

## Nurturing Tolerance in Your Teen

Our world has always been diverse. But never before has diversity been such a pressing, everyday issue. Our children grow up with children of different races, cultures, religions and backgrounds, no matter where it is you live. As a matter of fact, your teen's experiences are likely to be much more diverse than your own. In the 21st Century, the many challenges of such a diverse world are close at hand and affect teenagers on a daily basis. Through their immediate access to social media, it can be difficult to restrict young people's access to news and images of terrorism, school incidents, extremist groups, street violence and hate crimes. But should we? Becoming aware of the issues behind the headlines is the first step in becoming an active part of the solution. Tolerance today is not an optional character trait, it's a necessary life skill.



## Why Tolerance Matters:

- The United Kingdom is made up of diverse people. Your teenager will be better off if they can get along with different kinds of people.
- When older children and teenagers lack tolerance, they are at risk of letting bad things happen to innocent people; the innocent person might be your child or the child of someone you know.

## The Citizenship Foundation

<http://www.citizenshipfoundation.org.uk/main/page.php?399>

The Citizenship Foundation inspires young people to take part in society as equal members. They help them to understand the law, politics and democratic life. They promote participation, help parents, carers and teachers to teach citizenship and work with young people on issues that concern them.

The Citizenship Foundation wants society to be fairer, more inclusive and more cohesive. They want a democracy in which everyone has the knowledge, skills, and confidence to take part as effective citizens. Just as the Citizenship Foundation says:

***"Young people are society's energy! Find their spark and they'll light up our world."***

The world **does** need people who understand it and who want to work hard and shape it for everyone's benefit. We all want to open up opportunities for young people to take a lead and feel confident that they can make positive, effective, contributions to the world they live in - to give them a head-start for social action after their school years!



## 10 Ways You Can Help to Nurture Tolerance in Your Child

- **Talk about tolerance with your teen.** Tolerance is an ongoing process; it can't be captured in a single moment. Establish a high "comfort level" for open conversations about social issues. Let children know that no subject is taboo.
- **Identify intolerance when your teen is exposed to it.** Point out stereotypes and cultural misinformation in films, TV shows, computer games and other media. Challenge bias when it comes from friends and family members. Don't let the moment pass. Begin with a qualified statement: "Andy just called people of XYZ faith 'lunatics.' What do you think about that, Steph?" Let children do most of the talking.
- **Challenge intolerance when it comes from your teen.** When a child says or does something that reflects biases or embraces stereotypes, point it out: "What makes that joke funny, Harry?" Guide the conversation towards their own feelings of empathy and respect - "Jack uses a walker. How do you think he would feel about that joke?" or "How did you feel when Annie made fun of your glasses last week?"
- **Support your teen when she or he is a victim of intolerance.** Respect children's troubles by acknowledging when they become targets of bias. Don't minimise the experience. Provide emotional support and then develop and practice constructive responses. Develop a set of "comebacks" for children who are victims of name-calling.
- **Foster healthy understanding of group identities.** For tweens and teens, group identity is critical. Remind them of three things.
  - First, pride in our own groups does not authorise disrespect for others.
  - Second, no group is entitled to special privileges.
  - Third, we should avoid putting other groups down as a way to elevate the status of our own groups.
- **Showcase diversity materials in your home.** Read books and articles with multicultural and tolerance themes to your children. Bookmark equity and diversity Web sites on your home computer.
- **Create opportunities for your teens to interact with people who are different from them.** Look critically at how a child defines "normal". Expand the definition. Visit playgrounds where a variety of children are present—people of different races/ ethnicities, socio-economic backgrounds, family structures, etc. Encourage your child to spend time with elders—grandparents, for example.
- **Encourage your teen to call upon community resources.** The earlier children interact with the community, the better; we are not islands unto ourselves. If a child is interested in stars, visit the local

library, museum or planetarium. A child who is concerned about world hunger or homelessness can volunteer at a local soup kitchen or homeless shelter.

- **Be honest about differences.** Don't tell children that we are all the same; we're not. We all experience the world in different ways, and those experiences matter. Help your child understand the viewpoints of others. We are all the sum of our life experiences!
- **Model the behaviour you would like to see.** As parents we are our children's primary role models. We should try to be consistent in how we treat others and in our commitment to tolerance. If we treat people differently based on characteristics such as race or gender, our children are likely to do the same.

### **Allow Your Teen to Influence You.**

Let your teenager help you look at language and the media's portrayal of certain groups in a new light. It might be time to examine your own attitudes, as well. Do you make assumptions based on appearances? Are you quick to label someone a "Tory", "socialist" or "Liberal" simply because you disagree with an opinion? Is your attitude about a particular group based on what you've "heard", or as a result of what you've learned from experience and research? Especially in communities with less diverse populations, try to be open to the idea that misinformation may be deeply ingrained. A lack of understanding can be a dangerous weapon, and what you don't know may already be hurting you - and your children.

**To stop Hate ..... We must all ...  
NURTURE TOLERANCE**

