

INCLUSIVE PRODUCTION PRINCIPLES

By Jenae Tien Jenkins, creator of Allie and Friends



Amplifying cultural diversity, fostering kindness, growing together.

Created and Produced by Expand Your Library in collaboration with commissioning partner, ABC Kids Early Education, Allie and Friends sees a group of children come together to form friendships and collaborate on projects. Guided by Jenae Tien, they engage in cross-cultural communication and develop critical thinking skills. Allie and Friends supports young children to learn how to activate cultural allyship and encourages discussions around five key concepts:

ALLYSHIP, DIVERSITY, LOVE (relating to self, others, and skin tones), COMMUNICATION, COMMUNITY.

At the core of Allie and Friends lies a commitment to inclusive practices that cultivate a culturally, physically, and psychologically safe environment—ensuring that every child feels welcomed, valued, seen and heard, provided with scaffolding that allows each child to engage in a way that individually works for them.

This document offers a behind-the-scenes glimpse into Expand Your Library’s production process, serving as a resource for fellow creators eager to craft meaningful educational resources and media, alongside children and communities in a culturally responsive and equitable process, modeling allyship along the way.

1. CHILD SAFETY FIRST

Always our top priority.

2. RESPECT FOR CULTURE

Honouring the richness of every background.

3. ETHICAL FILMING STANDARDS

Integrity in every frame.

4. AMPLIFYING CHILDREN’S VOICES

Empowering the next generation to be heard.

5. CREATING AN EQUAL PLAYING FIELD

Ensuring everyone has a chance to shine.





Most of the time, it was about feeling comfortable inside and out - getting tissues for runny noses and singing songs to pass waiting time, but the children loved having a go-to person who had their back and their snacks! Crowd favourites included popcorn and mandarins!

Play and Rest Breaks:

We recognised the importance of play in children's development, incorporating regular play breaks to ensure the entire day felt like an extension of play. Food and water breaks were available all day, allowing children to eat, drink, and rest whenever they desired.



EXPAND YOUR
LIBRARY



Early
Education

1. CHILD SAFETY FIRST: ALWAYS OUR TOP PRIORITY

Designated Child Safety Liaison:

A dedicated child safety and engagement liaison (Jaclyn Bates) was present throughout the production to ensure that every child felt safe and supported. Jac (as she was affectionately known) was responsible for supervising the application of microphones, ensuring the physical and emotional safety of every child, coordinating risk assessments and logistics for each child throughout the day, sensory regulation accommodations, and rest time. This role illuminated concerns and ensured all interactions were appropriate and positive.

Jac was amazing at being there to help with conversations, finding ways to encourage children to share their experiences and opinions, and giving loads of positive encouragement to help them feel valued and capable.



INCLUSIVE PRODUCTION PRINCIPLES

Allies and Friends.



Appropriate Clothing:

We had strict guidelines for talent clothing, and we worked alongside parents and caregivers to ensure children wore age-appropriate attire ready for play.

The children all had better fashion sense than us adults—talk about setting the bar high!

Bonding and Preparation

Pre-Filming Bonding Session:

Before filming, we held a bonding hour where everyone met for free play, explored film equipment, reviewed the day's schedule, and the crew answered questions the children or families had. This session was crucial for building trust and ensuring the children felt comfortable and excited.

We always had a 'just in case' toilet break and made sure to do the basics like applying sunscreen and getting one last cuddle from their loved one before filming kicked off. We then engaged in another activity that was relevant to the theme of that episode which allowed the kids to work together and create craft, new games or share ideas. This was a great way for the children to get accumulated with one another and to get to know me and Jac (Child Engagement Coordinator) in a fun way. The executive producer (Alarna Zinn) often had to keep us all on track of schedule because we were having so much fun and lost track of time. This session was crucial for building trust and making sure the children felt comfortable and excited about the day ahead.



EXPAND YOUR
LIBRARY



Early
Education



There was acknowledgment and respect for each child's needs over a long day of filming. Some need to run around and blow off steam, others to retreat or spend a little time focussed on an activity or reconnecting with parents.

Playful and Creating a Stress-Free Environment

Play as the Focus:

The entire day was centered around play, designing activities as extensions of play to keep the atmosphere light and engaging, harnessing social and emotional skills, critical thinking and curiosity for one another.

Canossa Kindergarten Setting:

Filming took place in the inclusive environment of Canossa Kindergarten, featuring a large playground with lots of green space, a community garden, performance stage, and classrooms rich in culturally inclusive learning resources. The location was accessible and designed to be a welcoming space for all.





