



How to...

Make a difference



Junior Council members report on how kids can make everyone feel included.

When the 12 members of *The Week Junior's* Junior Council began meeting for the Spring 2022 session, they decided they wanted to use their voices to increase inclusion and promote diversity in the world. The children selected their topic, conducted research, interviewed experts, and wrote their stories. We hope their ideas inspire you to take action! If you do, write to us and tell us about it at hello@theweekjunior.com.

PUT KINDNESS FIRST



By Hunter, 12, Idaho

Being kind to those around you is important for many reasons. For instance, have you ever been the new kid at a school or activity? Were you welcomed? If you were, that probably felt good! But that does not always happen. If you were not welcomed, you might have felt excluded. To keep that from happening to others, give them a simple smile. Smiling can make someone feel included. It shows that you notice them and see them there.



Studies have shown that kids who feel included perform better academically. Feeling included has many health and mood benefits too. Students who are included in a social group are overall more positive to their classmates and teachers.

You can also be aware of signs that show that someone feels excluded. They might be sitting in a corner or not talking and participating in a discussion. Besides smiling at them, you can say hello. This is a great thing to do even if you feel shy or don't know them. Just try, "Hi, do you want to come sit by me or join me?" The more we all offer kindness to each other, the more the world will be a more inclusive place.

RAISE AWARENESS ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH



By Srishti, 11, New York

Mental health conditions, such as anxiety and depression, affect about 6 million children in the US. These illnesses can seem invisible because they aren't always obvious to others. People with anxiety can feel restless and have difficulty remaining calm. They may have feelings of dread or uneasiness about everyday situations. Depression can cause persistent feelings of sadness and affect how a person feels, thinks, and behaves.

If you're interested in raising awareness about these conditions, you can ask your school if it would want to help educate

students about mental health. Your school could host a mental health awareness day or week. Students could learn about steps that improve mental health, such as breathing and stretching exercises that can help reduce anxiety during stressful moments. Or maybe your school would be open to you starting a mental health awareness club. Members could share their experiences and find friendships.

The goal of these efforts is to build a better world for all children. As US Surgeon General Vivek Murthy once said, our aim should be to create a world that prioritizes "people and community and builds a culture of kindness, inclusion and respect."



LEARN MORE ABOUT ANTI-RACISM



By Christian, 10, Pennsylvania

Advocating for anti-racism means speaking up, taking action, and making decisions to ensure that all people are treated fairly in schools, communities, and workplaces. "No matter what people look like or what their background is, they should be treated as equals," Malcolm Kenyatta, a state representative from Pennsylvania, told *The Week Junior*. Here are steps kids can take.

See opportunities. When studying US history, it's important to learn about the injustices many people unfairly faced. Instead of feeling badly about those injustices, aim to promote equality. For instance, you could share ideas you have about anti-racism with your school.

Keep reading. *Blended* and *Stella by Starlight* are fiction books by Sharon M. Draper that explore themes of social injustice. Whenever you can, seek out books with characters who are different from you to get a window into their challenges. Discuss what you read afterward with family and friends.

Celebrate differences. "The most important thing you can do is get to know as much as you can about other people, other states, other countries, and different cultures," said Kenyatta. You can be anti-racist by befriending someone at school whom you usually don't play with. "We treat each other with respect and dignity when we know more about each other," he said.



ILLUSTRATIONS BY LORENA BAYONA



How to...

HELP FRIENDS WITH DIFFERENT ABILITIES



By Lucy, 9, Missouri

Navigating friendships can be hard when you are a kid. For kids who have a disability or different abilities it can be even harder because other kids may be unsure about what to say to them. I have experience with this because I was born with cerebral palsy, a disorder that affects movement, muscle tone, and posture. I always wear my leg splints to help me walk, and I use a wheelchair to help me go long distances, such as when my family and I spend a day at the zoo. I interviewed Laura Bocko Jenks, who works at Kids Included Together, an organization that promotes inclusivity. Here are ways she said that kids can help those with disabilities.

Recognize that a disability is a small part of a person's identity. While it's harder for me to do daily things, like taking a shower, I have other skills that I like to focus on. For instance, I have a really good memory and can remember things that other people don't.

Offer to help. I like when people ask what they can do to help me. It makes me feel welcomed and included. I am learning to advocate for myself and ask for help, but that is not always easy. My friends at school have found ways to make me feel included. For instance, they give me a head start when we are racing since it's hard for me to run fast. It makes me feel happy when people think of ways to include me.

