

Tips for Parents by Susie Kohl

Conversations About Skin Color

“**I** DON’T LIKE PEOPLE WITH BROWN SKIN,” a preschool girl explained to her teacher. This statement might lead people to believe that this little girl had learned racial bias at home and should be “talked to” about the unacceptable qualities of this kind of thinking. Fortunately, teachers understand that even young children make spontaneous, uncensored observations about skin color.

The teacher, who happens to have pale skin, responded by asking, “Why don’t you like dark skin?”

Her answer was, “My parents don’t have dark skin and I don’t have dark skin. I don’t like it.”

The teacher commented, “I love dark skin. I think it’s beautiful. I love seeing people who have all different skin colors. I’m so happy our school has so many different skin colors.”

There are many ways to speak to children about skin color, depending on their ages, their observations, and questions. The important thing is not to dismiss the subject. Sometimes young children have made negative comments to other children about the ugliness of their dark skin.

Studies show that families of color are more likely to speak to their children about these issues because they have to teach them to interpret other people’s reactions, maintain self-worth, and navigate in the world.

White families may feel that bringing up skin color is introducing a subject that divides people. However, research also reveals that bias in favor of white skin exists even at the preschool age, so simple discussions about the value of living in a world where people have a variety of skin colors is helpful. Older children are ready for more involved discussions.

There are many children’s books at every reading level that introduce subjects related to diversity in delightful, thought-provoking ways. We will have a display of children’s books at our compassion symposium on Saturday.

February 26, 2020

© 2020 The Meher Schools