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Back to School

Messages for Parents: Embracing Diversity

Teaching Your Child to Appreciate the Differences That Make People Special

Parents are uniquely positioned to guide their children to appreciate the differences that make each of us special. As a result of world events and heightened awareness of the relationship between bullying and school violence, there has been increased attention placed on the diversity that shapes the culture of the United States.

Explaining diversity in a way that is understandable to children can be a challenging process. Even when you have done your best to teach the importance of respect and treating others fairly, your child may still encounter hate and prejudice through the Internet and other forms of media, and even in their school or neighborhood. Teaching your child about appreciating diversity will help she/he do well in our diverse society, and promote good self-esteem and mental health.

It's never too early or too late to talk about diversity. Here are some tips on how to get started:

- **Recognize that you may consciously or unconsciously harbor negative feelings, biases and prejudices about others.** Be aware of how you speak and act in front of your children. The seeds of respect and intolerance are planted when children are young. If your children observe behaviors that promote tolerance and embrace diversity, they are more likely to exhibit these values as they grow and mature.
- **Read books or watch videos with tolerance, diversity and multicultural themes with your children.** Have discussions after each book or film to address any questions or concerns they may have.
- **If you ever hear or see your child doing anything that does not embrace diversity, immediately talk to him or her about bias and prejudice.** Let your child know that bias, prejudice and stereotyping are never acceptable. Establish open channels of communication with your children so that they feel recognized, understood, listened to, and respected.
- **Buy your child toys and games that celebrate the diverse culture in which we live.** Don't buy anything that promotes intolerance.
- **Point out stereotypes, acts of prejudice and bias depicted in TV, movies, computer games and other media** to help your child recognize unacceptable behavior or attitudes.
- **Encourage your children's friendships with people who are different from them.**
- **Work with your child's school or PTA to start a diversity book list or diversity organization.** Let your child's school board know that diversity in schools is important to you.
- **Enroll your child in schools, camps, learning programs, day care and after-school programs that celebrate diversity.**

- **Integrate culturally diverse artwork, literature or music in your home.**
- **Invite a friend of a different cultural background to your house for a family meal or holiday.** Ask the person to prepare a cultural dish or share stories with your family.
- **Acknowledge and respect that your children's problems at school are important to them.** Provide emotional encouragement and then brainstorm together to find constructive solutions to help them deal with their problems.
- **Be honest about differences between people.** Tell children that people are not all the same; Explain that we all experience the world in different ways and those experiences are important. Help your children to understand the viewpoints and ideas of others.
- **Remember that talking about tolerance and diversity is an ongoing process.** It cannot be summed up in a single conversation. Establish a no subject is taboo policy, this way your children know they can talk to you about anything.

Some simple terms to help you explain diversity to your child:

What is diversity?

- A variety of something, such as an opinion, color, style or ethnicity.

When embracing diversity these are some key words you should know:

- Uniqueness ó only one of its kind
- Appreciate ó value somebody or something highly; understand the meaning or importance.

The following terms prevent one from fully embracing diversity:

- Prejudice ó to judge someone or something before you know all the facts.
- Stereotype ó to group people in categories based on single characteristics.
- Bias ó an attitude that always favors one way of feeling or acting over any other