Differences Lift Us
We believe that diversity of all kinds enables us to better understand ourselves and others, value multiple truths, practice advocacy and allyship, and take action toward creating a more just and equitable world.

We define diversity as inclusive of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, gender identity, sexual orientation, family structure, neurodiverse learning styles, age, ability, nationality, immigration status, physical appearance, religion, belief systems, language, and more. A diverse, inclusive, and respectful community enhances the academic and emotional intelligence of all students and lays the foundation for them to make change in meaningful and mindful ways.

Differences lift us.

The purpose of this Toolkit is to give our families a method for having conversations about social justice and diversity with our children at home that supports the work we are doing at school. Our CDS community consists of a wide range of families, and we want to celebrate and respect everyone. You are welcome to read it cover-to-cover or to jump in at any point that can help support topics of conversation at home.

Social Justice as a Focus
Just as people who identify as white may think less about race on a regular basis - or not at all - we recognize that for many people in the world there are a multitude of discriminating factors that can affect a person’s daily life. People of color, different sexual orientation, physical disability or from various socioeconomic circumstances or political ideals all may face unavoidable considerations of bias throughout their day.

Recognizing every circumstance as a journey and seeing how we each benefit from varying systemic advantages is important to creating a just society. This doesn’t imply that members of a majority or any group enjoy a life free from struggle or hardship, but we want to teach our
children about the diversity of experiences that makes up our community so they can be informed advocates for themselves and others.

These conversations may be uncomfortable, and that is to be expected. We hope this toolkit will challenge everyone to engage in critical conversations outside their comfort zones. The tools here offer practical suggestions for being considerate members of the community, use clear examples for answering common questions regarding diversity, and provide a framework for conversations with your children. We hope it is helpful!

Regarding language, we use the terms ally and co-conspirator in different contexts throughout the Toolkit. The term “ally” is often used to convey an intention of standing up with and for others in a helpful way. The spirit of the term is right on. However, we feel being an authentic ally comes with a measure of humility and is usually aspirational in nature. In other words, instead of proclaiming our own status as an ally, the term is best used by others when our actions are felt to be truly helpful in advancing their cause. The term “co-conspirator” is similar to ally, but is often viewed as more active and proactive. It conveys the idea of standing with, instead of behind or on the side when things become difficult. There is a spirit of “we’re in this together” without talking over others, while still being in alignment along strategic and tactical approaches to activism.

We strive to honor and respect the cultures and beliefs you hold at home, and we make no assumptions about the conversations you may already be having with your children. We hope that these resources add another dimension to our home-school partnership.

Lastly, with the rapid pace of this evolving dialogue, rather than providing lists of books for further reading and specific vocabulary, we felt it would be more useful to offer websites with continually vetted and updated lists that can help our community critically examine the content. Below are a few:

- Diverse Book Finder
- Notable Books for a Global Society
- We Need Diverse Books
- Our Shelves
- The Conscious Kid

We welcome your feedback! How are these addendums helpful? How can they be improved? Please write me at anthonyw@cds-sf.org or call (415) 660-7452. Thank you for your time and interest in helping CDS become more inclusive!
A Note of Thanks

We at CDS appreciate your openness and willingness to participate in creating such a warm, welcoming, and inclusive environment for our children. Our hope is that we all can learn, grow, and benefit from taking just a little time to learn something new about other people, or a moment each day to consider how others may walk through this world, and by teaching our children to demonstrate the love and respect we all deserve.

Many people contributed to the creation of this toolkit, which was the intent as we are wiser together. The following parents/guardians helped co-write sections and provided editorial feedback: Lara Ezrin, Dee Hibbert-Jones, Carl Schneebeck, Amy Silverstein, Anna Sopko, Nomi Talisman, Alan Vitolo, and Lindsay Woollerson. Special thanks also to Stephen Goldmann as well as several staff and administrators who co-wrote chapters or provided editorial support, including: Alexsarah Collier, Andrei Ferrera, Lindsay Galligan, Antonette Greene, Jack Hamm, Trudy Hamm, Molly Huffman, Rebecca Kroll, Diane Larrabee, Ed Rhee, Amanda Richard, Rhonda Ross, and Donnie Weaver. Lastly, many faculty contributed by providing examples of how we practice social justice work in our classrooms every day. Our teachers are everyday heroes, fighting for liberty and justice for all.

With respect,
Anthony
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Race/Ethnicity

Introduction
At CDS, we encourage everyone to have regular conversations about race and ethnicity. Whether through books, media, or current events, or personal experience, normalizing discussions about race and considering different experiences are key to building an awareness that leads to action where everyone has equal opportunities, protections, and can reach their full potential. Rather than adhering to past ideals of being “colorblind” or “not seeing race,” we strive to help our children see and celebrate each other fully for who they are and be co-conspirators in a movement where all people feel visible, valued, and respected.

Race and Ethnicity in Our Community
At CDS, 48% of our students and 36% of our faculty and staff identify as people of color. According to an article from NPR about the census, the multiracial population is one of the fastest growing demographic segments in the U.S., and it comprises 30% of our total student population.

Kids and adults often face questions about their racial/ethnic backgrounds or experiences related to this identity and we encourage respectful inquiries that can lead to greater awareness and compassion. While the intention may be to connect and deepen our understanding, we also need to be aware that such questions can feel pointed and make the recipient feel uncomfortable. The message here: when getting to know people, proceed with caution - but proceed - and take time to build a relationship before jumping into the deep end. People may be enthusiastic to share or unwilling at that time, and both are OK.

For example, multiracial people are often asked “What are you?” out of genuine curiosity. If your child is multiracial, it’s important they feel they have a choice whether or not they are required to answer as the question itself can feel invasive and create feelings of self-doubt. If they choose to respond, they should share only what’s comfortable and relevant, even if that changes over
time or from day to day. For kids, we encourage them to avoid answers that use percentages, which can lead to feelings of or questions about being legitimately from a certain background. Instead of "I'm half Chinese, a quarter French, a quarter Russian, and Jewish" consider "I'm from Chinese, French, Russian, and Jewish heritages." The idea is that people are 100% fully a person, not half this and a quarter that.

The tools here are meant to help children relate to others in more respectful ways. Whether you are on the giving or receiving end of such personal curiosity, we can speak about where we come from in ways that can create understanding.

