

The beliefs and values of the world's religions and cultures are expressed in many ways, including through festivals and celebrations. Whether they relate to rites of passage, the seasons, living things or revered objects, they play a highly significant role in the lives of many children worldwide, as part of their developing life in the family, community and wider society, nurturing their sense of identity, values and beliefs.

The EYFS values the role that festivals and celebrations play in supporting children's learning and development in every area of learning, and through them parents and practitioners can support children in beginning to understand the commonalities of human values that are shared by all cultures and religions. The EYFS encourages families and providers to help children understand one another's cultures and beliefs in a world that's diverse and vibrant.

Celebrating diversity



Linda Mort explains the benefits of exploring the world's festivals and celebrations with young children...

A family focus

Helping young children to develop an understanding of religious festivals through the context of family experiences acknowledges and affirms the culture and beliefs of individual children. Sharing such information helps pictures in books 'come to life' for children, making them meaningful and memorable. Children will learn that members of families of all religions (or of none) love one another and that they show this in different ways, for example, by caring and sharing, preparing special food and by exchanging gifts. In the context of receiving and giving gifts, children can come to understand that families of all religions (or of none) think about making others happy by taking the time to choose appropriate presents.

Another valuable lesson in this context is that of voluntary service and charitable giving – people thinking about others outside of their family circle who might need practical or financial help. This could include visiting elderly people and also giving them harvest

Tip: A great way to help children to be accepting of others' cultures and beliefs is to look at a festival that's unfamiliar to your children (and possibly to practitioners and teachers too). Puppets can be used to 'answer' the children's questions. This conveys to the children an open and enquiring attitude to different faiths and will help them to treat other people of various religions and cultures with respect.

foods, giving poor people Zakat-ul-Fitr (money) at Eid-ul-Fitr, and helping children in need through the Children's Society charity which raises money from Christingle services at Christmas.

Through religious festivals, children can also learn that families of different religions may pray at home and attend places of worship where they meet other people to pray, to thank their God for everything in the world, and to think about how to be kind to one another. Children can relate to the events

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example, the story of the early life of the Buddha at Wesak. Such stories are ideal for giving children opportunities to be "curious, enthusiastic, engaged and tranquil, so developing a sense of inner-self and peace" (EYFS, Personal, Social and Emotional Development: Sense of Community). Teach children about the Jewish Springtime festival of Tu b'shevat, the New Year for Trees. Ask for the children's own ideas about how to celebrate World Environment Day (June 5th).

Special occasions

Celebrations are ideal for encouraging children to look for, and to talk about, kindness in others, and to celebrate one another's achievements. This could be done, for example, at birthdays, Mothers', Fathers' and Grandparents' Day, and also at circle time. Nurture, too, an enjoyment of thinking of simple events which give everyone pleasure, and ways to celebrate them, for example, by making up a poem or song about how pleased people are to see the birds come to feed at the bird table.

Ask families from various countries for information about customs in celebrating birthdays and festivals. For example, in Germany, children are given a special birthday candle marked off with lines and numbers. On each birthday, the candle is allowed to burn to the next line. At Christmas in Holland, Sinter Klaas visits children's homes and talks with them about their achievements during the past year, and their plans for the year ahead.

An imaginative approach to helping children experience festivals and celebrations can support their learning in many areas. By explaining to others how they celebrate a festival or take part in a celebration, a child's self-confidence and self-esteem is developed, and children's awareness of, and respect for, others' beliefs is nurtured. Listening to stories at festival time can help children develop a sense of right and wrong, as they re-tell and re-enact the stories. A sense of the passing of time in relation to festival seasons can be developed, and children can use all of their senses when finding out about, and making their own different festival foods, fabrics and artefacts. They can also express their ideas and feelings about festivals and celebrations in a variety of creative ways, including music, dance and role-play. By offering children the opportunity of sharing the joy of others' festivals and celebrations we can give them a gateway into a world of mutual understanding and shared human values.

told in festival stories and also to the moral of a story, so long as it's explained simply and in terms of feelings that they understand. This might include, for example, in the Diwali story, how Sita and Lakshman accompanied Rama into the jungle, because they didn't want him to feel lonely.

Many festivals are perfectly attuned to children's sense of wonder at the natural world, and their need to sometimes be tranquil. Many stories told at festival time emphasise a reverence for nature, for

find out more



This article is an edited extract from *The Fabulous Early Years Foundation Stage*, edited by Terry Gould and published by Featherstone.

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Guest appearance

Where possible, it's good to invite visitors into your setting at festival times to talk about their experiences of the celebration...

- Always lend your visitor the books you'll be sharing with the children, before the visit.
- Ask your visitor to choose a selection of pictures from the book to talk about and to give their 'take' on them.
- Encourage your visitor to recount a memorable family anecdote to help 'personalise' the pictures for your children. Some families may be willing to compile a very simple 'diary' of their festival celebration for you to share, possibly with a few photographs included.
- With permission, photocopy and enlarge some of the photographs for a captioned display, along with both authentic and child-made artefacts. Afterwards, put the photographs in a 'Big Book' for your library area.

Supporting resources

Reading material

Introduce children to the festivals of Harvest and Christmas with Books@Press's 'Puddles' series. Author Gill Vaisey's titles include *A wet and windy Harvest for Puddles* and *Puddles and the Christmas Play*, which follow the adventures of the titular cat. A selection of traditional Muslim stories is also available. Visit booksatpress.co.uk

