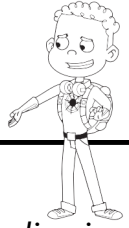




Talking with Kids About Disabilities

It's important to talk about disability with your children. Talking about disability can help children accept their own differences and be more accepting of others' differences. These conversations promote self-esteem, kindness, and inclusion. Here are some things to keep in mind when talking about disability with your kids:



Set the Example/Be A Model

- *The best way to teach your child acceptance and kindness is to model it yourself. Speak positively of other people's differences, including your child's own differences.*
- *Model respect with everyone you encounter, regardless of ability. Be patient and understanding in your interactions with others- your child will notice!*
- *Normalize disability. Did you know that more than 1 in 4 people have a disability? And everyone has their own strengths and challenges.*
- *Fill your home with books and media that reflect positive representations of people with disabilities. These can be great conversation starters, too.*

Talk About it/Encourage Curiosity



- *Questions mean your child cares. Kids might ask questions like "why is that person in a wheelchair?" or "why do I leave the classroom to take tests?" Listen to their questions and try to answer them.*
- *If you don't know the answer, encourage them to ask someone else or research it together*
- *If their question is awkward or embarrassing, don't shut it down. Model the words they could use instead.*

Use Clear, Simple Language/Keep It Positive

- *Keep your answer simple, honest, and direct.*
- *Keep your language value neutral. Avoid outdated, derogatory terms like "crippled," "retarded," and "handicapped."*
- *Children are curious and notice differences. When your children wonder why someone looks, talks, or acts differently than they do, take it as an opportunity to teach them that disability is a normal part of life.*
- *Express empathy, not sympathy. Avoid expressing sorrow or sadness for people with disabilities. Instead, try to understand each individual's unique experience as they share it.*
- *Try to take the focus off what someone "can't" do because of their disability. Instead, talk about what support or tools help them. For example, instead of saying "Johnny can't focus during work" you could say "Johnny needs a quiet room and extra time to get his work done."*



Other Things to Keep in Mind

- *Some disabilities are inside a person's body or mind, and we may not know someone is disabled by the way they look. For example, we can't see things like learning disabilities or many chronic health conditions.*
- *There are lots of types of adaptive equipment, and some can look fun to play with, like communication devices, fidgets, and even service dogs. Teach your child that we should respect these tools and make sure kids ask before touching or trying to help.*
- *Keep trying. It may take time, and a few different tries on different days, to get to know a new friend. If she isn't ready today, try again another day.*
- *Be patient. Just because your friend is quiet or looking away doesn't mean she is not listening. He may need more time to respond. It's okay to wait a bit for their answer.*

