

Talking About Acceptance

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Talking About Acceptance

(One to two Hour Lesson)

Program Description

What are we teaching our children to accept? The basic issues that are addressed in anti-bias, teaching tolerance, multi-cultural, and diversity curricula are gender, race, ethnicity and disability. But there are many other underlying issues that are a part of our children's life experiences, including sexual preference, culture, body size, religion, and economic status. Children as young as two years old show signs of discomfort with someone who is "different". This program provides parents with ideas and resources to assist their children to develop knowledgeable, comfortable, and empathic interactions with similarities and differences.

Program Objectives

1. Participants will be able to help their children have a knowledgeable, comfortable, and empathic interaction with people who are similar or different.
2. Participants will heighten personal awareness of gender, race, culture and physical abilities and how these influence their child rearing practices.

Intended Audience Parents of preschoolers

Materials Needed

1. Flip chart, markers, masking tape
2. Overhead transparencies and overhead projector
3. Handouts and pencils or pens
4. Children's books related to similarities and differences (Amazing Grace by Mary Hoffman, if available)

Topics and Time Frame

Introduction and Personal Identity.....	10 minutes
Similarities and Differences.....	15 minutes
Developmental	15 minutes

Tasks.....	
What Can Parents Do?.....	15 minutes
Summary.....	10 minutes
Evaluation.....	10 minutes

Introduction and Personal Identity

Introduce yourself and then have participants introduce themselves by listing at least three groups with whom they identify. You should start the list and begin to add to it with each introduction. Group identities may include family, something to do with ethnicity, race, gender, age, support groups, service organization, profession, hobby or recreation, religion, etc.

As a follow-up, share cartoon (overhead) entitled "Parent-Teacher Conference".

Similarities and Differences

Share with participants the book, *Amazing Grace* by Mary Hoffman, usually found in public and school libraries. If *Amazing Grace* is not available, use *The Man Who Ordered A Tortilla and Got An Omelette* (attached), or another children's story that focuses on similarities and differences. After reading the story, ask participants to share some of the gender, culture, race, ethnicity, and/or disability issues that were addressed. List these on a flip chart. Ask participants to add other aspects that they feel their children will encounter in their day-to-day activities.

Developmental Tasks

(For detailed information, refer to *Anti-Bias Curriculum: Tools for Empowering Young Children*, an NAEYC publication)

(Overhead #1)

- From ages 2 through 5 or 6, children:
- make early observations of racial cues
- form basic concepts about other people
- engage in conceptual differentiation through action
- recognize the permanency of characteristics (cues remain constant - skin color will not change)
- understand group concepts
- elaborate group concepts

(Overhead #2)

- By age 2, children are learning the appropriate use of the gender labels (girl, boy) and learning color names, which they begin to apply to skin color
- By age 3, children begin to notice gender and racial differences and show signs of being influenced by societal norms and biases and may exhibit "pre-prejudice" toward others on the basis of gender or race or being differently-abled.
- Between 3 and 5 years of age, children try to figure out what the essential attributes of their selfhood, what aspects of self remain constant. They wonder:
 - Will I always be a girl or boy?
 - If I like to climb trees, do I become a boy?
 - If I like to play with dolls, do I become a girl?
 - What gives me my skin color?
 - Can I change it?
 - If I interact with a child who has a physical disability, will I get it?
 - Will I always need a prosthesis in place of my arm?

5. By 4 or 5 years of age, children not only engage in gender-specific behavior defined by socially prevailing norms, they also reinforce it among themselves without adult intervention. They use racial reasons for refusing to interact with children different from themselves and exhibit discomfort and rejection of differently-abled people.

6. Five-year olds have established sex identity and constancy (they know that they are and will remain a girl or a boy), but they do not necessarily have accurate information about their gender anatomy. They have also learned the societal embarrassment about gender anatomy, which shows up as giggling, teasing, and sometimes surreptitiously trying to see or play with each others' genitalia.

7. Five-year olds are curious and want information about how babies are born.

What Can Parents Do?

