April 2022

THE COUNSELORS' CONNECTION

The Newsletter of the
Elementary Counseling Department

TEACHING CHILDREN ABOUT DISABILITIES

What's in this month's issue:

A significant part of creating an inclusive school environment is teaching children to understand and accept differences, including disabilities. Disability education reduces bullying, encourages empathy, and is an important part of children's social development. But how can parents and educators best help children to understand disabilities?

Even young children notice physical differences, and being receptive to their observations and questions normalizes their experiences and provides an opportunity to talk about what is the same and different about people. Having early conversations about the disabilities that children observe sets the stage for later conversations about less "visible" developmental and learning disabilities.

Here are some tips for talking with kids about disabilities:

· **Learn about disabilities together.** Age-appropriate books and kid-friendly websites about disabilities can facilitate conversations and teach kids that it is OK to ask questions about disabilities.

· **Answer children's questions openly and honestly,** using matter-of-fact explanations and focusing not only on differences but also on similarities between people.

· **Explain** that some people are born with disabilities and others develop disabilities later in life, and that a physical disability does not mean that someone also has a cognitive disability.

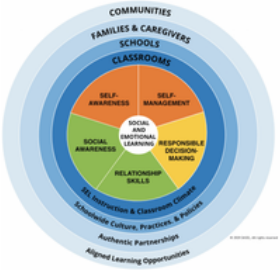
· **Avoid using the word "normal" to describe people without disabilities,** and teach kids correct terminology to describe a disability, using "person-first" language (see below).

· **Recognize that terminology about disabilities has changed over the years;** check out this chart, "Words Matter: A Guide to Disability Language Etiquette"

· **Teach kids to ask, "Is there anything I can do to help?" before assisting a person with a disability.** Likewise, tell kids not to approach or pet a service animal unless invited to do so.

· **Encourage children to develop friendships with peers who have disabilities,** and model how to treat every person with dignity.

SEL FEATURED TOPIC: FAIR ISN'T ALWAYS EQUAL



Children may have a difficult time discerning the difference between "fair" and "equal", but in fact the two terms have very different meanings. Equality means everyone is treated the same, while fairness means everyone is treated based on their needs.

The article "The Band-Aid Lesson: Explaining Fair Versus Equal" provides an analogy that may aid in explaining this concept to children. The analogy asks children to think about a doctor giving every patient who walked into their room a band-aid. While the band-aid may be helpful to some patients, it would not be necessary or helpful for everyone.

When children understand that fair does not mean equal, it can increase their capacity to empathize and be sensitive to the needs of others.

For more information on explaining fair versus equal to your child, please see the article link below.

The Band-Aid Lesson: Explaining Fair Versus Equal

TRY IT AT HOME! FIRST-PERSON LANGUAGE

Consider using words that focus on the person. For example, rather than saying:

The _____ child.
Consider saying:
The child with _____.

Similarly, rather than saying:

The child is a _____.
Consider saying:
The child has _____.

Choosing to communicate this way while writing and speaking indicate that we define an individual by being a person, rather than by having a trait.

It is always important to be mindful of how our words match our sentiments. It is crucial to listen to the way people describe themselves and take cues from their language. In addition, if someone finds your choice of words disrespectful, a sincere apology and asking how they prefer to be referenced is restorative.

Click here for more information on First Person Language.

SEL BOOKS OF THE MONTH

RESOURCE HIGHLIGHT OF THE MONTH: MEDICAL ACCESS

What is Medical Access?

In Pennsylvania, many children with disabilities are able to qualify for Medical Access. Medical Access (also known as Medicaid) has the broadest coverage of medical and mental/behavioral health services for kids under 18 of any insurance plan. MA can be a child's only insurance or it can be secondary to other coverage, covering those services or equipment not covered by the child's primary insurance. Medical access is a low- income health insurance program but, in Pennsylvania, parental income does not count for children with significant disabilities.

To qualify:

Child must be under the age of 18.
Child must meet the Social Security Disability Guidelines.
Resources (assets) of the child/parent are not counted.
Income of the child generally is counted.
Income of the parent and caregivers is not.

Click on this link to see if your child qualifies and apply online.

http://www.compass.state.pa.us/