Thinking About Fairness With Children

For children, the very idea of fairness revolves around their connection to their family's values. They usually grow to question or decide they no longer want to abide by these rules. However, the key to starting the discussion is to ask children an open-ended question that will help them think about what it means to be fair. This can lead them to realize that fairness is not always black and white and that there might be multiple ways of looking at things.

In his book, "Making Children Moral: Stories of Life and Death," Lawrence Kohlberg presents a very intriguing story about a boy named Toad who is a member of a beetle club. The club has some rules, and Toad is asked not to tell anyone about them. When the beetles happen to mention them, Toad is not fair to them and tells his family. They decide to boycott the club for being unfair, but Toad is not fair about it and tells the beetles about the boycott. It is the format of discussing issues that matter to them that gets the children actively engaged. Their 'will,' as Dr Montessori would say, means to be brave in real life. Reason alone says that you cannot be brave and afraid at the same time; but real life tells you that without a sense of justice, you cannot explain it rationally. We develop a deeper understanding.

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