(Refer to National Network for Child Care fact-sheet: *Helping Children Deal With Differences* by Marilyn Brink)

- RESPOND PROMPTLY
- GIVE SIMPLE ANSWERS
- USE THE RIGHT WORDS
- MODEL RESPECTFUL BEHAVIOR, BOTH VERBALLY AND NONVERBALLY
- ACKNOWLEDGE CHILDREN'S FEARS
- INTRODUCE DIFFERENCES THROUGH BOOKS

For additional interactive activities, select 1 or 2 from attachment

Summary Share with participants "Our Differences Make Us Special"

Evaluation Use standard Extension Evaluation instrument and procedures.

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Overhead #2

What Can Parents Do?

- **Respond Promptly**
- **Give Simple Answers**
- **Use The Right Words**
- **Model Respectful Behavior, Both Verbally And Nonverbally**
- **Acknowledge Children's Fears**
- **Introduce Differences Through Books**

References and Resources

Agricultural Communications

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Diversity: Crossing the Lines "Make Contact" (Concept Media) - 24 minute video and guide. Illustrates both the historical and contemporary immigrant experience, helping viewers develop an appreciation of the difficulties and challenges of adapting to a new land with new language and customs. Explores the root reasons for prejudice and stereotyping in U. S. society.

Gender & Communications: She Talks, He Talks (Learning Seed) - 22 minutes video, produced in 1994. Explores why female and male have trouble communicating.

Principles of Parenting: Will You Be My Friend (Auburn University) Video aired as a teleconference in 1997. Wally Goddard uses a panel of experts and video footage to discuss developing pro-social characteristics in children. Rejection, shyness, friendship and cooperation are discussed.

Valuing Diversity: Multi-cultural Communication (Learning Seed, 1995). 19 minute video and guidebook. Gives viewers practical suggestions on how to decrease their discomfort communication with diverse people.

4-H, Youth and Families Resource Library - Piedmont District

Family Information Services Notebooks, (1995 through 1998)

Care-giving . . . The Man Who Ordered A Tortilla and Got An Omelette, 1995, M&M-5

Cultural Response-Ability by Cirecie A. Olatunji, Ph.D.

- Addressing Racism From Parents, May, 1998, M&M-33
- Bias-Free Parenting: What Can Parents Do?, March, 1997, M&M - 21
- Grief Issues for Young Children: Some Thoughts and Reflections., January, 1998, M&M - 3
- Faulty Assumptions About Poor People, March, 1998, M&M-19
- How's My Cultural "Response-Ability?", 1995, M&M - 27
- Like Fish in Water", 1996, M&M -67

- Making Connections Between Home and School, Nov, 1997, M&M -69
- Multi-cultural Education, 1996, M&M - 50
- Reclaiming Our Cultural Selves, January, 1997, M&M - 10
- The Time Ball: Recording Life Events, 1995, M&M - 57

Talking to Our Children About Racism, Prejudice and Diversity: Helping five to eight year olds by Susan Linn, Ed.D. and Karen McGill Arrington, M.A., a publication of the Leadership Conference Education Fund, 1629 K Street, NW, Suite 1010, Washington, DC 20006

Web Sites

Anti-Defamation League (ADL) material on prejudice and tolerance now online, www.adl.org

Children, Youth and Family Consortium, The University of Minnesota, Celebrating Diversity in Families is located at <http://www.cyfc.umn.edu/diversity/>

Multi-cultural Pavilion is located at <http://curry.edschool.virginia.edu/go/multicultural/home.html>

National Network for Child Care Diversity Page is located at <http://www.nncc.org/Diversity/divers.page.html>

Southern Poverty Law Center, Teaching Tolerance Project is located at <http://www.splcenter.org>

YMCA Parent Tips: Learning to Live Together--Children and Cultural Diversity is located at <http://www.ymca.net/c/7/c.html> Search 'Diversity'

