



Common questions your toddler may ask about race and difference and how to answer them

Between the ages of two and three, children begin to develop understanding of their own identity as good, bad, attractive, etc. They also develop an understanding of their feelings and the feelings of others. This awareness can bring up questions about people who appear similar to and different from them. Below are some ideas to help you answer these questions, so your child can better understand the world around them.

If your child asks, “What’s that?” or “Why does that lady have a thing on her head?” (Could be referring to a bindi worn by a woman from India, or a Hijab worn by a woman who is Muslim.)

You could say, “I noticed that, too. It’s part of her culture.” If you notice your child is staring and/or pointing, let him or her know that it is not polite to stare. Tell them that it is okay to ask questions.

If you are in a situation where the other person is not busy or does not seem like they are in a hurry, consider encouraging your child to ask the person about what they’ve noticed. You could start the conversation by saying to your child, “Let’s ask.” Then, to the other person, you could say, “Excuse me, my [son or daughter] has a question for you. Do you have a minute to talk?” If the person says yes, encourage your toddler to ask their question. They might be shy at first, so by talking to the person first and encouraging your toddler to ask their question, you will teach them that it is okay to talk to people who are different from them. Many people are happy to answer questions and prefer being asked, rather than hearing things spoken about them that may or may not be true.

If the person seems busy or you don’t have time to engage in a conversation, make a plan to look it up on the Internet or get a book about that culture when you go to the library. This will show your child that you take their questions seriously and that you will remember to answer them.

If your child asks (after learning about the race of a friend that is different from theirs): “Am I [Black, Chinese, Mexican]?” You could say: “No, you are [insert your child’s race here].” You could then talk to your child about the similarities between them and their friend.