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DIGNITY & DISABILITY

INCLUSIVE

CONVERSATIONS

Having conversations with children about disability at an early age is essential to decreasing biases and creating a welcoming, inclusive environment.



TALKING ABOUT DISABILITY

Why?

Children learn biases as early as the age of 3 years old (Huckstadt & Schutts, 2014), and we can reduce negative biases and stereotypes by intentionally facilitating and promoting positive dialogue about disability identity.

Talking about disabilities in a respectful, factual way normalizes it so that children are able to see children with disabilities as peers, playmates, and friends.



Reinforce the importance of diversity by focusing on people and their strengths.

HOW?

1 **Encourage and answer questions.** Children asking questions (ex: "Why does he have that in his ear?") is a great opportunity to teach about disabilities and discuss how everyone needs different supports. Instead of "shushing," engage in conversation about disability.

2 **Talk simply and factually.** Give facts children can use to understand disability without negative connotations (ex: "He uses the device in his ear to hear").

3 **Discuss similarities and differences.** Acknowledge that all bodies are different and give reasons behind different supports provided for different children.

ANSWERING QUESTIONS

What is wrong
with him?

Answer questions about disability in a factual way without negative connotations.

Nothing is wrong with him. He uses a tablet to talk because his brain works differently than yours. He uses a tablet to speak, and you use your mouth. Let's go ask him his name!



ANSWERING QUESTIONS

Answer questions about a person's supports in a simple, factual way.

Why does Jackie get a special chair during circle time?

Jackie has a special chair because it helps her focus and follow along during circle time. Is there something that would help you focus during circle time? Just there are things that help you, sitting in a chair helps Jackie focus. We all need different things to help us learn!



ANSWERING QUESTIONS

Why are they in that chair? (staring at a person using a wheelchair)

Avoid "shushing" children and use their curiosity as an opportunity to learn and talk about disability.

They use a wheelchair to move. Many people use wheelchairs because it is the best way for their bodies to move. Do you have any questions? Would you like to go talk to them and introduce yourself?

Shhh! Don't stare!
Just keep walking.



DISABILITY AWARENESS & ACCEPTANCE

Show dignity and respect by including individuals with disabilities across contexts and conversations.

Humanize individuals by asking name, interests, strengths

Adapt activities so that everyone can meaningfully participate

Initiate interactions with individuals with disabilities

Include media with people with disabilities

Ask how they want people to refer to their disability (ex: person vs disability first)

Have open conversations about disability

RESOURCES

[Inclusive Training Toolkit](#)

[Tips for a Welcoming, Inclusive Classroom](#)

[Basic Guidelines for Interacting
with People with Disabilities](#)

REFERENCES

Huckstadt, L.K. & Shutts, K. J. (2014). How young children evaluate people with and without disabilities. *The Journal of Social Issues*, 70(1), 99–114. <https://doi.org/10.1111/josi.12049>