

How to talk to kids about kids with **MEDICAL CONDITIONS**

STUDENTS CREATING

Smiles

A Kid Again



Kids are curious by nature and can certainly ask a lot of interesting questions. "Why is the sky blue?" "How does the TV work?" "What's on the moon?"

Their growing brains are constantly asking questions to help them understand the world around them. And it's no different when kids see or encounter other kids who have a medical condition or disability.

Guinevere Nelson is a talker who loves to play with other children. And even though the way she communicates might look different than others, Gwinnie is always ready to join in and have fun.

"Some of the difficulties raising a special needs child with visual disabilities is the looks and misunderstanding I see on people's faces. It's almost a fear you see in people's eyes," said Gwinnie's Mom, Aja. "I just want to encourage people... Don't be afraid. You aren't going to hurt our feelings by asking questions. I want my child to have friends and play at the park just like anyone else and that won't happen if people don't talk to us."





To foster inclusivity, here are tips to help parents answer their kids' questions about peers who have a medical condition.

- Reassure their fears. Sometimes, kids will worry they will get sick, too. Parents can say things like, "It's really great that you have been really healthy. But there are some kids that haven't been." And then go on to talk about and answer questions about the specific illness in question.
- Find commonalities and set a positive tone. Differences shouldn't be a negative thing, and being honest and curious can take away a lot of barriers in interacting with kids with medical conditions. Offer suggestions for finding things in common, such as "you and your classmate are different

because he is in a wheelchair, but you both love soccer and drawing."

- Encourage curiosity. Here are some ways to ask questions in an inclusive and respectful way:
- Tell me about why you have that machine. It looks really cool!
- Wow, I really love the color of your wheelchair. Can you tell me what it does or why you have it?
- Wow, that looks like an awesome piece of technology. What does it do?
- We're going to play a game, and we want you to play with us. Is there anything we should know about you or how you can play with us?
- Ask questions, and don't assume. Adults and kids alike should be encouraged

to ask questions and not make assumptions about the illnesses or equipment that kids with medical conditions use. Parents should make it normal and natural to ask questions, as opposed to worrying, wondering, and making assumptions.

And Gwinnie's Mom also has advice for families raising a child with a visible medical condition:

"Take each interaction one at a time. There maybe be others out there who want to ask about your child but are too afraid. Strike up conversations as often as you can. Our tribe is what we make it. Maybe that new momma at the park will become your bestie and you've made a friend for life for your little."

I just want to encourage people...Don't be afraid. You aren't going to hurt our feelings by asking questions. I want my child to have friends and play at the park just like anyone else and that won't happen if people don't talk to us.

