

## It's time ... to share your experience

**"BEGINNING THE CONVERSATION IS THE FIRST LEAP FORWARD."**

*– Eileen*

**I** am the assistant director of a day care center with 20 families. It is a chaotic job, a rewarding job, and I have loved working there for over 14 years. One of the many things I love about my work is getting to see children who feel good about themselves and their bodies. We find ways to encourage self esteem and self-awareness through 'helping circles.'

A helping circle is a way to bring a concern or problem to the whole group and to find a comfortable solution. The teacher may start the conversation with "Has anyone ever missed their mom?" or "Has anyone ever been so mad that they hit someone?" Children will raise their hand and say if they have felt or done that thing. They may even make an observation about seeing it happen at the school. We then ask questions like: Why do you think this happens?; How can that child help themselves?; How can we help that child? We talk about being one big family at school and needing to take care of one another. What makes this job challenging is diversity of values in our families. Each child is raised within a unique family, with different values, traditions, cultures, expectations, and life experiences. One child may have attended the home birth of a younger sibling while another is raised in a family that protects them from images and conversations that graphically talk about sex. Even at [ages] 3 to 5, I see some children insist on privacy in the bathroom; they are careful about being completely dressed before joining their friends. Others are happy to leave the bathroom half dressed so they can run back to their game as quickly as they can. Opening the conversations with parents is key to blending these different values and finding safe ways to raise our children. When a parent hears about their child playing doctor on the playground, that moment becomes a wonderful learning opportunity. If the parent chooses to talk with us about their concerns, it gives us a chance to hear more about the parent's values and then take that into our lessons about setting clear boundaries with each other. I also feel it gives the parent a chance to practice talking about healthy sexual development with their children - one more basic tool that every parent should know. My hope is that when a child and family leave my care, they are all better prepared to talk about bodies, sex, and know how to ask questions about any concerns they have about the world around them."