2. RESPECT FOR CULTURE: HONOURING THE RICHNESS OF EVERY BACKGROUND

We were intentional about addressing cultural sensitivities and nuances throughout the script, filming process, and interactions. This approach created an environment where all children felt seen and heard. Community engagement was a priority, and we ensured that deadlines and time pressures did not impact the relationships being built with the talent, their families, and the surrounding communities. We prioritised language as a connector, ensuring that the simple act of using the correct pronunciation of names was emphasised, and all staff and crew were briefed on the importance of getting it right. We don't claim to be perfect, but respect for cultural identities was at the heart of every interaction, ensuring that all participants felt acknowledged and valued.

One child, whose name is often mispronounced in settings like school, had grown accustomed to hearing it said incorrectly. Over time, they had come to accept the mispronunciations and the variations others used, almost expecting their name to sound different each time it was said. This was disheartening and we wanted to showcase that we recognise the significance of a name and the love that his parents put into choosing it. By collaborating closely with the family, we took the time to understand the sound system and nuances of the child's name, ensuring that we honoured it by pronouncing it correctly.

The first time I addressed the child after working with their mother for some time to get the pronunciation right, they looked at me with a big smile and said...

"Wow, how did you know.... my real name?"



EXPAND YOUR
LIBRARY



Early
Education



By adopting a neutral role, we helped them articulate their emotions, thoughts, and reasoning, allowing them to see each other's perspectives.

This moment exemplified the need to model the core values of our show, which include allyship, celebrating differences and diversity, compassion, and intentional communication. It was my responsibility to seize that learning moment, addressing it calmly and kindly without shaming anyone involved. In the end, we held a group discussion where both children expressed themselves, fostering understanding and connection among the group. After our conversation, they made up, with the girl reflecting on her comment and wanting to make things right, practicing what she was learning about being an ally.

By day's end, they were inseparable (#BESTIES!) and the affected child gained confidence, feeling empowered to participate fully.

Conflict resolution and cultural sensitivity

Addressing Issues Immediately:

Throughout the day, we communicated intentionally with the children. If we noticed a communication or social and emotional barrier or a child feeling left out during free play, we addressed it quickly, allowing the children to critically think about the situation and find solutions together.

One day during filming, a child made a blunt comment about another child's hair, which embarrassed them and caused discomfort. While some might have brushed it off, the team and I recognised the underlying cultural biases at play, understanding the importance of addressing such moments immediately.

We were in a crucial part of filming with a large group of children, but I could see that the child who received the comment was withdrawn and sad. I immediately called for a break in filming and sat down with both children to discuss the comment.



INCLUSIVE PRODUCTION PRINCIPLES

Allies and Friends.



and their overall emotional well-being, and how we respond as adults can improve or exacerbate the situation, highlighting the importance of being intentional and empathetic in our language and actions. Through purpose-led intercultural communication, we can create an environment where children feel safe to express themselves and learn from one another.

Having worked with the children for only a short time, I did not have the luxury of an everyday classroom teacher experience. However, our prior conversations about allyship and diversity served as mitigation measures. They had already been introduced to these concepts, which made it easier to address and drive home points of reflection. They were witnessing in real time what being an ally is and is not, and how diversity is something we should embrace rather than isolate.

By addressing these moments promptly and compassionately, we can help children develop an anti-racist and empathetic foundations, where understanding, allyship, and a celebration of diversity are at the forefront of their minds during each interaction.

Although harm may not have been the intention, it's important to recognise that the outcome is what truly matters. In this case, had we ignored the situation, the child could have been left feeling unwelcome, shaking their sense of self and belonging, while the other child may have developed an incorrect belief that such comments are acceptable. This is why it's crucial to address the impact, not just the intent behind actions or words. Intentions don't erase the negative effects on those affected, and the responsibility lies in the outcome. This experience demonstrates how critical it is to address passing comments and their potential impacts in the moment.

Educators and content makers must be trauma informed. We don't always know the experiences children bring with them when meeting, working, teaching, or interacting with us, such as racial discrimination or bullying. We need to recognise that seemingly harmless remarks or actions can carry deeper cultural biases, reinforcing feelings of exclusion or inadequacy. Fly away remarks can significantly impact a child's sense of belonging, self-worth,



EXPAND YOUR
LIBRARY



Early
Education

INCLUSIVE PRODUCTION PRINCIPLES



We have some of the best one liners on tape... Some of the things the children said were hilarious!

3. ETHICAL FILMING STANDARDS

Integrity in every frame:

Allies and Friends adhered to ethical filming standards, which included creating a safe environment for the children, crew, and community members involved. We took additional steps to ensure accessibility on set, including ample catering to accommodate dietary requirements, flexibility with family needs, such as allowing families to bring siblings on set if needed. We set up a dedicated classroom for families to use, play, and relax and take a sensory break during filming.

