

# Talking to Children about Diversity

Parents are uniquely positioned to guide their children to appreciate the differences that make each person special. As a result of world events and heightened awareness of the relationship between bullying and school violence, there has been increased attention placed on the *diversity* that shapes the culture of the United States.

Explaining diversity in a way that is understandable to children can be a challenging process. Even when you have done your best to teach your children the importance of respect and treating others fairly, they may still encounter hate and prejudice through the Internet and other forms of media, and even in their school or neighborhood. Teaching children about appreciating diversity will help them do well in today's diverse society, and promote good self-esteem and mental health.

## IT'S NEVER TOO EARLY OR TOO LATE TO TALK ABOUT DIVERSITY.

Here are some tips on how to get started:

- **Recognize that you may consciously or unconsciously harbor negative feelings, biases, and prejudices about others.** Be aware of how you speak and act in front of your children. The seeds of respect and intolerance are planted when children are young. If your children observe behaviors that promote tolerance and embrace diversity, they are more likely to exhibit these values as they grow and mature.
- **Read books or watch videos with your kids that have tolerance, diversity, and multicultural themes.** Have discussions after each book or film to address any questions or concerns they may have.
- **If you ever hear or see your children doing anything that does not embrace diversity, immediately talk to them about bias and prejudice.** Let your children know that bias, prejudice, and stereotyping are never acceptable. Establish open channels of communication with your children so that they feel recognized, understood, listened to, and respected.
- **Buy your children toys and games that celebrate the diverse culture in which they live.** Don't buy anything that promotes intolerance.
- **Point out stereotypes, acts of prejudice, and bias** depicted in TV, movies, computer games, and other media to help your child recognize unacceptable behavior or attitudes.
- **Encourage your children's friendships with people who are different from them.**
- **Work with your children's school or Parent-Teacher Association to start a diversity book list or diversity organization.** Let the school board know that diversity in schools is important to you.
- **Enroll your child** in schools, camps, learning programs, day care, and afterschool programs that celebrate diversity.
- **Integrate culturally diverse artwork, literature, or music in your home.**

- **Invite a friend of a different cultural background to your house for a family meal or holiday.** Ask the person to prepare a cultural dish or share stories with your family.
- **Acknowledge and respect that your children's problems at school are important to them.** Provide emotional encouragement and then brainstorm together to find constructive solutions to help them deal with their problems.
- **Be honest about differences between people.** Tell children that people are not all the same. Explain that everyone experiences the world in different ways and those experiences are important. Help your children to understand the viewpoints and ideas of others.
- **Remember that talking about tolerance and diversity is an ongoing process.** It cannot be summed up in a single conversation. Establish a "no subject is taboo" policy so that your children know they can talk to you about anything.

### SOME SIMPLE TERMS TO HELP YOU EXPLAIN DIVERSITY TO YOUR CHILD

What is diversity? Diversity is a variety of something, such as an opinion, color, style, or ethnicity.

When embracing diversity these are some key words you should know:

- **Uniqueness:** Only one of its kind
- **Appreciate:** To value somebody or something highly; understand the meaning or importance

The following terms prevent one from fully embracing diversity:

- **Prejudice:** To judge someone or something before you know all the facts
- **Stereotype:** To group people in categories based on single characteristics
- **Bias:** An attitude that always favors one way of feeling or acting over any other

### TOP 10 TIPS FOR KIDS

1. Never make fun of people who are different from you in any way. Accept that everyone is special in his or her own way.
2. Start a new trend: Say only nice things about everyone.
3. Next time your parents take you out to eat, try a food from another culture.
4. Go to the library and check out books about kids from different cultures.
5. Remember that what someone looks like on the outside has nothing to do with what is inside.
6. Treat everyone you meet how you would like to be treated.
7. If you are being teased or bullied, tell an adult you trust. Show that you are confident in yourself by ignoring the bully and walking away.
8. Ask different people what they think about things. Respect their opinions.
9. Never stereotype a whole group of people. Treat each person as an individual who has his or her own ideas and opinions.
10. Believe in yourself! Just do your best and be proud of the different things that make you who you are!

## TOP 10 TIPS FOR TEENS

1. Talk with young children about their friends and what makes each of them special. Ask them to tell you about their special qualities as well!
2. Attend a play, listen to music, or go to a dance performance by artists whose race, culture, or ethnicity is different from your own.
3. Offer to help tutor students at your school who are at a different learning level than your own.
4. Speak up when you hear slurs or name-calling. Let people know that biased speech is always unacceptable.
5. List all the stereotypes you can, both positive and negative, about particular groups of people. Do you believe them to be true? Challenge yourself not to form opinions about groups of people without getting to know them.
6. Spend time volunteering with an organization that serves a group of people with different struggles than you—a homeless shelter, a nursing home, an agency that serves immigrants or refugees, a hospice, or a Head Start program.
7. Spend time trying to understand what it is like to live with a physical disability. Try to make a lunch using only one hand. Try to communicate with a friend without making any noise. If you have access to a wheelchair, spend an hour in it trying to move around your home, school, or community.
8. Spend time talking with your friends about how stereotypes make you feel. What can you do as a group to help turn stereotypes into positive praise of difference?
9. Go to an ethnic restaurant with your friends. Learn about the people from that part of the world.
10. Learn more about mental health from students who have a mental illness, such as attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder or depression. Ask them how it feels, when they realized they needed help, or how they cope. Spread positive messages about people with mental illness. Help to decrease the stigma!

Your program is here to help you along the journey of life. No situation is too big or too small. When you and your household members need assistance, reach out anytime and we will help get you on the right path to meet your needs.

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800-888-6332

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