

TEACHING KIDS TO ACCEPT OTHERS' OPINIONS

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We live in a complex world where hundreds of cultures and billions of individuals have to interpret the reality around them in order to function within it. While there are laws that must be obeyed, there are also standards, principles and mores that are intrinsic to particular groups and are open to personal choice. The principles or values we choose to adopt dictate the way we live our lives and respond in particular circumstances. Where there is personal choice, there is always personal opinion. Any hot topic e.g. politics, sex and religion, will encourage a rash of opinions that keep many a talk back radio or TV program in business.

It is imperative that we develop strong personal and family values because they provide clear guidelines to lead a successful life. It is equally important that our children understand the reason for our values and abide by them. If we don't instill our values in our kids, they will have no inner resources to make wise decisions, and will gravitate toward the most appealing suggestion coming from someone else in any given situation. Oft times this is hazardous to their health!

Our kids need to have their own opinions because theirs matter and should be valued. How do we teach our kids to develop opinions? The most effective way is to encourage conversation. Discuss stuff. Talk with them about what is happening around them and what is happening in the world. Look at the positive and negative aspects of issues and apply your family values to them. Suggest the wisest choices and possible outcomes given particular circumstances. Provide opportunities for your children to express themselves without being interrupted. Interruption devalues their contribution.

Teach your kids that opinions are just that. What someone else thinks has just as much value as what I think. There are some subjects that we feel very strongly about and 'know that we are right'. Pushing those beliefs down someone else's throat is not the way to change their way of thinking. We need to teach our kids to be gracious and accepting of others' opinions. There are times to express our beliefs and there are times we should wait till the other person is receptive.

We were having a conversation recently with a friend who made some extremely offensive remarks about God. It would have been easy to object and demand an apology. However, we knew that this friend had no idea of just how hurtful his comments were about our precious Lord because he did not have the same belief system as we do. We chose to say nothing at that time. However, the opportunity came up later where I was able to quietly explain to him the way

he could have a personal relationship with God. Had we reacted negatively to his insensitive comments, he may not have accepted our later opportunity. It is good to talk to our kids about the wisest way to share our opinions and beliefs. They won't know unless we tell them.

We also need to tell our children that it is OK to change their opinions, but that whatever they feel strongly about should still be based on their core values, thus ensuring a strong foundation to their beliefs and decisions in life.

If you have any comments or questions on this subject, please do not hesitate to contact us at sally@forefrontfamilies.org. We invite you to also check out our website at www.forefrontfamilies.org and our blog site at www.forefrontfamilies.blogspot.com for further assistance.