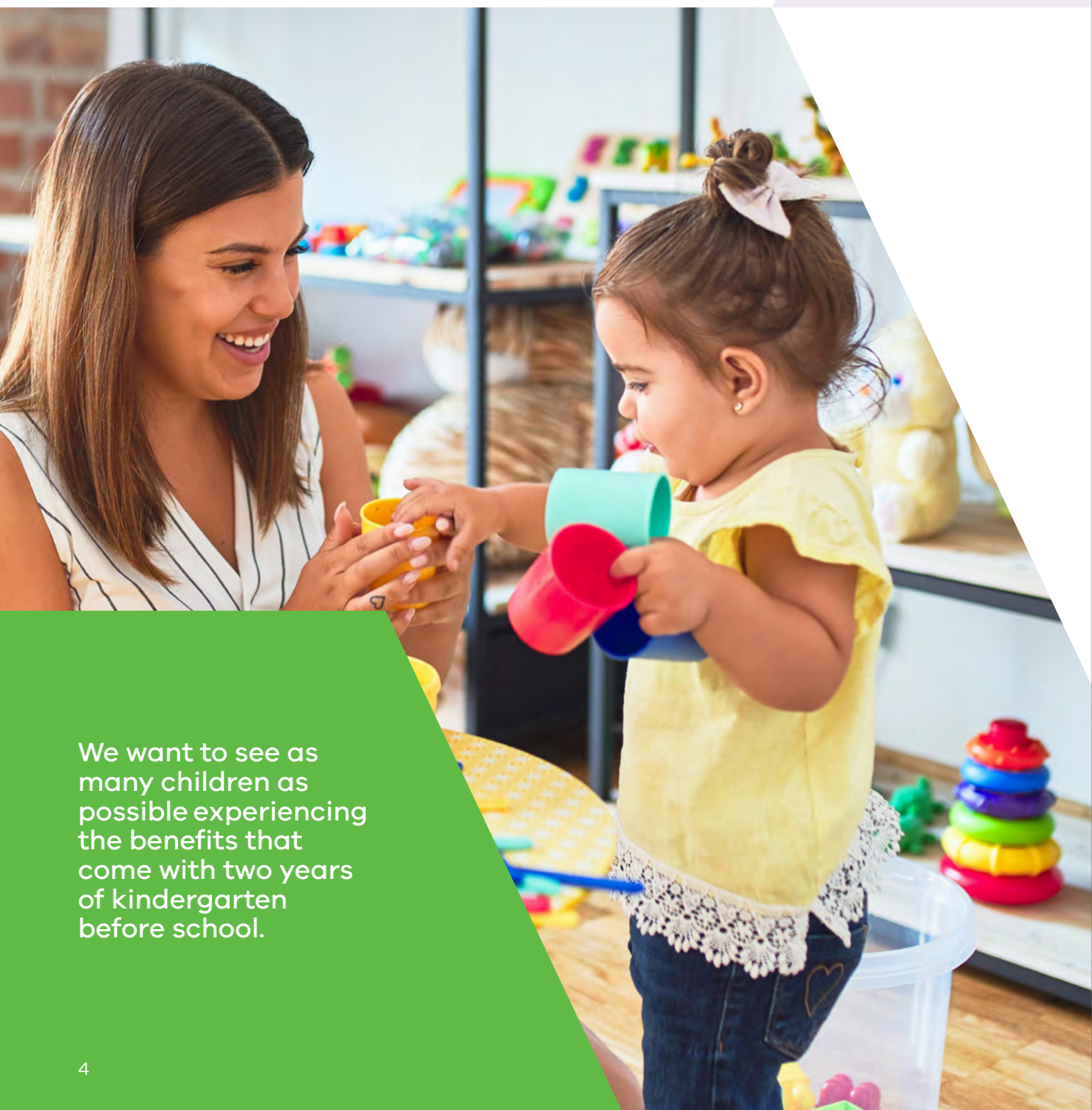
Acknowledgement of Country

The department proudly acknowledges Victoria's Aboriginal communities and their rich culture and pays respect to their Elders past and present. We acknowledge Aboriginal people as Australia's first peoples and as the Traditional Owners and custodians of the land and water on which we rely. We recognise and value the ongoing contribution of Aboriginal people and communities to Victorian life and how this enriches us. We embrace the spirit of reconciliation, working towards the equality of outcomes and ensuring an equal voice.

