

Preschool Curriculum

UNDERSTANDING YOU AND ME



DID YOU KNOW?

- ▶ **We don't need to wait to discuss differences with children!** Children are ready to discuss race at an early age and having those discussions makes a difference. While pre-schoolers are developmentally vulnerable to stereotypes because of their stage of development, they also respond rapidly to intervention. Group discussions are one of the interventions shown to be effective, leading us to believe that early childhood caregivers are uniquely situated to help children understand differences and overcome stereotypes (Hawkins, 2007). In one recent study, children who tested as 'less biased' at age six were found to be the children whose caregivers talked to them about race when they were three. (Katz, 2003)
- ▶ **Children are not "color blind"!** The research is clear. By the time babies are six months old, they are already paying attention to physical differences such as race and gender (Katz, 1981). Some children develop clear racial preferences by age two (Katz, 2003).
- ▶ **Some children use race as a factor in deciding who to be friends with!** At three years of age, 86% of white children chose other white children as playmates (Katz, 2003). More than half of five- and six-year-olds chose pictures of children who were the same race and gender as they were when asked who they wanted to be friends with (Best, 2005).
- ▶ **A strong sense of cultural identity can help children succeed!** Children who can function comfortably in both their own culture and the dominant culture have lower rates of substance abuse (Benard, 1991). High school students who were succeeding at school were more likely to have a strong identification with their own ethnicity (Lew, 2006). By supporting young children's links with their home culture and working to understand, reflect, and support their cultural identities, we can support their success in life.





Empathy

We know from both research and experience that babies have empathy—they come “pre-loaded” with it. Babies empathize with those they are closest to—when mom is happy, baby is happy. When big brother laughs, baby gurgles. When one baby cries, other babies cry. As babies and children grow, the empathic skills become more sophisticated—and this is where the grown-ups in a child's life come into play. Our job is to reinforce and nurture the empathy children are born with. We can do this in a number of ways.

Early in life, children need to be taught to recognize and name the feelings they have. This helps them recognize other people's feelings. A child must be able to identify for herself what the feeling she has is before she can see it in someone else and understand it's the same or similar to hers. Only then can she respond in an empathetic way.

We also need to notice and reinforce early attempts at empathy. This can be tricky—empathy often presents in ways we would not expect or even wish. It takes a wise teacher/parent/caregiver to see what's *really* going on. Imagine a two-year-old who sees another child crying on the playground. He doesn't know *why* the other child is crying, but he feels his fellow toddler's distress in his own body (pre-loaded empathy!) and he is distressed, too. Not knowing what else to do, he wallops the crier to see if that might make them stop. On its surface it doesn't look like empathy, but it is— *developing* empathy. It needs some guidance to be sure, but the empathy is there.

Building empathy skills is a lot like learning to read. First a child comes to understand that print means something. Then she learns letters, then small sight words, and eventually larger words and sentences are decoded.... As a child develops empathy skills, they learn that their own feelings mean something and have names. They learn those names and learn to identify their feelings with those names. Then they begin to recognize feelings they've felt in other people—sometimes they misidentify, just like when they're learning to read words, but practice helps with accuracy. Next they learn appropriate actions to take when they notice a certain feeling in another person that they themselves have felt. They learn that walloping the other frustrated child will not help the situation, but offering a helping hand might. As the child continues to develop empathy skills, they learn to look at another person and ask what *that particular person* might need or want.

Adults have the important privilege of helping children learn to channel their empathy in appropriate ways. When our children have solid empathy skills they are better able to read non-verbal cues, find their way through sometimes complicated relationships, and address issues as they come along. Empathy creates acceptance of self and others—and acceptance without judgment helps all of us navigate the differences and changes we come upon.

AMAZE

Families All Matter

BUILDING A COMMUNITY

STANDING UP FOR OURSELVES AND EACH OTHER

Only girls can

- ▶ Hi, everyone. Nick has come to visit us again. Nick is feeling very confused today. He's wondering if you can help him with a problem he has. Do you think you might have some ideas for him?
- ▶ Nick wants me to tell you what happened. Yesterday at his day care, a bunch of children were playing hospital. Some children were patients, some children were doctors, and some children were nurses. Nick was playing there and he put a stethoscope around his neck.
 - ◆ Nick wants to be sure you all know what a *stethoscope* is. Do you?
- ▶ He told one of the other boys he was the nurse and he was going to listen to his heart. That was when Nick got a big surprise. That other boy told Nick, "Boys can't be nurses. Boys have to be doctors." Nick was really confused by that because his uncle is a nurse and his uncle is a boy. He thought for a minute, then said, "Yes, they can. My uncle is a nurse. I'm going to be a nurse when I grow up, too." Then a girl who was playing spoke up and said she thought only girls could be nurses, too. Some of the kids who were playing thought boys could be nurses and some of them thought they couldn't. One other child said the nurse at her doctor's office is a boy, so of course boys can be nurses. Other children said they'd never seen a boy nurse.
- ▶ So Nick is trying to figure out what's going on. He wonders what you think about all of this.



Language Hint

Your group may be as confused by this issue as Nick and his friends. One explanation you can give them is that the idea that all nurses have to be girls or women is a stereotype.

Stereotypes are when we start to think that just because something is true of some people who look or act a certain way it is true of all of them.

Many nurses are women, but that doesn't mean all nurses have to be women. Many doctors are men, but that doesn't mean all doctors have to be men. Many men are good nurses and take good care of the people who are their patients and many women are doctors and take good care of their patients.

We need to watch out for stereotypes because they can hurt people, just like Nick was hurt by the idea that he couldn't be a nurse when he grows up.

234



Bullying Definitions

- Bullying is *hurtful, harmful* behavior that is *repeated* and involves the *misuse of power* by an individual or group towards one or more persons.
- A hurtful preschool behavior can result in bullying when it becomes *repeated, intense and targeted* if **adults allow it to continue.**

Keys to Change

- Supportive intervention – every time
- Don't model what you don't want to see (eliminate adult bullying)
- Open discussion of bias and stereotypes
- Opportunities to practice in low risk settings.