



The Kids on the Block

Teaching Tolerance and Acceptance

The formative years of childhood are the best time to learn tolerance for differences and appreciation of the diversity of life. During the first years of life, children establish their view of themselves and their world. It is important that children should develop a positive self concept from experiences of acceptance and belonging. Ideally, children will learn that a fulfilling life has less to do with talents, abilities or disabilities and more to do with access and acceptance. Parents and teachers can facilitate the healthy development of future generations to ensure inclusive communities for all God's people.

1. **Acknowledge differences.** Ask children to observe differences in people they know: Joey is short; Maria wears glasses; Matt stutters. Despite the wide diversity of human life, we are more alike than different, and we all share common needs for love, friendship and acceptance.
2. **Model appropriate attitude, behavior and language.** Make sure differences are not conveyed in a negative manner. Although some people have difficulty because of a physical or mental impairment, there are many ways to compensate for a disability. Positive language helps ensure positive attitudes. Use person-first language: a person who uses a wheelchair, a child with autism.
3. **Educate about disabilities.** Reassure children that a disability is not a punishment from God, nor is it contagious. Most disabilities are permanent, but a person with a disability is not sick and may not always need care or help from others. See the accompanying list: *Children's Books about People with Disabilities*.
4. **Set clear rules about treating others with respect.** Young people with disabilities are often targets for bullying. Any form of bullying is unacceptable.
5. **Answer children's questions honestly, clearly and simply.** Find factual information about specific disabilities that children may encounter. A good source is www.nichcy.com.
6. **Allow exploration through play.** Use sensitivity exercises to role play how it feels to be blind or get around in a wheelchair. Have children brainstorm ideas on how obstacles may be overcome in homes, classrooms, and communities. Help children feel comfortable around adaptive equipment while understanding such equipment, like walkers and communication devices, are not toys that can be shared in play.

Resources:

Center for Inclusive Childcare www.inclusivechildcare.org

Lesson plans for teaching about the disability rights movement:

<http://www.tolerance.org/teach/activities/activity.jsp?ar=872&pa=2>

Kids on the Block Puppets www.kotb.com

Helping Kids Include Kids with Disabilities, Barbara J. Newman, CRC Publications, 2001

disAbility Awareness Activity Book for Children, Teens, and Families, Joann E. Davis, Davis Publications 2005.

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