



Holiday Policy

Revised October 2012

Goals for Holiday Activities at IP

To promote connection among children, families, and staff

At IP we are committed to authentic relationships and to genuine community. Recognition of holidays can bring people together in warmth and togetherness and build and strengthen connections between home and school. They also can promote a sense of community among children as they learn about one another's holidays and participate in activities together. It is our hope that holidays will help to link home and IP in meaningful ways.

To support, validate, and represent the experiences of children, their families, and staff in the program

Clearly one of the most important reasons to include holidays in our curriculum is because they are such important and meaningful events in the lives of so many of the children and families at IP. It is our goal that holiday activities at IP support children's experiences at home and in their communities. We hope to give all children the message that what is important in their family is valid and worthwhile and worth mention at school. We aim to make children's families a visible, tangible presence in our classrooms. This is particularly important for children and families whose holidays are generally not reflected in the media, in store decorations, in children's books, and in mainstream society in general.

To offer another opportunity for learning in a developmentally appropriate way

Holiday activities and discussions can enrich and inform the lives of children. They provide an avenue for children and adults to learn about the important events in their own and many other people's lives. Holiday activities can also be perfect opportunities for children to learn in a hands-on way. Making decorations, baking, singing, creating, sharing and storytelling are activities that help our senses come alive with smells, tastes, sights, sounds, and things to touch.

To celebrate both similarities and differences in children's lives

Holidays are another opportunity to learn about the ways that we are similar to and different from one another. They can show children in direct, meaningful ways that the same holidays can be celebrated differently, and that people often celebrate holidays honoring events and beliefs unique to their ethnic or cultural groups. Through conversation about differences and similarities we can deepen the ways in which we know each other and grow our community. Activities can also help children see the similar themes that run through many different holidays such as death, renewal, light and darkness, liberation, and harvest.

To mark time for children and encourage awareness of natural rhythms in the seasons and in life

Holiday celebrations can underscore certain times of the year by celebrating beginnings, endings, and other significant rhythms, such as seasonal changes. By bringing holidays and other rituals that happen only once a year into our

curriculum we allow a break in the regular routine of full-day, year 'round child care where exceptions and special fun are the norm for a day or two.

To support children's connection to family and their cultural roots

Holiday rituals can reaffirm or deepen connection to cultural roots, helping to teach or remind children of whom they and their families are. These rituals can also give children a sense of security. They feel comfort in knowing that they will see some familiar sights, taste some familiar foods, and be together with people who are important to them. By including or talking about these same holiday rituals in the classroom, those reminders and feelings of comfort can be found at IP as well.

To stretch children's awareness and empathy

There are many different kinds of holidays celebrated and they are all special and wonderful for the families who celebrate them. It is our goal at IP to craft an approach to holidays that reflects the children and families in our program and that acknowledges the wider world in which we live. By learning about holidays that are different from their own, children become aware of other people's ways of living. This can help children learn that what and how they celebrate isn't the one right or only way.

To teach children critical thinking about bias

Holidays are an opportunity to live our commitment to anti-bias practices at IP. Since many holiday images and messages from television, videos, store decorations, and children's books unfortunately portray gender, race, culture, class, and historical bias, including these holidays in the curriculum provides opportunities to teach children how to examine what they see and hear for messages that are unfair or hurtful. Activities and discussions can also challenge children to consider the commercialization and mass marketing of certain holidays. These activities can lead children to understand that the inability to afford items, or choosing not to purchase them, doesn't make a family bad *or less than* other families.

To teach children about social justice and activism

Empowering children to stand up for themselves and others is one of the cornerstone goals of an anti-bias approach. By discussing and sharing social justice holidays such as Passover, Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Birthday, and Mexican Independence Day, children learn about what real people struggled over in the past to create a better life for themselves and others. These activities can lead to discussions about people who are working for justice today.

To have fun

Holiday activities, conversation, and sharing can be fun. They add spice to daily life and bring excitement, anticipation, magic, joy and laughter into the classroom.

Implementation

Nuts and Bolts

- In general, our approach to holidays is one of “recognition” and “discussion” rather than “celebration”, as in parties and candy and large get-togethers.
- When we bring in holiday related curriculum to the classroom, we ensure that the activities are developmentally appropriate.
- We provide for play about holidays.
- We incorporate and take advantage of opportunities to learn about science – through pumpkins cut open and decomposing, changing colors of leaves, etc.
- Focus on underlying themes of particular holidays (i.e. With Halloween we focus on dressing up, disguising ourselves, playing tricks and with Thanksgiving, we focus on ways our families come together to reflect on what we are thankful for.)
- We focus on the elements of a holiday that will grow our community, which is often the sharing of stories.
- We also celebrate birthdays, new births, comings and goings
- If we find ourselves faced with including a holiday that we are not familiar with, we will do our own research, in the library, on the internet, by reading children’s books, consulting a community center, and talking to colleagues and community members who celebrate that particular holiday to ensure that we have accurate information about the holiday.

