

Chapter 1

The Four Goals for an Anti-Bias Approach

The four goals for an anti-bias approach are for children across all age groups. They are also for the adults who raise and teach children. To effectively implement an anti-bias approach that cultivates the four goals in children's development, we need to cultivate them in our own development as well. We must constantly increase understanding of our own identity, our skills for interacting with diversity, our ability to recognize bias and injustice, and our willingness to act against it. For these reasons many of the discussion questions are designed to help adults reflect on our own identity development and experiences with bias. These discussions will help provide insight into what our own experiences have taught us. They will help us add on to that learning and translate it into effective ways to work with children.

The ways people work toward the four goals must take into account diverse developmental levels as well as our own diverse cultural styles and those of the children and adults with whom we are working. While the goals may be the same for all of us, the specific strategies will vary from person to person and from program to program. A central challenge is to continually develop our awareness of how children and adults communicate and learn and of what cultural factors influence them in doing so. We must also commit ourselves to deepening our understanding of our own cultural lenses, how they differ from or are similar to the lenses of others, and what the implications of the differences are for effective communication and facilitation of learning. For example, in addressing Goal 4, if we want children to

develop strategies for challenging bias, and our style is to be direct about an issue but the culture of the child and their family is to be indirect, we will face the challenge of navigating or negotiating between cultural differences. This requires an awareness of diverse styles and the creative willingness to explore, develop, and support a variety of strategies.

Goal 1

Nurture the construction of a knowledgeable, confident identity as an individual and as a member of multiple cultural groups (such as gender, race, ethnicity, or class).

This means creating the educational conditions in which all children are able to like who they are without needing to feel superior to anyone else.

The negative bias many of us learn and begin to believe about ourselves is often called “internalized oppression.” We can also internalize messages of superiority if the majority of messages about a group we belong to are positive while those about other groups are negative.

Goal 1 also means enabling children who are not of the dominant culture to develop the ability to operate within both their home culture and the dominant culture, and to negotiate and problem solve when issues arise from differences between the two.

Discussion Questions

- How did you construct a knowledgeable and confident self-identity (in relation to your gender, race, ethnicity, or class)? Did your educational experience nurture the process?
- What are some of the messages of *inferiority* you internalize when the majority of messages about a group you belong to are *negative* while those about other groups are positive?
- What are some of the messages of *superiority* you internalize when the majority of messages about a group you belong to are *positive* while those about other groups are negative?
- Describe a time when you were in a setting dominated by cultural values that were unfamiliar or different from your own. How did that feel? What difficulties did you experience?
- What are some of the challenges or difficulties faced by members of subordinate cultural groups learning to operate in both their own and the dominant culture?

- What are some of the challenges or difficulties faced by members of a dominant cultural group learning to operate in ways that include or are sensitive to cultures of relevant subordinate cultural groups?

Goal 2

Promote comfortable, empathic interaction with people from diverse backgrounds.

This means guiding children’s developing awareness of difference in a way that fosters interest in and empathy with difference, rather than a fear or judgment of it. It means helping them develop their skills to negotiate the day-to-day natural discomfort, tensions, problems, or conflicts that can arise from difference. Goal 2 means guiding *all* children—those in the subordinate groups *and* those in dominant groups—to adapt to difference. And it means guiding children to recognize and respect difference while simultaneously recognizing the commonalities all people share.

Discussion Questions

- What were the first messages you learned about differences in general? Where did those messages come from? Were they positive? negative? mixed?
- What were the first messages you learned about differences among people? Where did those messages come from? What values were attached to what differences?
- Recall ways in which you were different from classmates or friends. How did that feel? What messages did you receive?
- Recall ways in which a teacher or other adult helped you, classmates, or friends learn about and deal respectfully with differences. What messages did you receive?
- When someone suggests that a problem exists because there are differences between the two of you, does this raise anxiety? What about the belief that differences are common and generally can be negotiated?
- A Puerto Rican child comes to school with a pacifier. The teachers feel that the child, at age four, is too old to have a pacifier and tell her to leave it in her cubby. Why do you think the teachers responded this way? How might the teachers ask the family about their views on the subject? What do you think the teachers should do if the family says they feel that children should have a pacifier until they no longer want

it? (Consider the assumption of superiority—the unexamined idea that one’s own ways are natural or right.)

Goal 3

Foster each child’s ability to recognize bias and injustice.

This means creating conditions for children to develop the knowledge and analytical skills to identify unfair and untrue images (stereotypes), comments (teasing, name-calling), and behaviors (discrimination) directed at one’s own or another’s identity. It means knowing that bias hurts.

Discussion Questions

- Recall an early memory of an image, comment, or behavior directed at *your identity* that was untrue or unfair. Describe how you came to realize it was an unfair or untrue stereotype, prejudice, or form of discrimination. How did this realization feel?
- Recall an early memory of an image, comment, or behavior directed at *someone else’s identity* that was untrue or unfair. Describe how you came to realize it was an unfair or untrue stereotype, prejudice, or form of discrimination.
- Recall a time when you resisted attempts to help you recognize an untrue or unfair stereotype, prejudice, or form of discrimination. Why did you resist taking in this information?
- Recall when others resisted your attempts to help them recognize something as an untrue or unfair stereotype, prejudice, or form of discrimination. Why do you think there was resistance to the information you were trying to communicate?

Goal 4

Cultivate each child’s ability to stand up, individually and with others, against bias or injustice.

This means helping every child learn and practice a variety of ways to act in the face of bias expressed by other children and adults.

Discussion Questions

- What messages do you remember receiving as a child about standing up against things that are unfair? What messages do you hear in your environment now?

- Tell a story for each of the following scenarios. After each story, consider these questions: How did you feel after the incident? How would you have liked to handle the situation?
 - Tell a story about a time when you were a child and someone either did or did not stand up for you against something that was unfair or unjust. Tell another story about this subject from adulthood.
 - Tell a story about a time when you were a child and you either did or did not stand up for someone else against something that was unfair or unjust. Tell another story about this subject from adulthood.

Discussing the Goals

In any discussion of the goals, it's important to emphasize the need to address *all four goals* as we begin our own journeys of awareness and develop implementation strategies. Many people focus primarily on Goal 2 and inadvertently fail to address Goals 1, 3, and 4. Goal 1 is often omitted if there's an assumption that anti-bias work is primarily about relating to others (Goal 2). In fact, Goal 2 requires Goal 1's development of a knowledgeable, confident self-identity and group identity. Often Goals 3 and 4 are left out as people include diversity but do not also foster each child's critical thinking about bias or cultivate each child's ability to stand up, individually and with others, in the face of it.

General Discussion Questions

- What do each of the four goals mean to you?
- Do these goals reflect what you thought a culturally relevant anti-bias approach was about?
- Do any of the goals raise questions or concerns for you?
- What memories do you have of learning to identify bias against your own group or against another group?
- What experiences do you have, as an individual or in a group, of standing up against bias and injustice?