

Talking with Your Child About Differences

As your child grows, they will meet people who may look different, come from different types of families and have different abilities. Talking openly about differences can help your child develop kindness, empathy, and respect for others. This can help prevent bullying because children who are most at risk of being bullied are different from their peers in some way.

How Can I Talk with My Child About Differences?

- Start early.
 - Children notice differences from a young age. Use this as a time to teach.
 - Give honest answers that are simple enough for their age.
- Encourage your child's curiosity.
 - Let your child know it's okay to ask questions.
 - If you are unsure of an answer, say, "I don't know, but let's find out together."
 - Don't avoid the topic or make your child feel bad for asking questions.
- Discuss many types of differences.
 - Some differences can be seen (skin color, hair type, clothing style, disabilities and medical conditions like a missing body part or speech problems).
 - Some differences can't always be seen (religious beliefs, learning styles or cultural backgrounds).
 - Teach your child that everyone is different in some way. Everyone likes different things and is good at different things. And that's great!

What Can I Teach My Child to Do?

- Be respectful.
 - Ask before touching someone's medical equipment (like a hearing aid or wheelchair).
 - Avoid pointing or staring at those different from you, but asking respectful questions directly to the person is okay.
 - Use "people-first" language. Say "a person who uses a wheelchair" rather than "a disabled person". This reminds children that a difference is just one part of who someone is.
- Always include others. Teach your child to say, "Hey, do you want to partner up for this project?" or "Come join me and my friends at recess."
- Be an upstander. Teach them ways to help when they see someone being bullied for being different.

