

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 2-5

*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:

- ❖ *“We know children begin to notice racial and ethnic differences in particular between the ages of 3 and 5. This brings about a naive curiosity that isn’t yet linked to any positive or negative qualities about different groups of people. What happens after that is that positive and negative qualities do come into the picture, conveyed to children through their parents, significant others and the mass media.” **Dr. Derald Wing Sue** (professor of psychology and education at Teachers College, Columbia 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:

❖ *Materials needed: 4 pieces of paper; crayons, markers, colored pencils. Directions: You and your child should each draw a picture **using only one color**. Next, you should each draw the same picture on a new sheet of paper using all of the colors available. Now, brainstorm 3 words with your child that would describe each picture. Questions to discuss with your child: How does each picture make you feel? How did it feel to draw with just one color? How did it feel to draw with all the colors? What would it be like if everyone was exactly the same?*

❖ *Have a scavenger hunt, or brainstorm a list, to see how much diversity of different things you have in your home. Look in the food cabinets, refrigerator/freezer, clothes, jewelry, books, games, toys, dolls, pictures on the wall, etc. Questions to discuss with your child: What it would be like if we only had one choice of each? How does having different things feel? How are people different? Why is it good that people are different in many ways?*

❖ *Ask each person in your family to describe how they are different and what makes them special. Share those answers with your child. Ask your child what makes her/him different and special. Possible extension: Ask each member of the family to describe how each member is different and special. Find a photo of each member and add the words or phrases that describe how they are different and special to the photos. Discuss these photos/words with your family.*

Tips for Parents for the Preschool Years:

- ❖ **Be Honest.** Don't encourage children not to “see” color or tell children we are all the same. Rather, discuss differences openly and highlight diversity by choosing picture books, toys, games and videos that feature diverse characters in positive, non-stereotypical roles.
- ❖ **Embrace Curiosity.** Be careful not to ignore or discourage your youngster's questions about differences among people, even if the questions make you uncomfortable. Not being open to such questions sends the message that difference is negative.
- ❖ **Broaden Choices.** Be careful not to promote stereotypical gender roles, suggesting that there are certain games, sports or activities that only girls can do or only boys can do.
- ❖ **Foster Pride.** Talk to your child about your family heritage to encourage self-knowledge and a positive self-concept.
- ❖ **Lead by Example.** Widen your circle of friends and acquaintances to include people from different backgrounds, cultures and experiences.

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Sincerely,

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Parent Conversation Guide: Ages 6-12

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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.

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Parent Conversation Guide: Ages 13-17

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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.