

3 – 6 years. Supporting a child with a disfigurement: a teacher's guide

## Guide 4. Working inclusively with groups

### 1 WORKING WITH DIFFERENCE

Young children are so interested in the world about them that there is a good case for including group activities about appearance and difference. For example, the topic 'Ourselves' is taught through wide-ranging activities across many different subject areas. To make the activities as inclusive as possible here are some useful pointers:

- Children are all different. A child who looks unusual is not a 'different' sort of child in a class group where all the other children are the same. Every child needs to be able to feel different and special and that there are things they share in common with other children. "Leonie has her hair in plaits and Fatima has a pony tail. They both like to have shiny bobbles in their hair."
- Learning activities can address issues of disfigurement in amongst all the other small and big differences that make each child an individual.
- It is important that a learning activity is not led by disfigurement. This would tend to construct disfigurement as a problem rather than as a part of the ordinary variety that can be recognised among all people.
- Even very young children can be challenged in their assumptions about others – "What makes you think that big scaly dragon is wicked?"
- The whole person includes inner qualities as well as outward appearance and self-presentation – "Amit has bright eyes and a big smile. He can run fast and he is very good at counting."
- Be matter of fact about unusual features – "The mark across Gemma's forehead is there because she had an accident. She is OK now but has a scar." Small children often have scratches and bruises from knocks and scrapes as they run about, and are usually more than happy to show these to the group!
- Introduce appropriate vocabulary – "Adam's face is smooth in some places and bumpy in some places, which is unusual. It is called a birthmark."

### Learning activities 1 – Who's who?

#### Aims of activity

- to practise looking and listening carefully
- to extend vocabulary through neutral straightforward ways of talking about appearance including unusual features, and other qualities too.

#### Equipment and preparation

1. You need enough toy animals for each child in the group to have one – preferably toys which are all different from each other and some which have been damaged and repaired. You may find it helpful beforehand to make a list of the toys for

- yourself, noting down each toy's distinguishing features using suitably neutral descriptive vocabulary.
2. A picture/story book featuring several children at least one of whom looks unusual in some way. A good example is *Showtime* by Alex Clarke, which is published by *Changing Faces*. Again, you may find it useful beforehand to prepare for yourself a list of all the children in the book, with brief straightforward descriptions of both what they look like and an aspect of their character or behaviour.

### Activity

1. Give each child one of the toys to hold. Make sure everyone can see all the toys.
2. Ask the children questions about the toys (refer to your list of descriptions if you prepared this beforehand).

“Who has a small bear with a black nose?”

“Who has a medium-sized dinosaur with a mend on its tail?”

“Who has a dog with one glass eye and one button eye?”

“Who has a bear which has lost an ear?”

3. Read the story with your group, taking plenty of time to look at the pictures and learn who the people are in the story.
4. Then go through the story a second time, using the pictures to help your group make observations and answer questions about the characters in the story. *Showtime*, for example, is a story about Jake, Paul, Sally and Emma who are all in Mrs Watson's class.

What does Jake look like? What sort of boy is Jake – what does he do in the story?

What did Sally show? What would you ask her about the ring?

What does Emma look like? What does she tell us about herself?

What about Paul? What do we know now about Paul?

Who is telling the story?

It is very important that you have previously considered the reactions of any child who has an unusual or noticeable appearance and that you have already discussed with his parents issues such as what form of words they use to describe the scars and what account of the incident they are willing to share.

## Learning activities 2 – Outside and inside

### Aims of activity

- to help children to recognise and describe their own and each other's outward appearance and inner qualities
- to appreciate the range of different qualities that make us all who we are.

### Equipment and preparation

Each child will need a set of joined cut-out 'paper dolls'. These are not very easy to make so you might like to make some rows of 'paper people' beforehand. However, if sufficient time and assistance are available, it can be very rewarding for the children to make their own. In this case you will need long strips of paper, pencils and scissors. You will also

need coloured pens and crayons of a sufficient range to match the colours of everyone's skin, eyes and hair tones as well as clothes etc.

### Activity

1. Either make or distribute the paper cut-out 'dolls'.
2. Ask the children to describe their own hair, its colour and style, the colour of their eyes and of their skin.
3. With the paper dolls folded up, the children then draw and colour in the front and back silhouettes to represent themselves, adding appropriate clothes colours too.
4. Now get the children to open out their paper dolls and ask them, for instance, what is their favourite food.
5. Now they need to select one of their so far blank dolls and use this space to draw a picture of their favourite food.
6. Repeat steps 4 and 5 for various aspects or character, preference and experience. Useful personal features could include - how old are you? What is your favourite colour? How many brothers and sisters have you? Can you think of something that makes you different from everyone else? What pets do you have? Can you think of something that you share in common with everyone else (eg you all come to the same playgroup, nursery or school).



This work will help encourage awareness that we all are made up of both what we look like, and what we are like when you get to know us.