Helping Your Child Understand and Celebrate Differences
Preschool children, with their growing awareness of physical differences, often question or comment about skin, hair texture, body size, eye shape etc. Adults who do not fully understand this stage of child development can find these questions or comments inappropriate, racist, or at the least uncomfortable.
First, know that questions and comments about outward appearances are usual for this age. They reflect the beginnings of a developing identity. The concept of race constancy, that one’s racial group membership is fixed and will not change, is evident here.
What preschool children are working through in this aspect of development is twofold. One, they are trying to figure out if their skin, hair texture, body size, eye shape, etc. will remain permanent. They actually do not know if their physical attributes are going to change to look like someone else. Two, they are trying to reason the ‘why’ these differences exist.
Adults can help children through this developmental process most easily by talking about differences in skin, hair texture, body size, eye shape etc. and by giving facts. Adults can affirm that most of their physical attributes will stay as they are now and give factual reasons for differences.
For example, a discussion about the differences in skin tones could be: “I am glad you asked why Carol’s skin is such a beautiful dark color. While there are many different colors of skin, all of us have the same chemical, melanin, in our skin. Everybody. Some people have more melanin than others, and the more melanin a person has, the darker their skin. “
While children will often bring these questions up themselves, it can be helpful for adults to initiate conversations and offer factual information. While the facts may appear a bit intellectual for children, they appreciate and recognize truthful answers.
Most importantly, remember these sometimes uncomfortable questions and comments are not coming from a ‘racist’ place. Remain calm, and offer answers so that children can process the reasons for these differences, while affirming the differences as okay.
It is also important to offer support to children who may be considered, by other children, as different because of their skin color, hair texture, body size, eye shape etc. It is best to prepare a child with dialogue, a way to answer comments or questions regarding their physical attributes. For example, an answer for a child being asked about their (small) size might be, “I am just the right size for me” or “I may be small, but I have a really big brain.”
This developmental milestone is an opportunity for adults to talk with children about the differences that exist among people and how those differences are good. Adults can use this opportunity to help children understand their particular physical attributes, as well as the physical attributes of other people. They can help children feel positive about themselves and others.

References for link:
Book, “Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together In the Cafeteria: A Psychologist Explains the Development of Racial Identity”, by Beverly Daniel Tatum, PhD