Contents

Introduction	4
1. Working with multilingual families	6
2. Creating welcoming and inclusive environments	8
3. Engaging meaningfully from the start	10
4. Using different ways to communicate	14
5. Getting the right language supports	16
6. Promoting identity and belonging	18
Appendices	20
Appendix A - Planning template	21
Appendix B - Key words and phrases template	22
Appendix C - Community connections	24

Introduction



We want to see as many children as possible experiencing the benefits that come with two years of kindergarten before school.

Children from multilingual families, including children newly arrived or from a refugee background, are less likely than the overall population to enrol and participate in kindergarten programs. This may be because of language and communication barriers, limited awareness of services and their benefits, confusion around costs, and hesitation around enrolling 'so early' in a child's life.

We want to see as many children as possible experiencing the benefits that come with two years of kindergarten before school.

This guide is designed to assist you engage with multilingual families in your community, some who may be unfamiliar with kindergarten. It has been written by cultural inclusion specialists from fka Children's Services in partnership with the Department of Education.

The Victorian Government is committed to making it easier for all families to access kindergarten programs and reducing the barriers multilingual families may encounter when accessing early childhood education services.

Other departmental resources and initiatives to reduce these barriers include:

Early Start Kindergarten (ESK)

Available for children from a refugee or asylum seeker background, providing 15 hours of kindergarten each week for two years before school. Enrolling eligible children through ESK ensures they have priority of access, and services can receive additional funding and support.

Kinder translations webpage

Information in 30 languages about kindergarten in Victoria, including what it is and what children experience in kindergarten programs. Families can choose from written, audio or visual materials.

Culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) outreach workers

From January 2025–June 2027 the department is funding 25 local councils to employ CALD outreach workers. CALD outreach workers address barriers to kindergarten access and participation for children and families from CALD backgrounds. They also support families with their child's transition to school, and ongoing engagement and participation in education. See the list of participating councils on the [department's website](#).

In-language videos

Featuring Arabic, Chinese, Punjabi and Vietnamese families explaining the benefits of kindergarten and how to enrol. More languages are being added.

These resources are available on the '[Supporting CALD families to engage in kindergarten](#)' webpage.

Best Start, Best Life reforms

- **Free Kinder** – is available for Three- and Four-Year-Old Kindergarten programs at participating services, saving families up to \$2,627 per child each year.
- **Pre-Prep** – from 2025, Four-Year-Old Kindergarten will start to transition to Pre-Prep, rolling out in six local government areas (LGAs). In 2026, Pre-Prep will be available across Victoria to Aboriginal children, children from a refugee or asylum seeker background, and children who have had contact with Child Protection services. Each year more LGAs will be added to the roll-out schedule with Pre-Prep also becoming available in 2028 to children who have (or have a parent or guardian who has) a Commonwealth concession card and children who are a multiple birth child (triplets or more). By 2036, 30 hours per week of Pre-Prep will be available for 4-year-old children across Victoria.
- **50 government-owned early learning and childcare centres** – the first four centres will be available in 2025. These early learning and childcare centres will be built in locations across Victoria that have the greatest need and will make it easier for families to access education and care.
- **Ongoing roll-out of Three-Year-Old Kindergarten** – kindergarten services can deliver between 5 and 15 hours of Three-Year-Old Kindergarten this year and are increasing to a 15-hour program by 2029.

CHAPTER 1

Working with multilingual families



Victorians come from more than 200 countries and speak more than 260 languages. Children who attend kindergarten programs in Victoria reflect this rich diversity.

Starting Three-Year-Old Kindergarten is a big step for families. Often it is the first time that parents and carers are trusting the care of their child with someone they don't know.

Studies show that children thrive when their families are involved in their early childhood education. Participation in activities and regular communication between families and teachers is linked to strong outcomes for children. It models the importance of education and can set the stage for involvement in future school settings.¹

To develop positive relationships, it is important to find ways to engage and communicate meaningfully with families.

Victorians come from more than 200 countries and speak more than 260 languages. Children who attend kindergarten programs in Victoria reflect this rich diversity.

Some multilingual families may experience barriers accessing early childhood education so it is essential that services are able to engage with multilingual families and make them feel welcome. By doing so, every child can become a successful learner, actively participate in two years of play-based learning before starting school and experience the many benefits it has to offer.

The Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework (VEYLDF) provides Practice Principles to guide early childhood professionals to work together, and with children and families, to support learning and development outcomes for every child. The VEYLDF Practice Principle, 'Equity and diversity' acknowledges that children learn best when early childhood professionals respect their diversity and provide high quality learning opportunities and experiences free from prejudice and discrimination. Early childhood professionals working in line with the VEYLDF recognise multilingualism as an asset and support children to maintain their first language, learn English as an additional language, and learn languages other than English.

The purpose of this guide is to help you overcome any communication barriers and support your engagement with families in your area and who attend your service.

You will find information about:

1. Creating welcoming and inclusive environments
2. Engaging meaningfully from the start
3. Using different ways to communicate
4. Getting the right language supports
5. Promoting identity and belonging.

The guide encourages you to reflect on your practice and provides ways you can strengthen your relationships with multilingual families in your community. There are examples of how you can support families at different stages of the year, including enrolment and orientation, and throughout the year as you get to know each other better.

The guide is for all early learning professionals, including educational leaders, service managers, teachers and educators. You may refer to the guide and resources listed below during your [Early Years Planning Cycle](#), and for [Quality Improvement Plans](#).

Related resources

This guide is complemented by three online learning modules that will prompt further reflection and action. You can find the learning modules at fka.org.au, as well as:

- fkaCS fact sheet: [Barriers to active participation in early childhood education and care](#)
- fkaCS fact sheet: [Cultural inclusion support](#)

¹Family involvement makes a difference – Evidence that family involvement promotes school success for every child of every age. Harvard Family Research Project (2006)

CHAPTER 2

Creating welcoming and inclusive environments



'Children growing up in Australia are growing up in diversity. Australians are not a homogenous group: we differ in all aspects of identity, including gender, race, ethnicity, cultural heritage, abilities and disabilities, sexualities, religion and socio-economic status'.⁴

- Dr Anne Glover, Early childhood education specialist

The learning environment plays an important role in supporting and demonstrating a sense of belonging, value, and equity at kindergarten.

For families and children spending time at your service during enrolment and orientation, their perception of your environment can determine whether they feel welcome, safe, secure, and supported. The silent messages families internalise are as important as the messages they actually hear.

When families feel comfortable in early learning environments, it can lead to increased involvement, and in turn, success for their children². You can support children and families to feel welcome and a sense of belonging to your services by recognising 'culture and the context of family as central to children's sense of being and belonging, and to success in lifelong learning.'³

Families entering early learning spaces for the first time will look for ways the environment celebrates cultural diversity, advocates for equity, and invites belonging. This is particularly true for families who do not share a language.

Finding opportunities for connection through your environment is an important part of planning for how you will welcome new families. This is important all year, and particularly during enrolment and orientation.

Use the following questions to prompt further reflection and consider ways you can make your environment more welcoming and inclusive of your community.

Does your environment reflect the diversity of your community?

Think about what else you can do with your walls, display boards and posters to reflect multiculturalism, such as greetings in different languages and family photos. See [Appendix B – Key words and phrases](#).

Consider all of your resources – is there a good representation of different cultures, particularly those in your local community?

Think about what other books, music, and toys you could add to your learning environment.

What other ways can families hear and see their culture and language in your environment?

Consider celebrating and creating art and projects based on different cultural days, such as Chinese New Year and Diwali (Festival of Lights). Find or create a calendar that includes significant dates to celebrate.


² Family involvement makes a difference – Evidence that family involvement promotes school success for every child of every age. Harvard Family Research Project (2006)

³ [Belonging, Being & Becoming – The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia](#). Australian Government Department of Education and Training for the Council of Australian Governments (2019).

⁴ [The Anti-Bias Approach in Early Childhood](#). Dr Red Ruby Scarlet (2020).

CHAPTER 3

Engaging meaningfully from the start

A photograph of a woman and a young girl sitting at a table, playing with wooden blocks. The girl is on the left, looking down at a stack of blocks. The woman is on the right, smiling and looking at the blocks. There are various toys on the table, including a dinosaur figurine and other wooden blocks. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

The orientation period is an opportunity to ask families more about themselves, and for families to become familiar with your service and program.

It is important multilingual families and children feel like they belong at kindergarten, that they are listened to, and receive the information and support they need. Families will get a sense of the culture, and how they will fit in from their early interactions at your service.

There are different ways of communicating with families, including using translated information, an interpreter, and/or visual communication. There is also a variety of communication tools you can use (see chapter 4), depending on what suits your families.

