STORIES ABOUT OVERCOMING BIAS FOR KIDS

Difficulty: INTENSIVE | Frequency: VARIABLE | Duration: 5 MINS

WHY YOU SHOULD TRY IT

Although prejudice begins in early childhood, it peaks in middle childhood, around five to seven years old. Cross-race friendships start to become less stable in later childhood. But there are ways to help children question their own biases, overcome their prejudices about others, and make friends with people who are different from them.

When kids make friends across differences, it can improve their attitudes toward other social groups and reduce their anxiety when interacting with people of other races. Finding ways early on in development to help children foster ties across differences is important for the future of a compassionate and equitable pluralistic society.

TIME REQUIRED

This practice can take as little as 5 minutes.

HOW TO DO IT

Reading books can be a powerful way to help kids learn about themselves and others, because stories can serve as "mirrors and windows," as the scholar Rudine Sims Bishop once described. One important lesson that kids can learn through stories is that our own and others' biased attitudes about other people, like racism, can be overcome.

While our collective anti-racism work as a society is far from complete, you can highlight how biased attitudes can change over time when you're sharing stories with your child about history and current events. For example, if you're talking about the civil rights movement or even contemporary movements like Black Lives Matter, you might share important lessons like these:

> Prejudice is just like any other attitude, and attitudes change all the time. Prejudice is not permanent, because even after it develops, it can be changed. Leaders of the civil rights movement courageously helped people get rid of their prejudice. In life, changing the future is always possible. Anyone can learn to like people for who they are. Hard work is important, because with enough effort, even people who are prejudiced can change for the better. The civil rights movement shows us that we must be open to change our attitudes. Many times, people who start off with prejudiced attitudes change their views. Changing prejudice is important because with commitment to work at it, even prejudice deep down can be overcome.

You can share your own or your family's stories about resisting and overcoming your biased attitudes to show your

child that even someone close to them has been able to do this. What's more, the children's librarian at your local library can help you find stories with themes of learning inclusivity and developing friendships across differences like race.

EVIDENCE IT THAT WORKS

Pauker, K., Apfelbaum, E. P., Dweck, C. S., & Eberhardt, J. L. (2022). Believing that prejudice can change increases children's interest in interracial interactions. *Developmental Science, e13233*.

Children between 10 and 12 years old were randomly assigned to hear a storybook about students putting on a play that presented prejudiced attitudes as either fixed or malleable. In the fixed attitudes story, the message was that prejudice is permanent and does not usually change. In the malleable attitudes story, the message was that prejudice is not permanent and can be changed. In the next part of the study, the children had live video chats with a child they didn't know from another school. Ultimately, white children who heard the story that prejudice is malleable and talked with non-white kids had increased interest in future cross-race interactions, and their partners—who hadn't received a lesson about prejudice—did, too.

WHY TO TRY IT

Research suggests that when children are around 10 years old, their beliefs about whether prejudiced attitudes are permanent or changeable play a critical role in how interested they are in engaging with people of different races. In general, people who have more fixed beliefs tend to disengage from challenging situations when failure is possible; in this case, interacting with someone of another race might seem risky to kids because they could say the wrong thing and be seen as racist.

On the other hand, people who have more malleable beliefs tend to engage in challenges because they perceive the experience as an opportunity to learn and grow in their understanding and skills.

SOURCES

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This practice is part of Greater Good in Action, a clearinghouse of the best research-tested methods for increasing happiness, resilience, kindness, and connection, created by the Greater Good Science Center at UC Berkeley and HopeLab.