



## Practical Peacemaking Tips

A study by the Southern Poverty Law Center found that this year's political campaign has had a very negative effect on children. Children of color are afraid and anxious about their safety. Incidences of bullying, harassment, and intimidation of students whose race, religion, or nationalities have been verbal targets of candidates are up. Many teachers say, "The gains made by years of anti-bullying work in schools have been rolled back in a few short months." Source: Michael Winshp. "This Election's Teaching Our Kids Bad Habits". *Common Dreams*. 4-21-2016. (licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 License)

What can you do to help children in this mean-spirited climate?

- The teachings of Jesus are still true and need to be lived out now more than ever.
- **Remind yourself and teach your children that**
  - Disagreeing with someone is OK. Condemning them; dehumanizing them; blaming them for all the world's or your own problems; being mean to them; threatening them, or harming them is not.
  - Stereotyping people by race, religion, nationality, or any other characteristic goes against what Jesus taught.
    - We are called to love our neighbors as ourselves – and neighbors are not just the people in the house next door (Mark 12:28-31)
    - We are called to address our own faults and shortcomings instead condemning other people for theirs. We are not to judge others. (Matthew 7:1-5)
    - We are called to love our enemies and pray for them – pray for their wellbeing and for God's grace for them not for their destruction. (Matthew 5:43-48)
- Watch your own behavior, attitudes, and conversations. Little ears and eyes are always listening and watching. Children learn more from how the adults around them act than they do from what adults tell them to do or not do.
- Limit your children's exposure (and your own!) to media 'news' programming. Since the move to 24 hour 'news' broadcasting, 90% of what is shown is commentary not news. Learn to tell the difference and help children (when they are old enough) to do the same. Remember, most 'experts' called in to comment are paid to do so and usually do not have any direct knowledge of the situation they are commenting on. Note where they are from. Be aware of their bias. Especially when broadcasters are in 'crisis'

mode, speculation and hearsay are presented as 'fact' which means the 'facts' appear to change as new information comes in. It is sometimes days before actual accurate facts are known or shared. By then, people may have already formed opinions based on the hearsay or innuendo not truth and facts. This only makes a tense situation worse. Some broadcasters and commentators use inflammatory or sensationalizing language. Some commentators and many panels of 'experts' are not courteous to each other. Much of what is presented is done with entertainment value in mind not as fair-minded reporting or reasoned dialogue. The same things are true of internet news. Information gained from social media is not fact checked, may be hearsay, or can be easily fabricated. **Know your sources. Check for facts. Do not jump to conclusions – especially based on only one source.**

- Listen to your children. Ask them how they are feeling. Ask them about what is happening at school. Get involved. Work together with teachers and other parents – especially if your school population is diverse – to help children and families get to know each other so that children will learn to see each other as classmates, neighbors, and friends.
- Children need to know that adults – especially those in positions of power – do not always act as Jesus would want them to. Help children learn that being mean, disrespectful, rude, and lying is not OK no matter who is doing it. Help them learn to treat people with respect and caring even if those people do not do the same.
- Help children learn how to respectfully disagree with someone.
  - Teach them to listen to the views of others and work to understand those views even if they do not agree with them.
  - Teach children how they can share their ideas and opinions in ways that help rather than hurt.
  - Teach children that disagreeing with someone over something does not mean you cannot be friends with them.

The attitudes and ways of looking at other people children learn when they are young will follow them through out life. Their attitudes will either help make the world a better place in the future or help continue the mean-spirited climate that is causing so much trouble now. Be good examples and good teachers. Your children and the future depend on it!