The [VEYLDF 'Partnerships with families' Practice Principle Guide](#) includes information about developing partnerships with families and creating inclusive environments, and notes 'every partnership will be unique, just as each family, with their different experiences, values and priorities is unique'. Family communication preferences may also change over time.

Enrolment and orientation

Enrolment provides the opportunity to connect and understand the cultural values, expectations, and experiences of each family. It is the perfect time to explain key information about your service, including your orientation process, and lay the foundations for a collaborative relationship – explain how they can seek more information or what to do when they have a question.

Provide orientation information that is respectful, clear, and concise. This may include making sure families understand what they need to bring with them, explaining what happens during orientation, and examples of the types of conversations you will have and questions you will ask.

The orientation period is an opportunity to ask families more about themselves, and for families to become familiar with your service and program. You may use, for example, visuals, translation apps and hand gestures until you gauge what language supports will help future conversations.

How can families enrol in your service?

You could map the process and use it as a script for families on open days, or promote some messages on your social media.

Do families know how to enrol via the central registration and enrolment system?

Provide an overview of the system and how families can be supported in the process by your service, the Department of Education, and local councils.

What aspects of your orientation practices support multilingual families?

Consider making information available in [different languages](#).

Planning your approach to how you will engage and communicate with multicultural families during enrolment, orientation, on the first day and throughout the year can help make sure all families feel welcome at your service. See Appendix A for a planning template.

The first day of kindergarten

Starting kindergarten is a special time and the first days are important to everyone. Reflect on what will be most useful to families and could contribute to a smooth transition for children.

What do you need for the first day? What do families need? What do children need?

Identify these needs and how you will achieve them to get the desired outcome for each. You could use the 'Hello Kinder' resource.

How will you communicate the expectations and requirements for the first day?

Do you have a way of communicating with each family? If you need language supports, see chapter 3.

Breaking down barriers

Communication and language barriers can make it difficult for some families to access kindergarten. Some may feel uncomfortable communicating with limited English, for example. As soon as you become aware of any communication or language barriers, start working out strategies for how you can better facilitate family involvement at your service.

How can you build relationships with families?

Identify what could be getting in the way of relationship building. Connect with local community services to better engage and support families in your area (see Appendix C – Community connections). Encourage siblings and other family members to spend time at your service.

What barriers might families encounter when engaging with your service?

Early childhood education in Victoria may be different to what they know or may have experienced previously.

Multilingualism as a strength

When families and children are supported to use their first or home language, it can assist their involvement at your service.

There are many long-term benefits of multilingualism for children in their early years and adult life.

Encouraging the use of diverse languages in kindergarten services also leads to stronger local communities and prepares children for an increasingly connected world later in life.

How can you support children and families to use their home language?

Make sure everyone at your service knows how to [access an interpreter](#). Free telephone, video and on-site interpreters are available for all department funded kindergarten services (see Chapter 5 – Utilising language supports). You can also learn key phrases (see Appendix A).


What practical supports are in place to help families?

Find out the [community languages of your local area](#) and share translated materials from the [DE website](#). You can [order printed materials](#) (DE covers the cost of these). Also consider grouping families who share a language in the same social media groups, if you have any, and orientation cycles to help build connections and support information sharing.



CHAPTER 4

Using different ways to communicate

A photograph of a woman with dark hair, wearing a grey cardigan over a white blouse, smiling warmly at a young child. The child is partially visible on the left, gesturing with their hand. They are sitting at a table with colorful stacking blocks. The background shows a blurred classroom environment with shelves of books and toys.

If you are seeking information or actions from the family, think about how you can help them respond.

Building strong, two-way relationships with multilingual families is essential to children’s learning and development. You should consider what communication tools will have the best chance of reaching and staying connected with your families, and encouraging their active participation.

Communication tools

Email – When using email, it is important that content is clear and in plain English. Many families will have their email set in their family language, so you need to use content that is easily translatable. Using too many concepts or jargon words could result in your message being misinterpreted. Also avoid using acronyms.

Text messaging – Text messaging can be useful to share reminders and other important information. As with email, many people will have their phone or tablet device set to their most fluent language. If messages are in plain English, the content is more likely to be translated in a meaningful way.

Regular, scheduled telephone and/or video meetings – Video meetings could be set up individually or in small groups and can allow families to connect and discuss current and upcoming events at the service, or share ideas to include in the program. For some families, you might prefer to schedule regular telephone or video meetings that include interpreters or language support workers.

