



A B O U T F A C E

Tips For Teachers

AboutFace developed Tips for Teachers with the assistance of children, parents and educators to help you create a comfortable and supportive environment in your classroom for the child with a facial difference.

1. Educate yourself.

When you know that you will be receiving a child with a facial difference to your class, educate yourself with as much information on the child's condition in advance of meeting the child if possible. Begin your search with the parents. They are usually very open and willing to share what they know. Look to community organizations like AboutFace for more information and what you can do to make the school environment a safe and open place for this child.

2. Talk to the parents in advance.

It is critical to meet the parents in advance of meeting the child. This will allow you the opportunity to ask direct questions related to the child's condition, academic history, and other special needs without reservation.

3. Meet the child one-on-one.

Changing schools or starting a new grade is a natural anxiety period for all children. This anxiety is heightened for a child with a facial difference because they are anticipating possible reactions from others, about their difference. Meeting the child in advance and one-on-one will go a long way to helping the child become comfortable with you as the new teacher and encourage a rapport early in the relationship. Don't hesitate to ask the student what they think they need from you.

4. Create a circle of friends.

If the child is not new in the neighbourhood, but new to the school, ask parents if there are kids in the school who know the child to create a small circle of friends. By creating a small social network for the student you can help the student integrate faster. Often these early formed relationships can last well into high school. If there are no known friends in the school, teachers should consider asking an older student to be a peer mentor to the new child.

5. Never single out the child.

It is very important to remember that a child with a facial difference often does not need special attention. Unless it is important to other aspects of learning (visual impairment or hearing), don't single out the child on where they sit (front of the class versus back of the class). Let them choose or let them be part of your rotation schedule. Treat them as you would every child with the same expectations and opportunities. If they have any preferences, let them tell you.

6. Communicate regularly with parents on integration/peer relationships.

Your strongest allies are the parents. They too are anxious to know how the child is coping and integrating into the classroom. Agree in advance on a form of regular communication that works for the both of you to keep the other informed of any issues that may arise or for general communication. This could take any form such as a daily journal, a weekly report, a phone call, etc. This should be discussed and agreed upon in your initial meeting with the parents.

7. Keep an eye out for "silent" teasing or bullying.

Teasing and bullying can occur in front of teachers without them picking up on cues. Keep a sharp eye on non-verbal forms of teasing, such as staring, isolation or physical harassment, i.e. blocking, bumping, pushing, etc. Occasionally, encourage discussions on teasing in the classroom in a general way to increase awareness and non-tolerance. Look to community groups like AboutFace for additional resources, including Facing Differences, an educational resource for teachers to talk about facial differences in the classroom.



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8. Take a teasing complaint seriously.

Very often kids with visible differences will avoid telling parents and teachers about teasing they are experiencing. Therefore, if a child does step forward to ask for help in dealing with a teaser, do not take it lightly. Often the issue is a serious problem and can be a threat to the child and so they are seeking adult support. Do not assume that the child has discussed this with their parents. Often children with differences (facial or physical) will avoid telling parents so that they don't cause them any further pain. Remember, teasing is verbal abuse.

9. Make special arrangements with the child in private.

If there are any special issues with the child, i.e. hearing loss, visual impairment or physical limitations, never ask the child in front of the class or peers if they wish to participate or need any special arrangements. This will embarrass the child and make them uncomfortable among their peers. Always make arrangements to speak to the child in private about such issues.

10. Projects involving baby pictures.

Teachers should not hesitate or avoid assigning projects that include baby pictures, but need to be sensitive about the issue. Encourage children with facial differences to share their baby stories, but help create an environment whereby the difference can be explained in a safe forum.

11. Missing school for appointments.

Often children with craniofacial differences require regular medical appointments or major surgical procedures. You can help these situations by allowing "catch up" time to the child for work missed. As well, build a sense of class support by encouraging the class to say "good-bye" and "welcome back" to the child who needs to be away periodically.

12. Discuss differences and diversity often.

Classrooms today are more diverse than ever before. This wealth of diversity is a wonderful place to discuss all forms of differences regularly. It will encourage understanding and acceptance in the classroom, hallways, buses and schoolyard. Again, look to community groups to provide new and interesting programs to address diversity issues.

13. Encourage the child to discuss their difference as part of education.

Certainly not immediately, but over the course of the school year when projects and speeches are being assigned you should encourage the child to introduce their difference if their subject is appropriate. You will be surprised at how much the child knows about their condition, and how well accepted it will be by their peers.

14. Modeling a positive attitude for the class and the school.

As the teacher of a child with a facial difference, you have the opportunity to model positive attitudes towards facial differences. Others, who will model your behavior, will pick up your level of comfort and acceptance.

15. Use people first language.

Never define the child by their facial difference. Always notice the person first. Try to reinforce the concept that it is the person that is most important and the condition is secondary. Always make reference to the child by name and avoid making reference to their difference unless it is an important piece of information for the issue at hand. Remember the child is a person first.

AboutFace is a national charitable organization dedicated to helping individuals with facial differences and their families. We support individuals whose differences are present at birth or acquired as a result of disease or trauma. If you or someone you know has a facial difference and would like more information, contact AboutFace at 1-800- 665-FACE or www.aboutface.ca.

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