Ask thoughtful questions. Instead of asking someone what happened to them, ask them questions you would want to be asked. For instance: What do they like to do in their free time? What are their favorite foods? What plans do they have for the weekend?



TAKE STEPS TO PREVENT BULLYING



By Kendall, 11, Oklahoma

Bullying is when a person intentionally and repeatedly hurts someone who is considered vulnerable. It goes beyond playful teasing or conflict because one person is purposely harming the other. Today, bullying can often take place

on social media with one person name-calling or spreading rumors about another person. If you ever experience bullying or suspect it is happening to someone, tell a trusted adult. The good news is that there are ways that kids can help identify and reduce bullying, Sarah Aadland, a program director of Doing Good Together, a nonprofit in Minnesota, told *The Week Junior*. Here are some ideas.

Participate in in-person activities. The less time a person spends online, the more protected they'll be from negative online interactions. Plus, spending time with friends or new people in person is good for us!

Explore what interests you. When you sign up for a club or activity you enjoy, you're more likely to meet kids who share similar interests as you. And forming solid relationships with others can increase your confidence.

Try volunteering. Kids who spend time helping others, whether participating in a food drive or tutoring younger students at school, will strengthen their empathy muscle. Your empathy muscle is your ability to understand the feelings of others. Having empathy could better help you identify bullying behavior online.



STAND UP FOR EQUAL PAY



By Poppy, 10, WA

In 2021 in the US, women earned 82 cents for every dollar earned by men.

In order to make the same amount in a year as a man for doing the same job, a woman would have to work until March 15 of the following year. For this reason, every March 15 is National Equal Pay Day. Unfortunately pay equity is even worse for women of color. Asian, Pacific Islander, Black, and Latina women make significantly less because they face both gender and racial discrimination.

"Part of the problem is that women are paid less than men for doing the same jobs," Eve Mefferd, of the Institute for Women's Policy Research, told *The Week Junior*. She said another part of the problem is that we don't pay enough income for jobs that women traditionally do, like providing care, "This is unjust, and it also makes it harder for women to provide for themselves and their families when it comes to paying for food, shelter, and other important parts of life," said Mefferd.

This may seem like something kids can't do anything about, but



we can. You can go online, learn more and support equal pay at www.equalpaytoday.org. Research more about this issue by reading books, watching movies, and talking to people. Being informed is an important part of making change. Find out who your local representatives are by searching for them at usa.gov/elected-officials. Write them a letter or an email about your thoughts on equal pay. Our voices can be heard.



How to...

EMBRACE THE BENEFITS OF DIVERSITY



By Gabriella, 11, Nevada

We all have our own unique personalities, talents, and physical traits. We might come from different cultures or speak different languages. What if we looked at all these differences as strengths instead of weaknesses? Could we make the world more inclusive? You bet we can!

One way to understand how diversity makes us stronger as a whole is to imagine our society as a basketball team, Anna Spain Bradley, who works to promote inclusion at the University of California in Los Angeles, told *The Week Junior*. In order to create a winning basketball team, you need a combination of basketball players who have different strengths. You need strong defenders, great passers, and terrific shooters. If you only had one of these types of players, your team would not be as strong. It is the diversity of skills that creates the magic of the team.

As young people, we can promote diversity just by being ourselves. This will show others that they can be proud of themselves too. Whether you're with people you have known for a long time or just met, ask them questions. Be curious and aim to be a lifelong learner. Eat new foods, listen to new music, and be open to new places. Finally, think positive. "When people move together as a force for a better tomorrow, we're unstoppable!" Bradley said.



HAVE TOUGH CONVERSATIONS



By Olivia, 9, Texas

It can be hard to speak with people with whom you disagree. Author Kate Murphy equates it to feeling like you are "being chased by a bear" in her book, *You're Not Listening*. Yet, it is important to have these tough conversations. When we speak with others who are different from us, we learn about their lived experiences and in turn, that enriches our perspective of the world. I spoke with Eli Woody and Alyssa Rivera from the National Speech & Debate Association about why having tough conversations is important and how to keep them constructive.

According to Woody, it is important to reach out and listen to people with different perspectives because it widens your understanding of the feelings of others.



In a debate contest, having a moderator (a person who facilitates a discussion) can make sure that two people keep their comments fair and constructive. In a conversational setting, Rivera suggests that you stick to the facts and avoid basing any argument with how you feel. A good debate is backed by research and not meant to attack or hurt anyone personally.

Ultimately, the goal is not to "win" when speaking with people you disagree with. Instead, it is come away with learning a new fact or a new way of thinking!

ASK ABOUT PRONOUNS



By Jo, 11, Washington

Pronouns are the third-person references that people use for themselves, such as he/him, she/her, and they/them. Here's what to know about pronouns.

