

Helping your child to have a strong sense of identity

Issue No.002

One of the five learning outcomes in the Victorian Early Years Learning Framework and the Early Years Learning Framework for Australia is that *children have a strong sense of identity*.

All children will develop a strong sense of identity and this is about Who am I? Where and how do I belong? What influence do I have in my world?

Having a strong sense of identity is about learning that you're valued and worthy of attention. Children with a strong sense of identity look for and are open to new challenges. They ask questions and try new things. They know they can contribute to the world and make a difference. They also persist with things and enjoy their achievements.

Relationships are the foundations for your child's strong sense of identity.

To build a strong sense of identity, your child first has to feel they belong. They learn this through safe and secure relationships – first with their family and later with other caring adults and children. Your child's identity is also shaped by the ways that you and others respond to them.

As they grow, most children show interest in being part of a group and playing with others. They become increasingly confident in

different social situations and learn that their actions can have effects on themselves and others.

Having a strong sense of identity doesn't mean you have an outgoing or social personality. A quiet or shy child can also have a strong sense of identity.

How can I help my child to develop a strong sense of identity?

- Value what is unique about your child and accept your child for who they are right now:
 - Pay close attention to your child's attempts to communicate or interact with you – this tells children they are important and valued.
 - Acknowledge what your child says or does without being dismissive or judgmental – this tells them it is safe to express feelings and opinions.
- Encourage your child to make choices and decisions (within appropriate limits). This recognises that your child is able to make decisions.
- When your child says 'I can do it' – let them try. Support your child's efforts to be more independent (while still offering your guidance).
- Encourage your child to solve problems or to keep going when things get tough. This builds your child's resilience and sense of wellbeing.
- Help your child to learn how to treat others:
 - Give your child time to play alone and time to play with others.
 - Hold back and see if your child can fix their own problems or disagreements (but be ready to step in when they need support).
 - Model care, empathy and respect in your own interactions with children and other adults.
- Older children will be able to understand that some people have differing needs and they learn to respect the rights, feelings and efforts of others. As they grow they will be able to behave appropriately in a range of social situations and



begin to develop and exhibit appropriate behaviours for maintaining positive social relationships.

- Talk to your child about how each of us has similarities and differences to help them be comfortable and confident in who they are.
- Encourage your child to take pride in their home language and culture and encourage early childhood professionals to include your children's languages, relevant images, books and resources in their work.
- Encourage your child's interests and abilities – these are important ways for your child to express who they are. As children grow they can begin to appreciate the similarities and differences between individuals and groups including the language, cultural and religious groups that make up society.
- Give your child the opportunity to explore identity through dress ups and dramatic/pretend play.

Other related newsletters can be found at www.education.vic.gov.au



Related links

- [Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia](#)
- [Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework for all Children from Birth to Eight Years](#) (2009)
- [Curiosity and Confidence](#) – a Kids Matter information sheet

You may also like to read

- Early childhood learning
- Helping your child to connect and contribute to the world
- Helping your child to have a strong sense of wellbeing
- Helping your child to be an effective communicator
- Helping your child be a confident and involved learner

