

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 13-17

*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/2qK15jX>.*

Voices from the Field:

- ❖ *“The issue of identity comes up a lot during this period. (Teens) tend to be trying to find their way and develop their own personal identities, which sometimes can be threatened by any sense of difference. The teen peer culture contributes to finding ways of putting people down because of difference; and by this period, teens have either learned from home or from our society to put people down because of difference, or embrace it.” Dr. Marvin Megibow (clinical psychologist and professor (emeritus) of psychology at California State University)*
- ❖ *“Few are guilty, but all are responsible.” Abraham Joshua Heschel*

Parent Self-Reflection:

- Is your family and/or your child 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** – How did your family and/or your child get to know this person? What are the human qualities this person has that you appreciate or admire? Have you ever heard hurtful, stereotypical things said about or to this person? If so, what did you do or not do in response?
 - 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 ever heard hurtful, stereotypical things said by others about you or your family? About those on the list above? If so, what did you do or not do in response?

Conversation Starters:

- ❖ *When witnessing words or acts of prejudice, what do you think are the most effective ways you and others can stop the person from behaving that way? Who are those most responsible to respond? Who do you think would have the most positive impact on this person?*
- ❖ *Responding to words or acts of prejudice is hard especially if done by a friend or a person who says they were “just kidding”. Have you or anyone in your family ever stood up against or spoken out about something you felt was just wrong? Explain what motivated taking that stand? What were the values and beliefs behind that response?*
- ❖ *Overall, do you think your family, friends, neighborhood and the Milton community are welcoming and accepting of all people? If yes, what do you think made that the case? If not, what are 2 practical steps you individually and the community at large can do to make it so?*

Tips for Parents for the Teen Years:

- ❖ **Initiate Conversation.** Many believe the last thing teens are interested in is having a conversation with parents. But even if your teen doesn't initiate conversations about issues of difference, find ways to bring those topics up with them. Use current issues that matter to you as a springboard for discussion. Ask your teen what he/she thinks and be ready for and open to any answer. Be clear about where you stand and why.
- ❖ **Stay Aware of Who Your Child is Becoming.** Messages about differences exist all around your teen: the Internet, songs, music videos, reality shows, ads and commercials, social cliques at school. Know the websites your teen visits; take time to listen to or watch the music and shows they enjoy. Then discuss the messages they send. Ask your teen about the group or groups s/he most identifies with. Discuss the labels or stereotypes that are associated with such groups.
- ❖ **Walk the Walk.** Discussing the importance of valuing difference is essential, but modeling respect, acceptance and civility is even more vital. Evaluate your own circle of friends or the beliefs you hold about certain groups of people. Do your actions match the values you discuss with your teen? Teens are more likely to be influenced by what you do than what you say, so it's important for your words and behaviors to be congruent.
- ❖ **Broaden Your Child's World.** It may be natural for teens to stick to groups they feel most comfortable with during the school day. These often are the people they identify as being most like themselves. Provide other opportunities for your teen to interact with peers from different backgrounds. Suggest volunteer, extracurricular, worship and work opportunities that will broaden your teen's social circle.
- ❖ **Encourage and Model Activism.** Talk about the community issues that concern you, what you are doing about it or even what is holding you back from acting. When young people see that raising one's voice matters, they feel empowered to help resolve the issues they care about.