

# Teaching Kids About Inclusion and Acceptance

Celebrated on December 3rd each year, International Day of People with Disabilities aims to raise awareness about disabilities and promote inclusion and accessibility for all. With this designated day comes the reminder of the responsibility of teaching your child about acceptance and inclusion. Kids are naturally curious, and they may notice someone they see or know who looks or behaves differently than them and will ask questions. Here are some tips and suggestions for answering those inquisitive questions and creating a culture of understanding and inclusion.

## Give the facts

Your child needs to know that while a person may be different, there is nothing “wrong” with them. Use words and phrases that your child will understand. For example, if your child’s classmate is in a wheelchair, say something like “The muscles in her legs don’t work the same as yours or mine, so her wheelchair helps her move around instead”. Make sure to leave out emotional words, like how the disability is “sad” or “awful”; you don’t want your child to pity the person. Positive language is key. Additionally, here are a few other things that are particularly important to explain to your child in easy-to-understand language:

- Some people are born with disabilities, some develop disabilities later
- People with disabilities aren't "sick" or contagious
- Explain the equipment they might use and how it helps them

## Change the way you speak about those with disabilities

Kids will pick up on the language you use to describe someone’s disability. If you say something like “he thinks like a 2-year-old”, it may be easy for your child to understand the concept,

but this kind of phrase has a negative connotation. Instead say, “his brain thinks a little differently than yours.” Additionally, be on the lookout for hurtful words and negative labels, even when used as a “playful” insult towards another friend. Hurtful words such as “slow” and “retarded” perpetuate negative stereotypes of those with disabilities. Try to eliminate using harmful words that label others as different in your day-to-day life, and if your child uses it, explain why it is harmful and discourage future use of the words.

## Teach about abilities, not just disabilities

Your child must know that just because someone may not be able to walk, hear, or learn the same way they can, it does not mean they can’t share common traits and interests. Having a disability is a trait, not a identity. For



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example, a person may have autism, but they are not autistic. The difference of just a few small words makes a big difference in promoting acceptance.

Explain to your child how they are similar to the person with a disability. For instance, point out how their classmate also enjoys playing with Legos or watching football or dancing. It's important to help your child understand that we each have traits that make us unique, but those differences are also what make us special and we have a lot in common if we just take the time to learn about each other.

## Read kid's books that include characters of all abilities

An excellent way to help your child learn about disabilities is to read books with storylines about including people who are different from you or books that have someone with a disability as a main character. There are online lists of many books that you could choose and read together with your child, helping to normalize people of all abilities and increase acceptance.

## Be aware of how you respond to those with disabilities

If you're nervous or awkward around someone with a disability, your child will pick up on it. Stay calm and positive and don't stare. Additionally, if you are feeling negative feelings towards a person who is outwardly different from you, it might be important to take a moment to step back and examine your views and assumptions about others. Try to reframe your thinking to align with what you're teaching your kids: how to understand and be empathetic towards those who are different than you.

## Encourage empathy and sensitivity to others

Ultimately, acceptance of those who may be different boils down to empathy and kindness. These basic lessons are critical to making the world we live in a better and more inclusive place, not just for some people, but for all people.

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Originally posted on the Now What? Blog on 11.30.20 The Now What? Blog served for nearly 7 years to

1. Normalize parents seeking support and help as a manner of child abuse prevention
2. Engage community in how they can work to prevent child abuse
3. Work to build resiliency in families through promotion of the 5 protective factors

Maybe you coach a baseball team or you help care for the neighbor kids from time to time. You are investing in the safety and security of the children in our community. Because it truly does take a village to raise our children, we want to offer the tools needed to bring awareness and education to preventing child abuse.

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