

WELCOMING CHILDREN

Christine M. Todd, Ph. D.
Child Development Specialist
Human Development and Family Studies
University of Illinois Cooperative Extension

As you say good-bye to some children, you will be saying hello to others. Or you may be welcoming all the children back after a long summer holiday. Feeling welcome is important to children. It puts them at ease and helps them adjust more easily to their surroundings.

Think back to a time when you felt especially welcome as a child. What were some of the things that made you feel that way?

One way to make children feel that they belong is to learn their names quickly. Help them, too, to learn each others names. Names are special to each of us. Having someone say "Hi, Jack," or "Hello, Susan," when you walk through the door sends a strong message that you belong.

The physical environment also sends messages to children. A brightly colored bulletin board filled with interesting things says, "We're glad you're here!" Giving each child his own personal space or "cubby" and allowing the child to make a special name tag for it says, "You're special." Asking children about their favorite books and putting some of those books in the book corner the next day tells children, "People here will listen to you."

A third way to make children feel welcome is to find some time to talk to each child individually. Find out how many brothers and sisters they have, if they have any pets, what they like to do, and what's going on at home or in their neighborhoods. This tells children that you care about them as individuals.

Another way to welcome school-age children is to include them in decision making. This tells children that their ideas are important. Until you know the children well, it will be easier if you provide simple choices. For example, you could present two activities or two possible snacks for next week and allow them to vote on which one they want. This method works especially well with younger children who may have difficulty thinking up ideas on their own or deciding among many options. As you get to know the children better and they become more knowledgeable about the child care setting, you can offer them even more responsibility.

Feeling welcome is important to all of us. When you let children know in many different ways that they belong, you are building a foundation of trust and mutual respect.

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