Videos for Further Introduction

- Color Blind or Color Brave? - Mellody Hobson talks about how we can broach the "conversational third rail" of race
- How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love Discussing Race - Jay Smooth talks about how having difficult conversations, making mistakes, and still being a good person
- Sometimes You’re a Caterpillar - A snail and a caterpillar talk about privilege and race in a very approachable way
- A Look at Race Relations Through a Child’s Eyes - CNN study examining the perceptions and attitudes of children about race
- Do White People Get Stressed Talking About Race? - Two white people have a conversation about race with other white people and with people of color, with a surprise experiment
- 25 Mini-Films for Exploring Race, Bias and Identity with Students - collection of 1-7 minute films from the New York Times with related readings and activities

Vocabulary

- Social justice - the distribution of wealth, opportunities, and privileges within a society. Under equitable conditions, all persons, irrespective of ethnic origin, race, sexual orientation, gender, religion, etc., are to be treated equally and without prejudice.
- Civil rights - Personal rights acquired by an individual by being a citizen or resident, or automatic entitlements to certain freedoms conferred by law or custom. Certain civil rights (such as the right to equality, freedom, good governance, justice, and due process of law) are inalienable human and natural rights, whereas others (such as the right to hold a public office) depend on one’s conduct and can be lost. Also called civil liberties.
- Race vs. Ethnicity -
  - Race refers to physical attributes and appearances such as skin color, hair color, and bone structure. This is what is being described when you hear about concepts like white, Asian, and African American. Even these descriptions are somewhat confusing when you consider them in terms of ethnicity.
  - Ethnicity refers to cultural factors such as nationality, lineage, language, and beliefs. So, in this case, someone could be considered ethnically American or ethnically American and English-speaking. There is frequent overlap and
intersectionality when you consider a race grouping like Asian, for example, which actually has hundreds of ethnic groups.

○ Usage of the two is commonly confused in public discourse and media, leading many to not clearly understand the distinctions. When you hear something in the media like "The American race," there is really no such thing. The best way to keep them straight is to remember that race is physical while ethnicity is, well...everything else.

● Racism/racist - Prejudiced thought and discriminatory actions based on perceptions and stereotypes about race
  ○ Racism can manifest itself in many ways, including hiring practices, medical attention and diagnoses, access to housing and education, and physical violence.

● Institutional racism - Whereas individual racism is usually expressed in open antagonism and prejudice, institutional racism often involves subtle or explicit structuring of organizations and systems in a tacit understanding to keep people of color down or out.

● Reverse racism -
  ○ Perceived prejudice against the members of a majority group in employment, education, promotion, or distribution of benefits.
  ○ An argument used by opponents of affirmative action that any policy of giving special favors to any group automatically discriminates against other groups.
  ○ While individuals or groups may discriminate against members of a racial majority, reverse racism is an inaccurate concept because such discrimination would lack the institutional power that can only come from a majority.

● Post-racial - A theoretical environment in which the United States or any society is free from racial preference, discrimination, and prejudice.

Race and Ethnicity in the CDS Classroom
Here are a few examples of how teachers are addressing issues of race and ethnicity in the classroom.

● Teaching a series of lessons on the origin of racial categories and the words we use to describe race, ethnicity, and nationality (lower school)

● Discussing melanin in skin (preschool)

● Using charts to see everyone’s differences and similarities. Examples: hair color, type of hair, eye color, etc. (preschool)

● Presenting role models of various races and ethnicities (whole school)

● Reading literature and source material that highlights diverse experiences and multiple truths, both as a focus of the story and as incidental background to the characters (examples: scientists and inventors of different races/ethnicities; stories with Asian protagonists…)

● Using bilingual and Spanish books that represent many types of families, with vocabulary for all family members
Our hope is that people will have conversations about race/ethnicity to normalize it in conversation. At CDS, we do this through our various curricula and affinity group work. We encourage all our families to strive to be anti-racist allies through dialogue and action. We need everyone at the table, taking small or large steps and helping in any way possible.

**Conversation Starters at Home or with Other CDS Families**

It can be uncomfortable to talk with other adults about race/ethnicity. What can help is accepting multiple truths that may differ from our experiences. People of color (PoC) likely think about race on a daily basis, because the world treats PoC differently. PoC constantly need to weigh the cost of responding to everyday racism and possibly appearing “overly sensitive” or “angry” as stereotypes indicate.

Understanding our adult feelings of race:

- What stories and conversations can lead us to a deeper understanding about race?
  
  What do you feel is important to teach your children about race?
- How was race discussed or avoided at home when you were a kid? What conversations about race or news related to race are happening at home now?
- What emotions come up for you when talking about race? (See this TED talk from Howard Stevenson, “How to resolve racially stressful situations”)
- How can we all feel pride about our ethnic backgrounds, and acknowledge and respect the lived experiences of people from different backgrounds?
- How can we all be anti-racist in small or big ways?
- What’s one thing you can do to help confront racism?
- How can we keep the issues facing others alive in our everyday conversations at home?
- How do we feel about movements that may not include us or may have methods we don't understand? How can we acknowledge them and appreciate their voice even if they do not have a place for us?

Helping our children think about race:

- What are some age-appropriate responses to comments or questions that don’t feel good?
- What situations might call for a response to bias, either intentional or not?
- In what ways are we privileged? How might someone else not share the same privileges? How can we use privilege in positive ways?
- How can we show appreciation of others from different backgrounds? What might make someone feel unsafe or unwelcome?
- How do we show our support for others when we think we perceive bias or careless actions?
- How can we acknowledge our impact when we say or do things that are hurtful and likewise, stand up for others when they encounter hurtful situations?
Quick Responses
We want to provide examples of how you could respond to questions involving race, while also encouraging you to engage in a way that reflects your experiences and values. We hope these can help expand your language and understanding about these topics.

1. “Why do we need to keep talking about race?”
   - The more we talk about race, the more “normal” and less uncomfortable it becomes, and the better we are at having conversations. Practice is key. It’s important that we all have conversations, because race affects people of color on a daily basis. If we aspire to a truly equitable society, we need to find ways to talk about our experiences and appreciate and accept multiple truths as reality.

2. “I’m white - I don’t have a race”
   - Not seeing whiteness as a race is usually the result of white being the dominant, default race in the U.S. As in the analogy of fish being unable to see the water they swim in, it can be difficult because it “just is.” Images in movies, books, and organizations often show a majority of white characters, which implies it as the norm. As members of the racial norm, people perceived as white are usually treated differently than people of other races.

3. “Why can some people show pride and celebrate their race/ethnicity, but the same isn’t true for white people?”
   - There is an unfortunate history that links white pride with racist, oppressive groups. While numerous white allies have fought racist laws, institutions, and groups in the past, this doesn’t change historical reasons for drawing attention to white groups – to separate themselves from other groups and award privileges to whites. However, celebrating our Irish, German, Swedish, or other predominantly white ethnic heritages is highly encouraged.

4. “How can we all strive to be allies and co-conspirators with each other?”
   - We can start by accepting that society privileges certain groups in different ways. White people and people of color may receive different treatment in similar situations. If white people can be aware of these differences more often, we can take one step closer to being a just society where everyone has equal treatment. By checking in and working in collaboration with groups who are not like themselves, people can fight to make their privileges available to all. Here’s a great resource from Rosetta Eun Ryong Lee called “Growing as an Ally.”

Resources / Media

Websites
 Youtube: The Atlantic - Podcast: “How to Talk to Kids about Race”
 TEDx Talk, Dr. Amanda Kemp - Video: “How to have a voice and lean into conversations about race”
 Cracking the Codes: Joy DeGruy - Video: “A Trip to the Grocery Store”
 VOX - Video: “The myth of race, debunked in 3 minutes”
Whiteness Project - Video: White millennials in Dallas, TX talk about race
NPR - Code Switch - Podcast: “Race and identity remixed”
Black Lives Matter - Advocates for dignity, justice and respect
Talking Race - Teaching Tolerance, great materials for educators and families
Socioeconomic Diversity

Introduction

At CDS, we strive to give our families an experience that reflects the wider community and helps people make connections across all kinds of social identities. As part of this, we work hard to make sure that our school is representative of San Francisco’s population, and this includes having a broad socioeconomic group.

