



# Teaching Young Children About Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

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It is important to teach your child about diversity, equity and



inclusion. As they age, children may naturally pick up on differences, but it is one of those things that is better to introduce at an early age. Teaching young children diversity, equity and inclusion can be challenging, but it is so important to help your children learn how to embrace diversity in a way that is respectful and celebrates different cultures, backgrounds and experiences.

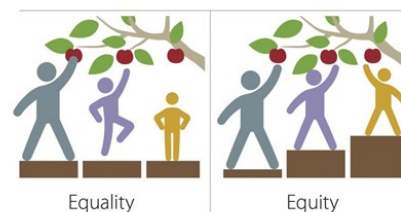
## What is Diversity, Equity and Inclusion<sup>1</sup>?

*Diversity* means that each individual is unique and recognizes our individual differences. These can be race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, age, physical abilities, religious beliefs, political beliefs or other ideologies.

*Equity* refers to the principle of fairness. Equity is similar to equality, but equality only works when everyone starts at the same place. Therefore, equity focuses on helping people obtain what they need so they can get to a place where equality is possible.

*Inclusion* means that we need to make sure that no one is excluded because of their race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, disability or anything else that makes them different.

This is not simply about



including diverse groups but making sure everybody feels welcomed so they have equal access to opportunities and resources and can contribute fully to our society.

## Ages and Stages of Understanding Differences

When is the best time to teach your child about understanding difference?



Children start noticing differences between people younger than we expect. One study found that 3-month-old babies prefer their own-race faces<sup>2</sup>. At about 2 years old, children may notice gender and racial differences. At 2 ½ or so, children can label boy and girl and the name of colors (they may begin to apply that to skin color). Around 3 years old, children may notice people with physical disabilities, skin color and appearance. Four- to 5-years-olds can display gender-appropriate behavior and identify their own race ethnicity<sup>3, 4, 5, 6</sup>. No matter how old they are, all children start making sense of the world from their own experiences, so early and age-appropriate teaching will be important. The best time to start teaching children about understanding differences is when they begin to recognize differences. As they begin to notice differences, teach them that those things are acceptable, just different, and diversity is what makes the world interesting and special.

## **How to Teach Diversity, Equity and Inclusion?**

### *Acknowledge Differences*

As parents, we have to accept that young children (as already mentioned) are surprisingly aware of differences earlier than we think.

Children need to learn to accept others for who they are instead of pretending that differences don't exist. Noticing people's differences is natural, but bias can develop in young children when parents or people around young children judge these differences.

### *Welcome Questions*

Allowing children to ask questions about differences can help children better understand people who are different from them. If your child has questions about differences in physical characteristics or cultural differences, talk about them openly. It will teach children that it is okay to notice differences, and more importantly, it will teach children that it is good to talk about different people. Teach children to also talk about it in a polite way, such as “why does she sit in a wheel chair?” or “why is her skin darker than mine?”.

### *Talk More About Similarities*

It is helpful to teach diversity, equity and inclusion emphasizing similarities rather than differences. Even though some friends might seem different to your child in some ways, it is likely that they have more in common than differences. For example, if a child in the classroom has two moms, point out all the similarities they share with your child. They might like the same TV shows and books, have a pet fish, or love dancing.

### *Be a Role Model*

Our children follow what parents (or caregivers)

do and what they say, so we have to try to send the right message. Young children may not understand prejudice, but they may absorb attitudes that are expressed by the adults in their lives. Monitor your own behaviors and your environment. Reflect on how you approach acceptance and inclusion, and whether your environment can include more positive diversity. We can try to get to know our neighbors, make an effort to talk to others at school activities or community events, and more importantly, be aware of people who might feel left out.

### *Teach Who You Are*

It is also important to teach your children about the histories and experiences of your family. Knowing their own family history is the first step to understanding diversity. Having a better understanding of their family origin can help young children appreciate their identity and recognize and respect other cultures better.

### *Read Children's Books About Diversity*



Books are always a great way to introduce young children to diversity, equity and inclusion.

As you read together, talk about the differences and similarities between the book characters and your children using easy, clear language. It is important that children see themselves in the toys, books and media around them. This will help children feel welcome and important. You

can always check with your local librarian or your child's preschool teacher for a list of recommendations. Look for books on all different topics such as racial diversity, disability, family configurations, culture and religion. See <https://tinyurl.com/xeuh4r59>.

### *Engage in Activities for Young Children*

Young children can learn about diversity, equity and inclusion by trying a number of different activities.

- ⇒ Foods from other cultures: Introducing foods from other cultures is a great way to teach similarities and differences. Once or twice a month, try a new recipe from other cultures, eat at an international restaurant near you, or visit a food or cultural festival in your community. Talk about different countries, their culture and traditions.
- ⇒ Artwork from another culture: Have your children learn about and create artwork from another culture. Create dreamcatchers (American-Indian), Origami (Japanese), Rangoli sand art (Indian) and Paper Mache Maracas (Caribbean and Latin).
- ⇒ Virtual field trips: With today's technology, children can explore the world around them from their own home. You can use YouTube videos or Google Map's street view feature to see how people live in other parts of the world. Also, virtually visit museum exhibits.

It is easy to find many different hands-on diversity, equity and inclusion activities online.

## Conclusion

We live in an increasingly diverse world, so it is natural that young children are curious about people who are somewhat different from them. Therefore, it is important to teach your child about the value of diversity, equity and inclusion at a young age. Parents or caregivers can help prepare children to accept and understand others by teaching them acceptance, celebrating differences and exposing them to many different activities. Learning about diversity, equity and inclusion is a lifelong process.

## References

1. <https://independentsector.org/resource/why-diversity-equity-and-inclusion-matter/>
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3. [https://www.pbs.org/kcts/preciouschildren/diversity/read\\_activities.html](https://www.pbs.org/kcts/preciouschildren/diversity/read_activities.html)
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