

Tip Sheets

Implicit Bias in Early Childhood

What pictures come to mind when you think of the following words?

- Professional basketball player
- Nurse
- Teacher
- Three-year-old with big emotions
- Five-year-old running out of the classroom

Were they a certain gender, race, or ethnicity?
What feelings came up for you?

Implicit Bias Supports Stereotypes

Implicit bias is the mental process that everyone has resulting in feelings and attitudes about people based on race, age, and appearance. It is an unconscious process and can be shaped by personal experiences and media. We are not consciously aware of the negative racial biases that develop over the course of our lifetime.

Implicit Bias in the Classroom

Implicit bias in the classroom might look like educators:

- Responding more harshly to behavior from boys or children of certain racial or ethnic backgrounds, even if the behavior is similar to that of other children.
- Expecting less from some children in terms of academic performance or behavior based on gender, race, language background, or socioeconomic status.
- Calling on some students more often, provide more praise, or offer more support based on subconscious preferences.

- Placing children into groups or labeled in ways that reflect biased assumptions rather than actual ability or behavior.
- Using materials, displays or curriculum are exclusive in representation of other ethnicities, cultures, and/or abilities.

COUNTERING IMPLICIT BIAS

REFLECTION

REFRAME

RETRAIN

RELATIONSHIP

REACT

Countering Implicit Bias

Reflection

Become aware of your bias using questions like those at the end of this tip sheet.

Reframe

Change the narrative in your mind.

Retrain

Create opportunities for ongoing professional development focused on equity, cultural competence, and anti-bias education. Support more inclusive classrooms, ask questions, read, and listen to podcasts on the subject.

Relationship

Build relationships with the children and families.

React

Early childhood educators play a powerful role in creating equitable learning environments. Stand up for bias and help others become aware of its existence. Addressing implicit bias isn't about blame—it's about awareness and growth.

Implement diverse materials into the classroom such as books, images, and materials that reflect a range of cultures, abilities, and identities.

Reflective Questions for Early Childhood Leaders and Educators

Self-Reflection

- Do I notice patterns in how I respond to children based on gender, race, or background?
- Do I assume some children will do better or worse before they even begin a task?

Classroom Interactions

- Am I giving specific praise to all children, not just the quiet or high-performing ones?
- Do I use each child's name often and speak to them with warmth and respect?

Classroom Environment

- Do my books, toys, and displays reflect a wide range of races, cultures, languages, and family types?
- Are children with disabilities or different abilities positively represented in materials?
- Do I include home cultures and languages in the classroom regularly?

Communication with Families

- Do I build positive relationships with every family, regardless of language or background?

- Do I listen without judgment and value family perspectives?
- Am I aware of how cultural differences may affect communication or expectations?

Ongoing Learning

- Do I talk with colleagues about these topics and reflect together?
- Am I open to feedback about how bias may show up in my practice?

Additional Resources

Project Implicit | Discover Personal Bias
<https://www.projectimplicit.net>

Young Hearts Open Minds
<https://youngheartsopenminds.org>

Embracing Equity
<https://www.embracingequity.org>

NAEYC | Anti-Bias Resources
<https://www.naeyc.org/resources/topics/anti-bias>

For more information, visit www.inclusivechildcare.org.

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