

february-march @ symbio

upcoming presentations

Dealing with Temper Tantrums

Tuesday 8 February
6:45-8:15pm

When a child's emotions overflow, the boundaries of composure often give way (for both children and parents). We will talk about the meaning and management of temper tantrums: how they relate to limit testing, what can be gained from them and what your response to a tantrum means to your child. Perhaps most importantly, we'll talk about how to reduce frequency and intensity of these emotional storms. The presentation will include a Q & A.

@ Peekadoodle Kidsclub
Ghiradelli Square
900 North Point Street, F100
San Francisco CA
RSVP: info@thepkc.com

Peekadoodle members:
\$35/person or \$55/couple
non-members:
\$40/person or \$60/couple

Emotionally Intelligent Discipline

Tuesday 15 March
7:00-8:30pm

In order for discipline to be truly effective, it has to help a child learn how to regulate and appropriately express emotions as well as control behavior. Because the goal of discipline is for a child to internalize a sense of appropriate vs. inappropriate behavior and ultimately moral action, discipline has to be relationally relevant. We will discuss effective ways to set limits, deliver emotionally supportive guidance and foster the development of a healthy ...

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Race Matters: Talking to Your Kids

Q: *I have a very outgoing, vivacious 4-year-old daughter. She is the kind of child who is interested in everything and won't let go of a subject until she's understood it. I love this quality in her, but I've recently come up against an unexpected struggle and I hope you can help me think this one through.*

My daughter's school had a program in honor of Martin Luther King Jr. Day. The children were taught about Dr. King's life and they discussed his "I Have a Dream" speech. Although there are children of many ethnic backgrounds at her school, diversity is not a topic that we've discussed before. I realize this was a probably a mistake now because my daughter is suddenly struggling to understand the meaning of racial differences and I am not sure how to help her.

We are Caucasian but have good friends of different races and my daughter has never before questioned why we don't all look alike. In the last couple of weeks she asks me constantly what race various people are. I want to encourage her awareness of diversity and thought I was dealing with her curiosity well. I told her that race is only a color on the outside, but underneath we are all human, and that this is what Dr. King told us. However, I realized I wasn't doing so well last week when we stopped at a convenience store. The man behind the counter was African American and my daughter said, "he dreams to be the same as me." Fortunately,

he did not hear her. Unfortunately, I could hear my own words, albeit not my meaning, in my daughter's mis-statement and I had no idea how to respond to her. I admit that I submit this to you with some shame and anxiety, even knowing it will remain anonymous. I want to teach my daughter to value people of all races, and that it's wrong to think it's better to be one race than another – how do I get that message across to her?

A: First of all, we want to thank you for your willingness to engage these questions, and your willingness to share them – even in the face of feeling shame. We've received many similar questions from parents in consultations over the years and we are always inspired by their courage in being willing to expose themselves for the sake of understanding and positive change.

Our collective history and current norms make racism a painful topic in this country; not the sort of thing most of us want to think about, much less introduce to a child. However, it is hard to talk about race without also talking about racism.

When the topic of race is raised, the first message many parents want to convey to their children is that we are all equal. But you cannot tell a child that two things are equal without raising the question of inequality, which is a painful and difficult topic for adults as well. Many of us are troubled by the disparities in power and privilege that we know exist all around us; many of us have not come to terms with how best to respond to such complex and omnipresent issues in our own lives. This makes it difficult to discuss such issues with children.

Parents often have an impulse to tell their children what they would like citizens of the world their children will inhabit to believe: we are all equally valued. However, this message is hard to convincingly convey when race is still a prime determinant of what sort of opportunities a person

is likely to have, what sort of obstacles she may face or even how likely she is to see someone who looks like her on movie screens and billboard ads.

Often, the quandary of how to address the subject of equality is resolved by substituting the notion of sameness for equality: “we are all the same under the skin.” The intention behind this message is to protect children from the pain of being on either side of a racial divide. Ironically, it serves to deepen the very divide it is intended to bridge. This is true for two reasons:

First, children your daughter's age are fascinated by difference. From gender roles, to the various attributes of fantasy characters, to the distinctions between big kids, little kids and adults - young kids glory in distinctions and the meaning behind them. It makes no sense to a child to ignore a difference. So, to tell a child to overlook skin color, or hair texture, or the shape of facial features is to fly in the face of what is, for her, a very natural and healthy inclination to notice those things; and it serves to minimize rather than celebrate the uniqueness of others. Kids don't want to overlook such differences, they want to explore them, and understand them. Adults discuss every other distinction that children take note of, if race is the only thing we don't discuss, it will be a conspicuous avoidance and a sure signal to a child that there is something unspeakable about the subject. We can unintentionally end up sending the message that racial differences are bad. When we tell children that we are all the same, we effectively negate difference rather than celebrate it.

Secondly, to an even greater extent than is true for us all, young children experience themselves as the center of the universe. They experience themselves as the standard to which all things are either similar or different. All the more so for those of us who are white and therefore see our likenesses reflected by images in the media (be that TV or signs and magazine covers in the grocery store line). Thus, for a child, the idea of a person's sameness refers to that person's sameness to the child (unless that sameness specifically references a third person). So, in a racial context, to assert to a white child that we are all, or should all be, the same is to assert that we are all, or should all be, white. Sadly, research shows that by about six years of age, this bias is well established for most white children, and for most children of color too.

So, what do you do to help your daughter? Begin by letting yourself off the hook. Racism is insidious, it is in the atmosphere and it is inevitable that your daughter will be influenced by racial bias. (If you are interested in this, there is a good book on the subject called, “*Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?*” by

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sense of self in your child in the toddler and preschool years.

@ GetzWell Pediatrics
1701 Church Street
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non-members:
\$40/person or \$60/couple

Beverly Daniel Tatum.) Because you cannot prevent it, your best defense against the impact of racism on your daughter's attitude towards diversity is not to overlook race but to celebrate it.

Your daughter has the natural instinct to do so: she is asking the questions that lead to diversity-positive conversations. If you want to encourage her appreciation of diversity, fuel her interest in it. Answer her questions about various friends' races, and talk about the difference between races, not just skin color, but customs, traditions, history, art, food and music. If you don't know, investigate. If your friends of other races from your own are comfortable with it, let your daughter ask them questions about those things.

At the same time, be sure that she gets a chance to hear and try to answer such questions about her race. She (and you) may not always be able to do so, but in

the very act of considering such questions your daughter will be moved away from the perception that her cultural norms are the default standard.

Of course, such consideration of difference will inevitably lead to later questions about why some people don't value difference. These are difficult topics, but better that she confront such issues in conversation with you than through silent osmosis. The chances are much better that she will do so if conversations about race and difference are a steady part of your discourse. The value of diversity will more easily become a real, feeling-level experience for your daughter if you are able to engage her in curiosity, enthusiasm and imagination related to diversity. Once she has that, the message that that people who don't like differences - or who are afraid of them - have made a mistake will make much more sense to her.

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