The issues of socioeconomic diversity are much deeper than just what someone earns. Socioeconomic rights are an important piece of human rights. They include the right to education, housing, adequate standards of living, health, science, and culture. At CDS, we talk about this because studying socioeconomic status often reveals inequities in access to resources, plus issues related to privilege, power, and control.

The term “socioeconomic” refers to the interaction between the social and economic habits of a group of people. Socioeconomic status (SES) is commonly defined as the social standing or class of an individual or group. It is measured as a combination of education, income, and occupation.

Videos and Resources for Further Introduction
- Understanding Social Mobility - Brookings Institute, an exploration of inequality and opportunity using Legos
- Cartoon explains how socioeconomic status affects people’s life chances
- Social Class in the Lower School Classroom - NAIS article talks about relative deprivation and relative privilege

Socioeconomic Diversity in Our Community

At CDS, we believe socioeconomic diversity benefits the entire community. We set aside nearly 20% of our operating budget toward sliding scale tuition, and about 30% of CDS families receive some form of assistance.

Vocabulary

- Socioeconomic mobility
  - Social mobility and status as related to an individual’s or family’s economic situation, background, and sense of financial security
- Low / medium / high SES
  - The vocabulary used to describe comparative levels of economic security and the accompanying social mobility
- Human rights vs. civil rights
Human rights arise simply by being a person. Civil rights, on the other hand, arise only by virtue of a legal grant of that right, such as the rights imparted on American citizens by the U.S. Constitution.

- **Collective rights**
  - Rights that are held by a group rather than by any one individual

- **Access to resources**
  - This is a topic that is important to social rights. It describes any actual or potential barriers that might prevent some people from equitable participation in society, whether that be socially, educationally, or physically.

- **Achievement gap vs. opportunity gap (in education)**
  - The term achievement gap is used to refer to the observed, persistent disparity of educational measures between the performance of groups of students, especially groups defined by socioeconomic status (SES), race/ethnicity, and gender.
  - The opportunity gap is one of the greatest crises facing America's schools. It is the disparity in access to quality schools and the resources needed for all children to be academically successful.

### Socioeconomic Diversity in the CDS Classroom
Here are a few examples of how teachers are addressing issues of socioeconomic diversity in the classroom. These are meant to give insight into the kinds of conversations that may be happening at CDS so that you can be prepared for what may come up at home. We hope to work in partnership with families while also respecting the cultural beliefs and traditions of each household.

- Share our own experiences and history related to SES, have conversations about how it affects everyone and especially people of color
- Acknowledge yet de-emphasize where people went on vacations while encouraging people to share local experiences, what people did, and who they spent time with
- Highlight scientists who faced socioeconomic challenges and still achieved success and notoriety
- Challenge stereotypes related to SES and homelessness
- Identify who may be homeless in our city, opening eyes to the fact that people can experience homelessness despite background or upbringing
- Talk about how SES impacts access to playing sports and games
- Point out similarities and differences among various immigrant groups

### Conversation Starters at Home or with Other CDS Families
**Understanding our adult feelings of socioeconomic diversity**
It can be uncomfortable to talk with other adults about income and social status, and we are often hesitant to begin these conversations with new acquaintances. Consider how you might talk about the following topics with other CDS families. How can you begin to talk about it with your children?
● How do we discuss public vs. independent schools? What was important to you in choosing CDS? What might be important to other families?
● How can we teach our children to be sensitive to others’ feelings by not over-emphasizing material things or vacations, knowing some families have extremely limited budgets?
  ○ Kids are aware that some families have more money and resources than others. That’s OK. What can help is being mindful of how much we’re talking about it in front of others and assumptions we may make about what’s affordable.
● Are socioeconomic issues about charity or social justice? How can we build the notion of “exchange” or “peer-to-peer” into our students’ lives?

Helping our children think about socioeconomic diversity
The most important message is that we rely on all our families to help make CDS what it is, and we recognize that people give in many important ways: with their time, with skills that can help the school, and financially. The important message is that we hope all CDS families feel equally important and valued.

The following are some results from seminal studies in the field that can spur good conversations:
● SES differences in language processing skill and vocabulary are evident at 18 months - National Institute on Health (Fernald, Marchman, Weisleder, 2013)
● Children, Youth, Families and Socioeconomic Status - American Psychological Association

Quick Responses
The following conversations have come up during school, mostly from students. We want to provide examples of how you could respond in ways that reflect different experiences and values. Most of all, we encourage you to engage in conversations to build vocabulary and understanding of this topic.

1. “Everybody is going to Tahoe for break. Why aren’t we going?”
   ○ Some families spend more money on trips than others. We have a limited budget for trips, but we can plan all kinds of fun things here at home.
   ○ We have other plans to do ___ (event). If you really want to go, we can start saving for a trip in the future.
   ○ We just don’t have money for trips right now. Maybe in the future.
   ○ What is exciting to you about going to Tahoe? Let’s see if there are some ways that we can do that closer to home that don’t cost as much money.
2. “Rich people should pay more so poor people can go to good schools.”
   ○ At CDS, about 30% of families receive sliding scale tuition. This is an important part of creating a diverse community with different perspectives. The school
believes it is important to have children from different backgrounds and perspectives because it makes the learning experience better for everyone.

○ What does it mean to say "good" schools? A number of public schools are excellent, and free. Our government believes that every child has the right to be in a good school where they can be safe and learn. We chose to go to an independent school where we pay tuition because [insert your reasons here].

3. “Poor people are lucky because they get things for free.”

○ CDS believes it is important to include all children in activities and trips, and financial considerations should not prevent anyone from participating. Families receive certain things and financial assistance out of need, not luck. Some families may feel uncomfortable receiving financial assistance. It’s important to understand that people can be successful in many ways that aren’t related to money. Some jobs provide a meaningful service to society but don’t necessarily pay as well as others.

Resources / Media

Websites

● Inequality.org - data and analysis about income inequality
● Playspent.org - game that has people make financial choices millions of Americans make on a daily basis
● CNN/Money cost of living calculator - compares groceries, housing, utilities, transport, and health care of two cities

Footnotes/Articles

1. Closing the Opportunity Gap, Arne Duncan, former U.S. Secretary of Education
2. Why We Need to Stop Calling It the ‘Achievement Gap’, Kayla Patrick, Education Post
3. Unequal Opportunities: Race and Education, Brookings Institute
4. The Education System Is Rigged Against Low-Income Students, Even in Kindergarten, Huffington Post
Sexual Orientation

Introduction
CDS has a strong tradition of being openly supportive of diverse family structures, including families with two moms, two dads, a mom and a dad, a single parent or guardian, and all of the shapes and sizes families take. As we print on our CDS Pride Parade T-shirts, “Love is love.” This sums up our belief that love chooses us, not the other way around.

