

Building Your Child's Sense of Family Belonging

Relationships with family members play an important role as children begin to develop a sense of self. When they feel a sense of identity and belonging within their own families, children are better able to grow emotionally, make friends, and appreciate and accept the diversity of others.

With Mother's Day right around the corner, it's a great time to share activities that celebrate the importance of family.

Below are age appropriate activities that we implement in the classroom, as well as activities you can do with your child at home.



INFANTS/TODDLERS:

In the classroom: Teachers use baby sign language to help children identify and eventually verbalize names for their family members. When parents enter the classroom, teachers say, "Look! Here's Sophia's mommy," while also signing "mommy." They work with parents to learn specific names used at home, and then use those names in the classroom.

At home: Use baby sign language as you come across names of family members in books and songs. To sign "mommy," tap your thumb on your chin repeatedly. To sign "daddy," tap your thumb on your forehead repeatedly. Remember to say the word aloud as you sign.

Recommended reading: *Spot Loves His Mommy* by Eric Hill, *Are You my Mother?* by PD Eastman

BEGINNERS (ages 2-3):

In the classroom: By age two, children begin to learn the names of extended family members, such as grandmother, uncle and cousin. They practice using these words as they talk about their families. After sorting stuffed animals by type, teachers might say, "This is the horse's family. He has a big family. Who's in your family?"

At home: Give your child play dough and encourage him to create the members of his family. Afterward, ask him to count and name them. This activity helps him conceptualize that multiple people make up his entire family and gives you insight into what family means to your child at his particular point in development.

Recommended reading: *On Mother's Lap* by Ann Herbert Scott, *Oonga Boonga* by Frieda Wishinsky

INTERMEDIATES (ages 3-4):

In the classroom: As children read stories about diverse families, teachers encourage them to share unique details about their own families. For example, teachers might ask, "Who has a sister?" or "Who has a pet?" Afterward, students create charts with the information.

At home: Have each member of your family make a thumbprint using finger paint on a piece of paper side by side. Then, ask your child to compare the various sizes, and guess which thumbprint

belongs to each person. As they talk about their family members, they begin to appreciate what makes their family unique.

Recommended reading: *Clifford's Family* by Norman Bridwell, *What Mommies Do Best* and *What Daddies Do Best* by Laura Numeroff

PRE-K/PRE-K 2 (ages 4-5):

In the classroom: Our older preschoolers begin to understand that their parents have more than one role. Family members are invited to visit and talk to the class about their roles inside and outside of the home. Students are encouraged to write and draw their family members in the different roles they serve. For example, "Mommy is a doctor."

At home: Go on an uninterrupted family outing with your child. Try to avoid checking work emails or answering unimportant phone calls. Afterward, ask your child to write about his favorite parts of the day in his journal.

Recommended reading: *Does a Kangaroo Have a Mother Too?* by Eric Carle, *The Napping House* by Audrey Wood

All of our schools will be celebrating families in really fun ways this Mother's Day season, and we hope that you do too!

- Lauren Starnes, PhD – Director of Early Childhood Education