

HELP CHILDREN UNDERSTAND DIFFERENCES

All children want to feel accepted and respected. As children with learning and behavioral difficulties increasingly participate in afterschool programs, the need arises to help children understand individual differences.

Understanding and accepting differences is at the core of respect. In order to show respect to another person, we must acknowledge that person's point of view. This is particularly true during disagreements. Often, conflicts arise because children make unfair assumptions about others' perceptions and intentions.

Helping children behave in respectful ways is an ongoing goal in afterschool programs. We often have rules and behavioral norms that assist children in behaving respectfully. But unless children understand and accept individual differences, it is unlikely that they will behave in respectful ways on their own.

Afterschool staff members can help children build understanding of different points of view through literacy activities. For example, children may:

- **Read a book and talk about how each character sees the world.** Ask children questions that challenge them to see differences between the characters.
- **Write a story, poem, or news story that expresses different points of view.** Encourage children to think about how different people may see the same thing (e.g., situation, interaction, event) differently.
- **Enact a role play or story drama that features characters who must solve a problem or conflict by understanding different points of view.** Engage children

in talking about how different characters approached the issue differently.

- **Explore differences among each other in a group discussion.** Invite children to ask questions of each other, or prepare questions for response.

These types of activities can be integrated into regular activities, such as reading time, homework, or tutorial sessions. They also may be developed into stand-alone activities that can be implemented at any time.

A CASE EXAMPLE

See the world through the eyes of Tiki, a Yorkshire Terrier, and her best friend Tiger, a little Maltese, in ***Life Through Tiki's Eyes, with Comment by Tiger***. Tiki, affectionately known as the Grand Dame of Bennington Hollow, shares her wit and wisdom about her home, the world outside, and the universe. Her longtime companion, Tiger, lovingly peppers the text with commentary. The two friends provide a unique perspective on experiencing the joy in everyday life.

Beautifully illustrated with photographs and graphics, ***Life Through Tiki's Eyes***, is appropriate for children ages 10 and older. The one-page stories provide a format for engaging children in discussions and activities focused on understanding the perspective of others. Use the following activities, which focus on the theme of pets, to help children understand different perspectives. [Note: If a child does not have a pet, allow him or her to create an imaginary one. Have them name the pet

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and give it a history. Or, have ready photos of animals from magazines that children can choose from and pretend is their pet.]

See the World As Your Pet Does

Read one of Tiki's stories with Tiger's comments (e.g., Rain, Sun, On Leaf Patrol, Crumbs, First Snowfall, Moonbeams, About Manners). Have children describe their perceptions of the story's theme. Encourage them to imagine themselves in the situation (e.g., looking out over a new snow fall, sitting in the hot sun, being stepped over). Ask them if they see these things differently or similarly to Tiki and Tiger.

Next, ask them to imagine the scene from their own pet's perspective. What would their pet have to say? Invite children to imagine they are seeing the world from the eye level of their pet (e.g., if the pet is a fish and is looking out through a bowl of water, have the child look through a clear glass of water; if the pet is a seven-pound cat, have them get on the floor and look up). Use Tiger's commentary as a format for collecting the children's responses (i.e., "Tiger claims the snow is really millions of frozen kisses that form a love quilt over the yard. His objective: To get completely snow-covered.").

Describe Differences and Similarities

Begin the activity by having children generate descriptors for their pet. To help focus the task for children with learning difficulties, have them suggest a descriptor word that starts



Books like *Life Through Tiki's Eyes*, can help children understand and respect differences.

with each letter in the pet's name. [See sidebar for Tiki.] Have children share their descriptors with the group. Invite the other children to guess what kind of pet is being described.

As a variation, have children compare their pets with Tiger and Tiki, as well as with the pets of their peers. How are they like Tiki and Tiger? What is unique about them? What peer has a pet that is most like theirs?

Pet Characterization

Tiki sees herself as the Grand Dame of Bennington Hollow. She is twelve years old and lives in suburbia. She has cataracts which cloud her vision, but that doesn't stop her from seeing the world her way, full of beauty and wonder.

Ask the children:

- How does your pet see the world?
- Does your pet have any special physical characteristics that affect how it moves, sees, or hears?
- What does your pet see all day? Are the things your pet sees different or similar to what Tiki and Tiger see?

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Life Through Tiki's Eyes, with **Comment by Tiger** sells for **\$14.95** and is available on **Amazon.com**, at **Barnes and Noble** (or its web site), **Borders.com**, or direct from the publisher, **Exceptional Innovations** (www.eximm.net) at **P.O. Box 3853, Reston, VA 20195, 703-709-0136**. As a special service to after-school programs, the publisher will make a limited number of classroom sets of the book available (**\$2.50 per book plus postage**). After-school programs are encouraged to contact the publisher for information on this special offer.



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- How would you characterize your pet (e.g., serious like Tiki, playful like Tiger)?
- If your pet is older like Tiki and Tiger, how was he or she different as a puppy or kitten? If your pet is a puppy or kitten, how will he or she be different as an adult?

To help children with learning difficulties process the discussion, use a web graphic organizer to provide a visualization of their thoughts. Write the pet's name in the center of the web and write descriptors on the spokes emanating out from the center.

As a variation, ask children imaginative questions about their pet, such as:

- Remember the "101 Dalmatians"? If your pet was in a group of 101 other pets just like him or her, could you pick your pet out? What special trait would distinguish your pet?
- If your pet had a profession, what would it be?
- If your pet was a character in a nursery rhyme or fairy tale, what would it be?

Imagine Your Pet As...

Often we assume that animals (and people) are limited in what they think and do. Tiki asks us to consider whether dogs have a secret life—do you really know what your dog is thinking when it stares at the wall or looks out the window?

Prompt children with these statements:

- All my pet does all day long is _____. If I was my pet I would _____.
- If I could change one thing about my pet I would _____. If my pet could change one thing about me, it would be _____.

As a variation, select another book. Have

Description of Tiki

Ten pounds

Intelligent

Kisses my hand when she is
happy

Interested in exploring the
world

children substitute their pet for the main character. Discuss how the story might change. Would their pet do things and say things differently?

What Would Your Pet Say?

Tiki and Tiger encourage people and their pets to write to them at tiger&tiki@exinn.net. After reading the stories, have the children write to them, or have their pet write to them.

As a variation, have children team up with a peer and exchange letters to each others' pets.

WRAP UP

In all cases, it is important to point out to children how differences enhance our world. Everyone has unique talents and abilities that can be shared. The key is to seek understanding and discover any false assumptions we may have about others so that we can correct them. [Copyright 2001, Exceptional Innovations] ■