In addition to supporting LGBTQ+ families, we also sometimes encounter children who are aligning as LGBTQ+ in elementary or middle school. For these children, understanding their sexual orientation is a process that can be confusing and scary at times. There are a lot of real and perceived risks for these children, including fears of being ostracized by their peers, not being accepted by their families, and not understanding what ramifications these feelings may have in their lives. The continued struggle for LGBTQ+ rights is real and some members of the community are threatened both verbally and physically on a regular basis. Our goal is to create an open and supportive environment to have these conversations at school and at home that lead to acts of kindness, understanding, and solidarity.

Gender and transgender issues are covered below in a section dedicated to this topic.
Videos for Further Introduction

- **LGBTQ**: Understanding Sexual Orientation and Gender Identities - the film features several young adults who talk about their journeys and how we can all be allies
- **GLSEN**: creating safe spaces in schools
- **5 Tips For Being An Ally**: MTV Decoded video with practical ways to be an ally
- **Meet real dads who responded to their kids coming out in the best way**: Upworthy
- **Actress Tatiana Maslany on Why She’s an LGBT Ally**: GLAAD: All Access

Sexual Orientation Diversity in Our Community

In general, San Francisco is an open and accepting place and our children are exposed to many different expressions just by living here. Our goal is for students to accept others that they meet and engage safely in conversations with people who may seem different.

Vocabulary

- There are a number of terms that may be unfamiliar to some, but there is a great resource available within the Welcoming Schools website. We recommend this link for a thorough list of definitions: LGBTQ definitions

What’s Happening at CDS

Examples of how teachers are addressing issues of sexual orientation in the classroom include reading books with lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer/questioning characters as well as a variety of family dynamics. In addition, teachers are talking directly about these topics with their students using language sensitive to our diverse community:

- Explicitly discussing exceptions when normative culture is expressed in a book. Example: “Not all families look that way…”
- Saying “grown ups” or “adults in your family” instead of assuming parents, mom or dad, or a two-adult household (e.g. a mom, a dad, a grandparent, a guardian)
- Inviting families to come in to share about their family structure (preschool)
- In sixth grade life science, students learn about the hundreds of animal species with homosexual or transgender identities

Conversation Starters at Home or with Other CDS Families

Understanding our adult feelings about sexual orientation

Consider how you might talk about the following topics with other CDS families and your children.

- How was sexual orientation discussed in your family growing up, if at all?
- What messages did you get about LGBTQ+ people from friends, at school, and in the media?
- Did you know any two mom/two dad or other LGBTQ+ families growing up?
- Did you ever question your own sexual orientation? What helped or didn’t help you along your path of discovery and identity development?
- How can we be allies to queer or questioning youth?
Helping our children think about sexual orientation

- Why do people get married? What are the benefits of being married?
- How does it feel to be called “different” or “not normal?” Is it OK to say this about someone else? Why?
- Do people choose their feelings? What feelings might you have that you didn’t choose?

Quick Responses

The following statements have come up during conversations among students, families, and the general public. We want to help parents respond, while also encouraging you to respond in a way that reflects your experiences and values and to engage in conversations that build fluency with this topic.

- “That’s so gay!”
  - We can all be allies by finding safe, age-appropriate ways to speak out against these and other comments. Direct, honest reactions can be very helpful, and questions can also help draw attention to such remarks.
    - “What do you mean by that? You may not have meant it, but what you said is hurtful. This kind of language is part of ‘hate speech’ which can be hurtful or isolating to others.”
    - “What can you say instead if you don’t like something?”

- “You can be my gay best friend!”
  - While the intention here is likely an attempt to connect or even signal solidarity, these kinds of comments can be confusing taken out of context and should be used with caution.

- “I’m wondering about my child’s physical appearance...could they be LGBTQ?”
  - It’s possible, but the two are not necessarily linked.
  - For many children, gender identity - the deep sense of how we feel we identify on the spectrum of gender - can be expressed in many ways, including physical appearance, hobbies, and interests. That said, clothes, hairstyle, and other elements of appearance may indicate that a child is questioning or “testing the waters.”
  - This is a critical time for children to connect with supportive adults, ideally members of their family. However, there are a number of faculty and staff members at CDS who are willing to serve as an additional resource. Feel free to reach out to Anthony Witte (anthonyw@cds-sf.org) for more information.

Resources / Media

- Our Family Coalition - Advancing equity for the LGBTQ families with children
- SF LGBTQ Center - Connecting our diverse community to opportunities, resources, and each other
- GLAAD - “Rewrites the script for LGBT acceptance”
- GLSEN - “Improving education, creating a better world”
The Gender Spectrum

Why should we talk about gender with children, especially at an early age?
Children typically begin noticing gender and absorbing gender stereotypes early in life, and we believe that the best time to have guided, age-appropriate conversations about gender is before beliefs start to become fixed and harder to change. Families unfamiliar with language and concepts may find themselves in an uncomfortable place when the topic comes up at home. According to the Mayo Clinic, children typically notice differences in gender between the ages of 18-24 months. Even at this early age, they begin understanding concepts such as “girl,” “feminine,” “boy,” and “masculine.” In the Early Childhood Program at CDS, they also typically notice biological sex since, per regulations, bathrooms in ECP have no doors.

Beyond biology, kids receive messages about gender identity from birth that all too often follow stereotypical tropes about the male/female binary: dolls and pink are for girls, trucks and blue are for boys. Girls play __, boys play __. Children get messages about what they can and can’t do, and what they should and shouldn’t try to become when they grow up. By having conversations about gender early and frequently, families can partner with CDS to help mitigate the effects of gender stereotypes in media and elsewhere, and help children reach their potential as humans, whether they identify as a girl, boy, in between, neither, or both.

Videos for Further Introduction

- [How do I talk with my preschooler about identity?](#) - Planned Parenthood
- [Avoiding Gender Stereotypes](#) - Parents.com, how susceptible kids are to stereotypes
- [Parenting and Family resources](#) - Gender Spectrum, many resources (they did a great PD at CDS)
- [Gender Identity in Children](#) - healthychildren.org
- [When Aidan Became a Brother](#), children’s book by Kyle Lukoff
- [Becoming Me](#) - Stories from 8 families with transgender or gender nonconforming kids
- [Transgender at 11: Listening to Jazz Jennings / More from Jazz Jennings](#) - ABC News
- [Transgender Teen Shares Powerful Message on Bullying](#) - ABC News
- [Beyond the Gender Binary](#), Yee Won Chong - TED, stories about navigating life and tips for being a good ally
- [Lauren Lubin](#) - Breaking free of the gender binary
- [Beyond the Gender Binary](#), Understanding Transgender Youth, Dr. Margaret Nichols
- [5 Ways to Support Trans Friends When They Come Out](#) - *Matrix* director Lilly Wachowski (formerly of the famous Wachowski Brothers) talks about supporting transgender people with a link to her own story
Vocabulary

Gender-related terms, like language in general, are constantly changing. Being open to that change is important. One key concept is that gender is a spectrum that may change over time, not a fixed male/female binary. Some common terms are listed below.

