

SPECIAL  
POINTS OF  
INTEREST:

- Considering the disabled.
- When is speech therapy advised?
- The battle of the sexes.
- Valuing vision.
- How our behaviors affect others.
- Using situations as opportunities to learn.

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# The Value of Acceptance, Diversity and Tolerance

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## What Happens?

Have you ever observed a small child playing with other children? Have you ever noticed that children seem to find one another in a crowd? Prejudices of a cultural or racial nature are absent until a child reaches an age where he begins to question differences and may receive answers that are based in stereotype and bias. A child's perceptions are also impacted by the media as she watches television and movies.

As children become aware of differences, parents must answer their child's questions: *Why is Sam's skin dark? Why does Jeff walk funny? Why are boys and girls different? Why does Samantha talk like that?*

Dr. Miriam Stoppard, parenting expert and author, rec-



**"Parenting includes teaching children about tolerance and accepting differences in others." (suite101.com, 2009)**

ommends that parents base answers on our inside similarities (suite101.com, 2009). When children ask why our hair or skin is different, explain that "people from different countries often have different appearances"

(suite101.com, 2009). Stoppard recommends using animals like birds as an example of varying appearances (suite101.com, 2009). A cardinal and blue bird are different, but they have many common attributes. Ask your child to describe the similarities: beak, feet, feathers, bones, heart, diet, etc. By focusing on commonalities, children begin to understand that like animals, humans are more alike than different.

Young children often ask about someone with physical differences. A child's curiosity may also come from fear that it could happen to them.

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## Living in a Global Society

Psychologist Paula Greene says that children learn tolerance or intolerance in three key areas: home, school, and the media (Whole Family, 2009). The globalization of our society reflects much more diversity than one hundred years ago. At home, our reactions and comments are

reflective of our attitude towards others. Whether in traffic, at the mall or in front of the television, we must be mindful of "blanketing" others with hateful or unflattering comments. If we are intolerant of diversity, our children will likely be as well. We must try to "teach our chil-

dren discriminatory awareness so they can respect a culture even when individuals in that culture behave" in a manner we find unusual (Whole Family, 2009). When we teach tolerance, we are teaching respect for all humanity.

## What Happens? (continued)



We are not born with prejudices.

Depending on a child's age, answer questions as honestly as possible. "Explain that the disabilities can be a result of accidents before, during or after birth" (suite101.com, 2009).

When possible, give examples of how someone with disabilities is doing the same thing as an able-bodied person. For example, if an individual with a disability is sacking groceries, it's important to focus

on the ability to help others while working. Stress to your child that individuals with disabilities can often still work, get married and have children.

By the age of 5, children should wholeheartedly understand that differences do not equate with inferiority. Regardless of difference, people should be treated the way we want to be treated. "It's important

to teach children to be kind, helpful and considerate to people with disabilities" (suite101.com, 2009).

As a parent, you are your child's first, and most important, teacher. What is modeled by you in and out of your home will be a direct connection to your child's behavior and attitude in and out of the home as well.

## Speech Therapy

Some students may need the help of a speech therapist. If you suspect your child may need assistance with articulation, fluency, or if you feel your child may have a language disorder, ask for support as soon as possible. Children in earlier grade levels are less impacted by leaving the classroom for one-on-one treatment. It's also impor-

tant to catch developing "habits" early.

Depending on what the speech therapist recommends, sessions may occur once a week or multiple times a week. Students may need treatment for several months or several years. Encourage your child to practice what the speech therapist recommends. Like any sport, the best way to

get better is through practice. "Find time to work on the skills the therapist has shown you" (Kids Health, 2009).

Children who have numerous ear infections at an early age are often impacted as their hearing or pronunciation is affected. Talk to your child's physician or your child's teacher if you feel help is needed.

"Lots of kids see speech therapists."

(Kids Health, 2009)

## Who's Better?

"Often, boys and girls will argue about who is better, stronger and smarter." (suite101.com, 2009)



If it hasn't happened already, in the future your child may ask who is fastest, strongest, smartest or just plain better. Boys or girls? Depending on cultural or ethnic beliefs, men and women often have stereo-

typical roles in the family. Point out that a Dad may do particular things that a mom may not. A Mom may do things a dad doesn't do. All of these things need to be done so by working together, we accomplish more. A boy may be strong in one area, but a girl may be strong in another area.

"Explain that men and women are created differently with different strengths but they generally complement each other" (suite101.com, 2009). Children who understand the value of equality will accept differences as varying strengths as opposed to weaknesses.

## See or Not to See?



When a parent realizes a child has difficulty seeing, a child often resists eye glasses for fear of ridicule and jokes at his expense.

Wearing glasses for some children is simply unthinkable as the words “four eyes” come to mind. Obviously your child can not continue to learn with poor eye sight so here are a few suggestions:

\*\*“When you pick out glasses,

### Vision is important!

remember as a general rule that smaller frames will probably suit you better” (Kids Health, 2009).

\*\*Contact lenses are an option but follow your doctor’s advice and instructions. Wearing contact lenses is a responsibility that the doctor will discuss with both you and your child. Cleaning and changing contacts may be something a child of 12 is ready for but not an 8 year old. If contact instructions are not followed, “you could develop

serious infections or ulcers in your eye that are painful, difficult to treat, and may need months of medication or even surgery” (Kids Health, 2009). \*\*Watch for indications of change in vision. Sitting closely to the television, placing a book up to the face, squinting, rubbing the eyes, or redness are a few indicators that your child is having difficulty with their eye sight.

\*\*Once your child has a prescription for glasses or contact lenses, annual appointments are usually advised.

*“We can’t expect our children to be tolerant if we don’t model respect for others.”*

*(Family Education, 2009)*

## What Are They Thinking?

Parents of a preteen probably understand that their child is very concerned about “fitting in.” Music, hair styles, make up, clothes, technology gadgets and speaking the same “lingo” as their friends becomes increasingly important. At this age, discrimination and biases can be difficult to monitor and control.

The following tips are recommended by the American School Counselor Association:

\*When opportunities arise,

discuss how prejudicial behaviors affect others, including ourselves.

\*Explore museums, fairs or events that showcase diverse cultures.

\*Visit landmarks or areas of historical significance in regards to civil-rights.

\*Encourage your child to read books by diverse authors on diverse subjects.

\*Share your family history and any struggles the ancestors may

have endured.

\*Media events sometimes arise due to a perceived injustice. Discuss both sides of the disagreement.

By openly discussing other religions, cultures, or injustices, you model tolerance and acceptance. “If you reassure your kids that they can safely be themselves in any situation, they will be more likely to respect differences in others” (Family Education, 2009).

## Talk About It!

The greatest time to discuss tolerance is whenever the opportunity presents itself. If you hear someone say something on television or while in public that is biased or racially insensitive, discuss it with your child. Circumstances present teachable moments to help your child understand that we must be accepting of others. “If your child sees

you helping the poor, befriending those of different races, religions, and cultures, they will learn to do the same” (Surf Net Parents, 2009). Present your child with opportunities for social interaction with people of various races, religions and cultures so he begins to understand the value diversity represents. More importantly, if you sur-

round your child with a tolerant environment and attitude in the home, she will most likely follow your example.



*“Children live what they learn, and they often learn through observation.” (Surf Net Parents, 2009)*

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## Resources:

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