

## Just One More Thing

By Nici Wooding

To all the parents who have already had or are soon to experience their child's first day back to school, I know what you're thinking....

"One more thing? I don't need just one more thing! I've already got too many things to count!"

And you do. I know you do. I believe you. And I'm right there with you.

Parenting is hard. AM I RIGHT? And to get through this thing we call Parenthood, it truly takes a village. We need each other. Together we are so much stronger, wiser, kinder, and brave.

So please, from one parent to another, could I please ask you for just one more thing?

As you send your kids off to school this year, talk to them about kids who are different than them that they will inevitably encounter while at school. The ones with different skin, the ones with different hair, the ones who cannot speak, the ones who flap their arms. The ones who have a wheelchair, the ones who have an aide. The ones who need some help in math, the ones who simply grunt. The ones who wear their headphones to cancel out the noise. The ones who sit alone.

Remind them that we're ALL different in some way or another, and that it's NOT a bad thing, but rather, what makes us all our beautiful selves.

And now that I have your attention, I'm afraid I still have one OTHER thing to ask...

Could you be brave enough to talk about these things and THEN ask them to be the one to say "Hello?" or, "Can I help you?" or "What's your name?" Any of those will do. I promise you that even just a "Hi" can mean So. Very. Much.

My beautiful little girl is starting pre-school this year, and just like any other parent I have ALL the feels about it. I'm excited and nervous. I'm anxious and scared. I'm hopeful and worried. I'm trying to hold it together. Because to most people, my daughter is most certainly different. Her eyes have a slight almond shape and her ears are smaller and lower set. Her stature is smaller and her gait is floppy and free. She's not yet able to speak many words, but she tries her best, for sure. She gets overwhelmed when there's too much going on and she often puts her head to the ground to calm herself down. And it is all of these things (and so much more!) that make her uniquely who she is. Her breathtaking smile. Her soft, loving hugs. Her exclamations of "YAH!" when she sees something she likes. Her melodic, little giggle.

She may be different in some ways than your son or daughter, but the way I love her is the same. Our love for our children is ultimately what binds us together in this crazy parenting life. Think of that when you are talking to them. Think of that when you are out and about and you see a child who's having a meltdown, or rocking back and forth, or spinning in circles. Those kids are loved just like yours. And they want love from others, too. Give it. Spread it. Show it. We'll ALL be better for it.