

Disability Campaign.org

Disability Awareness for Children



Every parent knows that children are curious; it's in their nature to ask questions, point, or say things aloud when they encounter something or someone new or different. Well, when it comes to disability, children can often be even more inquisitive. That is why it is important adults to help bring disability awareness to children.

Whether you are a parent, aunt, grandfather, or teacher, there are ways in which you can help a child learn more about disabilities. Children can feel comfortable around people with disabilities and behave in a way that is respectful to someone who is disabled. Below are some tips you can use with a child in your life to teach them disability awareness.

1. **Don't become upset because a child is curious.** The child's curiosity is an opportunity for you to share with them about disabilities. If the child behaves in a way that is inappropriate, apologize to the person with a disability. Then, explain to the child why that behavior was inappropriate and provide him/her an example of a more acceptable and respectable response.
2. **Highlight similarities, not difference.** Inform the child that people with disabilities are very similar to him/her. Highlight differences for educational purposes.
3. **Remind the child that being different is not something negative.** Do not put a "sad story" spin on the disability. The man who is blind is not a "poor, blind man" and nor should the

child “feel sorry” because of his “sad situation.” People with disabilities can live happy lives, accomplish goals, and participate in fun activities, too!

4. Read the child a children’s book that has a character with a disability.

This is an easy and safe way to introduce a child to the world of disabilities. There are children’s books that positively depict a character with a disability. You can loan the book at your local library or purchase it to keep at home. Read the child the book and allow them to ask questions.



5. Encourage “first people language.” Explain to the child that the person with the disability is not defined by his/her disability. Just because a woman is in a wheelchair, doesn’t mean she is a “wheelchair lady.” Instead, encourage the child to refer to her as the “lady or woman in the wheelchair.”

6. Name it by what it is. The wheelchair is a “wheelchair,” not a “big stroller.” The man using a brace does not have a “boo boo.” Likewise, a boy with Down syndrome is not a “slow,” but rather has a disability that may make it harder for him to learn. By providing the child with the correct words to use, you may prevent the child from yelling out something offensive and from seeing people with disabilities as something they are not.

7. A service dog, mobility device, audio/visual aid is not a toy.

At first glance, a guide dog may look like a fuzzy dog you can pet, but the dog should not be petted if it is working. Teach children the significance of disability aids so that they will not be tempted to quickly touch and grab something that is be vital to the wellbeing of a person with a disability.



8. You can't judge a book by its cover. Remind the child that a person doesn't need to "look disabled" to "be disabled." Even if the person doesn't "look sick" or use a walker, he/she may still need accessible parking. Likewise, just because a person is older, doesn't mean he/she cannot hear.

9. A person with a disability does not always need or want help. Still, that does not mean the person might not need or appreciate help. If you see that a person with a disability needs assistance, you or the child can kindly ask if he/she wishes to be helped.

10. Role-play at home. If the child is old enough, you can blindfold him/her to show what it is like to be blind. The child can draw with his/her mouth to experience what it is like not to be able to use his/her hands. Just remember to do so in a way that is fun, safe, and respectful of people with disabilities.



11. If you don't know the answer, don't make it up. Some children ask hard questions, such as "Why do her hands not work?" or "Does that mean he can't learn?" Do not make up an answer just for the sake of answering the question. Take these questions as a learning opportunity for you and the child. Do some research and find the information. When it comes to questions specific to a person, if the question is not too personal, inquire with kindness and prudence. Just remember the person with a disability doesn't have to share everything about his/her disability with you and your child.

12. Be careful with how you react in front of a child. You can be an example to a child. Children see the way in which adults behave and often times imitate such behaviors. If a child notices you feeling nervous, awkward, or afraid of people with disabilities, chances are that child will end up with similar feelings. Try to respond positively and calmly when encountering a person with a disability and maybe the child will follow your lead!

Joni and Friends can assume no liability in the recommendation of any product, service or organization, nor does this constitute an endorsement.

© Joni and Friends, 2013

Used by permission of **Joni and Friends**

P.O. Box 3333, Agoura Hills, CA 91376

www.joniandfriends.org