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# AAP News

## Justice Sotomayor: Ask people about what makes them different

by Melissa Jenco, News Content Editor

**Editor's note:** The 2019 *AAP National Conference & Exhibition* will take place from Oct. 25-29 in New Orleans.



U.S. District Court Judge Martin L.C.

Feldman of Louisiana and United States Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor, J.D.

More than 30 years ago while having dinner with friends, United States Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor, J.D., who has diabetes, was giving herself an injection of insulin in a restaurant bathroom when a woman walked in and mistook her for a drug addict.

She felt anger bubbling up as she overheard the stranger tell a friend what she thought she had witnessed.

"I went to the woman and said, 'Madame, I'm not a drug addict. I'm a diabetic and the injection you saw me take is insulin and it saves my life every day. Don't assume the worst in people when you see them doing something you don't understand. Why don't you just ask them?'" Justice Sotomayor told the crowd at her plenary address Saturday.

That encounter decades ago inspired the title to her new children's book, "Just Ask! Be Different, Be Brave, Be You," which encourages children to celebrate their differences and those of others.

Justice Sotomayor fielded questions about the book and her experiences with diabetes from her mentor, U.S. District Court Judge Martin L.C. Feldman of Louisiana, as well as from several local children.

"The rest of us kids who have those differences, we don't want them but we have them and we are different and yet rich in life and full in life and want to engage in life with all of you on terms in which you don't call us things like drug addicts," she said. "You don't look at us with pity, but you engage with us as human beings."

Instead of teaching children not to stare at people who are different, Justice Sotomayor encouraged asking empathic questions like whether they are in any pain.

One student in the crowd told her he is on the autism spectrum and likes to do things that are different from



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other children like origami. Justice Sotomayor recommended he tell others why he likes origami. When another child said she has trouble relating to her brother who has speech difficulties, Justice Sotomayor counseled her to find activities they both could enjoy and to help other people learn how to communicate with him so he feels included.

Asked if being diagnosed with diabetes at age 7 was scary, Justice Sotomayor told a story about being at the hospital for a blood test. As the doctor moved toward her with a needle, she jumped out of the chair, ran out of the hospital and hid under a car. But she also credited the condition with helping her become more determined, disciplined and hard-working.

"I spent most of my life thinking I was going to die young," she said, "but it propelled me to want to live life fully and it forced me to work hard, do things, do everything I could to enjoy life," she said.

*For more coverage of the 2019 AAP National Conference & Exhibition, visit <http://bit.ly/AAPNationalConference19>.*