

# learning links



Helping Kids Learn

[www.learninglinks.org.au](http://www.learninglinks.org.au)

Information Sheet 39

## When multiculturalism is simply not enough – how to encourage children to celebrate difference and learn tolerance

By Janine Zimbler (Family Therapist) and Janette Biffin (Early Childhood Educator)

**Reality television shows promising ‘make overs’ of our children’s behaviour have ‘out-ted’ the perennial subject of behaviour management from the private inner sanctum of the family. Videos of shows are passed around, swapped and traded and the merits or otherwise of the ‘naughty spot’ and other strategies ardently debated!**

As the reality of global world events unfolds before our eyes in the media, perhaps a new topic of immense significance to our time needs ‘out-ted’ and discussion – namely how to successfully ‘make over’ our relationships with others so that a world culture can be created where all people co-exist peacefully and harmoniously with others regardless of differences in race, religion, age, appearance, sexuality, development or ability.

As parents we are powerful role models for our children and have a crucial role to play in insulating our children from being brainwashed into believing destructive stereotypes and interacting with people accordingly.

The attitudes we project, how we act and what we say all have an enormous influence. How we cope with life and its challenges, how we relate to others in our world and how we overcome our weaknesses are amongst our children’s greatest lessons.

### Starting where the children are ...

At Learning Links children are given a powerful gift.

Throughout our organisation children from different cultural and religious groups are able to interact together, share learning and group programs. The richness of the exchange adds immeasurable value to the experience.

Our inclusive Preschool also allows children with and without additional needs to learn to play together and from one another.

Perhaps the greatest life skill all these children are being taught is how to give and receive acceptance.

### Some of the things parents can do to lead the way ...

1. Reflect on our own belief systems and understand why we believe the things we do.
2. Communicate positive messages about diversity.
3. Encourage discussion about our own differences and weaknesses and how we have gone about overcoming them.
4. Use everyday situations to encourage our children to help us solve problems. Explain that we all need help at different times for different reasons.

### How can we teach our children to be more tolerant?

When children are confronted by something that is unfamiliar or different, it is natural that they will respond with a multitude of feelings and emotions.

**Learning Links is a non-profit charity assisting children who have difficulty learning and their families.**

We raise funds to help children from birth to 18 years by offering a range of services including the following.

**Early Childhood Services** for children from birth to six years.

- Early childhood intervention and support for very young children.
- An inclusive preschool for children with and without special needs.
- An assessment and consultancy service for families who are concerned about their young child's development.
- Specialist early childhood teaching and therapy.

**School Age Services** for children from Kindergarten to Year 12 who have low support needs.

- Comprehensive assessments.
- Small group tuition and therapy.
- Occupational and speech therapy programs combining specialist education services and therapy.
- Outreach programs.
- The Ronald McDonald Learning Program for seriously ill children and the Reading for Life Program for children falling behind in their reading.

**Family Services** helping and supporting families and health professionals.

- Centre and home-based family counselling.
- Parenting Programs and groups for families.
- Case Management Services.

**Professional Development** for teachers and health professionals.

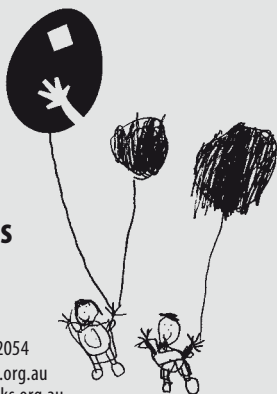
Presentations, workshops and advice on identifying and helping children with learning difficulties, learning disabilities and developmental delays.

**Learning Links has branches in six Sydney locations at Peakhurst, Penshurst, Fairfield, Miller, Dee Why and Randwick. We also offer some services to children in country NSW, the ACT, Victoria and New Zealand. A complete list of branch locations and contact numbers is on the back cover.**

## Learning Links

### Head Office

12-14 Pindari Road  
Peakhurst NSW 2210  
Tel: 9534 1710 Fax: 9584 2054  
Email: mail@learninglinks.org.au  
Website: www.learninglinks.org.au



Enquiries regarding this Information Sheet should be directed to Robyn Collins  
Tel: (02) 9534 1710 Fax: (02) 9584 2054 Email: rcollins@learninglinks.org.au

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In view of this, we want to expose children from an early age to difference in all its forms and in all areas of life. We want to convey the message that difference is merely a continuum along which all people are placed.

