

Unpack Your Perceptions About Diversity: Sandra

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 am a black woman, and my earliest memories of contact with white people started when I was about 3 or 4 years old. Sometimes I went to work with my daddy, who worked down at the fishing docks. I met some white men who worked with him.

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

The experiences and messages were positive. Everyone was friendly, and they played games with me when I was at the docks. Also, some of them came over to our house for fried catfish dinners.

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

My dad. I used to ask him all kinds of questions like, "When is my skin going to get white like Mr. Jones?" He always laughed and said, "Mr. Jones does have some beautiful skin, but your skin is also beautiful. And most of us keep the skin we were born with." His answers were usually matter-of-fact and positive.

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

I liked my dad's friends. They were all friendly. I really was shocked when I got older and realized that many people of different races did not like each other. I was proud of my dad, who accepted people for who they were.

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?

Absolutely. In high school, I joined clubs that focused on antibullying, and I dated people of different races.

Figure 3.8. Sandra's early perceptions about racial differences.