

## What response should I expect?

- Nothing at first - it will take some time but the doors will open.
- They will value their voices being heard and really listened to. Young people are rarely treated as or looked at as “experts” on anything.
- They may reveal to you that they are the target of discrimination, bullying or harassment because of their differences.
- They may express feelings of helplessness when dealing with issues of inclusion and fighting against the mistreatment of others. Talk about this.

## How can the Charlotte Coalition for Social Justice help?

- Provide you with information on our website and in our e-newsletter that will keep you updated with current events in the world of young people, and best practices and new ideas to address issues of diversity and inclusion.
- Offer a safe space for youth to come together across lines of difference to talk about issues of diversity and inclusion, think critically about why these issues exist, and explore ways that they can create positive change.
- Provide programs that young people can join, both inside and outside of their schools, to learn more about diversity and develop skills to be leaders for equity and inclusion. If a young person does not have a CCSJ initiative in her/his school, we can support them in starting one.
- Help answer your questions and talk you through difficulties you may be having addressing issues of diversity and inclusion with a young person.
- Set up forums and programs for adults interested in learning more about diversity and inclusion and/or for youth and adults to dialogue together around the issues.
- Support other ideas and initiatives that fall within the scope of our mission.

### Contact us!

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charlotte coalition  
for social justice

## Talking to Young People about Diversity and Inclusion



Photography by Wendy Yang

BUILDING AN INCLUSIVE COMMUNITY



### **Why talk to young people about diversity and inclusion?**

- The issues of diversity for the next generation are complex, challenging and potentially disastrous.
- The Social Capital Survey of 2001 revealed an unacceptable level of discomfort with our diversity. Out of 40 communities studied, the Charlotte region ranked 39th in interracial trust and 29th in social trust. Importantly moreover, the younger generation was shown by the survey to be the least trusting.
- Young people in our community have relatively limited opportunities compared to adults (particularly adults in the corporate world) to engage in training and dialogue around issues of diversity and inclusion.
- The world that young people live in is often hostile and demeaning and sometimes violent when it comes to dealing with difference.
- Young people need supportive adults to engage them in discussion around issues of diversity and inclusion, and help them put their beliefs into action.

### **What are the important things I need to keep in mind?**

- You are the role model - show your own courage and commitment to addressing issues of diversity and inclusion.
- Forget "not in front of the children" - be willing to openly question your beliefs, examine your attitudes and actions and correct yourself.
- Be mindful of your conduct with others and your comments about or to them.
- Young people's self-esteem in our society is very often tied to their sense of identity as members of dominant or subordinate, majority or minority groups. This can be complex for them because they will probably be dominant or majority in some groups and subordinate or minority in others. Think of how this affects your own life and help the young person to do the same.
- While you want to seize as many teachable moments as possible, you cannot necessarily respond to issues that are raised in the moment. If you aren't sure how to deal with something you saw or experienced with the young person it's OK to make a mental note about it and come back to it later.
- Believe that young people can be agents of positive social change.

### **How do I talk to young people about diversity and inclusion?**

- Have the conversation in a safe space free from peer or sibling pressure.
- Create an environment in which open discussion is encouraged and differing opinions are listened to and respected.
- Share your thoughts and opinions about controversial issues and encourage them to share theirs without your judgment.
- Talk openly about and celebrate the value of differences.
- Find out how the young person sees him or herself - are they part of the majority or minority, do they see themselves as dominant or subordinate in the groups to which they belong?
- Media has a huge influence on how young people perceive themselves and the world around them. Watch what they watch, listen to what they listen to and talk to them about how it affects their sense of identity and how they perceive others that are different from them.
- Talk to them about their world. Ask about their friends and their interactions with other young people at school, at their house of worship, in extra-curricular activities.
- Notice who they bring home and engage with socially. Find out what this says about their world or the way they operate within it.
- Find out what forms of discrimination the young person is seeing around them. Our society often blames the victim of discrimination - make sure they understand that those who are targeted are not at fault.
- Bias, bigotry and racism are learned. Whatever you hear - don't judge and condemn; help young person explore where the ideas, attitudes and beliefs come from. You don't have to know the answer, just ask "why" questions.

*It's important for you to talk to us about diversity and inclusion because as the adults in our lives you are a major influence in the way we think, and whether you know it or not, we will listen.*  
Anar Parikh, age 17, Myers Park - CCSJ Youth Activist