

## Living in a Culturally Diverse World

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Today, more than ever, young people across America are encouraged to live, learn, play and work together regardless of race, ethnicity, age, gender, religion, socioeconomic status, sociocultural factors and yes, even personal beliefs.

Often times, individuals allow their personal beliefs and experiences, whether good or bad, different or indifferent, right or wrong to shape their minds and form their thoughts. These thoughts, which are passed on from one generation to the next, usually indicate how receptive they will be to those around them.

Demographic data projects that by 2025, the population in the United States of America will increase to approximately 335 million people. It is estimated that non-white groups, such as Hispanic, Native American, African-American and Asian populations will increase dramatically (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1996).

Although there is no single definition for the term cultural diversity, it usually refers to a particular individual or group who possess backgrounds and experiences that are significantly different from those who comprise “mainstream” America (Thomas & Grimes, 2002). These differences may include variations in physical looks, dress, hair styles, language, tradition and foods, etc.

Culture diversity teaches people to recognize and respect similarities as well as differences. Regardless of age, people are often intrigued by the similarities and differences among people. In general, when people are able to recognize and respect common traits as well as unique characteristics, they are better equipped to live cohesively with individuals who are different. This often involves risk-taking, being less distrustful and putting aside one’s personal beliefs in an effort to value someone else’s viewpoint (Thomas & Grimes, 2002).

No matter where people go, they will encounter an individual and/or group of individuals with diverse backgrounds and experiences that are significantly different from their own.

### Parent Tips:

1. Be cautious of personal biases towards people who are culturally diverse. These biases can occur in behavior that is overt (open) or covert (hidden). Most biases begin in the home and are then transferred to other settings such as school, play, work, etc. It is important to remember that children “model” what they see.

2. Be open and honest when it comes to discussing individuals and/or groups from culturally diverse backgrounds who have different experiences. If your child has a question, do your best to provide an answer in an accurate, unbiased manner. In the event that you are unable to do that, contact the school psychologist or guidance counselor at your child's school.
3. Be fair and appreciate the significant contributions that have been made by all people. Do not demean any individual and/or group of people. Provide information in a positive light about individuals and/or groups through books, the internet, work, personal conversations, personal experiences, etc.
4. Broaden your horizons and become more aware of culturally diverse populations. This does not mean that you have to learn everything about everybody. However, becoming more culturally aware can be accomplished by being open minded, by recognizing and respecting different viewpoints, by attending cultural events and by establishing personal contact with culturally diverse people.

References:

Thomas, A. & Grimes, J. (Eds.) (2002). *Best practices in school psychology IV*. Bethesda, MD: The National Association of School Psychologists.

U.S. Bureau of the Census (1996). *Warmer, older, more diverse: State-by-state Population changes to 2025* (PPL-47). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Commerce.