Other Resources

Roots and Wings: Affirming Culture in Early Childhood Programs, by Stacey York (published by Redleaf Press in St. Paul, MN)

Words Can Hurt You: Beginning a Program of Anti-Bias Education by Barbara J. Thompson (published by Addison-Wesley)

A Youth Leader's Guide to Building Cultural Competence, Book by Advocates for Youth, 1025 Vermont Avenue, NW, Suite 200, Washington, DC 20005, (202) 347-5700, 1994

Anti-Bias Curriculum: Tools for Empowering Young Children has an extensive listing of children's books that address diversity in families, gender roles, racial and ethnic identity, disabilities, and work; prejudice; and activism, (pages 119 - 135)

Project RACE, Inc., 1425 Market Blvd., Suite 330-E6, Roswell, GA 30076, FAX: (770) 640-7101, Email: projrace@aol.com, <http://www.projectrace.mindspring.com/about.html>: advocates for multiracial children and adults through education, community awareness and legislation. Their main goal is for a multiracial classification on all school, employment, state, federal, local, census and medical forms requiring racial data.

The Man Who Ordered a Tortilla and Got An Omelette

by Janet Gonzalez-Mena, M.A. Child and Family Studies Program, Napa Valley College, Napa, CA, 1995 Family Information Services

The human tendency is to lump things and people into categories. That's how our minds sort out and deal with the complex world we live in.

Unfortunately putting people into categories is a simplistic way of understanding others. When we do that, we create stereotypes. I know - I'm guilty of stereotyping.

As an Anglo-American growing up in Southern California, I had a category of people in my mind called "Spanish." I didn't know the difference between Spanish-speaking people from Mexico and those who came from Europe. I didn't even know about all the other Spanish-speaking people who made up the population of Southern California, including those whose families had been in California a lot longer than mine. I lumped all "Spanish-speaking" people into one category. I had a lot to learn even after studying Mexico and South America in the sixth grade and dancing the Mexican hat dance.

My first surprise came when I went to a Spanish restaurant that wasn't Mexican. (In Southern California in those days, "Spanish" was the word that covered everything - from food to people. No one I knew ever used the word Mexican except for "hat dances.") As a native-born Californian, I was well acquainted with tacos and enchiladas, but nothing on the menu of this Spanish restaurant even resembled those. The man who ordered a tortilla got an omelette.

That was the beginning of my education as I finally began to sort out the lump of people I had stuck all in one category.

My education continued when I met Olivia, a native Californian whose grandparents came from Mexico. Olivia and I taught preschool together and every day I had a new lesson. I remember when one Anglo parent kept referring to the mothers of the Spanish-speaking children in our class as "the Spanish Ladies." One day Olivia gently said to her, "When you use that term, I think of ruffled dancers with roses in their teeth. Just call them Mexican women - that's what they are." The parent was grateful for the feedback just as I was whenever Olivia told me honestly what she thought and felt.

My most lasting lesson came when I met my husband who was born and raised in Mexico but didn't fit my idea of what a Mexican looked like. I knew intellectually that immigrants have been coming to Mexico for several hundred years just as they have been coming to this country. However, I accepted that U.S., Americans are from all different backgrounds, but thought of Mexicans as similar to each other. I had my first hint that wasn't so when teaching a Head Start class and I enrolled a red-haired freckled child named Juan who didn't speak a word of English.

It took me a while but I finally learned that Mexicans come in all shapes, sizes, colors, degrees of wealth, education, and pigmentation, and that was also true of people from Central and South America.

I also learned that where a person starts out on the economic ladder doesn't necessarily determine where he or she will end up. I have a friend who was born and raised in a house with a dirt floor in the Central Valley of California. He didn't learn English until he went to school, and he only lasted in school until the 8th grade, when he quit to work full time because his family needed money. Today he teaches English in a community college much like the one where he tentatively started back to school at the age of thirty. He was a reentry student long before anyone ever thought up that term.

