

Celebrating our differences

Children begin to recognize differences at very young ages. They see what goes on around them by listening, observing, and exploring. Our cars are different, our houses are different, our looks are different, even our smells are different.

We live in a diverse world where children will be exposed to many different people and experiences. As adults caring for children, we can show the positive aspects of differences. Often children, and we ourselves, may be sorting out our ideas about differences.

Alike and different

Exploring similarities and differences in a positive way is a good place to start.

Explore groups of things: dogs, cats, butterflies, fish, flowers, etc. Ask the children to think of what is the same about flowers. What is different? For instance, there are many types of flowers. Some are big. Some are small. Some are yellow. Some are yellow and red.

Explore things the children are interested in. For example, a child may love cars. Ask questions about what is the same. What is different? Who drives cars? Why do they drive? Asking good questions is important. It's also important to have materials to look at: books, pictures, drawings, and charts show similarities and differences between these items.

Understanding how items are alike and different supports the concepts of how people are alike and different.

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What you can do

Talk about similarities and differences among the children in your care. This brings the topic to a more personal level. When children are in a safe and familiar environment, learning about differences can be fun and informative.

Sharing differences about the group we are in is important. Learning how we are all the same and different can lead to acceptance and tolerance.

Make charts, posters, or pictures with the children, which show how we are the same and how we are different.

- Favorites: (food, sports, color, etc.)
- Hair color
- Birthdays
- Pets
- Shoe sizes
- Eye color
- Missing teeth

Review the findings with the children." Three of us have pets and two of us don't, Jim and Sally have dogs and Renee has a fish. Sally, Jim, and Renee have green eyes, Bob and Kara have brown.No one in our group has blue! Everyone likes pizza in our group!"

Having pictures, charts, posters, and photographs for the children to look at allows them the opportunity to revisit and think about how things are the same or different.

Represent diverse groups

Another great way to celebrate our differences is to invite families in to share. Encourage them to share the ways they celebrate an occasion or their special hobbies, interests, music. Learning about families within the group creates a sense of unity and understanding. Display photographs of families, as well as posters, books, dolls, and puzzles that represent diverse groups. If you can, offer different skin-colored paints, markers, crayons, and paper for art projects. Some caretakers like to mix skin color paints to match all the children, since everyone has different shades to their skin.

Celebrating our differences is an ongoing discovery. As caregivers of young children, we need to encourage the positive aspects of similarities and differences throughout all we do with children on a regular basis.