



## **Anti-Racism Action Guide: Talking with Pediatric Patients about Race**

Everyone within a position of power in healthcare (including but not limited to physicians, nurses, and behavioral health providers) can help reduce institutional oppression and systemic racism. Inequality and injustice contribute to poor physical and mental health outcomes for children. For example, chronic stress in response to repeated experiences of racism has been associated with increased inflammatory reactions, which can make individuals more vulnerable to developing chronic diseases (Trent, Dooley, & Dougé, 2019). Healthcare professionals have the opportunity to chip away at oppression when children and families know that their providers care about them and what is happening in the world. If providers never address or talk about a major stressor such as racism, then they are missing important information about how to help take care of their pediatric patients.

Children are also receiving messages about race from everywhere, including social media, friends, and what they observe in their communities. They are more aware than we typically give them credit for being and they are not color-blind; children as young as 2 years old use race to reason about people's behaviors (Hirschfeld, 2008). Some children may have fears and worries about racism, while others are unaware of the importance of this topic. Ignoring conversations about race means ignoring a part of many children's identity and means neglecting a topic of relevance to all children. We recommend that healthcare providers create a culturally safe space for pediatric patients and their families by obtaining training in culturally-aware care and acknowledging and being sensitive to racism experienced by pediatric patients

This anti-racist action guide includes a series of recommendations to help healthcare providers talk to their pediatric patients about race. Helpful resources also are included.

### **WHAT TO DO NOW**

#### **Obtain Training in Anti-Racism and Culturally-Aware Care**

- Obtain learning material such as books, videos, and podcasts relevant to anti-racism, white supremacy, and systemic discrimination
- Work through your own biases and privilege by familiarizing yourself with racial equity terms such as "implicit bias," "white silence," "tone policing," "white fragility," and "microaggressions"
- Refer to the anti-racism action guides for "Self-Exploration" and "What White People Can Do Now" for additional recommendations.

- Seek out guidelines from your professional organization that target cultural awareness
  - Check out the American Medical Association's information and resources on policies, publications, and training materials related to culturally-aware care
  - Review the American Psychological Association's and the National Association of Social Workers' published multicultural practice standards and guidelines
- Engage in continuing professional development opportunities that focus on diversity, health disparities, discrimination, or other racialized topics
- Read literature relevant to culturally-informed healthcare practices
  - Review and purchase resources from authors who are Black, Indigenous, or People of Color (BIPOC)
- Learn about complementary and alternative practices related to healing and wellness, such as Traditional Chinese medicine

### **Provide Culturally Relevant Care**

- Promote holistic and culturally sensitive care
- Integrate evidence-based screening tools about racism and discrimination into clinical care
- Develop treatment plans that address biological, psychology, social, and cultural factors
- Identify the ways in which oppression is being maintained at institutional and structural levels within your healthcare setting and how it impacts the care provided (or not provided)

### **Talk with Pediatric Patients and Families: General Tips**

- Remember, every family, regardless of race or ethnicity, needs to have these conversations
- Accept that some families may not be ready or willing to engage in these discussions yet
  - Follow the caregivers lead, unless an adolescent and parent differ, in which case both perspectives need to be considered
- Check-in with your own emotions beforehand and process and practice with trusted peers; avoid leaning on BIPOC peers to help with your emotional work
- Engage as a caring, collaborative, and culturally humble partner
  - Remain humble in your position as non-expert
  - Emphasize that you are there to listen and learn and are open to keep talking about racism and anti-racism
    - Do not move away from a listening stance to an action stance too fast, but do not avoid action
  - Ask how you can be most helpful and supportive
  - Acknowledge your privilege in the room
- Be honest, matter of fact, and open
- Use developmentally-appropriate language – see age-specific suggestions below
- Start with an open-ended question

- Encourage children to ask questions and give positive reinforcement for doing so
- Ask, name, normalize, and validate feelings
- Avoid making assumptions about others' experience.
  - Use reflective listening strategies to repeat, rephrase, or paraphrase disclosures or statements, such as: "So you feel\_\_\_\_, did I get that right?", "It sounds like the situation is\_\_\_\_, is that consistent with your experience?", "You're wondering if\_\_\_\_", or "What I'm hearing is that\_\_\_\_."
- Apologize and name any mistakes you make during the discussion
- Generate or obtain a list of age-appropriate resources for parents to continue having these discussions with their children
  - Refer to the anti-racism action guide for Parents: Talking to Your Children About Race for more recommendations
  - Consider providing resources specifically targeting BIPOC mental health support
- Thank the patient and family for their honesty and bravery
- Process the conversation with a trusted colleague for support and feedback.

### **Talk with Pediatric Patients and Families: Age-Specific Tips**

- 3-7 years old
  - Direct questions to caregivers first
  - Start with an open-ended question such as, "What is your family's experience with everything going on in the world right now?", "How has your family talked about this together?", or "What resources would be helpful to support you talking to your child about race?"
  - Introduce children to vocabulary such as race, Black, White, Latinx, Asian, etc.
  - Provide information to children about differences and how they are positive
- 8-12 years old
  - Direct questions to the entire family
  - Use open-ended questions such as: "How is your family supporting each other on the topic of diversity?", "What worries do you have right now?", or "What questions are hard to answer for your child?"
  - Discuss how to approach situations in which they are treated unfairly, or they see someone treated unfairly
  - Educate children about racial slurs and "bad" words related to racial differences
- 13-18 years old
  - Determine whether it's best to have these conversations alone with the adolescent or with the family or a combination of the two
  - Consider open-ended question such as: "Who are some people you feel comfortable talking to about this?", "How are you taking care of yourself?", or "I'm curious if you have ever felt discriminated against?"
  - Discuss recent news stories and more advanced words such as culture, ethnicity, and privilege

- Appeal to their intellect and encourage creative ways for meaningful experiences such as volunteering or other areas of positive change

## RESOURCES

- Aflac Pediatric Psychology Group (July 2020). *Making it make sense: How to talk to kids about race*. Didactic seminar presented at Children's Healthcare of Atlanta, Atlanta, GA.
- Hirschfeld, L. A. (2008). *Children's developing conceptions of race*. In S. M. Quintana & C. McKown (Eds.), *Handbook of race, racism, and the developing child* (p. 37–54). John Wiley & Sons Inc.
- Trent, M., Dooley, D.G., & Dougé, J. (2019). The Impact of Racism on Child and Adolescent Health: Section on Adolescent Health, Council on Community Pediatrics, Committee on Adolescence. *Pediatrics*, 144(2).
- Williams, M.T., Metzger, I., Leins, C., & DeLapp, C. (2018). Assessing racial trauma within a DSM-5 framework: The UConn Racial/ Ethnic Stress & Trauma Survey. *Practice Innovations*, 3(4), 242-260.