

## Managing Questions and Stares

A Guide for Parents, Guardians, and Caretakers\*

\*NOTE: The word "Parent" will be used throughout this module, but includes all of the above

## Managing Questions and Stares

- If your child has a visible difference, others may respond in various ways such as:
  - Showing curiosity, concern, upset, or surprise
  - Making comments
  - Asking direct, personal, or potentially upsetting questions
  - Staring
  - Looking, but then quickly looking away
  - Asking if they can help them

## Managing Questions and Stares

- As a parent, it is natural to want to protect your child
- You cannot shelter your child by avoiding others or by preventing questions or staring
- You can teach yourself and your child how to think about and react to these expected situations

## What You Can Do

1. Plan for situations when others ask questions or stare
2. Develop effective responses
3. Change or redirect the conversation
4. Practice your responses
5. Get others involved
6. Learn to manage rudeness

## #1 Plan for Situations



- Remind yourself that most people stare because they are curious or concerned
- Realize it is how you think about a situation that forms your feelings; other people do not cause your feelings or reactions
- Learn how to deal with questions and stares in a positive way. You cannot keep people from staring or asking questions.

## #1 Plan for Situations

- Children learn from watching their parents and listening to what they say
- It is very helpful for a parent to show patience for initial curiosity from others, and provide simple courteous responses to questions
- Responding positively to curiosity and questions teaches your child how to respond the same way



### #2 Develop Responses

- Think about questions you have been asked, or might be asked, by others
- Discuss what you and your child feel comfortable saying to people who stare or ask questions
- Listen to your child. Depending on their age, they may wish to use responses that are different from yours.



### #2 Develop Responses

- What words do you and your child want to use to talk about and describe things? Such as:
  - What happened or how they were injured
  - How your child is doing
  - Appearance (why they look the way they do)
  - Scars, pressure garments, splints, or braces
  - Changes in function, ability, or amputations



### #2 Develop Responses

- Plan answers that give enough information and reassurance to others, without going into details (unless you choose to)
- Get help in developing responses by using the “Response to Questions and Stares” handout, or by talking with:
  - Parents of other burned children or SOAR volunteers
  - Medical professionals
  - Counselors



### #2 Develop Responses: Example Questions and Answers

- What happened to him? *He was burned. He is better now.*
- How was he burned? *It was a house fire.*
- When did it happen? *It happened several months ago.*
- How did it happen? *We don’t know how the fire started.*
- Why does he look like that? *His skin looks different because his hand and arm were burned.*
- Does it hurt? *It did at the time of the injury, but not now.*
- Will it always look like that? *He is still healing from the injury.*



### #3 Change or Redirect the Conversation

- After your initial response, prevent additional comments by using statements that move the conversation and attention to something else
- You can change or redirect the conversation by:
  - Showing interest in the person who asked
  - Changing the subject
  - Ending the conversation
  - For more ideas, refer to the Changing Faces “Explain–Reassure–Distract Technique”: [www.changingfaces.org.uk](http://www.changingfaces.org.uk)



### #3 Change the Conversation: Examples

- If someone asks what happened to your child, give a simple response: *“Tim was burned by hot coffee, but that was a long time ago.”*
- To change the conversation, follow your initial response by a brief statement such as:
  - “How are you doing today?”
  - “What a pretty shirt you have on. Is red a favorite color of yours?”
  - “Thanks for your concern. We must get on with our shopping.”



### #3 Change the Conversation: Examples

- If someone asks why your child looks different, give a simple response: *“Tim is wearing a mask and special pressure garments because he was burned.”*
- Follow it with a comment such as:
  - “Tim loves going to the movies. What movies do you like?”
  - “Tim is going swimming tomorrow. Do you like to swim?”
  - “We are short on time and need to finish our errands.”



### #4 Practice Your Responses

- The more you practice, the easier your responses will become
- Practice with family and friends
- Practice while in the hospital or health care setting
- Discuss these practice sessions with your child to get their input and feedback



### #5 Get Others Involved

- Encourage family, friends, siblings, educators, and others to learn how to respond to staring and questions by reviewing the REACH website
- This group of supportive people can help your child by responding in a positive manner, such as:
  - Giving a simple explanation or comment
  - Changing the conversation to something else
  - Ending the conversation



### #5 Get Others Involved

- Remember, it is okay to ask for help if you or your child:
  - Feel overwhelmed or upset about dealing with the reactions of others
  - Want additional coaching or help in developing responses
  - Wish to discuss a difficult encounter that occurred



### #6 Managing Rudeness

- Most people who stare, ask questions, or make comments are doing so out of curiosity or concern
- You may occasionally encounter someone who is rude or reacts in an upsetting manner
- You will feel more confident about dealing with these situations if you plan a response for such encounters



### #6 Managing Rudeness

- Be assertive and make simple statements, such as:
  - “Please don’t stare.”
  - “I feel uncomfortable.”
  - “I would prefer you to say hello.”
  - “You can ask a question if you are curious.”



### #6 Managing Rudeness

- When people ask personal, invading, or too many questions, give a simple statement such as:
  - “I don’t want to talk about this anymore.”
  - “You are asking too many questions, I want to change the subject.”
  - “I don’t feel comfortable discussing that with you.”
  - “That is too personal of a question for me to answer.”



### #6 Managing Rudeness

- Sometimes others will make rude or unkind comments
- Such comments must be addressed. You can respond by saying:
  - “I do not like it when you make such hurtful remarks.”
  - “My child may look different, but she can hear what you are saying. It is very hurtful to both of us.”
  - “I will not listen to your comments. Good-bye.”



### #6 Managing Rudeness

- When others have been rude, it is helpful to discuss the situation later in a safe and quiet location:
  - Discuss how you and your child felt
  - Talk about potential reasons that others are rude
  - Discuss why it is important to respond, but not get into arguments or hostile behavior
  - Remind your child that most people are kind, not rude



### Age Considerations: Children 2-6 Years Old

- Children as young as 2 years old will notice visible differences in appearance
- Young children may have difficulty putting their questions or concerns into words
- Instead, it is reflected in their behaviors such as:
  - Staring intently or pointing
  - Abruptly walking up and touching
  - Running away, hiding from, or avoiding a child who is different



### Age Considerations: Children 2-6 Years Old

- They may not understand visible differences in appearance, and in fact may misinterpret what it is or why it happened
- Questions or comments from young children can seem strange or surprising, such as: Why does she look wrinkly? Am I going to catch what he has? I can’t play with him, he’s got scary things on him.
- Provide simple explanations to their questions

### Age Considerations: Children 7-11 Years Old

- Peer acceptance becomes very important in this age group
- They can be very critical of themselves and others
- A child’s self-confidence can be greatly affected by other people, comments, situations, or events
- It is important to discuss situations where others have stared or asked questions to assess how well your child is dealing with things

### Age Considerations: Children 12-17 Years Old

- Children in this age group have many concerns about appearance, how they look, and how they will fit in. This includes issues related to dating and sexuality.
- They can have big mood swings. This can be triggered by events involving staring or rude comments.
- They are better able to express themselves and can discuss complex ideas



### Age Considerations: Children 12-17 Years Old

- Be honest and direct with your child when talking about sensitive subjects
- Be respectful of your child's opinions, thoughts, and feelings even if you don't agree with them
- Encourage their independence and ability to handle things on their own
- Offer support and assistance as needed



### Age Considerations: Young Adults 18+

- Young adults are focused on being independent and self-reliant
- Assist your young adult to think of new situations where they might encounter staring or questions (employment, advanced education, career, or personal relationships)
- Encourage independence, while supporting them in planning responses to these new situations

