Celebrations and Holidays
Guidelines

It is our commitment to find "common ground" issues to celebrate about: seasons changing, children's achievements both individually and collectively, studies and projects, growth in plants/animals, reading books, and developmental milestones.

It is important to provide developmentally appropriate curriculum all year long. All activities need to be INCLUSIVE – a child should never be kept home because of activities being done in our classrooms. No one holiday should be celebrated more than others. We support our nutrition department’s policy of providing healthy foods at all times. Refer to handouts from Food Service and Nutrition departments; “No food brought from home” and family handout “Why do we ask families to not send in food ‘treats’ to Head Start.”

There are many exciting activities in the community throughout the year. They can also be crowded and hectic, making it difficult to keep track of 20 children and may be too stimulating for some of our children. Therefore, trips to crowded events should be for families to attend themselves, where children can be individually supervised We need to be careful not to rob families of activities they can do as a family by doing them at school.

If members of our communities want to give to our children, then it is most meaningful if the person or group actually gives the gift to our children, and acknowledges that relationship. Since relationships are reciprocal, it is important for our children to experience giving.

Teachers also need to remember the importance of maintaining the routines and predictable schedules on which young children rely.

GUIDANCE:
Considerations when planning celebration and holiday activities:

We encourage you to consider that there are many ways children can celebrate other than through eating food, making decorations or gifts, and having parties. Share our philosophy about holidays and celebrations with families at the beginning of the year. Begin by thinking about some of the big ideas that children can learn from your introducing different holidays into the classroom. For example:

- Families may celebrate the same holiday in different ways.
- Different families may celebrate different holiday.
- Not everyone celebrates every holiday.
- We can all learn about different holidays and how they are celebrated.
- There are special feelings associated with holidays; they are more than costumes, food, and parties.
- Children can make cards and or letters for each other all year long, with topics such as, get well, we miss you, thank you,
• Help parents and children to be creative and come up with your own things to celebrate that go
way beyond the commercialism of Halloween, Christmas, etc. Things like friendship,
cooperation, solving a problem, reaching a goal, or a long awaited change in weather.

Making Decisions About Holiday Activities Throughout the Year

In the teacher’s initial home visit with the family, he/she collects information about families’
observances, traditions, and preferences which can help in planning a culturally sensitive and
meaningful program throughout the year. Individual decisions about which holidays will be included
will be made every year and other times of the year when children and families leave or enter the
program.

Keep in mind the importance of making sure that your curriculum is culturally diverse ALL YEAR
LONG, and does not emphasize holidays as the only way to learn more about other cultures.

The decisions you make about celebrations and holiday activities should mirror the decisions you
make about everyday classroom experiences. Here are some points to keep in mind:

• Make sure holiday and celebration activities don’t become the whole curriculum.
  Holidays should have no more significance or emphasis than any other subject you explore in
  your classroom at any time during the year.

• Remember that preschool children, with their limited understanding of time concepts,
  may not remember what their families did last year. They may have difficulty thinking
  about celebrations that will take place several weeks from now.

• Set activities in the context of people’s daily life and beliefs.

• Think about other ways to respond to what children notice. For example, many objects
  children notice – pumpkins, gourds, lights, candles, decorated trees – can become materials
  for scientific investigations rather than holiday-related activities. You can make use of these
  learning opportunities.

• Think about ways to involve family members. Invite family members in to talk about their
  family customs and to share special objects related to the observance or holiday. Do not
  assume that everyone from the same ethnic group celebrates holidays the same way. Make
  sure that any differences in how each family celebrates are evident and respected. Be
  sensitive to the possibility that families with low incomes may find certain holidays stressful
  because of the enormous amount of commercialization and media pressure to purchase
  things. In the classroom, challenge these pressures by focusing on meaningful way to
  celebrate holidays without spending money.

• Preserve the regular routines of your classroom. Remember that holidays can be over
  stimulating for young children. Following the simple routines that they have learned in your
  classroom can be comforting.
• **Keep activities simple and low-key.** With this in mind, look for books that describe different practices. Learn songs (nonreligious) from different cultures and about traditions. Consider what related objects you can make available for children to explore in interest areas.

• **Incorporate open-ended activities that give children choices about what they make and how their creations are used.** For example, Julie Bisson, in her book *Celebrate! An Anti-Bias Guide to Enjoying Holidays in Early Childhood Programs*, suggests an art activity like making homemade wrapping paper that can be used for holiday gifts or at any time of the year. She also mentions making candleholders with playdough or clay. Her point is that these products can be used differently by children in different families. With this approach, you may not need to find alternative activities for children who, because of their religious beliefs, may not participate in holiday celebrations.

• **When in doubt, remember that “less is more.”** Listen to your children. What may be most important to the children is that you, their teacher, remain calm and relaxed throughout the year. Then, you can respond to the questions children ask.

**Plan for working with Children and families who do not celebrate holidays:**

We will not celebrate any individual holiday that excludes one or more children. If we have children in our classrooms that do not celebrate any holidays we will work with the family to come up with a plan for meeting their child’s needs so they are not left out.

**The Challenge for Teachers**

Even the most experienced teachers can lose sight of developmentally appropriate objectives and practices. On the other hand, teachers concerned about how to meet the needs of their very diverse student populations choose not to celebrate holidays at all. But, since the components of children’s everyday lives are what drive curriculum in a Creative Curriculum classroom, this is not responsive to children’s needs. Teachers need to work with the families in the class to find the appropriate balance year to year.

This policy complies with Head Start Performance Standard 45 CFR Section 1304.21, 1304.21a(1)-(3), 1304.53b, 1304.4e