Recorded video messages – You can use your preferred online platform to upload recorded video messages. Think about how you can use family languages with help from multilingual colleagues where possible. Consider using recorded video messages that show teachers and educators engaging with children in the learning environment, demonstrating learning through play.

Social media and online platforms – Services can use online platforms or private social media group chats to enable two-way communication and sharing of updates, messages and photos.

Applications – There are translation applications available that can translate information and generate calendars as well as send newsletters and reminders to families. Most of these applications will have a subscription fee.

Once you have identified what communication tools are available, you can select the most appropriate for each interaction with families.

Who are you communicating with?

Make notes of the names of the family members, and what their background and home language is. Normalise using names in daily interactions and make sure you use correct pronunciation and spelling.

What is the purpose of your communication and/or desired action?


If you are seeking information or actions from the family, think about how you can help them respond. Be clear how you will use the information (for example, ideas for additional learning at home) and ensure families see their contributions as constructive.

Do you need to provide language supports to help facilitate the communication?

See chapter 5 – Getting the right language supports

CHAPTER 5

Getting the right language supports



Community language support workers create a bridge between the home and service by talking to the child in their home language.

As well as having communication materials available in different languages, using a variety of communication tools and visual content, consider if any of the following language supports could support your engagement with multilingual families.


Language Support	Description	Examples of when to use	How to access
Translators	A translator changes written information into a different language. Translators should be trained in and have formal credentials in interpreting.	Enrolment and orientation information Important excerpts from parent handbooks Essential program information, such as changes to fees, policies, staffing	Free written document translation services are available for all department funded kindergarten services Vic Gov - Planning for translations
Interpreters	An interpreter is a qualified professional who makes it possible for two parties who don't share a common language to communicate. This includes sign language. An interpreter should be trained in and have formal credentials in interpreting.	Telephone or video call with family wanting enrolment information Face-to-face meeting – orientation session With families who are unable to read text/script in their home language or in English	Free telephone, video and on-site interpreters are available for all department funded kindergarten services and eligible early childhood support services.
Language aides	A language aide is an employee, such as a bilingual worker, who uses a language other than English in their work. Language aides assist with low-risk and non-critical communication.	Providing directions Making appointments Getting basic information	Community connections service staff.
Community language support workers	fkaCS community language support workers work with fkaCS consultants and early childhood education teachers and educators.	To create a bridge between the home and service by talking to the child in their home language To help the child communicate with other children in the service and develop friendships	Contact fkaCS

How do you let families know what language supports are available?

Consider what will assist them with enrolment, orientation, providing feedback etc. Try to arrange at least one face-to-face meeting with families.

CHAPTER 6

Promoting identity and belonging

A photograph of a woman and a young girl playing with colorful blocks. The woman is on the left, looking down at the blocks with a slight smile. The girl is on the right, focused on placing a yellow block. The background is a plain, light-colored wall. The image is partially obscured by a large blue triangle in the bottom left corner.

'Children's identity and their family and cultural histories shape their learning and development. Children feel welcome and learn best when professionals respect and acknowledge their unique identity'

- VEYLDF

When children feel that you understand them, it helps strengthen their identity. You can support a child's sense of identity by letting them know their background, interests and skills are understood and valued. This is part of the VEYLDF, with 'Children have a strong sense of identity' being one of the Early Years Learning and Development Outcomes.

When children and their families feel respected for who they are and like they belong and are in a safe environment, they are more likely to engage and express themselves. Recognising first or home languages and providing language supports can benefit a family's sense of identity.

Early interactions

You will start to understand a family and child's identity during enrolment and orientation. As parents and carers know their children better than anyone, there is no-one better to help you get to know their child. When you build strong relationships with parents and carers, everyone can work together to help children thrive at kindergarten and beyond.

Respecting unique identities

Recognising and respecting the uniqueness of each family and striving to learn about their background, culture and language can help children feel strong in their identity, and like they belong.

When children feel they are part of a group, they are more likely to participate in play, develop friendships and interact with others with care, empathy and respect.

The VEYLDF states: 'When children from birth have positive experiences of relationship and place, they can develop a strong sense of security, identity and belonging. They can construct a positive image of themselves, and behave as secure, significant, respected individuals'.

How can you promote diversity, equity and inclusion and make stronger connections with families?

