

How Children Perceive Differences at Each Age and Stage

2- to 3-year-olds may:

- * notice and ask about other adults' physical characteristics, although they are still more interested in their own.
- * notice other children's specific cultural acts. For example: *Elena speaks differently from me; Mei eats with chopsticks.*
- * exhibit fears about skin-color differences or the presence of physical disabilities.

4-year-olds may:

- * show more interest in how they are alike and different from other children; construct theories about what causes physical and cultural differences.
- * begin to classify people into groups by physical characteristics (same gender, same color).
- * be confused about the meaning of adult categories for what "goes together." For example, how can a light-skinned child have a dark-skinned parent? Why are children called *black* when their skin isn't black?
- * show influence of societal norms in interactions with one another (*Only boys can do that*).

5-year-olds may:

- * show an awareness of additional characteristics, such as different socioeconomic classes and age groups.
- * demonstrate heightened awareness of themselves and others as members of a family and curiosity about how families of other children and teachers live: *How can Sam have two daddies?*
- * continue to construct theories to classify or explain differences among classmates.
- * continue to absorb and use stereotypes to define others, and to tease or reject other children.

6- to 7-year-olds may:

- * have absorbed much of their family's classification systems for people, but still get confused about why specific people are put into one or another category by adults.
- * use prevailing biases, based on aspects of identity, against other children.
- * begin to understand that others also have ethnic identities and lifestyles, as they come to understand their own emerging group identity.

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