

# COUNSELING CONNECTION



## APRIL NEWSLETTER AUTISM AWARENESS MONTH

### BPA Student Support & Services

#### Celebrating Differences: Five lessons for teaching kids' acceptance

##### 1. *Challenge the idea of “normal.”*

Generally, people are treated differently because they're seen as “the other.” For children, anything outside of “normal” may seem undesirable. It's helpful to challenge the idea of “normal” to see past differences. All of us are born unique with different likes and preferences, so there is no one way to be “normal.”

Teaching children to see similarities is important, but the goal is not to eliminate our differences. By acknowledging differences and similarities simultaneously, kids will find they can learn from people who aren't like them. Studies show that ignoring differences actually makes discrimination worse.



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#### Tips for Parents

##### 2. *Teach children to not be afraid to ask hard questions. Don't shy away from hard answers*

- By answering honestly, you create opportunities for more conversations about differences which also shows your child that it's okay to ask respectful questions.

##### 3. *Cultivate empathy and community.*

- It is important to encourage children to empathize and help them get to know people unlike themselves.

##### 4. *Know your child is listening*

- It may seem easier to shield children from challenging issues, such as racism, bigotry, or oppression. But the reality is children will be confronted with these issues through the media, in day-to-day conversations, or with their peers.

##### 5. *Understand intent*

- If a child says something potentially offensive, it probably isn't intended to be harmful. It's best to correct the underlying misconceptions behind their statement or engage them in a conversation about how their words could hurt feelings.

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## APRIL NEWSLETTER CONT. REDUCING FOREIGN LANGUAGE ANXIETY FOR TEST TAKING

### BPA ELL Services

#### What is Foreign Language Anxiety?

English Language Learners (ELLs), students who are learning English as a second (or even third!) language, often express some form of anxious behavior in the classroom. Foreign language anxiety theory suggests that language learners tend to exhibit symptoms of anxiety, apprehension, or nervousness when they must show their knowledge under pressure.

#### **This anxiety can stem from a few different primary stressors:**

**Fear of Judgement:** When speaking a language that is not native to you, it's common to feel scared of sounding juvenile or uneducated. Many ELL students fear sounding "babyish" as they may not be familiar with more advanced grammar yet.

**Fear of Loss of Identity:** Students may be nervous about putting in effort with the English language if they feel that in doing so, they may be losing a part of their cultural identity.

**General Learning Disabilities:** In addition to the difficulties in learning a language, some students may also have a learning disorder like ADHD or dyslexia, which makes classroom learning doubly difficult. In those situations, teachers are presented with another layer that needs peeling in order to best accommodate that particular student.

#### How to Reduce Foreign Language Anxiety

There are a variety of techniques you can implement to encourage your ELL students. Of these, here are three baseline strategies which focus on how to reduce foreign language classroom anxiety:

***Don't force it.*** If a student is not yet comfortable speaking up in class, don't push them to do so. Instead, try to work with them one-on-one until they feel ready to speak in front of their peers. When they do speak, make sure to acknowledge their contribution to reinforce the idea that their participation in classroom discussions is valuable.

***Encourage diversity in the classroom.*** Instill the idea in all of your students that a diversity of languages makes for a richer classroom experience, and that students should never laugh at their peers if they make language errors. You might even ask your ELL students to teach the class how to say some basic phrases in their native language: this can shift the perceived power dynamics and breed empathy among their English-speaking peers.

***Develop a system with your student.*** As part of your ongoing dialogue with your anxious ELL students, consider developing a subtle system for them to let you know how they are managing. For instance, if they're having a particularly difficult day, you could have them place a certain item on their desk. This item's presence could, for instance, indicate whether they're comfortable speaking in class that day.

