



Helping Children Celebrate Diversity

God's family is wonderfully diverse. It encompasses people of all ethnicities, geographic locations, gifts and abilities, and ages. But in a world warped by sin, we often do not embrace those differences. Rather, we group ourselves into "us" and "them" in a variety of ways.

Typically, a person's awareness of diversity in gender, race, ethnicity, and abilities begins between the ages of 2 and 5. By the time children come to your children's ministry program, they've already absorbed attitudes and biases from their family and society. And so it's possible that a child in your group, being both curious and honest, might make a remark that could hurt another child.

When teachers and parents are silent, children's biased attitudes grow stronger. On the other hand, teaching about diversity can break down the wall of prejudice. Here are some suggestions for helping you make your children's ministry a place where children experience the unbiased, unreserved love of Jesus and each other.

Gently redirect the conversation. Kids are curious and honest and may not intend to be hurtful. While you do want to correct, you don't want to create unnecessary negative feelings for the children in the room. Gently correcting and redirecting inappropriate remarks in a way that celebrates diversity teaches children how to appropriately discuss the beauty of God's wonderfully diverse family.

Model acceptable behaviors and attitudes. When you warmly welcome all children and show no favoritism when you ask questions or assign tasks, you are showing children that Jesus' love does not exclude anyone. Speak positively about all cultures and ways of living.

Create an environment in your classroom that celebrates diversity. For instance:

- Choose diverse images for your room, ensuring that they represent people of many ethnicities, genders, ages, shapes, and abilities (i.e. children who use wheelchairs or other mobility supports).
- Display pictures of Bible stories that have been created by artists of different ethnicities.
- Stock your room with books, toys, and music that reflect cultural diversity and disability awareness.
- Celebrate Christian holidays with customs drawn from a variety of cultures.
- Adapt activities so that children who have a disability can participate fully.
- Provide paper, crayons, and paints that enable children to create a variety of skin tones, hair colors, and clothing in their artwork.
- Speak up. Take action when you hear racial slurs or put-downs that reflect stereotyped attitudes. Discuss what's being said or implied, and point out the pain this can cause others.

- Answer questions honestly. Children may wonder out loud about skin color differences, or express curiosity about a classmate who uses an adaptive aid or someone who is speaking with an unfamiliar accent. Silence speaks louder than words. Answer questions positively. And if you don't know the answer, say so and promise to learn more and report back.

Provide opportunities for children to interact with other cultures. Visit other churches, invite visitors to your class, or attend a cultural event as a group. Model curiosity and interest, not fear, when meeting people whose background differs from your own.

Encourage parents to celebrate diversity: Print out a copy of this document for each parent, explaining that these are the ways you're celebrating diversity with your *Dwell* group. Encourage parents to read some of the suggested picture books with their child(ren) as a starting point for conversations about diversity (see recommended resources at the end of this document).

Hold a Pentecost Day celebration: Tell parents a few weeks beforehand that you'll be celebrating Pentecost as a group, asking for volunteers to bring in a dish from their cultural background. On the day of the celebration, read Acts 2:1-12 aloud and talk about how the early church brought the good news of Jesus to a diverse group of people. You could also read *God's Very Good Idea* by Trillia Newbell to highlight how God created diversity.

At Pentecost, thousands of people from different cultures became one because of the Holy Spirit of God. Your group may be small, but you too can experience beautiful Pentecost unity, which is a great foretaste of what's in store for us in the new creation!

Recommended Resources:

It's important that illustrations and/or the authorship of the picture books used in your group reflect the diversity of God's people. Examples of excellent picture books which meet that criteria include:

The Lord's Prayer and Psalm 23 by Tim Ladwig

When Daddy Prays by Nikki Grimes

Let It Shine by Ashley Bryan

When God Made You and When I Pray for You by Matthew Paul Turner

Children of God Storybook Bible by Archbishop Desmond Tutu

God's Dream by Archbishop Desmond Tutu

Thank You, God by J. Bradley Wigger

He's Got the Whole World by Kadir Nelson

God Loves Me Storybooks by Patricia L Nederveld

God's Very Good Idea by Trillia Newbell

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