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HOW CAN I AVOID SENDING BIASED MESSAGES?

From the ADL's Miller Early Childhood Initiative Question Corner

About 10 years ago, Sesame Street developed a “race relations” curriculum. Formative research was conducted to determine preschoolers’ understanding of “race relations.” Researchers asked children if they wanted to be friends with children from difference “races” and how their mothers would feel about these friendships. Overall, preschoolers wanted to be friends with children of different “races,” but they perceived their mothers as less encouraging of these friendships. At most, one-half of the preschoolers reported that their mothers would be positive about them having a friend of another “race.”



This suggests that examining your own cultural assumptions and biases is a good place to begin your anti-bias work. For example:

- Do you respond differently with your child when a person of another race is coming towards you, such as clutching his hand tightly or locking your car doors?
- Do you show a genuine interest and openness to learning about and getting to know people who are different from yourself?
- Do you use stereotypical language about other groups or people?
- Do you tell ethnic or racial jokes, or jokes that demean women or gay and lesbian people?
- Do you show an interest in trying foods or participating in events/programs from cultures that are new or unusual to you?

As you ask yourself these and other questions, remember that it is okay to have some discomfort. Everyone has a “comfort zone” and it can be difficult to step out of this zone. Remind yourself of the importance of remaining open to learning and growing, just as you encourage your children to do.

Excerpted from *Bias-Free Foundations: Early Childhood Activities for Families* (2001, 8).