I remember one lesson that made me laugh. A four-year-old Mexican-American girl in my preschool class was trying to tell me about one of her Anglo classmates. She couldn't describe the child and she couldn't remember her name. She finally said in exasperation and frustration, "You huerras (blondies) all look alike and you're all named Janet or Jennifer or something." That was the first time in my life the shoe was on the other foot.

So my message is, be careful about labeling people and thinking that everyone you label in a certain way is alike. But know that's a natural tendency and everyone does it. We have to learn to perceive people as individuals even if they're all named Janet or Jennifer.

OUR DIFFERENCES MAKE US SPECIAL

Aaron Wolfson gave the following speech when he was a fifth grader at Rockbrook Elementary school in Nebraska. It was published in November, 1995 issue of Exceptional Parent.

Imagine a world where everything is the same. It would be pretty boring, right? That's why people who are different should be treated with respect.

People with disabilities are among those people who are different. Some don't talk, walk, read or write as we do. Many of us think that people with disabilities aren't as smart as we are.

Henry David Thoreau said, "If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him step to the music he hears, however measured or far away."

This is what Thoreau's words mean to me; if you learn at a certain pace, and your brother learns at a different pace. Don't force him to learn at your pace. Don't force him to learn at your pace. Who says his level of learning is any worse than yours? He is distinctly himself.

These thoughts refer to my experiences with my younger brother, Avi. He has special needs. He gives me a happy feeling, makes me laugh like a hyena and gives my day a great start with his bright and beaming smile!

The school district has given Avi a technical label "mildly mentally handicapped", which means he can receive certain educational services. This label creates a picture in my mind of Avi riding down a conveyor belt. A machine slaps a label on his head. The label reads, "This is Avi and he is handicapped."

But the label does not tell you who Avi really is that he plays football, collects dinosaurs and gobbles down hot dog. I know these things about Avi because I've spent lots of time with him and I've gotten to know him. People who see Avi for the first time might just go by the label. They could miss out on a nice friendship.

So let's not judge people because they seem different on the outside. On the inside, they are probably the same as you and me. Getting to know people who are different and unique helps you appreciate them. You can make some new friends, and you can learn something. That's why our differences make us special.

National Network for Child Care

HELPING CHILDREN DEAL WITH DIFFERENCES

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When noted kindergarten teacher Vivian Paley and her students from the University of Chicago lab school adopted a new classroom rule: You can't say "you can't play," they realized that's not how things worked in the real world. They began to see that whether or not you could play often depended on how you looked or whether you were different. So Paley and her students decided to try to make their classroom "nicer" than the real world.

All children learn very early what adults around them value. Between the ages of 2 and 5, children are becoming aware of gender, race, ethnicity, and disabilities (Neugebauer, 1992). They can see how we feel about people who are different from us. And our feelings gradually begin to influence their feelings. Children do what we do, not what we tell them to do.

We need to become aware of our own attitudes. Ana Consuelo Matiella encourages us to give children an environment in which they can begin to learn about differences. Our goal in this type of environment is for children to develop fairness and tolerance for differences and to learn to challenge unfair treatment of others.

For the longest time, in our efforts to be fair, we have tried to treat all children alike. "I don't even notice Kiki's color," her caregiver claims. Louise Derman-Sparks calls this the color-blind approach. She says that people who deny differences mean well. They are trying to counter bigotry by saying we are all alike under our skin. But this approach defines being different as something negative. When we deny a child's differences, we ignore his uniqueness.

Because children form identity and self-concept during this sensitive period of development, we must answer their questions honestly and factually. We must take the time to challenge distorted thinking, which is actually pre-prejudice (York, 1991). Young children watch their parents and teachers to see how they react to prejudicial ideas and comments. Our responses greatly affect the ideas that they will form.

Preschool children are naturally curious about the world, and they have questions about specific things that they notice. Questions about physical, gender, ethnic, or racial differences may be difficult for some adults to answer. But the way we answer will influence the child who is concluding that something is "wrong" with a person who is different.

