



Tips on Dealing with Diversity: A Self-Assessment

Raising issues related to diversity can be as hard for adults as for children. The more you think about things like prejudice or stereotyping or what equity means, the more likely you are to succeed in helping children deal with these issues. Doing diversity education is not about putting yourself on trial every time you speak. It is about committing to a journey that will take us to a world where every person is valued and values others.

The journey is important because we are all influenced by things like racism and sexism, and because all of us sometimes do or say things we later come to understand as hurtful to others. And the journey is important because it prepares us to help the children who look to us for guidance as they go on their own journeys.

As with all journeys, this one requires preparation. The type of preparation depends on who you are and what your previous experience has been. Answering the questions on this page won't take you to the end of the journey, but they can help you get started.

What we have been taught influences how we teach, so the journey begins by uncovering our own feelings, misinformation, discomfort, prejudices, and strengths.

When You Were a Child:

- What is your first memory of a person who was different from you? How did you feel at that first encounter?
- Did you have any friends who were different from you?
- What messages did you get about people who were different and where did those messages come from?
- Did you agree with the messages you received? If not, what did you do about it?
- What kinds of things were you and your family proud of and how did you express that pride?

As an Adult:

- What kinds of things do you think are most important for other people to know about you? When you describe other people, what kinds of things do you use to identify them? Are the answers to those two questions the same?
- How do you interact with someone who doesn't share your perspective?
- Who are your heroes? What makes them heroic? Are any of them from groups different from those with whom you identify?
- How do you react when you encounter prejudice? Does your reaction change if you are alone? With friends or family? With strangers? With children?
- Do you have any attitudes that you would like to change?



Working with Children:

- How do you foster cooperation?
- Do you ask some children to compromise more than others? Which ones, and why?
- What do you do to make sure all your children feel welcome? Are the things you do the same as what the child's family would do to make someone feel welcome?
- Do you know enough about the backgrounds of your children to name heroes that are like them?
- Do your expectations for children vary according to gender, race, physical ability, culture, or other similar categories?
- When do you praise or reward children? Which behaviors always elicit your praise, no matter who the child is? Which behaviors only elicit praise when they are done by a particular child or group of children?
- How do you help children feel safe?
- Do your activities and materials reflect the diversity of your community?

Working with Families:

- How do you find out about the families of the children in your care?
- How do you define "family?" What do you think makes a "good" family? What do you do when the families of the children in your care don't fit your image of "family" or "good family?"
- What do you do when you don't agree with a family's choices or attitudes, or when the family doesn't agree with your approach?

Always:

- Try to picture yourself in someone else's shoes. How do things look different?

Just being on this journey won't give you the magical power to solve every problem, but you will be helping to create a world where children - all children - can thrive.

Adapted from *The Puzzle Place Trainer Manual*, p.B-13 (c) Lancit Copyright Corp. /KCET.