- **Cisgender**: when a person’s gender identity matches the biological sex assigned at birth.
- **Transgender**: when a person’s gender identity does not entirely match their biological sex assigned at birth. People also use terms such as genderqueer to express that their behavior or expression of gender (clothing, hairstyle, voice, etc.) may not match stereotypical gender norms. Transgender people may express their identity through ways listed above, and others may physically alter their bodies to reflect their identity.
  - Regarding transgender children (like the child in *When Aidan Became a Brother*), they often have a feeling they identify differently early as well (3-5 yrs). For some children, this may be a stage. For others, it's an early indication of who they will develop to be long-term. There's also a growing number of teens who **don't identify as male or female**. Regardless, it's important to affirm their identity as it develops, taking the lead from the child.
- **Personal gender pronouns**: People who do not identify as either female or male may use pronouns such as “they, them, their” or “ze, hir” Example: “This is my friend ___. They’ve been in education for 12 years.”
- **Gender binary**: the inaccurate yet prevalent notion that most people strictly identify as either female or male, feminine or masculine. This binary typically supports stereotypes that can lead to statements beginning with “Girls don’t ___” or “Boys should ___.“ Feminine and masculine attributes can further constrain personal growth when used in statements like “Real boys/men don’t ___” or “A proper girl/woman should ___.“ These statements can negatively impact positive identity development and limit a child’s potential based on what they perceive they can or can’t do as prescribed by gender stereotypes.
- **Gender creative/expansive**: the notion that many people do not identify along a fixed gender binary (female/male) and instead may identify along the spectrum of gender in a way which may change over time. Concepts such as feminine or masculine may apply to differing degrees or not at all. Gender creative children may exhibit behaviors typically ascribed to either female or male, both, or neither.

Visit these websites for commonly used terms with definitions:

- **Gender Spectrum** - [The Language of Gender](#)
- **Welcoming Schools** - [LGBTQ definitions](#)
- **PFLAG** - [Glossary of terms](#)

What’s Happening at CDS

Drawing from the knowledge of our faculty and staff and our partnership with Gender Spectrum, we aspire to support everyone in their personal expression and be a gender-inclusive community. In 2016, CDS started using a gender-inclusive admissions application that allows
children to identify as male, female, another term, or a combination. We have also developed gender support plans tailored to students in each division.

We practice using gender neutral language, such as “everybody” or “people” instead of “guys,” “girls,” or “boys,” and inquiring about gender pronouns. While this may seem like a cliche for a progressive community, we believe that creating a space to be mindful of the importance of language helps people feel accepted, seen, and equal, and that it helps create better citizens overall.

- Teach about the social construct of gender, discuss gender stereotypes and how they affect people, and identity stereotypes in texts
- Find stories with lead characters of different genders during read-alouds.
- Read books about kids without normative gender expression and talk about the wide range of expressions
- Students can choose to be characters of any (or no) gender when acting out stories
- Include “she,” “he,” and “they” as gender pronouns, and default to “they” when the gender is unclear
- Avoid grouping students by gender
- Post pictures on the bulletin board that represent a variety of students. All genders are seen doing all tasks.
- Present role models of different genders. Example: regularly highlighting scientists who are women.

**Conversation Starters at Home or with Other CDS Families**

Children are innocent, can’t they just be free to play? Is exposure to conversations about gender helpful at an early age? How might I respond if my child brings up gender? According to Gender Spectrum, kids often begin expressing their gender identity between the ages of 2-4. So, talking about gender biology (the sex babies are assigned at birth), identity (the gender we feel we actually are), and expression (ways in which we show it, such as hairstyle, clothing, voice, behavior, etc.) in preschool isn't taking away their innocence, but rather engaging them in thoughts and providing a framework for conversations they may already be having. At this age they're already mirroring and adopting behaviors from the gender messages they're exposed to in media and other sources, many of which support gender stereotypes.

So, it's important to talk with all kids early to mitigate the effects of gender stereotypes. It's a perfect time to positively affirm how they identify and what they're feeling about their own gender, and ensure that they feel seen and heard. First step? Listen. Be an investigative reporter: what are your child’s thoughts about gender? How did they get these ideas? Next, especially for younger students, read books together that challenge gender stereotypes by addressing concrete stereotypical statements children or others make. Discuss the stories from multiple perspectives in context. Find out what your child has heard in terms of gender-specific statements like “Boys are better than girls at ___” or the opposite, and get their thoughts. If
stereotypes are present (and it’s likely they are), focus on the potential of all kids to become whatever they want. Lastly, when it comes to their own identity, assure them that however they identify is OK: “Some kids feel they're a girl, others feel they're a boy. Some kids feel like they're both in some ways, others feel like they're in between or neither. This can change over time, but whatever you’re feeling inside is right for you.” The important message is that they are who they’re meant to be and are accepted as is.

Why does CDS offer gender support plans?
We believe using a gender support plan creates a shared understanding about the ways in which your child’s authentic gender will be affirmed and supported at CDS. We recognize that gender-creative children may see gender as non-binary (beyond female/male), fluid, or both, and this form is an attempt to capture a snapshot of how they understand themself at this moment. For some children, identifying in a gender-creative, non-binary way may be a stage. For others, it can be an early indication of who they will develop to be long-term. Either way, having a gender support plan can help us partner with families so that together we can provide specific support for gender-creative children at every step along their journey at CDS.

How can having conversations about gender help kids who identify as female or male?
Open conversations about gender can help all kids who feel they can't act or be a certain way due to gender stereotypes break free of those constraints. Instead of limiting themselves from participating in a particular activity or sport because of their assigned gender (i.e., what’s on their birth certificate versus how they feel), they may believe they can. This can result in children questioning gender stereotypes, being able to reach their potential without constraints from stereotypes, and advocating for others to do the same. In other words, talking about gender and gender stereotypes is more likely to result in all kids being able to play happily because they can all feel comfortable with who they are.

Understanding our adult feelings about transgender people
- Have you considered what it might be like if your gender identity, the gender you feel you are, was different from your biological sex as identified at birth? What might it be like to tell family and friends? What could help you feel supported?
- According to the National Transgender Discrimination Survey¹, 78% of students in K-12 expressing a transgender identity reported being harassed, and 35% were victims of physical assault. Sadly, these students are also at a significantly higher risk for self-harm and suicide. How can we as a community embrace the many ways people identify?
- What gender expectations exist in your own parenting? As a society, we’ve assigned gender to everything, and toys are an obvious area affecting kids. Have you considered if any of your behaviors could express unstated expectations?

Helping our children think about transgender people
- Have you ever been misidentified as the opposite sex by someone? How did it feel?
- What comes naturally to you? What would it feel like if everyone thought that was unnatural and wanted you to act differently?
Quick Responses
The following statements have come up during conversations among students, families, and the general public. We want to help parents respond, while also encouraging you to respond in a way that reflects your experiences and values and engage in conversations to build fluency with this topic.

