

Counselor's Corner

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Talking to Kids about Tolerance

“Treat others the way you want to be treated.” Teaching our children tolerance must begin with this Golden Rule, but it certainly does not end there. There are times when we as parents must explain things that are painful and unfair – racism, sexism, stereotypes, hate. There are times when we must comfort our children, helping them learn that what some people do to others isn't always kind or fair. Opportunities to teach about tolerance are offered frequently in our society. As parents we need to have the time, patience and desire to help our children grow into adults who value and honor diversity. We need to make sure we get our kids involved in activities where they have an opportunity to interact with people who aren't necessarily like them. Acknowledge the positive aspects of differences among people. Teach kids to learn to value each other's differences.

~**Speak openly.** When we are honest with children about our country's history of bigotry, sexism and stereotypes, we help prepare them to challenge these issues when they arise.

~**Model equity.** As parents, we are our kids' first teachers. When it comes to teaching tolerance, actions speak louder than words. If you say that boys and girls are equal do your actions send the same message? Is there such a thing as “girls' activities and boys activities?”

~**Do something.** Take a stand when you witness injustice. Challenge racism, bigotry and stereotypes, and encourage your child to take action, too. Silence and inaction in the face of bigotry condone it. If your child says or does something indicating bias or prejudice, don't respond only with, “Don't say that.” Also add, “What made you say that about Sam?” Then explain why the action or comment was unacceptable.