All children and family members were given access to playground areas when they were not in use for filming. We embraced a wrap-around community approach to filming that allowed families to show up as their authentic selves and feel a part of the crew. We also ensured to have all consent forms signed prior to conducting any activities, filming or photography.

Inclusive Filming Techniques

Improvisation and Child-Led Exploration:

The script allowed for key beats to be explored, but there were no scripted lines for the children. Instead, we encouraged improvisation, letting the children lead the exploration and express their genuine thoughts and feelings. Scaffolding lines were provided when needed, but the focus was on capturing the children's authentic reactions, thoughts, questions and interactions.

Respecting Children's Comfort Levels:

We were mindful of each child's comfort levels on set. Our crew was instructed to respect children's cues, fostering a supportive environment. We made sure to always acknowledge and respect when the children were simply done for the day.

One day while filming, all adults were instructed by a child to look away while they said a particular thought, so the entire crew turned their backs or covered their eyes while the child figured out her response and it worked like a dream!

Other times the set crew would be quiet and not provide any suggestions of play and did not plant any 'conversation idea seeds' so the children could lead the play exploration without any adult interruptions. The crew and I carefully watched and only interacted when needed or when engaged with by the children.



EXPAND YOUR
LIBRARY



Early
Education

INCLUSIVE PRODUCTION PRINCIPLES

Allies and Friends.



IF A CHILD WAS SHY, WE WOULD ASK QUESTIONS LIKE:

- Is there anything that would help you feel more comfortable?
- Would you like to take a short break or keep going for now?
- Would you like us to adjust the lights or the noise level?
- Is there something we can do to help you feel relaxed and ready?
- Would you prefer to observe for a bit or jump in when you feel ready?

“Jenae, myself and the crew were always including children in the process and the goal of what was happening. We explained why their words and insights are valuable, and why other children might benefit from their experience. I think that experience will be one that really endures for the children on the show. The importance of their world view, and by extension, the importance of another’s that differs from them.” - Jac, Child Liason Officer.



EXPAND YOUR
LIBRARY



Early
Education

INCLUSIVE PRODUCTION PRINCIPLES

Allies and Friends.



The Crew

Diversity among the Crew:

Our crew reflected a range of cultural backgrounds, varying health conditions and neurodiversity. This diversity was celebrated and supported through tailored working styles, brain, sensory or rest breaks, respectful cross-cultural communication and design thinking for a collaborative creative process.

Lead by Example:

We maintained a clean and tidy filming environment, showing respect for the kindergarten and encouraging children to do the same.

We ensured no food wastage, donating any unopened excess food to a local women's shelter.

All toys and resources were carefully looked after and the crew took pictures of the kindy before the day started to ensure everything went back the way it was at the end of the day.



EXPAND YOUR
LIBRARY



Early
Education

© 2025 *Allies and Friends* is a collaboration between Expand Your Library and ABC Kids Early Education.



4. AMPLIFYING CHILDREN'S VOICES

Empowering the next generation to be heard:

Every aspect of Allies and Friends was guided by the voices and perspectives of children. Whether choosing games, incorporating creative ideas, or involving children in the music recording, their input was central to shaping our approach. We actively listened to and included their suggestions, ensuring their voices were reflected in the show's content and structure.

Acknowledgment of the country and the importance of place and culture were fundamental to our process, explored through books, resources, and community. The language in the Acknowledgement of Country was developed through a collaborative consultation process with [Reconciliation Australia](#), ensuring it aligns with cultural protocols and demonstrates deep respect. Each episode begins with this acknowledgment which does not always happen in children's content but we felt it was essential in setting a standard of respect for First Nations People, Culture and care for Country.

It featured imagery of place and a diverse range of children from various cultural backgrounds. Starting with the presence of a First Nations child from the Country we were on (Yuggera and Turrbal), who also created the accompanying didgeridoo introduction music and was remunerated for his cultural input and time and paired and voiced by a non-First Nations child whom was also remunerated for their time.

This combination, we hope, reinforces the importance of visibility and representation while demonstrating that we all share the responsibility to walk together in honouring Country and the Traditional Custodians of the land. We aim to inspire inclusion, allyship, and cross-cultural respect, with an intentional unifying tone for each episode of Allies and Friends.



“An observation I made was that Jenae always came to eye level when talking to the children. As person to person, showing respect and taking away any sense of hierarchy. Fabulous to see also how this behaviour was taken on by the rest of the crew.” - Jac, Child Liason Officer.

Open Communication:

We maintained constant communication with children, parents, and caregivers, keeping them informed of each step of the filming process. This transparency built trust and allowed for seamless collaboration between families and the production team. We appreciated and asked for feedback from children and their families, making individual accommodations as needed.

Remuneration:

All child actors and community were fairly compensated for their time and talents on screen. Each child also received a Deck of Diversity card set to encourage ongoing family conversations around inclusion and allyship, as well as vouchers from local bookstores. We wanted to connect the children with inclusive books, resources, and people in their local community.