1. “Is that person a boy or a girl?”
   • The most important thing is to treat the question as a natural one that arises in the circumstances — which it is.
   • From a distance, we can offer that we are unsure and it is unimportant to us.
   • If we are engaging with the person, listen first. Be courteous and respectful.
   • If a question is appropriate, “What are your personal gender pronouns?” is one that can be received well. When asking, be matter-of-fact, neither shy and apologetic nor incisive and abrasive. You’re asking, as a social courtesy, for information that will allow you to show continued social courtesy. That is nothing to be ashamed of or apologetic about. The more that this question is treated as a natural social gesture, the more it will become a natural social gesture.

2. “Why do we need to talk about pronouns?”
   • As part of creating an inclusive and accepting community, it allows us to put into practice how we interact with people who identify at different places along the spectrum of gender

3. “Does he/she/they like boys or girls?”
   • That isn’t really our business and should not matter.

Resources / Media
- Gender Spectrum - website full of information about gender, identity, and terms to help guide conversations
- GLAAD Reference Guide - Vocabulary with definitions
- National Center for Transgender Equality - Advocacy organization for transgender people
- 8 Critical Facts about the state of transgender America - Washington Post, 1/22/2015
- Miss Representation - How mainstream media stereotypes women and what we can do
- The Mask You Live In - Conversations with boys about masculinity
- Straightlaced - Students talk about how gender-based expectations impact their lives

Footnote
1. National Transgender Discrimination Survey - a 2015 research paper documents the experiences of transgender people in the largest survey of its kind
Neurodiverse Learning Styles (Learning Differences)

Introduction
At CDS, we hope that everyone will have conversations about neurodiversity (also known as learning differences and learning diversity). We recognize that society supports and normalizes certain learning styles over others, and that it often misunderstands and undervalues people who don’t conform to these styles. Many famous people fall under the neurodiverse umbrella: Albert Einstein, Agatha Christie, Steve Jobs, Whoopi Goldberg, Steven Spielberg, Daniel Radcliffe, Keira Knightley, and John Lennon, to name a few.

Rather than viewing learning differences as deficits, we hope to acknowledge them as assets that can enrich the learning of all students through different perspectives. Many of the famous people mentioned gave credit to - rather than blamed - their diverse learning styles as part of the secret of their success. At CDS, we extend accommodations to support children in the way that they learn best. A child's individual learning style may be best explained by a learning specialist. They make recommendations as to how to best support the child by providing additional learning tools, extra time, or a quiet space to take tests, etc. Resources provided to neurodiverse students do not compromise the learning potential of the neurotypical child.

While the range of learning styles we are able to accommodate at CDS is limited, we strive to both recognize, affirm, and normalize all our students’ unique abilities, foster confidence in their learning styles, and promote a greater appreciation for neurodiverse learning styles in general.

Videos for Further Introduction
- **Educating a Neurodiverse World** - TED Talk, held at Teachers College, NY
- **Like Everyone Else** - Learning Disability Awareness: Children talk about their lives, how to support them
- **Playing to Our Strengths** - TED Talk on neurodiversity and education
- **Here’s What Neurodiversity Is - And What It Means For Feminism** - discusses the intersection of different aspects of identity with neurodiversity

Vocabulary
- **Neurodiversity** - a relatively new term to describe the variety of ways in which we learn and how this diversity brings a richer learning environment for all students.
- **Learning disabilities / differences** - terms that are falling out of favor due to their emphasis on how a person’s learning style differs from traditional standards. These terms are still used in certain evaluations and assessments, especially in public schools when creating an Individualized Education Program (IEP) for students, developed under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).
- **Dyslexia** - a range of learning challenges related to language. For more, click [here](#).
• Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) - a chronic condition marked by inattention, impulsive behavior, and/or hyperactivity. For more, click here.
• Asset-based approach - An approach to learning based on community development, focused on collaboration to achieve positive change using individuals’ knowledge, skills, and lived experiences.

What’s Happening at CDS
At CDS, for example, certain students take tests separately from their classmates or receive extra time or tools. These accommodations are designed to support children in the way they learn, and our decisions to treat children differently are typically based on recommendations from experts. The important thing to realize is that learning is not a competitive activity and we are not taking resources away from the entire group to give to one or a few students.

Here are a few ways we practice having conversations about neurodiversity at CDS:
• Normalize conversations about how everyone learns differently and we are all on our own journey.
• Give students multiple strategies and empower them to select the one that works best for them.
• Offer student-created projects to support diverse learning styles.
• Group students by mixed abilities and learning styles.
• Talk openly about accommodations so that other students see them as part of the educational landscape, not something to hide or be ashamed of.
• Give students time to reflect before responding. Rely on the “think, pair, share” learning method, which is a collaborative learning strategy in which students work together to solve a problem or answer a question about an assigned topic.
• Offer a variety of learning tools (noise reduction headphones, hand tools, etc.), and discuss how different people need different tools to succeed.
• Consider different learning styles when planning lessons, including visual cues, oral instructions, and manipulatives for kinesthetic learners.

Conversation Starters at Home or with Other CDS Families
Understanding our adult feelings about neurodiversity
• How has the neurodiversity landscape changed since you were a child?
• How was neurodiversity discussed or avoided at home for you?
• Did you struggle with learning as a child? How did you feel about it? Did you receive support?
• In the above list of influential people with learning disorders, when and how might they have been supported in non-traditional ways on their road to greatness?

Helping our children think about neurodiversity
• How does it feel when you are trying hard at something and still can’t get the hang of it? Some things that are easy for us to learn or do can be really frustrating for other people.
How can we be good classmates when someone is struggling to learn something?

Quick Responses
The following statements have come up during conversations among students, families, and the general public. We want to help parents respond, while also encouraging you to respond in a way that reflects your experiences and values and to engage in conversations that build fluency with this topic.

1. “[Someone] in my grade reads/does math really poorly or doesn’t know X”
   ○ Can you do anything to try to support them? Wouldn’t it feel good to be helped with something that is hard for you?
   ○ Can you tell me some things that they do really well?

2. “Why did [someone] have to go to a special school and not stay at CDS?”
   ○ Your teachers can help many students, but sometimes kids need additional focused, special attention in order to be successful, and we don’t always have enough people to support them well.

3. “Why does that student get extra time (or other accommodations) on tests or assignments? It doesn’t seem fair.”
   ○ The extra time or accommodations are there to level the playing field so they can be successful like other students. Like wearing glasses, these accommodations are not unfair advantages but tools to help.

4. “Why do we need to do things differently for that student?”
   ○ CDS intentionally pays attention to our similarities and differences in many ways so all students feel they belong. Students also benefit from having discussions with people from diverse backgrounds, providing multiple perspectives that make for a richer learning environment for all.

Resources / Media
Websites (Adults / Children)

- **Understood** - For learning and attention issues
- **All Kinds of Minds** - Putting science to work in classrooms
- **LD Online** - Guide to learning disabilities and ADHD
- **National Center for Learning Disabilities** - Improve the lives of children and adults with learning and attention issues

For Kids

- **Children's resources on neurodiversity/learning differences**
Physical Disabilities

Introduction
At CDS, our goal is for us to acknowledge physical disabilities as part of a person's identity, but not necessarily what defines them. A first step in this is gaining the tools to talk about physical disabilities in a respectful way. The term “disability” covers a wide range of conditions. Some are obvious, such as a child with a physical disability who uses a wheelchair or a child with a visual impairment who uses a cane to navigate when walking. Other disabilities may be more "hidden" -- for example, children who have autism spectrum disorder.

