



# 20 Ways to Teach Acceptance

by Debra Fulghum Bruce

**C**hildren are not born with prejudice; it is learned. They will become compassionate adults if we lead the way with acceptance and understanding of all children. Following are some practical tools that can help broaden your students' ideas of the world and the human race.

**1** Talk openly about diversity in your classroom—the different names, color of hair and eyes, birth dates, personal interests. Emphasize that everyone is unique and made in God's image.

**2** Encourage questions and give honest, compassionate answers. A first grade student, Ashley, was curious about elderly adults. "Why is my grandma's skin so wrinkly?" she asked. "Why does Mr. Jackson walk with a stick?" A simple explanation about aging satisfied her.

**3** Explain empathy—to feel as another person might feel. Ask, "How would you want to be treated if you were different from a group of friends?" Challenge students to treat others the way they want to be treated.

**4** Check out books that show differences in all people—foreign countries, aging, and disabilities. Talk about how boring the world would be if we all were the same and how God has a plan for each of His children.

**5** Plan a trip to a nursing home or rehabilitation center. This can help your students become more accepting of those with disabilities.

**6** Adopt a surrogate grandparent for your class. Plan to invite this church member to your class and ask her to share about her own childhood. Suggest that children call this person during the week just to chat and express appreciation.

**7** Check out books on different customs. Talk about these with your students and incorporate some different customs and clothing in your next holiday celebration.

**8** Check out books on sign language for the deaf. Learn the signs for "I love you" and teach this to your students. Use these throughout the class time.

**9** For younger children, use everyday activities to talk about similarities and differences. For example, make a fruit salad, and let your students help slice the fruit. Talk about the different colors, tastes, and textures of the fruit.

**10** Ask students to cut out pictures of people from magazines. Talk about the differences—sizes, colors of hair and skin, and ages. Affirm that God's love is big enough for all people!

**11** Volunteer your class to help serve lunch at a local homeless shelter. Help students accept those who are not as fortunate and talk about being benevolent. Even the youngest students can assist in passing out napkins or packets of sugar.

**12** Collect canned goods for a family who may not have the material advantages your students have.

**13** Get an overseas pen pal, perhaps a missionary who has elementary-age children. Help your students write letters or draw pictures and mail them.

**14** From a travel agency or airline ticket office ask for brochures on different countries. Look through these with your class and talk about the similarities and differences in clothing, hairstyles, climate, terrain, and transportation.

**15** Using your encyclopedia, make a list of foods brought to America from other countries such as frankfurters, tacos, pasta, and ice cream. Share this information with your students.

**16** Talk about the diversity in heritage among your students. Share where your ancestors came from and encourage students to do the same.

**17** Tape a world map in your classroom. Put colored thumbtacks where your church missionaries are stationed. Talk about the different continents, countries, and climates.

**18** Schedule a missionary to speak to your class. Ask him or her to dress in the native costume and talk about cultural differences.

Suggest that the missionary share different ways God is using to tell the good news to those in other lands.



Provide hands-on opportunities to teach children how it feels to be different. For example, ask

students to take a rubber band and stretch it around their fingers. Then ask them to try to write their names or color pictures. Say, "This is what people with disabilities have to live with if they have severe arthritis, cerebral palsy, or other diseases." Talk about how

Christians are called to understand and accept differences.



Most important: Be a loving role model. Teaching students to accept all God's people is a teacher's challenge.

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### Questions For Further Study—

1. What issues of potential prejudice in your community or congregation have you addressed with your children or children's ministry team?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. What steps might you take in addition to the ones mentioned in this article to confront prejudice among your children or children's ministry team?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. How might you tactfully address prejudice among parents in your congregation?