

Enhancing Your Child's Multicultural Awareness through Celebration of Difference

by Patricia Van Velsor and Deborah Cox

Following are some suggestions for helping your child develop awareness and appreciation for differences in themselves and others. While this is not an exhaustive list of ideas, it is designed to help you get started in your own process of discovery, a journey that will encourage your child to do the same.

As a parent:

- ♥ Become multiculturally aware yourself. Pay attention to people around you who appear to be ethnically dissimilar and strike up acquaintanceships with them. Do this in front of your child, so he/she too will strive to meet others who are different. Talk to your child about unique contributions made to our communities by persons of specific cultures/ethnicities.
- ♥ Help your child to learn about his/her own ethnic background. Ask grandparents, great-uncles and -aunts, or others to talk about the part of the world where your family originated. Find a globe or map of the world and locate this place. Talk about what the culture is like there now, and at earlier times. Discuss how your ethnic background differs from that of your neighbors and friends.
- ♥ Invite a family from your neighborhood or church, whose ethnicity is different from yours, over for dinner. Exposure to other cultures will facilitate your child's openness to differences in people. Process these experiences with your child by asking them questions later about the experience (e.g., "How did you feel talking to someone with an accent different from yours?").
- ♥ Evaluate your own biases and how they might be evident to your child and affect their opinion about others.
- ♥ Invite conversations with your child after news shows, movies, or television programs showing racial tensions or portraying people of different ethnicity negatively. Invite your child to question what they see (e.g., "How do you think that boy felt when he was treated like an outsider?" "How would you handle a situation like that?").
- ♥ Encourage your child to talk about their own fears of particular groups and any school incidents involving discrimination against children who are different (e.g., "Are there things about you that you feel embarrassed or ashamed about?" "What kinds of people make you feel nervous? Why?").
- ♥ Provide opportunities for your child to interact with children different from them. Actively seek out children with different backgrounds or children from other socioeconomic groups and allow your child to participate in supervised activities with them.

- ♥ Read books to your child about other children that are ethnically and culturally different from them. Ask your school or community librarian to suggest appropriate books. Your school counselor may also be able to suggest books and magazines that will help you become more culturally aware and help you teach your child to appreciate difference.

Revised 1/10

Drs. Deborah L. Cox and Patricia Van Velsor are assistant professors in the Department of Counseling at Southwest Missouri State University.



Provided for you by the:

Missouri School Counselor Association

3340 American Avenue, Suite F, Jefferson City, MO 65109

800.763.MSCA • msca@mvp.net

www.schoolweb.missouri.edu/MSCA

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