

# Say Hello! Welcoming Children Through Language

## Building Bridges with Simple Greetings & Cultural Inclusion

### Why Greetings Matter

Greeting children in their home language is a powerful first step toward building a safe, respectful, and inclusive classroom.

For Dual Language Learners (DLLs), it says:

“You and your family belong here.”

For monolingual children, it invites curiosity and builds empathy.

Key Insight: A warm hello in a child’s language builds connection, reduces anxiety, and shows that diversity is valued (Office of Head Start, 2020; Hurtado, 2023).



### Common Greetings in Indiana’s Top Languages

Language	Greeting	Cultural Connection
Spanish	¡Buenos días!	Involve extended family (familismo) in activities
Haitian Creole	Bonjou / Bonswa	Respect storytelling and faith traditions
Burmese/Chin	Mingalaba	Provide trauma-informed care and visual cues



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Language	Greeting	Cultural Connection
<b>Punjabi</b>	Sat Sri Akal	Celebrate Sikh holidays, include grandparents, honor dietary and cultural traditions
<b>Arabic</b>	Marhaba / As-salamu alaykum	Respect religious practices and family structures
<b>Mandarin Chinese</b>	Nǐ hǎo	Emphasize storytelling and respect for elders

## Honoring the Punjabi Community

### Voices from Indiana:

*“Learning just one greeting like Sat Sri Akal shows respect—it means so much to parents.”*

*“Many Punjabi families want to be involved but don’t know how. A little guidance goes a long way.”*

### Barriers Punjabi Families May Face:

- Language and translation challenges
- Unfamiliarity with the U.S. education system
- Few culturally relevant materials or staff
- Isolation or stigma tied to seeking support



### Ways to Support and Welcome:

- Provide forms, signage, and flyers in Punjabi
- Partner with Gurdwaras and Punjabi community leaders
- Invite extended family to events or drop-offs
- Respect dietary needs
- Include Punjabi books, stories, rhymes, and music in class
- Celebrate Vaisakhi and Lohri
- Ask families about their traditions and routines
- Learn about hair traditions and teach peers to respect them



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## Educator Tips: Cultural Respect in Practice

Practice	How it Helps
<b>Learn &amp; use “Sat Sri Akal”</b>	Builds instant trust and shows cultural awareness
<b>Create a multilingual family wall</b>	Helps children and families feel seen
<b>Model respect for elders</b>	Mirrors key Punjabi values taught at home
<b>Invite family storytelling or song sharing</b>	Honors oral traditions and strengthens identity
<b>Train staff on Punjabi cultural practices</b>	Prevents misunderstandings and fosters connection

## Key Research Findings

- Greetings in children’s languages increase inclusion and emotional safety (Office of Head Start, 2020)
- Children in multilingual environments show stronger empathy and communication (Fan et al., 2015)
- Honoring home language boosts identity, school readiness, and cognitive growth (Castro et al., 2011; Espinosa, 2020)
- Authentic engagement with families leads to stronger partnerships and outcomes (Uccelli, 2023)

## Creative Ideas for the Classroom

- “Hello Wall” with greetings in children’s languages
- Multicultural Circle Time with rotating greetings
- Learn one new greeting monthly + related story or music
- Invite parents to teach songs, games, or greetings in Punjabi
- Hold a Punjabi Heritage Day with storytelling, music, snacks, and family participation

## Final Thought

When we greet a child in their home language, we greet their entire family—and their history—with care and respect.



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## Welcoming Haitian Creole Families

Early care centers can welcome Haitian families by incorporating Haitian Creole in communications and materials. Celebrating Haitian cultural events, such as Haitian Flag Day, and including Haitian music, art, and literature in the curriculum can also help families feel valued and respected. Identified Gaps and Opportunities

There is a need for more translated materials and resources in Haitian Creole. Providing information on local Haitian community organizations and services can bridge gaps. Collaborating with Haitian community leaders, Haitian churches and organizations can also enhance support.



## Barriers and Challenges Haitian Families May Face

- Language barriers
- Limited access to culturally relevant resources
- Economic challenges

## Strategies for Engagement and Support

- Offer bilingual staff and translated materials
- Create family engagement activities that reflect Haitian traditions
- Maintain open, two-way communication
- Provide workshops on navigating the education system and available resources

## Cultural Practices and Traditions

Haitian culture places a strong emphasis on respect, faith, community, and family involvement. Incorporating these values into early childhood education—through community-building activities and family-inclusive events—can be very effective. Using storytelling and oral traditions in teaching also resonates deeply with Haitian families.

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