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**WELCOME**

Reducing Stereotypes and Promoting  
 Inclusivity in Childhood

Dr. Laura Elenbaas  
*Department of Psychology, University of Rochester*

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**Road map**

1. Why do children develop stereotypes?
2. What are the consequences?
3. What can schools do about it?

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## Road map

Millions of children around the world experience unfair treatment, but children are also perpetrators of interpersonal discrimination.

Child development research can help us understand where stereotypes and discrimination come from and how to reduce them.

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## Misconception #1

“Prejudice is an adult problem, children are colorblind”

Children pay attention to other people’s race (and other identities) from very early in life

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## What happens when?



**Infancy**  
- Recognize gender, race



**Preschool**  
- Gender, race stereotypes start



**Elementary**  
- Wealth/poverty, sexual orientation stereotypes start



**Middle School**  
- Stereotypes depend on peer group expectations



**High School**  
- Identity development  
- Stereotypes depend on peers and self

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## Misconception #2

“Children only learn stereotypes if their parents are biased”

Parents and caregivers have a very important influence on children’s beliefs, but they are not the only source

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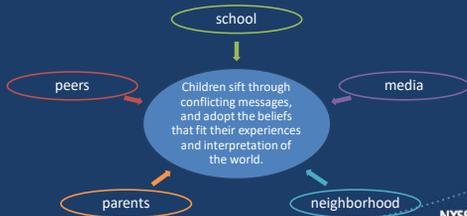
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## Why do children develop stereotypes?



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## Misconception #3

“Talking about diversity with students is a nice ‘add on’, but it’s not that important for academic outcomes”

Promoting inclusivity provides students with social skills they’ll need to succeed now and in the future

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## Why should we promote inclusivity?



### More strengths

- Perspective taking
  - Empathy
- Personal identity
- Resistance to social pressure
- Communication skills
- Conflict resolution skills
- Academic achievement



### Fewer risks

- Behavioral problems
  - Dropout
- Stress and anxiety

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## Why should we promote inclusivity?



These strengths help students in the present, and give them a crucial foundation for future academic, civic, and workplace success

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## What kinds of discrimination do children face?



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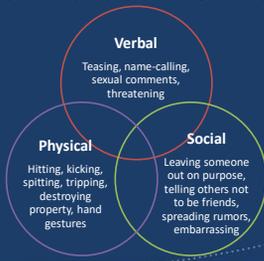
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## What does bias look like in childhood?



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## How common are these experiences?



70% of racial or ethnic minority adolescents have experienced discrimination from peers because of their race or ethnicity  
*10% say this happens frequently*



80% of LGB adolescents have experienced discrimination from peers because of their sexual orientation  
*10% avoid going to school because of safety concerns*

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## Where does this happen?



Most instances of peer discrimination happen at school  
Students say it happens out of sight of teachers and staff  
(e.g., playground, hallway, cafeteria)

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## What are the consequences?

Experiencing discrimination puts students at elevated risk for...



- Stress
- Anxiety
- Social withdrawal
- Depression
- Academic disengagement
- Classroom behavioral problems
- Skipping school
- Drops in grades

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## What can schools do about it?

Stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination **are not inevitable**.

Schools play an important role in promoting inclusivity!

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## What can schools do about it?

Schools can:

1. Establish a safe and inclusive environment
2. Seriously consider representation
3. Encourage friendships between students of diverse backgrounds

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## Establish an inclusive environment

### Policy Level

- Add gender, race, sexual orientation, religion, socioeconomic status, etc. to anti-bullying policies
- Decrease less-monitored spaces (e.g., playground, hallway, cafeteria)



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## Will it work?

