

Addressing Children’s Questions About Differences

Young children often notice differences in others and express their observations as comments and questions. As you think about what children are saying, keep in mind the context of their comments, their tone, and their body language. Whether a child is observing, or expressing curiosity or discomfort, your response is important.

Differences that young children tends to notice include:

Questions About GENDER ROLES: “You can’t be a nurse” (to a male nurse) or “You can’t do that because you’re a girl”.

Suggested response: “Boys and girls can do different things and still be boys or girls”.

Questions About SKIN COLOR: “Why is that man (or lady) brown?”

Suggested response: “People have different skin color. Let’s look around. People are different in many ways. We have different colored eyes and different colored hair”.

Questions About PHYSICAL CHALLENGES: These questions tend to center on curiosity about special equipment and why people need to use it. Your role is to help children see what the person can do and/or adapt play so the person can participate.

Questions About LANGUAGE: “That person talks funny”.

Suggested response: “People speak in different ways. We each speak the way our familys speak. How you talk sounds different to them”.

Questions About CLOTHING: “Why are they wearing those clothes?” “They look funny”.

Suggested response: “People dress in different ways. The way we dress may look funny to them. We don’t like people to laugh at how we dress and they don’t like us to laugh at how they dress.

Questions About WEIGHT: “Why is she fat?”

Suggested response: “People come in different sizes and it’s ok to be different sizes”.

Questions About FAMILY COMPOSITION: Young children assume that other families are like theirs, so they may question any difference they notice. “Is that your mommy? You don’t look the same”.

Suggested response: Children easily grasp the differences in families and rather than feel discomfort, are just curious. Generally, it is the adult who brings his own discomfort to the-situation. The important message is that people have different kinds of families yet all families take care of each other.

*As you interact with children:

Respond to all comments and questions. Pretending you don’t hear something or shushing a child with “That is not nice” may result in the child generalizing that the characteristics she’s curious about is not okay.