

# A HOME WITH DIFFERENT RELIGIOUS BELIEFS

**This** brochure has been compiled to support families with parents representing different religious beliefs.

The brochure discusses what kinds of issues such families should address, for example, before the couple has any children together, so that the coexistence of different world views and religions could really be seen as richness of life.

At best, a family with two differing belief systems functions as a resource for children's growth, development and learning, and children experience their family culture as acceptable and valuable.

## A home with two religious beliefs

Religion and religious traditions and values have different meanings for different people, and their importance may change depending on the life situation. Values and customs related to religion and culture may become particularly important when someone moves further away from one's own family. In such situations, it may feel even more important to adhere to religious and cultural values and customs than before. Familiar traditions and rituals and the community forming around them strengthen one's own identity, provide safety, create a sense of belonging and alleviate homesickness. Sometimes, you may not recognise how much your religious belief means to you until you fall in love with someone who considers totally different traditions important.

The significance of religion may also become emphasised when you are establishing a family. It is natural that both parents want to see their children grow up within a familiar framework they cherish. If this is important to both parents, they should discuss well before the children arrive which matters they consider to be of essence to them in their own religion. Which traditions are so important to them that transferring them to their children seems essential?

We tend to get mixed up about whether certain customs and norms are related to culture or belief. It is a good idea to consider which matters are based on religious beliefs and which derive from cultural norms. For example, you should discuss and mutually agree on the birth-related rituals before the child is born (e.g. baptism and shaving the baby's head). As the child grows, the dress codes, hygiene practices, matters related to eating and wishes related to fasting, for example, also become topical. In a home with two beliefs, compromises must be made, so it is advisable for the parents to think in advance in which matters they are ready to be flexible and which things they absolutely want to adhere to.

Arguing about issues related to religious beliefs in front of children throws a dark shadow over the belief and makes it more difficult to build the child's identity in a positive and balanced way. The more positive the picture that children build of their parents' religions in their mind, the more likely they are to grow into these religions themselves.

When two adults from different religious backgrounds have a family, they need to take down the strict boundaries surrounding their respective religions. The family must build its own values, traditions and norms around them. Growing into the family's common – albeit diverse – culture of customs and traditions enhances children's sense of safety and the well-being of the whole family.

Adopting the religions of both parents and following the traditions of both never takes away anything from the other. On the contrary, the more positively children are attached to the culture and belief systems of their parents, and the communities surrounding these, the safer they will feel on their life paths and the more support they will have along the way. At the same time, this will strengthen the connections to the grandparents on both sides of the family and the roots of each family.

Various religions have many common features in the basic pillars of the religion and the guidelines for what constitutes a 'good' life for children. It is important to focus on these!



## Check list for parents

- Consider which religious issues you find essential and in which matters you could be flexible.
- Decide well before your children are born which religious traditions and rituals are of importance to you. Then decide which traditions and ritual you want to continue and which ones you don't.
- Create your family's own values, customs and traditions that are just perfect for you.
- Children can grow up in a balanced way, keeping the religious beliefs of both parents in their hearts.
- Respect each other's world views and religions - they are of equal value. Your spouse has grown into a suitable partner for you surrounded by these particular values; they are a part of him or her. Basically, no religion is better than the other, it is a matter of interpretation. Having a home in Finland does not automatically make one religion more suitable for the family than the other.
- Getting to know each other's beliefs and building a deeper understanding of them are part of the continuous process of getting to know one another in a relationship and accepting the partner as he or she is. Also, when it comes to the other spouse's religious beliefs, you should maintain a curious and querying mind instead of locking down your views in accordance with your own beliefs. At the same time, this offers you an opportunity to update your own views of your own traditions. Even one's own world view is never fully complete but develops along with one's personal growth.
- Religions have many good things in common  
– focus on them!

## Play - the arena where religious beliefs can meet

Play stems from the child's own life experience, it is a story of the child's personal life. In play, the child solves conflicts between his or her wishes and the real world. Confidential interaction situations allow emotions to emerge and make it possible to encounter new things. To the participants, play can provide a strong sense of existence, depth of existence, and even recognition of its religious dimensions. The aim is to promote the development of an interactive atmosphere in the family that would support the child's participation, thinking and expression skills.



