



Our first-ever ParentNet meeting focused on cross cultural awareness was held in the Farmhouse on February 27, 2019. We had a great discussion on the following topics:

- ❖ Developing friendships across kids from different cultures
- ❖ Imbibing cultural values at home
- ❖ Celebrating diversity

Developing friendships across kids from different cultures

Situation: *We moved from China four years ago – while our daughter had a good social circle growing up, coming into high school here has socially been a challenge. There is a lot of school work, and she focuses all her attention on doing that work well but is not able to mingle as easily with her classmates. It's not as if she is not social at all – she does talk to her friends in China, and some Chinese friends here – but we want her to spend time with her wonderful American friends as well.*

Discussion:

Join common extra-curricular activities: One parent noted that mingling with others happens more easily during afterschool hours. It might be helpful to join your child in after-school clubs where there is more idle time (and greater opportunity to mingle) than during school time.

Find shared common interests with others: One of the most difficult parts to socializing is the initial ice-breaking. When kids share a common interest, that becomes easier – it could be the score of a game they like, the joy of ballet or critiquing some of the debate judges from a tournament. One parent noted that even when time was not available during a debate practice session to talk with other students, her son would talk on Skype after coming back to brainstorm to the debate topic. There almost always are interests that are shared – find them!

Invite other families to your home: One of the parents noted that an easy way to help is to invite another family home for a get together, or possibly go together on a joint activity – such as hiking. In general, when children see other family's coming home, they will also get the courage to take the initiative and approach others.

Prepare your child to talk about your culture: There are situations where it is helpful to prepare your child for awkward questions – kids unknowingly can step on other's sentiments when they comment on the type of food they eat, the clothes they wear, or the accent with which they speak. Preparing your child to gracefully answer questions (with one-liners) that come up will help both your child and their curious classmate understand and accept each other better. If you invite a family home, teach them something about your culture – for instance, ask your child to show how to eat with chop-sticks. In other words, help your child to learn and embrace their ethnic identity – this will convert cultural differences into a positive experience.

Encourage your child to show a desire to know others: Friendship and socializing is a two-way street. Encourage your child to have the courage to take the first step by being genuinely interested in others. Help them understand that they should seek out friends.



Imbibing cultural values at home

Situation: *As parents of third culture kids, how much can we realistically influence our kids to not forget their roots such as speaking our native language and appreciating our culture.*

Discussion:

Explicitly teach your native language(s): It can be difficult to expect your child learn how to read, write, and speak your native languages. Instead, consider setting time aside to teach your native language on a regular basis. One parent noted that they have a small window of 30 minutes where they only converse in their native language. Another parent noted that you should be careful in how hard you push based on your child's personality so that you maintain a healthy relationship balance.

Stay connected with your family and friends from your home country: It is helpful to visit your native country so that kids stay connected with your extended family and culture. Having regular video calls with relatives also helps retain the desire to speak their native language and love their culture.

Celebrating diversity

Situation: *How can we help kids embrace cultural differences.*

Discussion:

Model the right behaviors: Kids always observe and learn from their parents. It is critical for a parent to model the right behavior when it comes to interactions with other cultures. Make yourself aware (or ask questions) of sensitivities associated with another person's race and/or background. The more you value and respect diversity, the more your children will as well.

Celebrate food around the world: Food is a wonderful way to introduce your child to different cultures. Participate in international festivals and other community events to celebrate and experience other cultures.