

Tip Sheet For Parents

Ten Ways to Nurture Tolerance

1. Talk about tolerance.

Tolerance is an ongoing process; it cannot be captured in a single moment. Establish a high "comfort level" for open dialogue about social issues. Let children know that no subject is taboo.

2. Identify intolerance when children are exposed to it.

Point out stereotypes and cultural misinformation depicted in movies, TV shows, computer games and other media. Challenge bias when it comes from friends and family members. Do not let the moment pass. Begin with a qualified statement: "Andrew just called people of XYZ faith 'lunatics.' What do you think about that, Zoe?" Let children do most of the talking.

3. Challenge intolerance when it comes from your children.

When a child says or does something that reflects biases or embraces stereotypes, point it out: "What makes that joke funny, Jerome?" Guide the conversation toward internalization of empathy and respect -- "Mimi uses a walker, honey. How do you think she would feel about that joke?" or "How did you feel when Robbie made fun of your glasses last week?"

4. Support your children when they are the victims of intolerance.

Respect children's troubles by acknowledging when they become targets of bias. Don't minimize the experience. Provide emotional support and then brainstorm constructive responses. Develop a set of "comebacks" for children who are victims of name-calling.

5. Foster a healthy understanding of group identities.

For tweens and teens, group identity is critical. Remind them, however, of three things. First, pride in our own groups does not mandate disrespect for others. Second, no group is entitled to special privileges. Third, we should avoid putting other groups down as a way to elevate the status of our own groups.

6. Showcase diversity materials in your home.

Read books with multicultural and tolerance themes to your children. Assess the cultural diversity reflected in your home's artwork, music and literature. Add something new. Give multicultural dolls, toys or games as gifts. Bookmark equity and diversity Web sites on your home computer.

7. Create opportunities for children to interact with people who are different from them.

Look critically at how a child defines "normal." Expand the definition. Visit playgrounds where a variety of children are present -- people of different races/ethnicities, socioeconomic backgrounds, family structures, etc. Encourage a child to spend time with elders - grandparents, for example. Attend religious services at a variety of houses of worship.

8. Encourage children to call upon community resources.

The earlier children interact with the community, the better; we are not islands unto ourselves. If a child is interested in stars, visit the local library, museum or planetarium. A child who is concerned about world hunger can volunteer at a local soup kitchen or homeless shelter.

9. Be honest about differences.

Do not tell children that we are all the same; we're not.

We experience the world in different ways, and those experiences matter. Help your child understand the viewpoints of others.

10. Model the behavior you would like to see.

As parents and as children's primary role models, we must be consistent in how we treat others and in our commitment to tolerance. If we as parents treat people differently based on characteristics such as race or gender, our children are likely to do the same.



Source: www.tolerance.org/parents

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