

ABILITY AWARENESS

What is the importance of promoting disability awareness and acceptance in schools?

Studies have found that many children with visible physical differences experience a cycle of negative peer interactions, which increases their risk for social discomfort, rejection, and potential adjustment problems throughout their lifespan (Harper & Peterson, 2001).

These negative social experiences, along with any physical or cognitive barrier, might exclude these children from fully participating in their educational environment. Any student who actively participates in their school is more likely to experience positive, successful social interactions with students, teachers, and others (Simeonsson, et al., 2001).

If we can teach children about disabilities at a young age, the hope is that they will be accepting of people who are different and encourage the participation of children with disabilities in an educational and social environment.

What are some general concepts to teach at each age?

- 3-5 Year Olds-Teach that while everybody is different, everyone has similarities too. We all have special things about us.
- 5-7 Year Olds-Help to make them aware of more specific issues and promote sensitivity to all people's differences. Teach them to think how they can help children with disabilities participate.
- 8-10 Year Olds-Teach them respect for people with disabilities.
- 10-13 Year Olds-Teach them how to be a good friend to people with disabilities.

*It is important to remember that these are general concepts and are not strict guidelines as to what should be taught at each age. Several of these concepts overlap and could be taught to children of various ages. These are just some basic ideas to get you started depending on what age level you work most closely with.



Down Syndrome Connection of the Bay Area
Encouraging the unlimited potential in children and young adults with Down syndrome