

ideas for parents

Easy Ways to Build Assets for and with Your Child

FAST FACTS

ASSET #34: Cultural Competence

Youth are more likely to grow up healthy when they have knowledge of and comfort with people of different cultural/racial/ethnic backgrounds.

42%
of youth surveyed by Search Institute have this asset in their lives.*

What Are Assets?

Assets are 40 values, experiences, and qualities that help kids succeed. "Cultural competence" is one of five social-competencies assets.

* Based on Search Institute surveys of 217,277 6th- to 12th-grade youth throughout the United States during the 1999-2000 school year.

Appreciating Differences

In a perfect world, we would all know and feel comfortable with people of a wide variety of cultural, ethnic, and racial backgrounds. We would have caring relationships with many different people. We would participate in a variety of cultural customs.

Yet even in communities that are diverse in terms of ethnicity, race, and culture, the majority of people spend time with people who look like them, think like them, and often act just like them. Many people do this, not because they are prejudiced, but because they don't know how to begin reaching out to people who are "different."

However, even if you feel uncomfortable interacting with people from races, religions, and cultures different from your own, your child is growing up in a world that is more diverse racially, economically, religiously, linguistically, and in other ways, than the world you grew up in. As adults they will need to have skills to work with people from a wide variety of backgrounds and perspectives.

"Cultural competence" doesn't mean that we all have to like each other. It does mean that we treat each other with respect, tolerance, and equality. It means we strive to understand other cultures, and perhaps come to appreciate and value them. It means we



want to learn about the values, perspectives, and ideas of people who are different from us.

Before your child can feel competent dealing with people of various cultures, your child first needs to develop an ethnic awareness and cultural identity of her or his own. What's your family's ethnic heritage? How do you feel about it? Do you celebrate it? When you listen to stories from your family history, what have you heard about how your ancestors viewed and lived with people who were different from them?

"The way we feel about ourselves and the way we react to racism may reflect assumptions that are centuries old," say Darlene Powell Hopson, Ph.D., and Derek S. Hopson, Ph.D., clinical psychologists and authors. With your child, explore your feelings about people who are different from you. Talk about where your cultural competencies are strong and where they need some nurturing. Together you can foster a sense of cultural competence in each member of your family.

Quick Tip:
Expose your children to a wide variety of people.

Helpful Hints

Tips that make building cultural competence with your child easier:

- **Examine images that television, movies, and books project of people of various cultures. Discuss what's authentic, what's stereotypical, and how you can determine the difference.**
- **Together learn words from another language.**
- **Avoid making stereotypical comments and challenge those made by others.**
- **Know your roots and share your pride in your culture with others.**

Worthwhile Goals

Create an open family atmosphere that encourages discussion and action when it comes to differences.

Set goals such as these:

- Discuss as a family the effect of prejudicial attitudes and behavior.
- Plan family outings to diverse neighborhoods in and around your community.
- Encourage your child's school to create a "Diversity Club" to promote harmony and respect differences.
- Mark your calendar with holidays of various cultures and important civil rights dates. Discuss the traditions and events of these dates as they occur.
- As a family, petition local government to make your city or town a prejudice-free zone.

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3 Important Steps

When your child has a negative reaction to a cultural or racial difference:

1. **Immediately find out more about what happened and what your child is feeling.**
2. **Ask questions to help your child figure out why he or she responded that way.**
3. **Point out harmful, hurtful responses and suggest alternatives that promote cultural competence.**

FINAL WORD

"Cherish and preserve the ethnic and cultural diversity that nourishes and strengthens this community—and this nation."

—César Chávez

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time together

Three ways to build cultural competence in your child:

1. **Read articles together or rent videos that focus on cultures different from your own. Talk about what you learn.**
2. **Encourage your child to get a pen pal from a different country or culture. Search the Internet for pen pal sites.**
3. **Invite to dinner a family that is culturally or ethnically different from your own. Share stories about different customs, traditions, holidays, foods, etc.**

More Help for Parents

40 Ways to Raise a Nonracist Child by Barbara Mathias and Mary Ann French. This book give practical, age-specific advice (from infancy through the high school years) on how to teach children to shun prejudice. (Published by HarperCollins.)