In play situations, adults also need to be sensitive about the situation and participate in versatile ways. As co-players, adults observe and open dimensions of play where the atmosphere of fear has dissipated and each player can feel that they are equal participants in the situation. Through play, children learn to show positive interest in others and their surroundings. The family processes both shared and differing views in positive ways. Joint and meaningful play promotes the development of the child's religious and cultural identity and dialogue skills, creating new ways of doing things together.

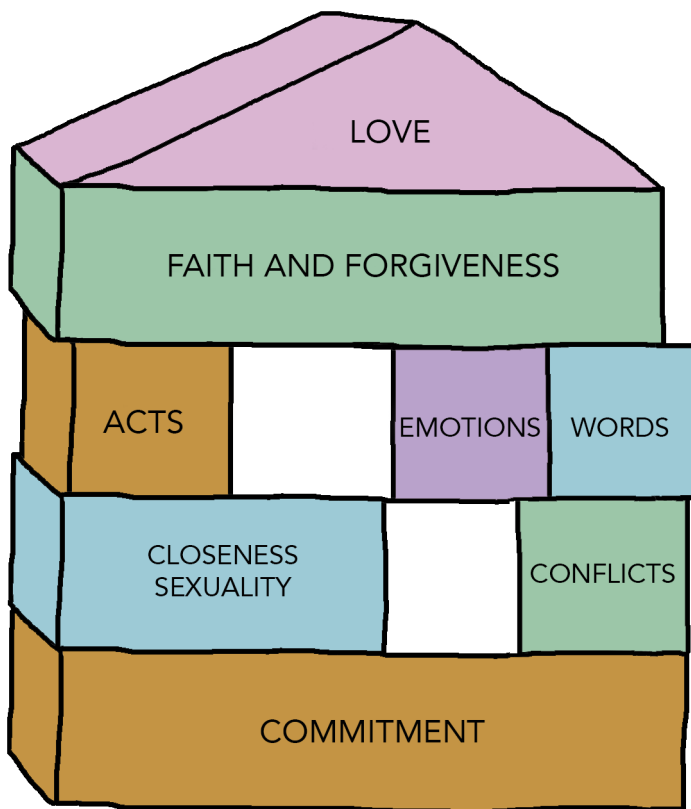
### **Tell your family what kind of plays you used to have**

What kind of plays did you have as a kid? Which stories were important and familiar to your family?

Which values would you like to transfer to the next generation through play and fairy tales?

Sometimes children's birthday parties are celebrated only between the representatives of the child's own culture. What if you invited guests from different cultures – children and their siblings, their parents – to your child's birthday party or just for a visit?

What kind of play would that generate?



### **Our family home**

Every family is unique, and the shared life and daily routines educate both adults and children. It is important to stop and reflect on the family's relationships and the values upon which we build our lives. We all need love and acceptance, respect and togetherness. This all strengthens and protects mutual love in the family.

You can do the following exercise together with the children and build the house one piece at a time:

## COMMITMENT

The foundations of the house are built upon stable and safe commitment. Commitment creates stability and communion. As a family, we can take care of each other and grow together. Questions to reflect on: Who belong to our family? What connects us? (home, family name...) What kind of traditions do we respect? What kind of religious values and customs affect our lives?

## EMOTIONS

The daily family life evokes many kinds of emotions. Emotions are not right or wrong, all feelings are allowed. What brings you joy today? What are you grateful for? What are you worried about or scared of? What annoys you today?

## CONFLICTS

All families have things they disagree about. Each family member is a unique individual, and everyone has their own wishes and thoughts. It is important that even in the middle of a conflict we listen to each other and want to settle things.

Try to remember a situation in the recent past when you solved a dispute constructively.

What kind of feelings does a conflict evoke in you? How does it feel to make up?

## TRUST AND FORGIVENESS

The feeling of safety becomes stronger when we trust each other. It is important to abide by what has been agreed. If we betray someone's trust, we can apologize, and we can forgive. This allows love and intimacy to grow.



### SEXUALITY, INTIMACY & TENDERNESS

Both children and adults have the need to be touched and be close to others. Children need adult protection to develop in a safe environment. It is, therefore, important to consider what kind of a touch feels good and safe to you.

