



Talking with Your Children about Culture and Diversity

Often, we feel the urge to shield our kids from the harsh realities around us. But sometimes the best gift we can give them isn't "safety," but a set of tools to deal with difficult feelings and the true nature of the world.

Children and young adults are more perceptive than we think. They know what's going on, they hear about it at school, and as much as I wish it were possible to shield kids from all the darkness in the world, I've come to realize that the real gift we can give our kids is not the gift of "safety," but rather a complete set of tools to deal with the true nature of the world around us.

We need to teach our kids that it's possible to live with their difficult emotions—anger, fear, sadness, discomfort—and still go forward demonstrating compassion, kindness, and hope. Instead of reacting in fear or anger, we need to impress the important value of an inclusive, diverse, and accepting community. Don't fear the other—embrace him. Learn about him. Understand the multitude of factors that might make his worldview different than yours. The root of terror is fear, hate, and ignorance. Our differences don't need to create a huge divide. Exposing children to different cultures, races, sexual orientations, genders, religions, and languages can help turn fear and ignorance to understanding and compassion.

Start the Conversation. Make it a point to eat as a family at least once a week and ask your children to share one thing that worries them. Get specific. What circumstances make them feel uncomfortable, scared, angry, or sad? Be willing to listen to their viewpoint. Sit through these emotions together. Don't label them, don't judge them—just providing a safe space for the discussion is good medicine. You can suggest taking five mindful breaths as a useful tool to reduce reactivity.

Continue the Conversation. Maintain a continuing conversation. Be sure to let your teens know they can come to you about issues that matter. Talk to them about the importance of diversity and acceptance. Explain to them that you can disagree respectfully and without hate. Would it be nice if our politicians demonstrated this? Sure, but just because they don't doesn't mean it's a lost cause. Talk to your teens. Use the name-calling as an example of what not to do, ask them how they might better handle a disagreement, or role-play. Not only will you be setting a good example, you'll probably learn a lot about your kids' lives, friendships, and opinions.

Extract Courtesy of Theo Koffer, Mindful.org

The information contained in this article is provided for reference and we encourage you to continue explore ways to continue the conversation with your children. Additional helpful links:

[Today.com Parenting Guide](#) [NPR.org Talking About Race with Young Children](#)
[Healthychildren.org Talking with Children about Racial Bias](#)

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