People can use any pronoun. A recent study suggests that nearly one in 10 young people identify as gender-diverse. They don't fully identify as male or female. People who identify as nonbinary—meaning they identify as neither male nor female or sometimes both—may use they/them pronouns. Others use a combination, like he/they or they/she.

Ask and learn. When you meet someone, you can kindly ask, "By the way, what are your pronouns?" Be sure to tell them what pronouns you use. When you take the time to ask someone their pronouns, you are demonstrating that you are open to all gender identities.

Try gender neutral terms. If you are unsure about someone's pronouns or aren't able to ask them, use nouns that aren't about gender. You could use student/students or kid/kids. You can also use they/them/their to refer to one person. Did you know that these pronouns have been used to refer to one person or a group of people since the 1300s?

Use their name. If you know someone's name but not their pronouns, call them by name their name. "Using a person's name takes the focus off gender," Dr. Erin Pahlke, a professor at Whitman College, told *The Week Junior*.

Keep trying. If you happen to call someone by a pronoun they don't use, don't worry. Correct yourself and continue the conversation. For instance, Dr. Pahlke gives this example of how to move on: "She—sorry—I mean, they are really good at the monkey bars."



UNDERSTAND NEURODIVERSITY



By Jack, 9, Maryland

Did you know that one in five Americans think differently than other people? They may have a health condition that makes their brain work differently. These conditions include autism (a disorder that affects the ability to communicate and interact) and dyslexia (having difficulty reading).

Instead of thinking of people whose brains think differently as having a weakness, it's more inclusive to think of their brain differences as being "neurodivergent." Neurodivergent is a concept that all brains are normal and people who think differently have valuable contributions to make.

"There is more to each of us than we can see," Michelle Lassiter of Understood.org, told *The Week Junior*. If you meet someone who tells you they have a condition that affects their thinking, ask them if they are



comfortable talking about their differences. "You could say, 'I would love to know more about your unique way of thinking. Are you okay talking about it?'" Lassiter said. "If the person you're asking doesn't want to talk, respect their decision," she said. "Remember that if they don't share, it doesn't mean they don't like you. They probably just don't feel like talking at that moment."

"The most important thing to consider when thinking about other people's brain differences is recognizing that we are all different in one way or another," said Lassiter. Together we can do amazing things we might not be able to have done on our own.

RECOGNIZE YOUR OWN BIAS



By Noor, 12, New Jersey

Unconscious bias is when a person forms assessments of others without being aware of doing so. These assessments tend to be based on certain qualities people have, such as race, gender, age, weight, and religion. It's normal for people to have unconscious bias, and recognizing it can help you become more inclusive.

How does unconscious bias come about? It can develop at an early age, based on what children see and hear in their daily lives. You can have both positive and negative biases. For instance, if you share many qualities with someone, you may have a positive feeling toward them. But if you don't share any qualities with them, your brain may view them in a less positive light. "Being aware of one's unconscious bias helps people look at situations more objectively and hopefully more authentically," Ray LeCara Jr., a teacher of 30 years, told *The Week Junior*.



What can be done? Whenever you can, reach out to kids who are a different race, gender, religion, or other difference than you. If you both share a common activity, you could use that as your starting point to get to know one another. The more we interact with those who are different from us, the more we will see how similar we all are. Our similarities will be greater than our differences.

BE AN UPSTANDER



By Vihan, 8, Virginia

Upstanders are people who stand up for others who aren't being treated fairly or kindly. It's when a person uses their voice and takes action to stand up to an injustice, such as when a child is being bullied. "Upstanders are, in my opinion, the very best of what it means to be an American," Jason Miyares, attorney general (a top leader) of Virginia,



told *The Week Junior*. "They protect and stand up for those that can't help themselves." Miyares shared ways that kids can be upstanders.

Stand up for kindness. If someone is teasing another person, try saying, "That's not funny." That simple statement can have a powerful effect on stopping unkind behavior.

Be a buddy. Invite someone who has been teased to play with you. You can also ask if they want to talk if they seem sad.

Help "bystanders" become upstanders. If you see friends or classmates laughing along with the person who is saying a mean thing, tell them that they are hurting someone instead of helping them.

Tell an adult. If you notice someone being treated unfairly, seek out a trusted adult. They may not be aware of the situation and can decide how to handle it.

Get your school involved. Ask your teacher if you can make signs to help people learn about how to prevent bullying. Or maybe you and other students can write a class pledge that explains how your classroom will aim to stand up against bullying.