Conducting Effective Conversations

**Good Practice**

**When your child expresses a stereotype, you give them an alternative viewpoint.** Providing an alternative viewpoint gives the child an opportunity to think about their point of view from a different perspective, which may weaken their attachment to their previous point of view and alter their perspective. You do not need to be an expert in the topic under discussion, instead you can effectively challenge by asking more generic questions such as 'have you considered what effect your opinions might have on the targets of your comment?' and 'if someone were to disagree with your point of view, what would they say to counter your argument?'

**You research the answer to a question with your child present.** Researching answers together not only ensures that the child is receiving accurate information but also teaches them the value of research and how to research for information in a safe and effective way.

**You are unsure about the answer to a question so, rather than pass on inaccurate information or falsehoods, decide to leave the question unanswered for the moment.** Admitting that you are unsure of the answer to a question is a much more positive approach to teaching and learning than imparting information which is inaccurate or only part of the answer. Leaving a question unanswered in order to research the answer and impart accurate information at a later date is good practice as long as the question is not forgotten about completely and left unanswered.

**When your child expresses a prejudicial view, you empathise with how they are feeling.** Recognising a person’s emotion if they are feeling angry or upset about something is an important tool in helping someone feel listened to and engaging them in further conversation. It is important to understand and engage with the underlying anxieties that they may have which are being expressed through this opinion. The person may have low self-esteem and/or concerns about loss of identity and belonging. They may have picked up fears from the media, or from family members and peers. Just dismissing their concerns or giving intellectual arguments as to why they are wrong, instead of understanding why a person may feel concerned, has the potential to create bitterness, a feeling that they have not been listened to and to reinforce their prejudice and fear. Empathising with how someone is feeling is not the same as condoning what has been said.

**You use reasoning and enquiry questions to get your child to question the evidence that they are basing their ideas on.** Asking questions to enable the child to question the basis of their own points of view, rather than have you question it for them, is an effective way of challenging an attitude.

Examples of reasoning questions:

What are your reasons for saying that?

Do you have any evidence?

Why do you think that is the case?

How do you know?

Examples of enquiry Questions:

Can you give an example/counter-example?

If you say that, does it follow that…?

Is that always that case or only sometimes?

What are the exceptions?

Are you saying exactly what you were saying before?

**Inappropriate**

**When a child offers their friends’ opinions on an issue, you tell them that their opinions are racist.** Labelling opinions as, for example, racist is not always an effective way of attempting to shift someone's attitudes away from prejudice towards an alternative perspective. Instead, this can breed resentment, anger and defensiveness in that person. Telling a child that their friends’ opinions are racist could cause a lot of conflict within the person, who is caught between their friends’ views and the views of their parent/carer. Instead, an alternative perspective should be given, allowing them to think about all of the opinions voiced and attempt to forge their own opinion on the issue.

**You use the terms ‘they’ and ‘we’ when discussing differences in culture and belief.** When discussing difference in culture and belief, the terms 'they' and 'we' are divisive, creating a 'them' and 'us' dichotomy. Using 'they' and 'we' can perpetuate stereotypes about groups of people and makes the assumption that everyone within a group will identify or act in the same way.