

We are all different from one another. Everyone you know and everyone you will ever meet is unique and different in some way. The world would be a boring place if people were all the same. Often, the hard part is accepting others because they are different and *knowing how they might want to be treated*. At St Stephen Catholic School, we strive to achieve understanding and inclusion.

When you have a child with specific differences, you often worry. You worry, *will my child make the sports team? Will my child be invited to the birthday party?* Learning and social learning can take a bit longer for these children. Often, the hard part is accepting others because they are different and knowing how they might want to be treated. This Month I would like to bring focus on our ESE students and how they enrich our lives. I encourage all our parents to talk to their children about accepting others, understanding, and how we can all be included.

Some common questions students may have about ESE students are:

- ***How did that person get that way?***
- ***Can I catch what he or she has?***
- ***Why doesn't that person's body work right?***
- ***Why does that person look funny?***
- ***Why does that person act funny?***
- ***Why doesn't that person talk?***
- ***Why does that person cry and scream so much?***
- ***How come he or she must miss so much school?***

I cannot tell you how to answer these questions, but I can give you some guidelines.

- ***Be sure you understand the question***
- ***Always correct misinformation or incorrect assumptions***
- ***Do not ignore children's fears; address them.***
- ***Respond immediately to a question, fear, or inaccurate information***
- ***Examine your own behavior and language.***

Using role-play or social stories can help you with these situations. This is an example of a social story that can help you.

Situation:

A mother and her daughters are having fun at a neighborhood picnic. The girls see a little boy just sitting there. The boy looks withdrawn and is not speaking. The girls begin to giggle.

Response:

Ask the girls why they are giggling. Explain to them there might be several reasons why the boy is not speaking. Maybe he cannot; perhaps he cannot speak very well and is shy about this; maybe the boy has trouble understanding words, or perhaps he is just shy around girls. Help the girls understand how the boy might be feeling because they laughed at him. Ask the girls to think about a way to be thoughtful and supportive of the boy.

Keep in mind these special conversations and moments are called teachable moments. Teachable moments are unplanned, spontaneous events for parents and teachers to anticipate with zest. These moments are powerful teaching tools. Enjoy, value, and savor each one. I encourage you all to have those teachable moments with your children this month. If you have any questions, please feel free to reach out to me at jstencil@sscsfl.org.