

Unpack Your Perceptions About Diversity: Mike

Describe your early perceptions about diversity in terms of one of the following: disabilities, race/ethnicity, language, or family structure.

1. What are your earliest experiences/memories of someone with this difference?

I was 5 years old when I met a boy who lived with his grandmother. He did not have parents.

2. Were the experiences positive or negative? What were the messages given to you about someone who has this difference?

I think the experience was negative. When I asked about it, my mom said that his parents could not take care of him. So I thought there was something wrong with him or his parents.

3. Who gave you these messages and how were the messages delivered?

My mom. After she told us that his parents could not take care of him, my mom said we should not talk about him anymore. That made me think there was something bad happening at their house.

4. How did those messages affect your early perceptions of individuals who were different from you? How did you think, feel, and act?

I was creeped out; I actually thought there was something scary about the boy, the grandmother, and the house. I never played with him. I used to think that anyone who did not have a mom and a dad must have something wrong with them.

5. Do you still have those same ideas and feelings or engage in those same behaviors? If yes, how have your original perceptions been reinforced? If no, what happened to change them?

No, my ideas about children who come from all kinds of home situations changed when I was in college. I met all kinds of people who were raised by one or two parents, foster and adoptive parents, or two dads. I think I was open to change because my college roommate became my best friend. He was a foster kid with two dads. He talked about how hard it was to be a foster kid and how thrilled he was to have a family. Of course, now I realize that the world needs all kinds of families.

Figure 3.10. Mike's early perceptions about unique family structures.