



Caring for BAME Children

Celebrating Diwali

With you every step of the way

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Celebrating Diversity

Teaching children about and allowing them to experience their own and other religions and cultures is important to creating a diverse and understanding community. With understanding comes acceptance and it is important to create this understanding by allowing children from all cultures and religions to share their experiences and what is important to them and their families.

As a foster carer you have a duty to allow the children in your care to explore their own heritage and background. Participation by the whole family in whatever capacity will promote your child's self-worth and acceptance into your family environment. Celebrating Diwali and any other important festivals which arise throughout the year enables children to feel valued, supported and respected, with this comes confident children. When your own birth children join in, it allows children to see that they all have differences but this is okay because this is what makes us all special and unique but similar at the same time.

These are some of the ideas you could implement to help children within your care celebrate their heritage and Diwali:

- Research the story behind Diwali and share this with all children as a bedtime story
- Create candle holders with the children using clay, salt dough or playdough
- Decorate colour in Rangoli patterns
- Look on the internet, in the library or book shops for Diwali books for children
- Make Diwali cards
- Purchase or make some Indian foods
- Make Indian sweet to give as gifts
- Dress up in authentic clothing, sarees for girls and Kurta for boys.

Celebrating diversity can be done in a whole range of ways such as through posters and photographs showing young children that people all over the world look very different and story books that show Britain is a culturally diverse society. Celebrating religious and cultural events such as Diwali, Christmas and Eid is another way and many nurseries have tasting days where children bring in dishes from their country of origin. Children enjoy learning about the different cultures of their friends.

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Diwali

Diwali also known as the “festival of lights” is an ancient Hindu festival celebrated every year. It is one of the most important festivals in Hinduism, and an official holiday in many Asian countries. The festival spiritually signifies the victory of light over darkness or good over evil, knowledge over ignorance, and hope over despair.

Its celebration includes millions of lights shining on housetops, outside doors and windows, around temples and other buildings in the communities and countries where it is observed. The festival preparations and rituals typically extend over a five-day period, but the main festival night of Diwali coincides with the darkest, new moon night of the Hindu Lunisolar month Kartika. Diwali is celebrated by some Hindu’s in the honour of Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth. Others worship the goddess Kali instead of Lakshmi, and call the festival Kali Puja. The god Krishna is also recognized.

Before Diwali night, people clean, and decorate their homes and offices. On Diwali night, Hindus dress up in new clothes or their best outfit, light up diyas (lamps and candles) inside and outside their home, participate in family puja (prayers) typically to Lakshmi – the goddess of fertility and prosperity. After prayers there are fireworks and a family feast including mithai (sweets), and an exchange of gifts between family members and close friends. Diwali also marks a major shopping period.

On the same night that Hindus celebrate Diwali, Jains celebrate a festival of lights to mark the attainment of moksha by Mahavira, Sikhs celebrate Bandi Chhor Divas and some Newar Buddhists also celebrate Diwali remembering Ashoka’s conversion to Buddhism.

Diwali dates back to ancient times in India, as a festival after the summer harvest. The diyas (lamps) symbolically represent parts of sun, the cosmic giver of light and energy to all life.

Celebration

Diwali is one of the happiest holidays with meaningful preparations. People clean their homes and decorate them for the festivities. People also buy gifts for family and friends including sweets, dry fruits, and seasonal specialties. Children hear ancient stories, legends and myths about battles between good and evil or light and darkness from their parents and elders. Girls and women go shopping and create rangoli and other creative patterns on floors, near doors and walkways. Young people and adults alike help with lighting and preparing for patakhe (fireworks).



Rituals and Process

Rituals and preparations for Diwali begin days or weeks in advance. The festival formally begins two days before the night of Diwali, and ends two days thereafter. Each day has the following rituals and significance:

Food and Diet

Dhanteras starts off the five day festival. Starting days before and through Dhanteras, houses and business premises are cleaned, renovated and decorated. Women and children decorate entrances with Rangoli – creative colourful floor designs both inside and in the walkways of their homes or offices.

Boys and men get busy with external lighting arrangements. For some, the day celebrates the churning of cosmic ocean of milk between the forces of good and forces of evil; this day marks the birthday of Lakshmi – the Goddess of Wealth and Prosperity, and the birthday of Dhanvantari – the God of Health and Healing. On the night of Dhanteras, diyas are ritually kept burning all through the nights in honor of Lakshmi and Dhanvantari.

Dhanteras is also a major shopping day, particularly for gold or silver articles. Merchants, traders and retailers stock up, put articles on sale, and prepare for this day. Lakshmi Puja is performed in the evening.

Naraka Chaturdasi (Day 2)

Narak Chaturdasi is the second day of festivities, and is also called Choti Diwali. The Hindu literature narrates that the asura (demon) Narakasura was killed on this day by Krishna, Satyabhama and Kali. The day is celebrated by early morning religious rituals and festivities followed by special bathing rituals such as a fragrant oil bath are held in some regions, followed by minor pujas. Women decorate their hands with henna designs. Families are also busy preparing homemade sweets for main Diwali.

Lakshmi Puja (Day 3)

The third day is the main festive day. People wear new clothes or their best outfits as the evening approaches. Then diyas are lit, pujas are offered to Lakshmi, and to one or more additional deities depending on their region of India.

Lakshmi is believed to roam the earth on Diwali night. On the evening of Diwali, people open their doors and windows to welcome Lakshmi, and place diya lights on their windowsills and balcony ledges to invite her in. On this day, mothers are recognised by the family and she is seen to embody a part of Lakshmi, the good fortune and prosperity of the household. Small earthenware lamps filled with oil are lit and placed in rows by some Hindus along the parapets of temples and houses. Some set diyas adrift on rivers and streams. Important relationships and friendships are also recognised during the day, by



visiting relatives and friends, exchanging gifts and sweets.

After the prayer, people go outside and celebrate by lighting up patakhe (fireworks). The children enjoy sparklers and a variety of small fireworks, while adults enjoy bigger fireworks. The fireworks signify a way to chase away evil spirits. After fireworks, people head back to a family feast, conversations and mithai (sweets, desserts).

Padwa, Balipratipada (Day 4)

The day after Diwali, is celebrated as Padwa. This day ritually celebrates the love and mutual devotion between a wife and her husband. The husband gives thoughtful gifts, or elaborate ones to respective spouses. In many regions, newly married daughters with their husbands are invited for special meals. Sometimes brothers go and pick up their sisters from their in-laws home for this important day. The day is also a special day for the married couple, in a manner similar to anniversaries elsewhere in the world. The day after Diwali devotees perform Goverdhan puja in honour of Lord Krishna. Diwali also marks the beginning of the New Year, in some parts of India, where the Hindu Vikram Samvat calendar is popular.

Bhai Duj, Bhaiya Dooji (Day 5)

The last day of festival is called Bhai dooj (Brother's second) or Bhai tika in Nepal, where it is the major day of the festival. It celebrates the sister-brother loving relationship, in a spirit similar to Raksha Bandhan but with different rituals. The day ritually emphasises the love and lifelong bond between siblings. It is a day when women and girls get together; perform a puja with prayers for the wellbeing of their brothers, then return to a ritual of food-sharing, gift-giving and conversations. In historic times, this was a day in autumn when brothers would travel to meet their sisters, or bring over their sister's family to their village homes to celebrate their sister-brother bond with the bounty of seasonal harvests.

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