Gaining equality and accessibility for the disabled community is an important goal for us as a society. Some statistics illustrating the importance of this subject are that one in five Americans has a physical disability, and that only 17% of eligible workers with disabilities are employed vs. 65% of those without (Bureau of Labor Statistics, June 2015).

Videos for Further Introduction
- Things to Do When Your Kid Points Out Someone’s Differences
- Physical Disabilities - TED Med Talk
- Talk to Me - An 11-year-old girl with cerebral palsy makes a request
- We’re More Alike Than Different - People with Down syndrome challenge stereotypes
- The Present - Animated short story about a boy with a disability who receives a present, based on a comic strip by Fabio Coala
- 25 Inspiring People Who overcame their disabilities

Vocabulary
- Handicapped - Although handicapped is widely used in both law and everyday speech to refer to people having physical or mental disabilities, those described by the word tend to prefer the expressions “disabled” or “people with disabilities.”
- Physical disability - A limitation on a person's physical functioning, mobility, dexterity, or stamina. Other physical disabilities include impairments which limit other facets of daily living, such as respiratory disorders, blindness, epilepsy, and sleep disorders.
- Accessible - rather than using “disabled” to describe parking space or bathrooms, for instance, we encourage “accessible”
- Respectful Disability Language: Here’s What's Up! - National Youth Leadership Network includes helpful language and outdated terms

What’s Happening at CDS
Through our curriculum at CDS, we raise children’s awareness of physical disabilities to foster a richer understanding of the human experience and build sensitivity to the people around them. Third graders learn about people with disabilities, experience what it's like to navigate halls and classrooms in a wheelchair, and visit a local dance troupe made up of physically disabled
performers (to read more about our student-led initiatives for change in this area, see this article from our website.) Students also learn that rather than regarding physical disabilities from a deficit mentality, they can provide certain advantages and perspectives that add to the experience.

Conversation Starters at Home or with Other CDS Families
Understanding our adult feelings about physical disabilities:
● As a child, did you experience or know anyone with physical disabilities who had an impact on you?
● How has your family discussed or reacted to people with physical disabilities in the past? What areas could you use practice with?
● How many public figures or celebrities can you name with major physical disabilities?
● Can you name the physical disability of these accomplished people? Stevie Wonder, Marlee Matlin, Franklin Delano Roosevelt...
● If you are a hiring manager, parent/guardian, child - how can we remain open minded and empathetic toward people with physical disabilities? How can we be allies and create equity?

Helping our children think about physical disabilities:
● No two people are the same -- some differences are just more noticeable.
● A disability is only one characteristic of a person. People have many facets, with various likes and dislikes, strengths and challenges.
● Children with disabilities are like all children in that they want friends, respect, and inclusion.
● Children can be born disabled or become disabled from an accident or illness. You can't "catch" a disability from someone else.
● Just because someone has a physical disability (when a part or parts of the body do not work well) does not mean they necessarily have a cognitive (or thinking) disability.
● Children with disabilities can do many of the things that other children do, but it might take them longer. They may need assistance or adaptive equipment to help them.
● What advantages might a person with a disability have over an able-bodied person?

Quick Response Quiz
The following statements have come up during conversations among students, families, and the general public. We want to help parents respond in a way that reflects their experiences and values and engage in conversations that build fluency with this topic.

1. “Why is she in a wheelchair?”
   ○ She uses a wheelchair because a part of her body does not work as well as it could.
2. Hearing your child and their friends talking about another child’s physical disability or appearance
- Keep your cool and remain neutral. Stress that how a person looks doesn't indicate anything about who they are, and be sure to refrain from making negative comments yourself about another person's appearance.

3. Witnessing someone with difficulty walking navigate public transportation
- Imagine what it's like for the person in the wheelchair, receiving this negativity on a daily basis. Stand up and offer assistance (lowering a seat, helping with a safety belt, etc.), but don't assume your help is needed - and don't feel dejected if the offer is refused.

Resources / Media

Websites
- **LightHouse** for the Blind and Visually Impaired - San Francisco center that offers training and resources, and promotes “independence, equality and self-reliance.”
- **Aging and Disability Resource Center** - SF Gov, information about long-term services and supports, aging, and living with disability.
- **How to Truly Listen** - Deaf professional percussionist Evelyn Glennie talks about music
- **Disability Programs and Resource Center** - San Francisco State University website with links to information plus physical and technological resources
Adoptive Families

Introduction
CDS has a strong tradition of being openly supportive of diverse family structures, including racially similar and transracially adoptive families. While adoptive families have been a “norm” at CDS for some time, misperceptions persist.

For children, understanding that their family is built by adoption can be an affirming story, along the lines of, “Your birth parents loved you but realized they couldn’t take care of you, so they needed to find a family who could. We are so fortunate to be the family who gets to have you.” Still, some adoptive children can get unwanted attention or scrutiny, along the lines of “Who are your real parents?” or “Why were you given up for adoption?” Adults of transracially adoptive families may be asked “Where are the real parents?” or “How are you going to support their ethnic background?” While the intent may stem from pure curiosity or genuine concern, these questions can feel invasive and hurtful.

To help normalize these conversations, CDS teachers use a variety of materials to engage in intentional discussions about family structure and read books where characters happen to be adopted, whether of similar or transracial backgrounds. It’s important to validate that moving from one birth parent to another parent is a huge thing, even more so for transracially adopted children. We hope conversations at home can help demystify the topic for curious children and adults alike.

Videos/Media
- National Council for Adoption - website with adoption resources

Vocabulary
- Real mom, dad, or parent - Best to avoid. Often used with innocent curiosity, meant to distinguish between a biological parent and the person who raises a child (though the impact may be hurtful)
- Birth mom, dad, parent - biological parent
- Mom, dad, parent, guardian - person raising a child, regardless of biological connection
- Positive adoption language - see a list from the Adoptive Families website

Conversation Starters at Home or with Other CDS Families
Consider how you might talk about the following topics with other CDS families. How can you begin to talk about it with your children?

- How was adoption discussed in your family growing up, if at all?
- What messages did you get about adoptive families from friends, at school, in the media?
Did you know adoptive families growing up? How many adoption stories do you know?

**Quick Responses**
The following conversations have come up during conversations among students, families, and the general public. We want to provide examples of how you could respond, while also encouraging you to respond in a way that reflects your experiences and values. Most of all, we encourage you to engage in conversations to build vocabulary and understanding around this topic.

- “Is that your real dad/mom/parent/guardian?”
  - “What do you mean by that? I’m sure you didn’t mean it, but what you said is hurtful. Real parents are the ones who care for me.”
- “Why did that child’s real family give them away?”
  - “Some families realize they are unable to give children the love and care they want to. One choice is to find an adoptive family that can. It’s a difficult decision, and one that is for the greatest good of the child.”
- “Isn’t it sad that the kid doesn’t have real parents?”
  - “The child’s family is their real family.”