Connection to Seasonal Changes and Rhythms

- We maintain a connection to seasons, natural rhythm
- Our thoughts and commitments around the seasonal cycles are broader than any particular holiday
- We weave the natural world into our classrooms
- We nurture children’s relationships with the natural world
- We honor the rhythms of the seasons
- Our curriculum practices often center on the natural world, as we notice the changes in weather, lightness and darkness.
- We may have nature tables or seasonal tables in our classroom

How We Work in Partnership With Families

- We aim to make home/school connections permeable.
- We strive to bring home into the school by bringing holidays in.
- We send invitations to families to help us celebrate holidays all year long.

- We invite families to participate by bringing in specific family traditions.
- We honor each family's contribution – listening, acknowledging, demonstrating respect, and asking questions.
- We gather holiday memories from families by asking families, for example, to “bring a clue about something you did while on vacation” or “bring something that helps you tell a story about your winter break” and “after Halloween please bring in pictures of your child in her/his costume”. Or we send home blank posters or boxes inviting families to fill them with vacation/holiday memories.
- We will work closely with families who celebrate a holiday we are not familiar with to ensure that we understand not just what the holiday is about but also exactly how this particular family celebrates it.

Anti-Bias Practices

- We bring out the inherent anti-bias and diversity themes in an intentional way.
- We seize the opportunities to talk about similarities and differences in holidays and how we celebrate or don't.
- *In the preschool rooms we talk directly about stereotypes in holidays.* For example we help kids think critically about stereotypical images of Native Americans at Thanksgiving time (and year 'round) and older women at Halloween time (and year 'round)

Balance

- We intentionally don't allow one or all holidays to “take over” the curriculum or our days with children.
- We carefully plan so that holiday activities or conversations don't take over an entire day, week or month.
- We create our own EELP traditions and seasonal celebrations.
- We create a “safe haven” from the overload that children receive outside of school
- We have a “seasonal” emphasis on holidays.
- We weave holidays into the ongoing life of our classrooms, rather than stopping what and how we do our daily practices to focus on a holiday or holidays.
- In general we steer away from holiday parties in the classroom.

Non-Secular and Inclusive

- We use “some people believe...” when talking about a particular holiday or celebration so children don’t assume that everyone celebrates a particular holiday or in a particular way.
- We don’t promote any particular holiday.
- We create opportunities for children to bring their family experiences around holidays into our classrooms in ways that are respectful of a range of practices and beliefs

Religion

- We try to observe holidays in a secular way but may briefly and generally explain the religious story behind a holiday.
- While we focus on the secular aspects of a holiday, we try to do that without sacrificing the underlying meaning of a holiday
- We are careful not to promote any religion or any holiday as the “right” one
- We use the term “some people believe...”
- We answer children’s questions simply and matter-of-factly and refer them to their families for more information
- We don’t stop a child’s singing/storytelling about holidays

Commercialism

- We avoid activities that may put a financial strain on any family
- We talk to children about advertising and marketing in ways that make sense to them in order to teach them that companies who sell products do whatever they can to make you want to buy
- We focus on the underlying meaning of a holiday as being about “being thankful, or “sharing” or “giving”, rather than “receiving lots and lots of presents”.

How We Choose Holidays

We will gather information from families about what holidays and special days are important in their families and how they celebrate them

- We might do this by:
Inviting families to a meeting to share information about what holidays they celebrate at home
Putting out a survey asking for information about what and how families celebrate
Having informal conversations with families at drop off/pick up and at other appropriate times to ask for information about holidays in their families.
- We will work closely with families to build trust and assure them that we will use their information respectfully and appropriately particularly when families

are hesitant to share personal information about holidays and other family and cultural practices for fear that it will make their child look “different”.

- We will ask families to share not only *what* they celebrate but also *how* they celebrate each holiday.

Introduce Holidays that are not Celebrated by Enrolled Families to Increase Awareness

- We’ll bring in holidays that the teachers and other staff at EELP celebrate, especially if they are holidays that are unfamiliar to the children
- Next we’ll look to the community outside of EELP and bring in a handful of holidays throughout the year that introduce diversity. We’ll do this in a way that connects to children’s own experiences and understandings.

Holidays that we plan to include no matter what

- Holidays, celebrations, rituals and events that have become a part of “EELP Culture” such as the celebration of births, deaths, birthdays, coming and goings, etc.
- Holidays that portray stereotypes and/or misinformation to help children learn critical thinking skills
- Social justice holidays in order to expose children to people who have worked for social justice

Considerations

- We won’t assume that a person from a particular ethnic or cultural group celebrates a certain holiday. For example, we won’t assume that every African American person celebrates Kwanzaa.
- We will plan carefully and intentionally so that we include a balance of holidays from specific religious and cultural groups and create a balance of national holidays and other holidays.
- We will ensure that at least one holiday is represented from every family enrolled in our discussions and activities.
- We will bring in holidays so that everyone in the program is represented.
- We will make careful decisions about whether or not to include holidays that are celebrated by one child in the classroom in order to avoid making them feel like a “token” or the “spokesperson” for their group.
- We will educate ourselves about holidays we don’t know about so we don’t present misinformation or stereotypical images or ideas.