How Can Outdoor Play Increase Children’s Anti-Bias Skills?

Early Childhood Question Corner

Children’s outdoor play offers many opportunities to teach and reinforce anti-bias behavior. To get you started, incorporate some of the below tips excerpted from Bias-Free Foundations: Early Childhood Activities for Educators (2005, 28):

- Take advantage of these opportunities by helping children to learn skills such as taking turns, sharing toys, and inviting new children to play. For example, when two children are on a see-saw you could say, “Melissa, Randy, it looks like Shelly wants to play on the see-saw, too. Why don’t you ask her to play with you? Then you can decide together how to play on the see-saw in a fair way.”

- Encourage children to stand up for someone who’s getting teased or chased. You might model saying, “Stop that! You’re hurting Juan’s feelings!”

- As children play, take advantage of opportunities to point out and praise the ways children work together successfully, and to gently offer them suggestions when they need help getting along.

- Discuss with children situations that occur during their outdoor play.

- Ask children if there are rules or agreements that might be needed to make sure everyone gets along when playing outside, for example, “Everyone gets a turn to play on the slide if they want to.” Help them to write down their ideas and post them.
While engaged in outdoor play, help children avoid stereotypical gender roles. For example, if you see only boys playing t-ball, you might encourage some girls to join the game and/or if you see only girls playing with the jump rope, ask them to invite some boys to have a turn.

During outdoor play, questions and comments about differences children notice will probably crop up from time to time. For tips on addressing this, see Question Corner installment, "How should I respond when children notice differences in others?"

Help children develop the skills to get along with a variety of people by changing the size and members of groups of children; groups should have a diversity of ethnic backgrounds, gender, personality styles, abilities, and interests.