**What’s Happening at CDS**
Here are a few examples of how teachers are addressing issues of adoption in the classroom. These are meant to give insight into the kinds of conversations that may be happening at CDS so you can be prepared for what may come up at home.

Here are a few ways we practice having conversations about adoptive families at CDS:
- Use books and other materials that include different family structures and adoptive families throughout the grades
- Explicitly discuss exceptions when normative culture is expressed in a book. Example: “Not all families look that way…”
- Invite families to come in to share their family structure (preschool)

**Resources / Media**
- *Over the Moon* - children’s book about adoption in general
- *Maya* - children’s book about a girl adopted from Guatemala, living in Missouri
- *Adoption Terms* - relevant to the adoption process, from Findlaw website
- *Adoption Stories* - the trials, tribulations, and joys of adoption, from The Atlantic
- *Realities of Raising a Kid of a Different Race* - Time Magazine article about transracial adoption
- *Adoptive Families* - website with resources and adoption stories
CDS Affinity Groups

Affinity Groups are meetings where students who share a core identity – usually underrepresented – can meet and hopefully feel more connected, visible and included. These gatherings create a safe space where every member can speak openly about their experiences.

These groups are based on core identifiers such as race/ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, nationality, family structure, neurodiversity/learning differences, and more. We offer as many groups as possible, depending on adult facilitators who also share the given affinity. Watch a video on Affinity Groups at CDS here.

FAQ’s

Why hold affinity groups?

- Affinity groups provide a space for students traditionally underrepresented in society to connect, share their experiences, and feel safe and “normal” as they explore their identity. While not every child experiences affinity groups in the same way, these groups can be life-changing. Teachers and staff who lead the groups share some of their own stories and, in so doing, open the door for students to share as well.

Who leads affinity groups?

- Affinity groups are led by CDS faculty and staff

How old are the children who participate?

- We hold groups in both the lower and middle school.
- Research shows that children beginning at age two or three notice physical differences and, though they may not understand the social construct of race, they begin to understand their own identities in relation to the rest of the world.

What kind of benefit are we expecting from these groups?

- Affinity groups can be an effective way of promoting positive identity development.
- Recent publications find that engaging early in these kinds of discussions is an important element to nurturing children’s social/emotional needs. By doing this we are hoping to strengthen their character, increase their resilience, and provide greater chances for future success.
- CDS students in their own words have said this about affinity groups: “I realize I’m not alone,” “I learned about how many people have divorced parents,” and “We got to talk to people about topics that we had in common.”

How do they work?

- In lower school, these groups are largely social gatherings, a chance to share a meal and talk about whatever comes up using simple guiding questions. Participation is optional, and they may meet during lunch or after school.
- In middle school, we feel students are developmentally ready to engage in deeper discussions about identity (and are doing so in classes), so participation is required. Students have a say in which groups are held, decide how they as individuals identify,
and choose which group they’ll join. Discussions are largely student-led, and they are
couraged to bring relevant topics to the table. In the past, middle school groups met
every fourth Friday from 2:45-3:30 p.m.

- Students may participate in multiple groups.

Can parents/guardians participate?

- The student affinity groups are just for the children. However, CDS does have adult
  affinity groups. These groups are encouraged to hold one or two social events per year.
  Events can be very casual, from a potluck in the park to a day at the beach. These
  events should be low cost for both hosts and participants, and easily accessible by
  public transportation.

Where can I find out more about the purpose of affinity groups?

- For more information, please click [here](#) to read a statement on the role of affinity groups
  written by former CDS parent and Board Member Richard Hylton.

Don’t affinity groups just promote segregation and not diversity?

- Affinity groups are one aspect of creating a diverse and socially just world. They create
  the safe spaces needed for people to have conversations and shared experiences that
  build strength and pride. Equally as important, are the collaborative efforts between
  different groups towards creating equity for all. Allies are people who do not identify with
  a certain affinity group, but want to support the equal rights of people from that group.
  Ally work and affinity work are both important aspects of creating social equity.

**Affinity Groups in 2019-20:**

**Lower School**

- Asian Heritage
- Girls of African Heritage
- Kids of Multiple Households & Single Parents
- Latina/o/x Heritage
- LGBTQ-Headed Families
- Multiracial Heritages
- Neurodiverse Learning Styles
- South Asian Heritage
- Students of Color

**Middle School**

- Asian Pacific Islander/South Asian Heritage
- Black/African Heritage
- Boys
- Girls
- Interfaith/Spiritual Beliefs
- International/Recent Immigrant
- Jewish
• Latina/o/x Heritage
• Multiple Households/Divorced/Single Parent-Guardian
• Multiracial Heritages
• Neurodiverse Learning Styles
• Queer Alliance (LGBTQ)
• White/European Heritage

Family Affinity Groups

• Asian Heritage
• Black/African American Heritage
• Families Built Through Adoption
• Latina/o/x Heritage
• Neurodiversity Task Force
• One Love (families with a single child)
• Rainbow Families (formerly LGBTQ-Headed Families & Families with LGBTQ Questioning Kids)
• Single Parent/Guardian
• South Asian/Indian

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Footnotes
1.  *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?*, Dr. Beverly Daniel Tatum, numerous other sources.
Creating Inclusive Events

We do not expect that every event be open to every person, but when making events public, we do request that our community considers how available it will be to the larger group.

Here are some things to consider.

**Accessibility**
- How close is the event space to public transportation?
- Is the space accessible to people in wheelchairs, crutches, or with mobility issues?
- Is the event scheduled at a time when working families can attend?

**Socioeconomics**
- Events should be low cost to both hosts and attendees.
- How can we create events at both private homes and apartments where people from different socioeconomic backgrounds can feel comfortable and welcome?
  - Small changes in language can help people feel welcome and comfortable. Example: Does naming something a “cocktail party” exclude non-drinkers? Is the event a social gathering focused on alcohol, or could another expression be found such as “Parent/Guardian Night,” or “CDS Adult Social.”

**Themes**
- We take pride in our cultures and traditions and, if not handled carefully, themes can lead to insult or exclusion. And, even if one member of a culture says it’s OK, that person may not represent the majority feeling of CDS families of similar background. Examples might include: science fiction, music, notable decades...

**Gifts and Appreciations**
- If you are giving gifts, it’s a good idea to check in with families to see if they have preferences around gift giving in general or specifically with their child(ren). It is hard to know what exactly may be inappropriate, so have a discussion first. Some examples might include:
  - Giving toys that include weapons
  - Giving a doll of a certain race
  - If you are giving clothes, whether there are any preferences related to messages or modesty

**Partial List of Events at CDS**
- Welcome Potluck & Family Diversity Potluck - Everyone is welcome. Come share, discover, and celebrate!
- Bid & Bash Fundraiser and Auction
- Country Fair
- Family affinity group parties
- Grade-level parent parties
- Family class parties
- Birthdays