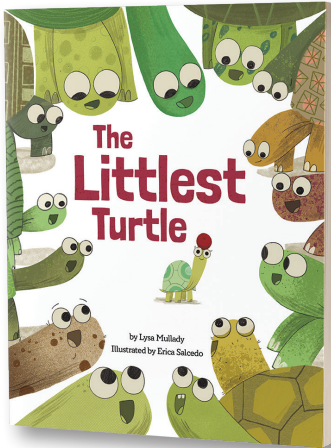




AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

Helping Your Child Understand Equity

by Lysa Mullady



This is an excerpt from the Reader's Note in *The Littlest Turtle*.

You can purchase the full book with 20% off and free domestic shipping [here](#). Enter code **MPKIDS20** at checkout.

We teach our children how to be good citizens by modeling values that reflect respect for each member within the community. These values come to life when we promote positive actions: turn taking, sharing, and using our words to ask for what we need. These acts reflect fairness. What is good for me is good for you, what is good for you is good for me. When asked to share and be fair, kids are easily satisfied when they see each person getting an equal amount. This is equality. Each person gets the same and is provided with the same opportunities. What is harder for children to understand is the idea of equity. Equity understands that one size does not fit all. Each circumstance calls for giving what is needed, even if it is different from the need of another. Fair is not always equal. Sometimes, fair is different from how things have been done in the past. Advocating for this idea is how we create a world where each one of us can rise and thrive, together.

Empathy

In order to understand equity, children need to be sensitive to the feelings and experiences of others. Equity is tied to empathy. We help children develop empathy by speaking to both sides of a story. Every interaction, either experienced or observed, gives an opportunity to learn perspective taking. Casually explore.

When you play a game, how does it feel to be the winner or the loser? If you see a person outside in bad weather, wonder what it is like for them. Together, make a donation to a charity and explain how important it is to help others in need. Guiding words to understand the experience of another not only develops empathy, but compassion as well. Compassion puts the care in community.

What's Your Opinion?

Another community building skill is the ability to accept differences of opinion. We all know what we like and what we don't like. We have favorites—(vanilla with rainbow sprinkles). We have dislikes—(liver and onions). Just like

recognizing others experience things differently, we each have our own opinions. Fostering this understanding is as simple as using phrases like “I’m with you,” or “That’s not for me.” As we encourage children to try new things, allow opportunity for choice. Showing appreciation for their preferences builds respect. A child who feels respected, in turn respects others. Respect builds feelings of trust, safety, and wellbeing. For yourself and for each other.

Me, You

No two members of a community are exactly alike. Everyone is special in their own way. Skin color, size, family composition: these are some of the traits within our circle of identity. Growing up, children begin to see differences in others. It is natural for children to point out and ask why another person is different than them. Answer in a comforting way. “Oh, you noticed that.” Acknowledge the truth. “Yes, that person is tall.” This can even be a moment of wonder: “We must look different to them.” The conversation is not about how we are all the same: in a community we are all different. Who we are as individuals makes us unique. Who we are as a whole creates our community. I am me and you are you. Together we live and grow, side by side.

We

With others, we share our days. Where we live. Where we learn. Where we play. In all these places, each person has a responsibility to act in a way that makes sure everyone is safe and has a good experience while being together. For kids, this is taught through upholding the many rules we live by. We keep our hands to ourselves. We use a speaking voice to ask for what we need. We ask before we take. These actions show an appreciation for the basic rights of another. We don’t hurt each other and we respect each other’s things. A strong community safeguards the right for each member to live in peace and harmony.

Developing Voice

Children learn to use their voice when the adults in their lives react patiently to their thoughts and feelings. Listening encourages communication. Reflecting what we hear helps others feel seen. Take the time to explain how or why things are done. This practice engages cooperation. Giving choice, when possible, develops voice. Teaching the difference between negotiable and non-negotiable choices develops awareness. As they grow, children who are seen and heard develop a strong sense of self. This esteem leads to the skill of speaking up for themselves and for others—advocacy.

Accept Differences

It is unrealistic to expect people to agree all the time. How we settle these differences is a mark of maturity. Fighting, yelling, and tantrums are markers of emotional dysregulation. It is our responsibility to use coping strategies. Discussion is the best method for walking through discourse. The goal of talking it out is not to find a winner or loser. Not to determine who is right or who is wrong. Conversation is the avenue to peace.

This Article’s Author

Lysa Mullady has been an elementary school counselor for 30 years. She was born and raised on Long Island, New York, where she still lives with her family and golden-doodles. She is the author of *Bye Bye Pesky Fly*, *Three Little Birds*, and *Red Yellow Blue*. Visit lysamullady.com, @lysamullady on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.