5. CREATING AN EQUAL PLAYING FIELD

Ensuring everyone has a chance to shine.

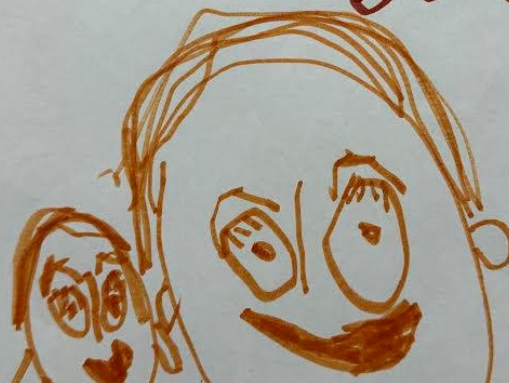
First-Name Basis:

Children were encouraged to call us by our first names, creating an environment of equality. This approach fostered mutual respect and made the children feel more at ease, allowing us to build strong, happy friendships.

We often received beautiful gestures of trust from our little Allies and Friends such as notes, drawings, flowers, pebbles and invitations to share lunch together on the playground. “Come and eat with us Jenae!”


I loved that you invited us to film with you. I liked that you let us do the paint and mix colors and play. I love you so much.

DAVID



INCLUSIVE PRODUCTION PRINCIPLES

Allies and Friends.



Through intentional, inclusive, and enjoyable practices, we aim to create a platform where all children and families feel respected, valued, seen, and engaged in a shared journey through thoughtful content and conversations.

In essence, our production of Allies and Friends embodied the principles we strive to establish within Australian early childhood centres and schools—environments where inclusion, allyship, and cultural diversity are not just discussed but actively practised and celebrated.

We are continually learning, growing, and adapting:

Allies and Friends, along with our team, recognises the importance of receiving feedback, committing to ongoing self-education, and engaging intentionally with the community. This approach nurtures authentic allyship and enhances future content that reflects the diversity and values of modern Australia. It amplifies all children's voices, promotes inclusivity, challenges stereotypes, and empowers children to connect with, respect, and celebrate the diversity around them and within themselves.

Child-Centred Audition Process

Play-Based Auditions:

Our auditions were centered around play, and observation, rather than traditional audition methods that require children to do or say certain things like scripted lines. Children were allowed to engage in ways that suited them, and we observed how they interacted with each other. We also took time to speak with small groups of kids at a time and conduct group work activities and also collaborated with parents and carers to ensure each child's needs were understood and met, such as one on one sessions and unconventional audition methods to allow each participant to engage in a way that worked for them.



EXPAND YOUR
LIBRARY



Early
Education

© 2025 Collaboration between Expand Your Library and ABC Kids
Early Education.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

1. Child Safety First: Always our top priority

- Appoint a **Child Safety Liaison** to ensure physical and emotional safety on set.
- Conduct **risk assessments** before filming sessions and monitor risk throughout the day.
- Prioritise **play and rest breaks** throughout the day.
- Ensure **appropriate clothing** that allows for comfort and play.
- Create a **stress-free filming environment** by incorporating fun and engaging activities.

2. Respect for Culture: Honouring the richness of every background

- **Integrate an array of perspectives** and **co-collaborate** for example, First Nation and Marginalised groups
- Be **intentional** in addressing cultural sensitivities in scripts and interactions.
- Engage thoroughly with **families and communities** to ensure culturally respectful representation.
- Prioritise **correct pronunciation of names** as a sign of respect and inclusivity.
- **Welcome** language, thought, ability, culture or background **differences**.
- Address **bias and exclusion** in real-time, fostering reflection and learning moments.
- Content creators must be **trauma-informed**, understanding the impact of language and actions on children's experiences.

3. Ethical Filming Standards: Integrity in every frame

- Ensure **authentic representation** by involving culturally diverse voices in decision-making.
- Uphold **ethical guidelines** that respect children's dignity, boundaries, and agency.
- Be **transparent with families** about the filming process and obtain informed consent.

4. Amplifying Children's Voices: Empowering the next generation to be heard

- Design activities that **encourage self-expression** and meaningful participation.
- Facilitate opportunities for children to **share their stories and perspectives**.
- Model **active listening and responsiveness** to children's ideas and concerns.

5. Creating an Equal Playing Field: Ensuring everyone has a chance to shine

- Provide **scaffolding and accommodations** to support diverse learning and engagement styles.
- Foster **inclusive interactions**, ensuring every child feels valued and included.
- Recognise and **address barriers** to participation in real-time.
- Maintained **constant communication** with children, parents, and caregivers for transparency and trust.
- **Remunerate** all involved, equitably and fairly.