**Yes!**



Research Example: When schools add protections for LGBTQ students to their anti-bullying policies:

- LGBTQ students hear fewer homophobic remarks, feel safer
- Non-LGBTQ students more likely to say excluding someone who is LGBTQ is unfair
- Teachers and staff more likely to intervene to stop bias-based bullying

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## Establish an inclusive environment

### Training Level

- Train teachers and staff to recognize discrimination in childhood, and what to do if they see it
- Encourage students to speak up if they see discrimination



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## Will it work?

Yes!



- Research Example #1: When students know that teachers will take action against discrimination:
- Racial and ethnic minority students experience less name-calling, teasing, social exclusion
- Research Example #2: When students do intervene to stop bias-based bullying:
- They are generally successful within 10 seconds

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## Seriously consider representation

Policy Level

- Consider whether students in schools, classes, and after-school activities are as diverse as the communities they serve



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## An issue with a long history

- Many districts are “re-segregating”
  - Across the country, schools today are as segregated as they were in the 70s
- African-American and Latinx students are especially likely to attend schools where over 90% of students are the same race or ethnicity
- The states with the most highly segregated schools are:
  - California, Illinois, Maryland, Michigan, New York, Texas

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## Will it work?

**Yes!**



Research Example: In schools with greater racial and ethnic diversity, African-American, Latinx, Asian-American, and European-American students:

- Experience less exclusion and harassment
- Feel less lonely
- Feel more safe

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## Seriously consider representation

Curriculum Level

- Integrate discussions about gender, race, sexual orientation, religion, socioeconomic status, etc. directly into the curriculum



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## Won't pointing out differences make students biased?

**No!**

Many adults have this worry, however:

- Children already notice differences between people
- They need caring adults to help them understand their social world
- Constructive conversations about race, religion, etc., do not make students prejudiced

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## Will it work?

Yes!



Research Example #1: Students who have more conversations about recognizing different cultural perspectives:

- Express less ethnic and religious prejudice

Research Example #2: Teachers are more likely to launch these conversations:

- When they feel their colleagues and administrators support them

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## Encourage friendships

Policy and Curriculum Level

- Provide opportunities for students to work with peers who differ from them in gender, race, sexual orientation, religion, socioeconomic status, etc.

– e.g., class assignments, after-school clubs



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## How do I do that?

Make sure:

- 1 The interaction is cooperative (not competitive)
- 2 Students of all backgrounds “come in” with equal status
- 3 The whole group is working together on a shared goal
- 4 Students know that adults support friendship formation

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## Will it work?

**Yes!**



Research has shown that friendships between students of different backgrounds are extremely effective at reducing stereotypes and prejudice:

- This works for students of all ages
- In schools with all levels of diversity
- Friendships promote inclusivity by increasing perspective-taking and reducing anxiety

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## Final thoughts

There are many ways for schools to help reduce stereotypes and promote inclusivity.

**Now** is the best time to start!

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## Questions?

Take a look at the Extra Resources handout  
Reach out any time: [laura.elenbaas@rochester.edu](mailto:laura.elenbaas@rochester.edu)

Have a specific question you'd like to explore in your school or district?  
Consider contacting a researcher!

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## Reducing Stereotypes and Promoting Inclusivity in Childhood

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<http://scdlab.digitalscholar.rochester.edu/>

### Resources to Check Out

Teaching Tolerance

<https://www.tolerance.org/>

Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning

<https://casel.org/>

StopBullying.gov

<https://www.stopbullying.gov/>

National School Climate Center

<https://www.schoolclimate.org/>

Society for Research in Child Development, Social Policy Reports

<https://www.srcd.org/research/briefs-fact-sheets>

Below the Surface: Talking with Teens about Race, Ethnicity, and Identity

Authors: Dr. Deborah Rivas-Drake and Dr. Adriana J. Umaña-Taylor

Parenting Beyond Pink and Blue: How to Raise Your Kids Free of Gender Stereotypes

Author: Dr. Christia Spears Brown

Children and Social Exclusion: Morality, Prejudice, and Group Identity

Authors: Dr. Melanie Killen and Dr. Adam Rutland