

FAMILY RESOURCE

CONNECTION

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The only way we are ever going to ensure peace on this planet is to adopt the entire world as “our family.” We are going to have to hug them and kiss them. And dance and play with them. And we are going to have to sit and talk and walk and cry with them. Because when we do, we’ll be able to see that, indeed, everyone is beautiful, and we all complement each other beautifully, and we would all be poorer without each other.

-Stan Dale



Alike and Different: Helping Children to Appreciate Diversity

Children are around two or three years old when they begin to notice physical differences among people—some are short and others tall, some have blue eyes and others have brown, and some have dark skin while others have light skin. They notice hair—some straight, some curly, some short, some long, and some have none at all.

The way in which children deal with and interpret what they observe as different is affected by a variety of influences. These influences include what they see and hear in their homes, in child care or school, and in their neighborhoods; what they view in the media; and what they are told by friends, relatives, neighbors, and teachers. We have all heard comments similar to the following: “Carl is in a wheelchair so he can’t play with us,” “Let’s pick a book for Becky about cooking, not about camping,” “You eat rice all of the time if you are Chinese,” “She is poor and wears funny clothes.”

For some adults, biased statements are unintentional. However, such statements do feed the intolerances our children learn to adopt. By simply rethinking our own biases and prejudices, families and caregivers can be careful not to label others. The goal is to encourage children to see people as individuals, not as groups.

Specific Ideas for Helping Children Respond to Diversity

- ◆ Respond to all children and families as individuals, not members of a group. Take time to learn from other families.
- ◆ Actively listen and respond to children. To listen effectively, stop what you are doing and look a child in the eye. When you do not acknowledge a child’s questions or feelings, or

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Mission

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- ◆ do not respond to a child's needs or concerns in an interested, caring, and honest manner, a child may begin to feel ignored and confused. For example, when a child asks "Why does that man talk like that?" listen carefully and offer an honest answer, rather than dismissing the question because you are uncomfortable discussing it.
- ◆ Find ways to teach all children to understand and accept differences.
- ◆ When it is necessary to talk about where a family or person is from, it is more helpful and supportive to respond to the diversity of families in terms of their national and regional group membership, rather than broad U.S. Census categories. For example, a family from Columbia will see themselves as Colombian, not Hispanic, Korean-Americans do not choose to be placed in the same group as Japanese-Americans (historic enemies), Guatemalan Mayans do not see themselves as Hispanics, and members of various Native American Nations usually identify with their specific tribe.
- ◆ Every child should see an image like him- or herself and family in child care and school programs. This is achieved through diverse staff, artwork, books, dolls, posters, games, family communication pieces, bulletin boards, public relations information, calendars, magazines, etc. The images are best when they are of real situations and families rather than stereotypical images.
- ◆ Communities, child care centers, and schools that serve families of just one race or ethnicity should make a concerted effort to have materials and staff that reflect diversity. This is equally important for homogeneous minority programs.
- ◆ Include a range of diverse perspectives through activities such as going on field trips, playing games, singing songs, listening to diverse music, cooking foods, and sharing traditions and stories.
- ◆ Find ways to respond immediately and appropriately to any negative comments or actions toward children based on their diversity. As role models for children, families

and caregivers must say and do what we hope to see the children say and do. We must respond to differences in a positive way and speak up when we encounter bias and prejudice. Children take their lead from the behavior of the adults around them. If someone makes a disparaging remark in front of you and you say nothing, the child assumes that you agree with that person's comment.



Children's Diversity Pledge

- I believe that all kids are different and special in their own way;
- I believe all kids deserve to be loved, accepted, and respected for who they are;
- I will work on being a good friend so that all children feel welcome around me and my family;
- I will not judge people because of where they live, the color of their skin, their abilities, their spiritual beliefs, or whether they are a girl or a boy;
- I can and will find the good in all people;
- I will not tell or listen to jokes that make fun of other people;
- I will be a peacemaker in my family and in my school;
- I will show pride in my family and heritage;
- I will learn as much as I can about my family traditions and the traditions of other kids in my school;
- I will try new things and think about new ideas because it helps me be a better person.

-Cultural Exchange Corporation,

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