

# HOW DO WE TEACH OUR CHILDREN TOLERANCE IN A WORLD FILLED WITH INTOLERANCE?

Lori Roy- Food for Thought- July 8, 2016

This has been one tough summer so far for our nation and our world. As the mother of a toddler and with a baby on the way, it is so easy to let myself be afraid for my children growing up in a world filled with hate, anger and fear. How will they survive in this world? And then....I watch my daughter. I watch her wave and smile at each and every person she sees. She doesn't care about race, gender, sexuality, wealth, poverty, age, political affiliation, she literally loves everyone. She was born loving everyone. Hate and discrimination are learned and sadly experienced.

As educators, parents, and a community, we have the power to teach our children how to communicate with one another. We have the power to teach them how to disagree without hate. We teach through modeling. If I have learned anything in the last few months, it's that my daughter sees and hears EVERYTHING. Your children, our students, see and hear everything.

America is filled with people who are different from ourselves. This already diverse country is only going to become more diverse as our children grow and become adults. This is America and growing in diversity is truly part of the heritage of our country from the beginning. As stated in [kidshealth.org](http://kidshealth.org), *"because of these differences, our children will have more opportunities in education, business, and many other aspects of life. Our children's success in today's world-and tomorrow's- depends on being able to understand, appreciate, and work with others."*

Tolerance is a fair, objective, and permissive attitude toward opinions, beliefs, and practices that differ from one's own (<http://www.dictionary.com/>). So how do we teach our children to be tolerant? First and foremost...WE have to BE tolerant ourselves. We must model respect and understanding of differences. We can encourage self-confidence in our children because self-confidence leads to a stronger ability to embrace and even stand up for others who may be different. We can respect different cultures and even learn about them together as a family. In school, we teach children about a wide variety of cultures, religions and the history of our world.

It is okay to disagree with things that are going on in the world. Differences make us who we are. Talk with your children about what the world would be like if everyone was exactly the same. But remember, so often, "it's not WHAT we say, it is HOW we say it." We must remember to be respectful in sharing our opinions and differences.

Your child's future is in your hands and our hands and our (the adults) future is in the hands of your/our children. What kind of world do we want them to live in when they are adults?

I have included some great articles to help families and teachers alike on the next page. I have also bulleted out some solid ideas for teaching children tolerance from <https://childdevelopmentinfo.com>.

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**Here are some tips for how to teach your kids tolerance.**

- Look at the way you treat and speak to others. Does this reflect tolerance? Demonstrate a respect for others and reflect on your own attitude regularly.
- Kids listen and learn from you. At school, I have often overheard kids stereotyping and joking about the slang names given to different groups. When asked about those words they mostly tell me that is what they have heard used at home. Even if you're having a conversation with your partner, be mindful that your kids may be listening. Think carefully about the words you use. By all means talk about differing groups in a factual and informative manner, but avoid joking and any degrading name-calling. Your kids may repeat what they have heard and sometimes in less private situations.
- Answer your kid's questions honestly and respectfully. Everyone notices differences in people so it is perfectly okay to discuss them with your kids if done in a respectful way.
- Choose programs, movies, stories and games that value differences. The media has a powerful ability to shape attitudes. If you do watch or see something that is prejudice, be sure to talk about it with your kids and the hurt it can cause to those groups.
- Expect your kids to treat others with respect. By modeling tolerance yourself, you should certainly not accept disrespectful behavior both inside and outside your home.
- Value the differences within your own family. Accept the qualities each member possesses regardless of differing styles, interests and abilities. Help your kids feel values for who they are too.
- Foster self-esteem in your family. We all know that people who don't respect others rarely feel happy and secure within themselves. Kids who do feel good about themselves tend to be more courteous towards others.
- Involve your kids in situations where diversity is present. This may be at sport, school, day care and camps.
- Learn together about other cultures and traditions. Explore how different cultures celebrate occasions in their own special way and go about life. Talk about it and appreciate the experience.
- Teach your own family traditions to your kids and encourage pride. Value and talk about where you belong and be open to teach others what you have to offer.

***Think about the behaviors you wish to see in your child. Then model those behaviors, because kids will mostly follow in your footsteps.***

**Sources and Resources:**

<https://childdevelopmentinfo.com/how-to-be-a-parent/communication/talk-to-kids-tolerance/>

<http://kidshealth.org/en/parents/tolerance.html#>

<http://matadornetwork.com/change/7-ways-to-teach-kids-tolerance/>

[http://www.educationworld.com/a\\_lesson/lesson/lesson294.shtml](http://www.educationworld.com/a_lesson/lesson/lesson294.shtml)

<http://www.parentfurther.com.php53-8.dfw1-2.websitetestlink.com/resources/newsletter/raising-culturally-aware-kids>

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/parenting/wp/2015/07/06/how-silence-can-breed-prejudice-a-child-development-professor-explains-how-and-why-to-talk-to-kids-about-race/>

<http://www.tolerance.org/>- This is just an all around great resource for teachers and parents!