

You can decide to fight discrimination

To be truly one united people, celebrating diversity is not enough. Even focusing on harmony alone will not do. We have to face and fight discrimination.

In this series about racial discrimination, we have shared many **anecdotes** about kids who were treated badly just because of their ethnic backgrounds, what they looked like, their accents, or where they were from. Their stories illustrate different forms of racial discrimination.

There are no easy solutions. That is why racial discrimination has been around for a very long time. But, like other age-old diseases, we now know how to prevent it as well as what to do to help those who are hurt by it.

Not enough to celebrate diversity

Nowadays, we often hear people say, "Celebrate diversity!" That sounds good, doesn't it? Yet, it only scratches the surface of what needs to be done.

We celebrate diversity when, for instance, concerts have different traditional dances and songs, banners show multicultural artwork, and buffets offer foods from all over the world. All these let us enjoy other people's cultures as well as our own. However, they do not give us a deep understanding of the people in a community. Someone may love Malay satay and yet know very little about Malays.

Furthermore, every concert, banner and buffet can only fit in a fraction of a big city's cultural diversity. It is almost impossible to have all ethnic groups represented in what we do. For each one we include, we exclude many more.

Not enough to focus on harmony

The other **catchphrase** you would have heard often enough is "racial harmony". Harmony is, of course, wonderful. What could be better than to have everyone living together

VOCAB BUILDER

anecdotes (say "anek-doh-ts"; noun) = short accounts about real happenings.

catchphrase (say "katch-frayz"; noun) = a phrase that is used very often.



peacefully? However, aiming for harmony alone will not do; we must work together to get rid of discrimination.

Let's say that two kids in a class are quietly being treated badly. No one will partner Katie because she looks different, and Aye hears his classmates imitating his foreign accent. All of them — including Katie and Aye — look happy though. As a class, they break no school rules, work well together, and even bagged a trophy in a choral singing contest. The teacher is praised for achieving harmony in this

class. He has no idea that Katie and Aye are facing racial discrimination. If he goes on focusing only on harmony, kids like Katie and Aye may continue to be treated unfairly.

We must do more

To get rid of discrimination, we have to face it and deal with it directly. It is a little like a doctor advising you to stay healthy while you are well. But, if you break your leg, you would expect your doctor to do more than just say, "Don't worry — just eat, sleep and

play well!" She should take an X-ray to see the fracture clearly and then do whatever is needed for your bones to heal. Likewise, when kids are hurt by racial slurs, bullying, sarcasm and other mean attacks, there has to be help for healing and making right what is wrong.

The first step is to know what unfair treatment looks like. To help you recognise racial discrimination, our past articles have shown you its many faces — the ways in which kids are treated badly because of their looks, their accents, where they come from, and their cultures.

Unfortunately, even when people are able to spot discrimination, they often don't do or say anything about it. Sometimes, no one knows what to do. Or, they are too scared to get involved. Yet, we all realise that the bullies must be stopped, and the victims must be helped.

When you spot discrimination, what you do is up to you. But, don't do or say nothing. You have many choices. In fact, if you look through this series of articles, you will find more than 25 suggestions for kids. We encourage you to start right away with the easier ones. And, when you are ready, follow up with the rest as well. And, know that every little bit you do will help.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

When you come across discrimination:

- Take a mental x-ray of the situation. Look hard at it. Ask yourself who has been hurt and why.
- Discuss what you see with your friends.
- Plan before you say or do something to help the victim. Refer to our earlier articles for ideas.

Listen hard when someone tells you about being treated unfairly. If the person seems to be deeply hurt or humiliated, suggest getting help from a teacher, school counsellor or another trustworthy, caring adult. Kids can also talk to Tinkle Friend by calling 1-800-2744-788 or chatting at www.tinklefriend.sg.

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— By MARY GEORGE