

It's Time to Talk About Hate: A Family Centered Initiative

Dear Milton Community:

First and foremost, thank you for participating in “It’s Time to Talk About Hate”, a family-centered initiative for all who live in Milton. While it is true this project is in response to unacceptable incidents in our community and others, it nonetheless reflects a goal that merits diligent and ongoing effort – a goal that is both lofty and necessary:

To raise children who have integrated the values of respect, acceptance and civility into the core of their very being.

Tolerance is not enough. Unfortunately, there is no onetime magic pill to make this happen. For these values to be maintained and strengthened in our community they must be affirmed and reaffirmed on multiple fronts, where each person takes it upon him/herself to be both messenger and role model. Even more, these ideals are not limited to any particular time or place. **Raising children to be decent human beings isn’t easy.** Yes, “it takes a village” and enough people in this little village of ours have come to the realization that now is the right time for parents and guardians to make a special effort to engage their children in a serious and thoughtful conversation about embracing diversity. We hope you find this Conversation Resource Sheet helpful. Thank you again for your participation. It is an investment we are making in ourselves and in one another.

Thank you also to all the groups and organizations in Milton whose support made this initiative possible.

Sincerely,

Milton Interfaith Clergy Association, Rev. Hall Kirkham, Chair.

Parent Conversation Guide: Ages 6-12

*Each age-appropriate Conversation Guide includes statements from experts in the field, tips for discussing these ideas and suggested conversation starters/questions to help facilitate the conversation with your child. These ideas are taken directly from *Beyond the Golden Rule: A Parents’ Guide to Preventing and Responding to Prejudice* (<http://www.tolerance.org/publication/beyond-golden-rule>) written by Dana Williams and published by Teaching Tolerance (<http://www.teachingtolerance.org>).*

Recommendation for Getting Started:

- *Read through this Conversation Guide and decide how to adjust it to best work for you and your child.*
- *Set aside a quiet time and place to engage your child using the conversation starters below. We would like everyone to make this happen by the end of May.*
- *Once you have done this, we encourage you to add your name to a public listing of all those who have participated in this initiative and “had the conversation”. To add your name, please follow this link: <http://bit.ly/2qKl5jX>.*

Voices from the Field:

- ❖ *“Children are very aware of belonging or not belonging to the group at this age. Peer relationships are paramount to them, and you’ll either see embracing of difference or separation and discrimination coming in at this point, depending on what they’ve been taught in the home. These are the years when you’ll either see the fruits of your labor or the negative aspects of what you did or did not do during the preschool years...Parents are the first and most important and influential teacher at this age. What you allow them to read, watch, see and hear lays their foundation with all sorts of information that will help form their responses to difference. If they attend a school that lacks diversity, if they watch TV shows that paint stereotypical pictures of certain groups, if they visit websites that use slurs and putdowns to describe people — all of these influences inform children’s responses to other people.” **Dr. Roni Leiderman** (associate dean of the Mailman Segal Institute for Early Childhood Studies at Nova Southeastern University)*
- ❖ *“Few are guilty, but all are responsible.” Abraham Joshua Heschel*

Parent Self-Reflection:

Is your family and/or your child related to, friends with or friendly toward anyone who is of a different: race, color, ethnic group, religion (creed), gender expression or identity, national origin (ancestry), physical ability, sexual orientation, family structure?

If Yes – What are your similarities and differences? What do you like about this person?

If No – It is human nature to feel comfortable with people who are “like us” and to feel unease or discomfort with people who are different from us – see list above – and yet we are all equally human beings. Have you or your child ever heard someone tease or say mean things about or to someone else because of the way they look, dress, cut their hair, talk, etc? Has your child ever been teased? If so, what was s/he teased about and how did it make him/her feel? How was the incident resolved? What do you as a parent think is the best way to resolve these kinds of behaviors among children this age?

Conversation Starters/Activities:

- ❖ *Ask your child what his/her favorite family tradition is. Share with him/her what your favorite one is. Ask your child if he/she knows any of the traditions in which friends engage. Share with him/her some of the traditions of your friends that might be different from your own family.*
- ❖ *For lower elementary: Ask your child to draw a picture of his/her friends. Ask your child to describe each child. How are they like your child? How are they different? Ask your child what makes each friend special. Ask your child what makes him/her special.*
- ❖ *For upper elementary/early middle school: Ask your child who he/she plays with at recess or sits with at lunch. Ask your child to describe each child. How are they like your child? How are they different? How are his/her friends special? Ask your child what makes him/her special.*
- ❖ *Ask your child if he/she has ever seen someone be unkind/mean to someone else who is different (i.e. based on race, ethnicity, religion, how the person talks, what the person wears, etc.). If yes, ask him/her to describe the situation and how he/she responded. Ask if he/she would do anything differently. If no, ask how he/she would respond if he/she saw someone being unkind/mean based on differences (i.e. based on race, ethnicity, religion, how the person talks, what the person wears, etc.).*

Tips for Parents for the Elementary and Preteen Years:

- ❖ **Model It.** Talking to your child about the importance of embracing difference and treating others with respect is essential, but it’s not enough. Your actions, both subtle and overt, are what she will emulate.
- ❖ **Acknowledge Difference.** Rather than teaching children that we are all the same, acknowledge the many ways people are different, and emphasize some of the positive aspects of our differences — language diversity and various music and cooking styles, for example. Likewise, be honest about instances, historical and current, when people have been mistreated because of their differences. Encourage your child to talk about what makes him different. After that, finding similarities becomes even more powerful, creating a sense of common ground.
- ❖ **Challenge Intolerance.** If your child says or does something indicating bias or prejudice, don’t meet the action with silence. Silence indicates acceptance, and a simple command — “Don’t say that” — is not enough. First try to find the root of the action or comment: “What made you say that about Sam?” Then, explain why the action or comment was unacceptable.
- ❖ **Seize Teachable Moments.** Look for everyday activities that can serve as springboards for discussion. School-age children respond better to lessons that involve real-life examples than to artificial or staged discussions about issues. For example, if you’re watching TV together, talk about why certain groups often are portrayed in stereotypical roles.
- ❖ **Emphasize the Positive.** Just as you should challenge your child’s actions if they indicate bias or prejudice, it’s important to praise him for behavior that shows respect and empathy for others. Catch your child treating people kindly, let her know you noticed, and discuss why it’s a desirable behavior.