

## What does the research tell us?

At Early Years, our approach to Good Relations is informed by research from Queen's University, Belfast. Too Young to Notice? (Connolly et al 2002) showed that from as early as three years old, children begin to be affected by the divisions that exist in Northern Ireland and start to internalise the cultural preferences and attitudes of their own communities. By the age of six, one third of children who took part in this research were making sectarian remarks. This research also emphasises that family involvement is crucial to the success of young children's learning. It acknowledges that parents are the first educators of their children and that it is parent's values that children will imitate in their first years, meaning it is likely they will acquire similar values and attitudes, as they grow older

In 2004 the Media Initiative for Children Respecting Difference Programme was piloted in ten playgroups across Northern Ireland. Over a three-week period five of the groups implemented the programme while the other five acted as control groups. In just three weeks measurable effects of the pilot programme were found in terms of increases in young children's ability to recognise instances of exclusion without prompting, their ability to understand how being excluded makes someone feel and their willingness to play with others including those who are different to themselves.

Early Years then carried out the largest ever RCT of its type in 2008 involving 1,181 children, 868 parents and 232 practitioners to test the results of the pilot.

Early Years continues to work together with parents so we can help you support your children to grow in confidence and show respect and acceptance for others.



**early years**  
the organisation for young children  
media initiative for children

For more information or to get involved in the programme contact  
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# Good Relations & *Your Child*

## What is RRDP?

RRDP is a programme that offers children, parents and practitioners the opportunities to discuss and acknowledge similarities and differences between themselves. The key objective is to change attitudes through the implementation of a programme which has a proven, evidence based track record. The project is supported by the EU's PEACE IV Programme, managed by the Special EU Programmes Body.

## If we don't acknowledge difference, we fail to prepare our children to live in a diverse society.

Children will notice difference regardless of whether you explore and teach your child about diversity or not. You can make sure that what they are learning about difference is accurate and positive. Exploring difference will not make your child prejudiced against others.

## Start with what you know.

Explore with your child what makes them unique. By celebrating your child's unique qualities, you are indirectly teaching them about how other people are unique and special too. From this, your child will learn to look for and appreciate the unique qualities of others. Likewise, talk to your child about the diversity and 'uniqueness' they encounter within your family or community and model a positive attitude and vocabulary about difference.

## Actively look for subtle openings that create opportunities to talk about diversity.

Media is a powerful tool; maybe your child's favourite TV programmes or books have a message about difference and respect? Advertisements also often feature short but powerful messages about difference. We are fortunate to have many local festivals and events that celebrate diversity. Why not go along as a family?

## Why is Good Relations so important?

Every parent wishes for their child to grow up in a fair and equal society. As our country becomes more diverse, one of the most important lessons we can share with our children is about understanding and accepting the difference and treating others with respect.

However, many parents simply don't know how to start conversations about difference or worry about saying the wrong thing. Here are some pointers that you may find useful in addressing diversity and helping your child to understand difference.

## Answer your child's questions with honesty.

Children are naturally curious; it won't occur to your child to not ask questions about difference in public. It can be embarrassing to be asked "Why does that woman only have one leg?", "Why does my friend have two mums?", or "Why is that boy's skin different to mine?" when the person is within hearing distance.

Answering these questions, especially in public, can be tough, but it's important to answer questions honestly and age appropriately. Many people who are visibly diverse will welcome the opportunity to answer your children's questions, or will appreciate that you ask rather than ignore.

Often, fear of using outdated or politically incorrect terminology stops parents from having discussions about difference with their children. However, by avoiding questions around diversity, children may develop the attitude or opinion it isn't important or is something to be feared. By avoiding the issue there is the potential risk that children fill the gaps in their understanding with negative language and behaviours learned from others and through the media. Don't let your own fear stop you from talking openly with your child.