Elizabeth Cary, author of "Talking about Differences Children Notice," gives some guidelines for responding to awkward questions. Children are more comfortable with differences when they understand why people are different.

RESPOND PROMPTLY. If possible, answer questions as soon as children ask them. If you ignore questions, children may decide that there is something wrong about the question or the person the question concerns. Children learn not to ask questions that make people uncomfortable. Prejudice often begins when children develop misconceptions based on their limited experiences.

GIVE SIMPLE ANSWERS. Answers should be simple and relate to a child's experience and level of development. If a child asks, "Why is that man so dark?," you can say simply, "He is dark because his mother and/or father is dark. You have blond hair just like your mother."

MODEL RESPECTFUL BEHAVIOR, BOTH VERBALLY AND NONVERBALLY. Many people were taught as children not to stare. They were taught so well that they avoid looking at people with disabilities at all.

ACKNOWLEDGE CHILDREN'S FEARS. Some children are afraid of the unknown. They may have wrong ideas about people who are different. They may be suspicious of unusual people and resist the new and different. Fears should be accepted, and children should be offered help to deal with their fears. Helpful responses acknowledge the child's feelings. You might say, "You're scared of the man without legs." Then give the child the tools and experiences to help her deal with her fear.

INTRODUCE DIFFERENCES THROUGH BOOKS. It can be less threatening for some children to meet people who are different first in a book. Issues surrounding differences can be discussed in terms of the characters in the book. Then you can broaden the discussion to include children in the group or people in the community.

It is important for adults to be sensitive to the unasked questions as well (Cary, 1992). If you sense that a child is confused or uneasy, try to verbalize those feelings for him. Get feelings out in the open so you can talk about them.

Remember, though, that actions speak louder than words. So we must be especially careful about how our actions shape the values that children learn as they encounter the people in their world. If we don't act, they will learn by default the messages that are all too prevalent in the world. And we'll find ourselves perpetuating ideas that we really do not want to pass on to our children.

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National Network for Child Care

CELEBRATE DIVERSITY!

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Children are growing up in exciting times. We live in a diverse world. Just think about the different languages people speak. Think about the many ways people fix their hair. Listen to the variety of music styles and instruments. It isn't necessary to travel to another state or country to find differences. Diversity is all around us. It is as close as the nearest TV, magazine, home, school, or store.

To live joyful, interesting lives and to be at peace with each other, people must appreciate each other's differences, as well as their similarities. Children are learning to do this today in family day care, their own homes, and everywhere they go!

Communities are more multi-cultural. Many family day care providers care for children with diverse backgrounds. As a result, we are getting to know more about other ethnic groups and cultures.

In some family day care programs, all of the children are from the same ethnic or racial group. If your community is not very diverse, you have an additional responsibility to the children in your care. They will soon be going to school with people from other backgrounds. Right from the start, it is important for you to make opportunities for them to celebrate diversity.

At first, children will notice differences among themselves. You should help them appreciate how wonderful it is that Rhonda has curly, black hair and that Amy has long, brown hair.

As they grow, they will begin to understand the greater diversity that exists in the world. This is the beginning of a multi-cultural, anti-bias curriculum.

A multi-cultural approach to working with young children is based on appreciating many human differences. The obvious ones include culture, race, occupation, income level, age, gender, religion, sexual orientation, and physical ability and disability.

Sometimes it is easier to get a handle on an idea when you know what it isn't as well as what it is. An anti-bias multi-cultural approach is NOT:

- Reading a book about Chanukah each December
- Cooking tortillas for lunch during Mexican week
- Taking a field trip to the Chinese New Year parade
- A lesson once in a while on not hurting each other
- Making maracas for the musical instrument collection
- Covering the children's eyes so they can feel what it is like to have their vision impaired.

Activities such as these can be valuable if they are just some of the ways your program appreciates individual differences. If anti-bias, multi-cultural activities are scattered about the year or are seen as a quick way to get in some multi-culture, they can be harmful. Children may not understand how the ideas connect to their lives. Diversity should be celebrated every day in many different ways.

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