

The ABCs of Diversity: Helping Kids (and Ourselves!) Embrace Our Differences

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Carolyn B. Helsel and Y. Joy Harris-Smith's parenting guide *The ABCs of Diversity* is about navigating modern culture in an effective, loving way.

Harris-Smith and Helsel know that parents want to prepare their children to succeed in an ever-changing world, and to engage people with love and empathy. For many, though, especially those who feel contemporary differences in an acute way, this is a tall order. To help, their book suggests ways of addressing children of all ages on complicated topics of race, gender and sexuality, and religion.

A steady approach shows parents, both through direct instruction and its caring tone, how to be nonjudgmental—first with themselves, then with their children, acknowledging that everyone needs to change and let go of past patterns. From this place of healthy self-acceptance, people can engage with others and their differences.

The book's three sets of ABCs make it easier to conceptualize the shift from automatic reactions of fear to intentional actions of acknowledgement, and eventually to interpersonal actions that are about cultivating connections. Powerful and straightforward, the text focuses on imparting the vocabulary, tools, confidence, and grace to have challenging conversations with children.

While this work is practical throughout, the appendix takes it to the next level. There are suggested books for children of all ages to help with developing empathy and understanding, along with a confidence-inspiring script for parents to address when children say embarrassing things. This involves affirming, asking children questions, admitting what you don't know, and allowing the other person to answer. The work is grounded in Helsel and Harris-Smith's Christian background, evidence in its emphasis on giving parents tools to honor God's love for all people.

The work in *The ABCs of Diversity* is about cultivating deep empathy through honest conversations with children.

MELISSA WUSKE (July / August 2020)

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