

When your kid makes a cringe comment - how to respond

This resource is exclusive for members of the [Luminary Braintrust](#) (LBT) and attendees of Raising Luminaries Illuminati workshops. Please don't share it - instead, urge folks to [join the LBT](#) to support my work and help me create more resources like this. - Ashia

Create a family policy so kids know they are allowed to ask about physical differences, but *also* the importance of not making folks who look 'new' to them feel uncomfortable or othered.

Each individual has different preferences and feels comfortable with various levels of frankness, usually depending on our mood at the time. Speaking for myself - a visibly multiracial person who often wears earmuffs in public to deal with an otherwise invisible disability:

- **Create a plan**
Agree with kids (ahead of time) to save questions about other people's bodies and faces for when you're alone together. This makes it easier to cut them off when they're about to hurt somebody with a quick *"That sounds like an at-home conversation."* and they'll *know* what you mean.
 - **Don't stare**
(Or if you must stare - please don't do it while frowning. It's scary and we get nervous about getting yelled at or you know, attacked.) Curious staring is uncomfortable, but hostile staring is *terrifying* - and it's hard to tell the difference!
 - **Don't look THROUGH us**
Avoid conspicuously *avoiding* eye contact or pretending we don't exist.
 - **Smile & say 'hello'**
Like you're talking to a fellow human. Because you are!
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When your kid points at (or talks about) someone in public

Don't just hush your kiddo and pretend they didn't say anything. Silence teaches our kids that talking about differences (or being different) is something to be ashamed of.

Instead, leap in with a cheery tone to suggest that differences are both normal to be curious about, and also normal.

- "Yeah, they have a really cool pink wheelchair!"
- "Those are some sweet earmuffs! Smart for a noisy place like this!"
- "Oh a new neighbor,* let's say hello!"

**Words like 'neighbor' 'classmate,' 'friend' - suggests that this person is one of us - a member of our community. Instead of othering folks, we broaden our kids' sense of who counts as 'one of us.'*

You don't have to whisper. If your kid is being rude, name it.

If you can swing this without being invasive or bothering them - transform this from a conversation *about* someone (objectifying) else to a conversation *with* the person (collaborative).

Since pointing someone out and talking *about* them can be objectifying and dehumanizing, we re-humanize each other by connecting through *normal human interactions*.

A simple *"Hello. Sorry about that. That was rude, I'll talk to my kid about this."* is plenty.

If your kid won't stop the cringe:

Just be honest with your kids - *"Talking about other people's bodies, especially when ours are different - can make folks uncomfortable, and we're being rude. Let's learn about the many ways our bodies work when we get home."*

Remember - This is a *person*, not a learning prop for your family.

If your kid says something rude and *the person knows* - It's okay to actively apologize. But don't turn this into 20 questions and drill this person on their differences.

"Sorry about that, we've been reading about skin color and my kid got excited because we live in a bit of a bubble. I understand if it made you uncomfortable or feel singled out, no *[neighbor / fellow shopper / community member, etc.]* should have to deal with being spotlighted like this. I'll talk with my kids about this when we get home."

The point is to de-center yourself and remember that folks who look 'different' have to deal with this constantly. Don't take it personally if this person is irritated with your kid's behavior.

Just like *any other person* - treat us like a friend who has just as much right to take up space in public and move through the community without getting questioned and singled-out.

Example scenarios & Responses to your kiddo

"Look how fat that lady is!"

"People come in lots of sizes! She's got cool pants, too! But kiddo - it's not kind to comment on someone's body unless they invite you to, okay?"

Follow-up privately:

"It's okay to be curious, but remember, we don't comment about people's bodies. In our culture, people who have larger bodies are often bullied and picked on by fat-phobic bullies. In our family, we think fat bodies are beautiful. But when we comment on their bodies, that might remind them of being bullied, and could hurt their feelings."

"Papa! Papa! Look, it's Papa!" (*said while pointing enthusiastically to a very feminine octogenarian*)

"Oh I see that person has brown skin and light hair, just like Papa! How pretty! But Papa is a man, and given how they are dressed, that person is likely to be a woman, and probably doesn't want to be called the word we use for your grandpa who is a man."

Follow-up privately:

"That person today had brown skin and light hair like papa. We don't have many people with brown skin in our neighborhood, so I can see why you were excited. However - sometimes it hurts people's feelings to be mistaken for someone else, just because of the color of their skin or their age. Like if your teacher assumed you and **[friend]** are exactly the same just because you have the same **[rarer feature]**. So let's say 'hello' to new people and ask what they want to be called!"

Child misgenders someone

"**[Name]** uses **[pronouns]**. It's important to use the names and pronouns people tell us because it shows respect."

Follow-up privately:

"It's impossible to tell someone's gender based on how they look. I know it gets confusing because so many people make assumptions based on our clothes and hair. When we guess, that might hurt someone's feelings if they feel strongly about their gender. It's okay to make mistakes, but next time let's ask how people like to be addressed first."

"Look, Mama, wheelchair!"

"Yes that person has a very cool wheelchair! It is RED and has FOUR wheels!"

Follow-up privately:

"Not many people use wheelchairs around here, so I can see why you were excited to see someone using one. But when many people are always commenting one thing about a person, like their height, or the wheelchair they use, they can start to feel like no one sees them as a regular person. Next time, try not to single out people based on the mobility devices they use unless they invite you to ask questions."

"That old lady gave me a candy!"

That was so nice of **[name]** to share! But compared to you, *everyone* is old. You're three.

Follow-up privately:

"Older people are very active and smart and capable and age is a normal part of being a human. But because so many people use older age as a reason to hurt women, it might hurt **[name]'s** feelings to label her as 'old.' This label might remind her of being picked on, so avoid commenting on her age, okay?"