What kind of tenderness do you like? How do you feel when someone hugs you?

### WORDS

We need speaking and listening skills to interact with others. Values and cultural traditions are also transferred through both words and real-life example. Stories and memories are part of the family's richness of life. We are not mind-readers, and, therefore, it is important to share our thoughts, feelings and wishes. In the family, it is important to foster shared moments of conversation when everyone can talk and listen to one another. Who in your family is a good listener? What kind of things would you like to talk about today?

### ACTIONS

Spending time and doing things together without hurry create joy and intimacy. What kind of games or household chores do you like? What do you like to do together?

### LOVE

The family can reinforce its mutual love by both words and actions. How do we take care of each other? What brings joy to the whole family?

### UNNAMED

Did we miss some important questions?

## Building a home together

The family is gathered together in a circle. Each family member greets the rest of the family with a nice move or gesture! When someone has made their own move or gesture, the others respond to these by repeating what they just saw. The family then sits down in a circle on the floor or on chairs. One of the adults asks all the others to close their eyes.

After that, he or she gets up and goes to another family member and draws a figure (house) on his palm. The one who has had a figure drawn on his or her palm can open his or her eyes and go to another family member and do the same. When everyone has had a figure drawn on their palm, they all try to guess together what the figure drawn on their palms was.

The family reflects together on all the houses that have been important to them and shares ideas about the home where they are living now. Next, they build their own family home in the middle of the circle. The house can be made using building blocks, legos or sticks, or the family can even fold a napkin into the shape of their home.



They discuss together the various parts of the house and their properties.

- The building has a foundation that supports us, provides a solid base. How can we support each other at home?
- The house has walls, and they are straight. How can we be straight and direct to one another at home?
- The house also has a roof that provides protection. How can we provide protection to one another?
- The house has windows and doors that help us see and hear sounds of life around us. Who are the people and what are the sounds around us?

We all need a home, and we can give each other a home. Having a home is a big reason to be thankful for. The family reflects on what kind of things they have in their home that bring them joy and which matters they can be grateful for. Everyone can now go and get small objects of their choice and place them in the home built together to signify matters.

They are happy and grateful for. Everyone will also be given a chance to tell the others what they are happy about and what they are grateful for in their own home.

The family can light up a tealight candle together in the middle of the home built to signify that, in this home, everyone is safe and can give shelter to each other. (www.parisuhteenpalikat.fi)

## **Supporting cultural identity in early childhood**

Every child has an individual cultural identity, and each child's cultural identity needs support in order to develop in a balanced way. The fact that children grow up in a home with two religious beliefs does not mean that they would have two separate cultural identities. Children adopt both religious beliefs as their own and build their own identity from the building blocks provided by each belief. The adults are responsible for providing children with positive experiences that encourage them and guide them to be curious about things. The support given for children's cultural identity gives them a structured self-image and provides them with a positive general approach to life.

The cultural identity changes and is modified throughout life. The objective is that children would learn to understand and appreciate the diversity both in themselves and in their surroundings and to act constructively and respectfully in this environment in accordance with their personal values. If children's world view is expanded at an early stage in such a way that representatives of different cultures and languages and people from different backgrounds are considered equal actors, it will be easier for them later in life to consider special features as a natural, everyday thing – as something that touches everyone in some way. If the child's own family and people around them have a positive attitude towards the child's background, he or she probably has confidence in his or her background as well

In the family, the parents could pay attention to, for example, how they refer to other people. Do they use the words 'others', 'those people' or 'them' – or do they talk about 'us'? What kind of feasts and holidays does the family celebrate? Do these feasts and holidays reflect the diversity of Finland, such as the International Romani Day and the Sámi National Day? There is diversity in all of us!

**More information and pedagogical tips:**

[www.dialogikasvatus.fi](http://www.dialogikasvatus.fi)

[www.kulttuurinvuosikello.fi](http://www.kulttuurinvuosikello.fi)

[www.juhlakalenteri.fi](http://www.juhlakalenteri.fi) /

[www.festkalender.fi](http://www.festkalender.fi)

maksuton e-kirja "Kulttuuri-identiteetti ja kasvatus  
- kulttuuriperintökasvatus kotoutumisen tukena"

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