

Q&A

TEACHING YOUR CHILD TO RESPECT AND EMBRACE ONE ANOTHER'S DIFFERENCES.



How can I help my child respect and appreciate other cultures and diversity in our increasingly cosmopolitan society?

Our children will encounter cultures and practices that are different from their own. Research tells us that children become aware of ethnic differences as early as age three, with many children being able to categorise people based on racial and gender characteristics. It is thus important for parents and educators to introduce cultural diversity education from a young age.



Through this, children will learn important values and skills such as empathy and embrace different perspectives that will help them develop healthy social relationships. Nurturing an appreciation for cultural diversity makes for a more inclusive society, where differences are celebrated, not merely tolerated.



Here are some practical ways to develop your children's appreciation of diversity and other cultures:

- ▶ **Read with your child picture books** that describe different cultures and practices. Help them understand how and why other people may do things differently.
- ▶ **Encourage cross-cultural friendships** through play dates.
- ▶ **Draw attention to how people can be classified.** This can be along different cross-cutting dimensions such as interests, hobbies and skills, and not just ethnicity or other visible cues.
- ▶ **Be a good role model.** Create a family environment where adults are culturally sensitive and respectful. It is worthwhile to remember that values are caught and not taught.



When is the best time to introduce children to global issues, and how can we foster their global mindset?

Young children are highly impressionable. The early years are a good time to raise their awareness of issues around us and beyond, and help sow the seeds for children to develop a value system of openness, flexibility in embracing another's perspectives and being socially and environmentally responsible.

The early childhood curriculum provides an excellent frame to weave in these elements. We can enhance young children's awareness and understanding of both local and global issues, and help shape their behaviours and attitudes. It can start as early as the toddler stage. Some strategies include interactive hands-on experiences, inquiry-based learning and project work, discussions, and questioning techniques.

As educators and educators, we can foster our children's global mindset in the following ways:

- ▶ **Introduce songs and music from the different ethnic groups** including those from around the world.
- ▶ **Visit places of cultural interest** such as the Chinatown Heritage Centre, Malay Heritage Centre and the Indian Heritage Centre.
- ▶ Select issues that are relevant and tangible for children, **based on their interests and developmental stage.** These include animal welfare, the plight of children around the world, and reaching out to the elderly.
- ▶ **Use circle time** to discuss issues on a regular basis. Children learn from sharing and exchanging perspectives and ideas with their peers.
- ▶ **Invite speakers from different nationalities and cultures** to speak to the children about their diverse backgrounds.



ASK THE EXPERTS



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