### Teaching difference in ways that children will understand

1. If you have a friend or a neighbour with a disability, explain the disability to the child and talk about it openly.
2. Point out familiar 'helpers' or 'aids' that are widely used such as glasses, asthma puffers and walking sticks to create understanding.
3. Read stories, watch movies and TV shows that include children from different cultures and/or with disabilities.
4. Provide toys that expose children to difference eg dolls from other cultures, Barbie in a wheelchair and puzzles (pictures displaying diversity).
5. Play 'alike and different' games such as Guess Who, make lists of likes and dislikes, paint and discuss different hair colours, skin tones, eye colours and shapes.
6. Link up with families from other cultures. Attend the cultural events of various communities. Take children on outings to areas such as Chinatown and enjoy sampling a range of cuisines such as Thai or Nepalese.
7. When visiting friends or relatives who have a family member with a disability, take your child along. Alternatively, invite them over or go on outings together. It is important to prepare for all visits by asking the guests about any special requirements they might have. Issues such as wheelchair access, toileting, feeding and behaviour management might need to be addressed. Choose activities that everyone can participate in and enjoy.
8. Explain the continuum of friendship. Help children understand the difference between 'having a best friend' and giving a warm, friendly greeting to someone. When children understand this concept they may be more willing to interact with a wider range of children.
9. Address injustices – when you hear children talk inappropriately about people with a disability or from another culture – deal with it on the spot. Question what the child means and says and reframe the comment and the child's understanding. For example if a child says that another child is stupid because he does not talk – respond by acknowledging that he does not talk yet, but emphasise that the child is learning to talk – focus on the child's strengths and talk about alternate ways of communicating that people have.
10. Develop empathy – create opportunities to talk about feelings with your child. Discuss things that can make your child angry, happy or sad; things that can hurt their feelings and things your child might say that can hurt the feelings of others.
11. Aim for your child to see children or adults different from themselves as people just like themselves – with or without similar likes to other people of their own age – who want to participate in as many of life's opportunities as possible and who have lots of abilities and skills.
12. Explain that people need the assistance of different kinds of 'helpers' eg glasses, asthma puffers etc to achieve a happy life. Invoke understanding of the person's needs rather than feelings of being sorry for the person with a disability.

### How can we help our children cope with intolerance?

It is important to help all children develop resilience to cope with worries, fears and hurts. There are a number of ways in which we can promote resilience and develop a child's self esteem.

1. Always be emotionally available for your child. Spend time together and enjoy special shared activities. Maintain a strong interest in your child's life. Children need to feel special, valued and safe at all times.
2. Acknowledge your child's successes and attempts. Find people or relatives significant to the child who will celebrate the child's successes at home or at school however small they are.

3. Share positive images (with friends and at school) of your child and of his/her life eg photos of a new puppy. Create a special photo album for your child to use.
4. Praise and encourage your child, especially when things go wrong. Praise attempts and efforts, not only successes. Send messages that it's O.K. to make mistakes.
5. If your child is finding it hard to shine at school – encourage your child to participate in extra curricular activities in which they can succeed and enjoy.
6. Compare your child's current performance with his/her own past performance rather than with that of others eg look what you did before, look what you can do now...or that's a skill you haven't learnt to do yet.
7. Encourage your child's participation in family, school and community events.
8. Especially encourage friendships as children who play alone are often targets.
9. Do whatever is necessary to facilitate your child's independence or success. For example, if your child has difficulty organising him/herself, arrange his clothes in order of dressing or make a visual timetable of the morning routine.
10. Help your child formulate an age appropriate story/response to use to explain his/her additional need. The story should be factual and not contain anything that your child could be teased about. For example, your child might say "the muscles down this side of my body are very tight, you know, just like when you run and don't warm up. But that's O.K., because I can use my other side to do everything".
11. Make sure that you provide opportunities for your child with a disability to succeed. For example, open-ended or no fail activities like water play, blocks, box construction or bubble blowing. This will increase your child's self esteem and allow your child to participate successfully and demonstrate competence.
12. Teach your child to be assertive. Learning to say clearly that he/she does not like being called a name is a good start.
13. Foster a proud sense of cultural and/or religious identity and connectedness in children. Encourage them to share and explain special significant celebrations at school or with friends.
14. Help children understand that there are laws in Australia that make it illegal to discriminate against people or groups based on culture, gender, age or religion. If necessary intervene on behalf of your child if discrimination or bullying occurs.
15. For children with additional needs, always focus on the strengths of your child and not on the disability. Focus on what your child can do, rather than on what they can't do. Encourage them to do the same, especially when amongst their friends.

## learning links

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**Early Childhood Services**  
– all enquiries to Head Office

**School Age Services**  
– contact your local branch

**Family Services**  
– contact your local branch

**All other enquiries**  
– Head Office

### Head Office

12-14 Pindari Road  
Peakhurst NSW 2210  
Telephone: (02) 9534 1710  
Preschool: (02) 9533 3283  
Facsimile: (02) 9584 2054  
Email: [mail@learninglinks.org.au](mailto:mail@learninglinks.org.au)

### Northern Suburbs Branch

2 Alfred Road  
PO Box 634  
Brookvale NSW 2100  
Telephone: (02) 9907 4222  
Facsimile: (02) 9907 4244  
Email: [nsb@learninglinks.org.au](mailto:nsb@learninglinks.org.au)

### Western Suburbs Branch

Unit 7/9 William Street  
PO Box 1026  
Fairfield NSW 1860 (2165)  
Telephone: (02) 9754 2377  
Facsimile: (02) 9755 9422  
Email: [wsb@learninglinks.org.au](mailto:wsb@learninglinks.org.au)

### Southern Suburbs Branch

10 Railway Parade  
Penshurst NSW 2222  
Telephone: (02) 9580 4888  
Facsimile: (02) 9580 4788  
Email: [ssb@learninglinks.org.au](mailto:ssb@learninglinks.org.au)

### South West Sydney Branch

88 Shropshire Street  
PO Box 42  
Miller NSW 2168  
Telephone: (02) 8783 7111  
Facsimile: (02) 8783 7222  
Email: [sws@learninglinks.org.au](mailto:sws@learninglinks.org.au)

### Eastern Suburbs Branch

1/20 Silver Street  
Randwick NSW 2032  
Telephone: (02) 9398 5188  
Facsimile: (02) 9326 5364  
Email: [esb@learninglinks.org.au](mailto:esb@learninglinks.org.au)