

Parents: Teach Your Kiddos About Differences | CPD

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Mom Tristan West and her little hero, Jayson

Can I ask a favor of you? Something you can do to make things better for my little hero and his friends like him all over the world? Will you please teach your kids about difference? Will you teach them to celebrate, embrace and love different? Will you please break through the awkward silence when they see someone who is different from them at the store and instead of ignoring the situation or telling them not to stare, would you please approach the different person and help your children have a conversation with him/her?

Will you please go out of your way to find books and stories to read to your kids that have characters and illustrations of people who use wheelchairs, walkers, wear hearing aids, and wear glasses? If finding those books is difficult, will you please print your own pictures to add to some of your favorite books? When you are at the store, museum, mall or holiday event, will you please keep your eyes open for a child who is different and look for an opportunity to introduce your children to this child and instigate a conversation with that child and family?

Will you search for movies or tv episodes that have characters with disabilities and use these to have conversations about friends at their school who have unique challenges? Will you use play to model for your

children how to interact with those who are different? Will you use their dolls to include a doll who is alone and cannot talk? And use their legos to build their action figure a wheelchair, and talk about how chairs are a necessary tool in order for some children to be mobile? Will you please send your children out the door with a hug and a kiss and a message to say hi to someone new today, maybe someone who is alone, different and doesn't have friends? And when they return home from school, will you please ask them about their new friend they said hello to? Will you please invite that new friend over for a play date or a birthday party? Invite the parent too, and ask him/her what things to do, say and how to build that relationship. Will you please have family lessons at home about what it feels like to be different, without friends, and the challenging struggles some people face?

Teach your children that the best thing they can be in this entire world is a good friend. Will you please teach them they can lift another's burden by simply saying, "Hello! Can I sit with you?" Will you please talk with them about the power of their influence? Will you let them know that if they are nice and friendly to someone who is different, all of their friends will follow their example? Will you please instill in them the desire to make a difference in this world by being kind?

And if you do, your children truly will change the world and make it a better place for so many who struggle to feel a part of it. And through their kindness and new friendships, I guarantee that kids like mine will also change their world. Lessons about love, God, charity, faith, and goodness are sometimes taught best by those who cannot speak. The path to heaven is sometimes best led by those who cannot walk. And an understanding of what is most important in this life is sometimes taught best by those who do not appear to understand.

Your children will gain a lot from those who are not like them, and my child learns so much from his peers. I dream of a world where my child is picked first instead of last, who always has a friend to sit by instead of an empty chair. Please help your child be that friend. Help your child be the answer to another child's prayers. Children are good by nature, but they need their parents' help to break the barrier of discomfort, confusion, and awkwardness and know it's okay to love different! They need you to teach them.

This may require you to also feel uncomfortable and to do things you've never done. Find the courage to talk to the stranger in the store, help those who need accommodations, and say hello to someone not like you. Your children are watching, and your actions speak louder

than words. Your courage and example matter. Your children's kindness matters. Because of your actions and efforts, my son and his friends will feel like they matter. Thank you.

Sincerely,

A mom of a very special boy

Author's note: Thank you for reading, and feel free to share this post. Also, feel free to ask questions about ideas or share things you are doing with your children to teach them. Or commit here to do something new, possibly uncomfortable, this week. We all have a lot to learn from each other, and we all have room to grow.