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Top 5 Tips for Lacrosse Parents to Talk Diversity and Inclusion with Their Kids

Have you ever had an uncomfortable moment where your child loudly said, “Mom, why does that person look like that?” Or they might have asked, “Dad, why does my coach talk so funny?” The typical (and natural) reaction for a parent is to quietly whisk the child away from the embarrassing situation and move on as quickly as possible.

Despite the often awkward scenario, it’s natural for a child to become increasingly aware of the difference in the way people look, speak and behave. As parents, we are uniquely positioned to guide our own values and transmit them to our children and their teammates.

Explaining diversity in a way that is understandable to children at any age can be a challenging process, but by helping your child understand and respect similarities and differences you will also help your child develop a meaningful perspective about diversity and inclusion.





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Five Tips —

1. Keep Competition in Perspective – Education is Key

The lacrosse field is the ultimate classroom and it is an extremely effective tool we have to help children develop positive principles and behaviors. These are the same characteristics we want our children to develop and carry with them the rest of their lives. No other platform organically infuses as many quality values into a daily structure quite like sports. That concept can be easily compromised if we allow lacrosse to just become about competition. Instead we must view competition, both on and off the field, as an opportunity for kids to learn from not only their successes and failures, but to learn from the people around them.

2. Lead by Example

Children listen to what we say as well as watch what we do, which unfortunately means the saying “Do what I say, but not as I do” doesn’t often work. So every time you yell at an official or talk negatively about a coach or teammate in front of your child, they soak in every word and eventually they will be swayed by your actions. As a parent, it’s important to note that the attitude of your kids is dependent on the examples they see you setting on and off the field. You have to set the pace. If you desire to have your children demonstrate inclusion and open mindedness, then they need to see it authentically lived out in your life as well. Openly talking with other parents and players about each other’s differences can foster new perspectives for your child and it can expand their understanding of other groups, cultures and communities. If we are to teach our children to make decisions that are not based on stereotypes, then we must be willing to do the same.

3. Acknowledge Teachable Moments

We can’t control the messages that our kids get from TV or from their friends, but we can reinforce the importance of respect and embracing everyone with a positive attitude. When children ask about a teammate or coach’s differences, start by listening to the question and the language that they use. If they use insensitive or stereotypical language when they ask a question, explore why they feel that way and identify why such language could be hurtful. Recognize moments to teach life lessons in an age appropriate way and don’t let those opportunities slip away. Take the time to answer



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those uncomfortable questions and give an objective and thoughtful response. As parents, we must help them appreciate and learn about those differences, not pretend that they do not exist. Unless parents are willing to help explain to children what seems strange or different to them, we will never be successful in teaching children to understand and appreciate all differences.

4. Select a Respectable Program That You Can Trust

Do not tolerate a winning coach with bad morals. Remember your children are in an impressionable stage in their lives. As much as you might try to un-teach or condemn a derogatory stereotype or racial slur used by your child's coach, the reality is that those poor behaviors have already been taught. A good coach plays a huge role in creating a team environment where all children feel valued and all children can learn. Coaches should never tolerate disrespect from their players, parents or coaching staff. They should establish ground rules for their program and even let the kids help to establish these rules. Do you know what your program's inclusion policies are? Does your program have a policy in place to protect players and parents from any form of discrimination or harassment? You should know, before you sign up, what is important to you and your child's playing experience and express your concern if you see someone act in ways that are exclusionary. It is imperative that parents respond in ways that create greater inclusion and also acknowledge unproductive comments or behavior.

5. Admit Your Shortcomings and Address Them

As a parent, you don't have to be perfect. In fact, you'll probably be surprised at how much credibility you gain with your children when you're honest with them about your shortcomings. When we as parents say and do things that reinforce stereotypes or are exclusive, we have a responsibility to reflect on our behavior and openly discuss with our children what went wrong and how it can be corrected. It can be a powerful moment when a parent can model humility and be open to feedback after we have unintentionally done something that does not align with your values. Let your children know that you're human. Admitting your mistakes clears the channels for real communication and it removes those barriers that will allow for deeper sharing and problem solving.