



Talking to children about discrimination

Kids often see prejudice in the world or are victims of it themselves. Discrimination—whether in regard to race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, age, or disability—can be lessened through education and an open heart. When do you start talking about discrimination with your kids? As soon as you can.

Toddlers through elementary age

Kids are sometimes the first to notice and point out what is not the same about people. Studies have shown that kids pick up on differences in race by age 3. Don't shame them when they point out them out in others. Start talking about our differences early. Tell them how the variety helps make up the world. Teach how many cultures help make the country we call home. Some talking points:

- Did you notice how Angela's skin tone is lighter than ours? It's neat that we don't all look the same.
- Has anyone asked you where you are from? That's because you have an interesting mix of facial features, hair, and eye color.
- It's okay to notice when people are not the same as us. It's not okay to make them feel badly about it.

If your child asks about current events involving discrimination, let him know there is good and bad in this world. Give him a clear but age-appropriate account of the conflict points. Don't just say "bad people do bad things." It's often more complex than one person or event.

Middle and high school age

As kids get older and are more tuned into how discrimination affects us, have more in-depth talks. Tell them about the history of racism and other forms of discrimination. If they are on the receiving end, make sure they know they do not have to accept it. But, they do need to be safe about confronting the people who offend. They can speak up to their friends and tell them that it's not okay to talk to or about other people like that. They have the best chance of getting someone to listen to them if they talk one-on-one and tell them how the bad phrase or event made them feel. A child should walk away from people he doesn't know. Not only can it be unsafe, it can also be a waste of time and energy.

All ages

When it comes to discrimination and your kids, keep an open door to talk about matters. When talking about current events, encourage them to get to the root of the problem by gathering facts. It's easy to get caught up in the emotional aspect of what seems to be a racist event. You owe it to your kids and future generations to stay away from generalities and labels.

Above all, inspire your kids to make friends with and learn about people from all over. Take them to cultural museums and events. Help them feel pride in their own background and experiences. Lead by your example.

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