

# Get used to people's different appearances

Last month, you read about racism against dark-skinned people. We continue to look at racial discrimination based on physical appearances.

Have you seen someone making fun of others or leaving them out because of the way they look? If their features are different as a result of their **ethnicity**, then treating them badly can be racial discrimination. Take, for example, these three snapshots.

Raj has a **prominent** nose. Several times, while in the train, he saw kids nudging one another, pointing to his nose and giggling hysterically.

Jay's hair is naturally frizzy. He likes it that way. But, when he wanted to enter a K-pop contest with his buddies, they said he would not fit in because his hair did not look right.

Lisa is the biggest kid in class. She needs plus-sized clothes. One day, the uniform aunty called out to her, "Hey, XXL girl, here's your uniform." From then, "Double-X-L" became her nickname.

Each of these kids is being singled out by a physical feature — Raj's nose, Jay's hair texture, and Lisa's body size and shape. They feel hurt by what happened. When people put down someone based purely on how that person looks, the silent message says, "You look weird. You are different from us." Even when other kids do not realise that they are being cruel, it is painful for the victims.



These three kids do, in fact, look a little different from most of the students at school, where the majority are Chinese. Raj, Jay, and Lisa each belongs to a different ethnic minority group. They have certain physical features that are nothing special in their own communities, but these features stand out when these minority kids are in school amongst the mainstream majority.

Sadly, the ethnic differences are targets for racist people who are bullies. The bullies may even be minority kids themselves — they are guilty of racial discrimination when they pick on other ethnic minorities.

Bullies have sick minds that enjoy

hurting people. They find ways to be cruel to their victims. Just like vultures know which weak animals to attack, bullies seek out kids who are not strong enough to protect themselves.

## VOCAB BUILDER

Aryan (say "air-yen"; adjective) = Caucasian-looking, typically with blue eyes and blonde hair.

ethnicity (say "eth-ne-se-tee"; noun) = a social group that has the same ancestry, culture, language, and homeland. Race is a more general term than ethnicity.

prominent (say "praw-me-ment"; adjective) = big and noticeable.

## RACIAL DISCRIMINATION

Racial discrimination hurts individuals, communities, and the whole society. Its roots go back to ancient history. Its seeds continue to be planted. To stop this thorny weed from spreading, we must stand united, regardless of race.

## What you can do

Have diverse friends. Thankfully, here in Singapore, kids can choose to have friends of different races, and feel safe regardless of their own race.

When you look at someone, replace the question "Is she beautiful?" with "How is she beautiful?". Do the same for yourself. Ask "In what ways do I look good?" instead of "Do I look good enough?".

Never forget that outward appearances tell you next to nothing about the real person. Do not judge people by their looks.

Ban racial discrimination amongst your friends. Even if someone looks ugly to any of you, no one has the right to put down that person.

Celebrate the incredible diversity — various skin, hair, eye colours; curly, wavy, frizzy, straight hair; bodies of many shapes and sizes; distinctive facial features — that distinguishes ethnic groups from one another. It is what makes the human species so beautiful.

— By MARY GEORGE

## Defining beauty

History tells us that people used to see the features of their own tribe as the most beautiful. We call this a same-race bias.

As the world became more connected through travel and the internet, this natural same-race bias got affected by other ideals.

Today, the western concept of beauty tends to rule. Most supermodels and film stars are fair, slim, tall, and with **Aryan** features. People may feel inadequate if they do not fit this ideal of a beautiful woman or handsome man.

One remedy to this problem is to help kids feel good about themselves, no matter how they look to others.

### NEED HELP?

If you or a friend is feeling very sad or upset, talk about it to a caring adult whom you trust. You can also contact Tinkle Friend free of charge.

- Call 1-800-2744-788 on weekdays from 2:30–5:00 pm
- Chat online at [www.tinklefriend.sg](http://www.tinklefriend.sg) on weekday afternoons.

## Body image matters

Research studies tell us that kids who are ethnic minorities are easier prey if they do not feel positive about the way their bodies look.

We can feel optimistic about Raj, Jay and Lisa. They have families who are proud of their cultures. They attend events in their home communities. There, they blend in easily because so many people look like them. As their ethnic identities grow, Lisa, Raj, and Jay are likely to develop strong and

healthy body images. When racist kids and adults are mean to them, it would still hurt. But, having a positive body image can help them to get over it sooner.

There are many minority kids who are more vulnerable than Raj, Jay, and Lisa. They might not recover easily from racial discrimination. But, even if an individual is strong enough to take it, it is simply wrong to discriminate against that fellow human being.