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Black History Month – Helping Little Ones Understand Diversity

Long before the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960's, Black History was recognized in America, first as Negro History week which began in 1926 and later it evolved into Black History Month in 1976.

For the pre-K and kindergarten set, February presents a perfect time to help little ones begin to understand, embrace and celebrate diversity.

At The Children's Museum of Indianapolis Preschool, diversity is not taught, it is celebrated.

There's plenty of time later in a child's life to explain slavery and prejudice says The Children's Museum of Indianapolis preschool manager, Cathy Southerland, but early on, children should see examples of what makes everyone unique and special.

Ms. Southerland admits though, that children are curious and so, you might expect some pointed questions that deserve answers. Provide honest answers she says, without lengthy, complicated explanations. For example, if a child asks about another's skin color, preschool teachers at The Children's Museum have youngsters get out their paints. The children are shown how to mix colors to make new colors. They try to match their own skin color and the skin colors of classmates.

"We want children to understand it is ok to ask questions and it is ok to be curious. This is something that makes each person special" says Southerland.

And it's not only skin color that adults may be asked about. Young children may point at a person with a disability and ask what's wrong. That's natural and according to Ms. Southerland, usually nothing to be embarrassed about. She says people with obvious disabilities often say they get used to questions and stares. An immediate lesson may be what's called for. "Knowledge is a powerful thing and it's when you don't know, that's when you may start to fear somebody who may look a little bit different to you."

If you need help getting started with the discussion, public libraries are great places to find age-appropriate books about diversity.