



Helping your child value diversity

AS A PARENT, YOU MAY THINK ABOUT WHAT THE WORLD will be like when your child reaches adulthood. Today, travel to distant countries is faster and more common. The Internet provides us with access to people, goods and services around the globe. People from many parts of the world are becoming members of our communities. You may wonder what experiences you can give your young child now, which will help her be successful in a society that is diverse and fast-changing.

YOU ARE YOUR CHILD'S GUIDE

No matter what the world will be like in the future, respecting people of different backgrounds and cultures will be important. You are your child's consultant on the world! He will learn what is acceptable by watching and listening to the adults in his life. He will notice who you speak to, choose to spend time with and show respect for, and also who you criticize and avoid. The most powerful thing you can provide to prepare your child for the future is an open, accepting attitude toward diversity.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

It's natural to feel uncomfortable with unfamiliar people or cultures, but learning about differences and finding similarities can help. Here are some suggestions for discovering the diversity that is all around us.

- ◆ Young children must develop their identity as members of their family's culture before they can learn to accept the cultures of others. When you form traditions for your own family you help your child to feel unique by understanding her cultural heritage.



- ◆ Invite someone from a different background to share one of your family's cultural traditions. Your children will learn more about their own heritage through helping someone else experience it.
- ◆ Value and celebrate differences. Many of us were taught that the fair thing to do is ignore the ways people are different. In fact, showing our children respect for differences teaches them to recognize the unique strengths of every person.
- ◆ Be comfortable with your child's questions. As adults, we may cringe as our preschooler asks, "Why is that man's skin a different color?" From a very young age children notice differences without placing a value judgment on what they observe. Answering your child's questions in a matter-of-fact way will encourage her to explore and accept differences.
- ◆ Sample the wonderful diversity found in toys, music, story books and art from other cultures. Your baby or toddler will not realize these materials come from afar, but they will be exploring different sights, sounds and textures. And you will be developing parenting practices that will help your child experience diversity as she grows. ❖

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