Invite families to share information about themselves and their child. Also see [Appendix C](#) for a list of community services you could connect with.

Appendices



Appendix A - Planning template

	Enrolment	Orientation	The first day	Ongoing participation
Welcoming environments				
Engaging meaningfully				
Different ways to communicate				
Language supports				
Promoting identity and belonging				

Appendix B - Key words and phrases template

Use the provided table and ask families to help you as they are the expert in their home language. They will be able to support you in understanding the pronunciation, how the words and phrases are used and how their child will respond.

You could also ask the family for consent to record them pronouncing the key words and phrases. This will support you in your learning and give you greater confidence in your interactions with the children.



Key words and phrases for _____

Language:

	Family section	Service section
Words/phrases in English	Words/phrases in above language	How it sounds to you
Hello		
How are you?		
Can you show me?		
You can have a turn		
Help		
Stop		
Please		
Thank you		
Mum and Dad will be back soon		
Goodbye		
Wash hands		
Toilet		
Snack		
Are you hungry?		
Drink		
Would you like to go outside?		
Would you like to play?		
Come and join us		

Add your own words and phrases below...

	Family section	Service section
Words/phrases in English	Words/phrases in above language	How it sounds to you

Appendix C - Community connections

As well as other early childhood organisations, maternal child healthcare services, playgroups, social groups, churches, and places of worship, you may find it useful to connect with some of the migrant, refugee and asylum seeker support services and local settlement services listed below.

[Spectrum](#) - With offices in Dallas and Sunshine, Spectrum offers a range of settlement and family services to newly arrived and established families with migrant and refugee backgrounds.

[The Migrant Information Centre](#) - Supporting the Local Government Areas of Boroondara, Knox, Manningham, Maroondah, Monash, Whitehorse and Yarra Ranges, the Migrant Information Centre provides families with settlement services, support programs and multicultural playgroups.

[Southern Migrant and Refugee Centre \(SMRC\)](#) - SMRC is a community organisation that supports refugees and migrants in Melbourne's South and East. They offer family and children services, education, employment, and community support, and can connect families with local social and community groups.

[Migrant Resource Centre \(MRC\) Northwest](#) - Supporting the Local Government Areas of Brimbank, Hume, Moonee Valley, Maribyrnong, Hobsons Bay and the Shire of Melton, MRC Northwest offers settlement support services for migrant and refugee communities. Services cover aged care, disability, and local community-based projects.

[Foundation House](#) - Foundation House offers support services to people from refugee backgrounds through individual, family and community support and group programs. Foundation House also provides training to education services, particularly around trauma-informed practice and how to welcome and include families from refugee backgrounds.

[Cultura \(Barwon Region\)](#) - Cultura is a not-for-profit charitable community service organisation supporting the Barwon Region. Cultura offers settlement services, community programs, youth, disability, and aged support services as well as education and training.

[Wimmera Southern Mallee Development](#) - Wimmera Southern Mallee Development's Settlement Program supports people from migrant and refugee backgrounds to settle in the Wimmera Southern Mallee. Services include individual client casework, assistance with social networks and links to support services.

[Loddon Campaspe Multicultural Centre \(LCMS Inc\)](#)
- LCMS Inc offers support in areas of settlement, employment, education, and capacity building. Their wide range of online resources includes information on bilingual support, local social groups and family and youth projects such as Multicultural Storytime videos.

[Sunraysia Mallee Ethnic Communities Council \(SMECC\)](#) - SMECC provides settlement engagement and transition support, playgroups, translation services, cultural training services and education services across the Sunraysia region.

[Refugee Council of Australia](#) - The Refugee Council of Australia has an interactive service directory that has information on services and community groups available across metro and regional Victoria.

[My Community Directory](#) - is a site that allows you to search and filter by region and category, providing links and contact information to: settlement services, health services, disability services, cultural and migrant services, arts and creative services, church groups and places of worship, community, and neighbourhood centres.

Add local services in your area:

© State of Victoria (Department of Education) 2023



Engaging with multilingual families is provided under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International licence. You are free to re-use the work under that licence, on the condition that you credit the State of Victoria (Department of Education), indicate if changes were made and comply with the other licence terms, see: [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

The licence does not apply to:

- any images, photographs, trademarks or branding, including the Victorian Government logo and the DET logo; and
- content supplied by third parties.

Copyright queries may be directed to copyright@education.vic.gov.au



Department of Education