

Teaching Children about Diversity



Where there are people there are also differences. There are different skin colors, religions, genders, views, clothing sizes, stories, backgrounds, noses, ears, mouths and much more. So, it seems normal when we pick out the differences between ourselves and others. However, making judgments about differences can interfere with our openness and our acceptance of others who are different from us. As adults, we have the ability to reflect on our own biases and challenge our preconceptions about different groups. Children however, need examples of others who are open and accepting of diversity as they learn by copying the behaviour of adults. Parents and teachers can play an active role in helping children to be more accepting of and kind toward those who look different from them.

Children tend to base their stereotyping on physical traits, such as race, gender, or age. Children make sense of the world by grouping people together according to how they look. As a result, children will most likely identify with a group of people who have a similar appearance to them, and they will become disengaged from people who appear different from them. For example, if children in Switzerland in a classical setting like their Swiss family or their school class while they grow up divide people by race or gender, they will most likely believe that someone who is physically dissimilar from them is very different from them. This experience of sub-grouping will reinforce any differences. Likewise, when parents or teachers talk about the differences among groups of people in a negative way, children learn to separate themselves from others who appear different.

Teachers at globegarden help children value and appreciate diversity in everyday experiences by modelling behaviours that are open and kind toward others in an often multi-cultural classroom and setting.

- **Embracing differences.** Parents and teachers can provide their children with examples of equality when interacting in a kind way with all kinds of people – different or not. By meeting and embracing all people of independent on gender, age, disability, race or ethnicity, religion, or sexual orientation, children learn to embrace differences.
- **Watching the language.** Parents and teachers should refrain from using explicit remarks that categorize people. So questions like « Did your mum bake that cake for you » or « boys like blue, girls like pink » often do not seem to be a big deal, but teach children a segregated view on the world. Instead it would be beneficial to be neutral or affirming of different groups and ask « Did your parents bake this cake » or « Who loves which colour ? »
- **Always practice kindness.** It is too often, that we are not aware of our body language around others and act different towards them. By increasing our awareness of our nonverbal behaviours and treating everyone the same, we model for our children how to treat others with equality and kindness.
- **Have Multi-culti Experiences.** Engaging in multicultural experiences is a fun learning experience for everyone. Diversity experiences lead to fewer stereotypes. At globegarden our teachers introduce children to new religious setting or cultural events or holidays. Doing this as a family at home will give you the chance to discover new things about you and others through participation in new cultural experiences.
- **Zero-Tolerance of Intolerant Behaviour.** If you or teachers witness your child acting or speaking out in judgment of diverse groups, speak with him or her about it. Talking to children



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about why it is important to treat everyone with kindness and equality is important.

- **Living the difference.** Most of us have probably felt different in one situation or another. And each of us certainly knows someone who was or is somehow different. In times when xenophobia is taking on completely new facets, bullying is on everyone's lips and being different is simply rarely accepted in society, it is important to remember and to teach our children values such as tolerance, friendship and acceptance.

Children need role models who motivate them to engage in multicultural activities. While children are in many different learning environments throughout their lives – some more diverse – some less, parents still have the greatest impact on how their children perceive and act toward others. These strategies for valuing diversity and accepting differences can also be shared with other family members, friends, or teachers. Through collaboration, teachers can reduce stereotyping in children, leading to stronger relationships with all types of people.

At globegarden there are many children with different backgrounds, cultures, and religions. Many families do not even share the same mother tongue at home but raise their children in multi-lingual settings. The diversity of globegarden – in staff members, children and families is a big chance to make children comfortable with diverse people and differences. They will gain mutual acceptance of themselves and others. At globegarden first friendships are formed, independent of differences of language, skin colour or family religion. If parents and teachers embrace and value differences, children will no longer think of themselves as different from others. Rather, they will feel more connected with their peers and become more accepting of peoples' differences.

Our globegarden education expert tip for at home is the picture book "Something else" by Kathryn Cave and Chris Riddell, that wonderfully talks about diversity.

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