



Anti-Racism Action Guide: Talking to Your Children About Race

Parents of all racial backgrounds often are often uncomfortable talking to their children about race. There is a common misconception that parents should teach children to be colorblind (i.e., “not see color”) and therefore talking about race may put ideas in children’s head about promoting racism. Parents also may want to protect children from knowing about realities of racial disparities and injustice in the world. However, a colorblind approach can contribute to racist attitudes and behavior, as well as jeopardize the formation of a positive racial identity.

Most psychologists now recommend a race-conscious approach to parenting, in which parents name race early and often, discuss racial disparities, and commit to anti-racist behaviors and attitudes. Research has also evolved to capture that Black families often initiate discussions about race with their children at earlier ages than white families do, and in a more intentional manner. This anti-racism action guide includes a series of tips for talking to your children about race, along with a list of pertinent resources.

Be Self-Aware and Engaged in Personal Growth Related to Anti-Racism

- Model good behavior for your children and lead by example
 - Have conversations with others about race
 - Read diverse materials and consume diverse media
- Look at your own biases, acknowledge them, and work to mitigate against them
- Acknowledge if you make a mistake in how you are talking about race
- Be aware that it’s ok to be uncomfortable talking about race
- Refer to the anti-racism action guides for “Self-Exploration” and “What White People Can Do Now” for additional recommendations

Start the Conversation

- Initiate the conversation with your children and do not wait for them to bring up the topic - parents have the greatest influence on young children’s beliefs about race and it’s important that your children receive information from their parents
- Talk to children starting from a young age, as it is never too early to talk about race - children are not truly colorblind and multiple studies show that babies as young as 3 months old begin to notice differences in skin color
- Have discussions about other skin colors, heritage, and culture early, and celebrate uniqueness and differences
- Define important words for your children

- *Race* - how we identify and how we define groups of people based on physical characteristics (i.e., Black, White, Brown)
- *Ethnicity* - sharing of national or cultural traditions within a group (i.e., German ancestry)
- *Culture* - shared set of customs, art, social institutions, and achievements of a specific nation, people, or other social group (i.e., Caribbean culture)
- *Discrimination* - unfair treatment of people and groups based on characteristics like race, gender, age, or sexual orientation
- Remember, if you avoid talking about race, children may assume it's a bad topic and will not talk about it with you and they will still learn from other sources (e.g., media, friends, school)

Have Conversations in Developmentally Informed Ways

- From ages 0-3
 - Point out different skin colors
 - Read books and watch shows that feature diverse people, including protagonists of a different race from your child
- From ages 3-5
 - Discuss common terms like Latinx, Black, White, Asian
 - Frame differences positively
 - Discuss where your family is from
- From ages 5-10
 - Help children celebrate uniqueness and differences between people
 - Discuss how to confront people who treat others unfairly and how to stand up for others being treated or excluded unfairly based on race, gender, etc.
 - Ask if your child has ever seen someone treat someone badly
 - Ask if they have ever treated someone badly
 - Discuss racial slurs or “bad” words. Initiate conversations about different cultures
- From ages 10-14
 - Discuss current events with children (i.e., Amy Cooper in NYC) and ask what they would do to be an upstander in that situation
 - Encourage children to research and learn about different cultures
 - Take children to museums and volunteer with organizations that align with their values
- From 14-18
 - Ask teens about what social issues are important to them and invite them to share their ideas about how to make a positive change (i.e., canvass for elections)
 - Reflect on your own behaviors and invite them to do so as well

Expose Children to Diversity in Their Everyday Life

- Ensure that children see and learn about people in different groups (i.e., race, gender, sexual orientation, ability, religion, etc.)
- Expose them to different types of cuisines

- Encourage children to read books and watch movies or TV shows that have characters with diversity
- Encourage them to make decisions about friends using a variety of personality characteristics to inform their choices
- Allow children experiences where they can play with diverse groups
- Research and intentionally introduce different cultures to your children

Question Children on Comments They Make

- Discuss with your children words that are off limits and that others would find offensive
- Explore current beliefs to understand how to increase empathy or counter stereotypes
- Query your child if they make a negative comment related to race
 - Ask them, “What makes you say that?”
- Help your child understand in a way that builds compassion the hurtful impact of their words if they say something that is offensive to another person
 - Help them apologize and make amends

Teach Children How to Respond to Racist Encounters

- Encourage your children to tell you or another trusted adult if they experience or witness racist behavior from others
- Teach your children what to say if they feel safe to call out racism directly

Resources

BOOK RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHILDREN AND TEENS

- Something Happened in our Town: A Child’s Story About Racial Injustice, by Marianne Celano, PhD, Marietta Collins, PhD, & Ann Hazzard, PhD
- I’m Not Dying with You Tonight, by Gilly Segal & Kimberly Jones
- Not My Idea: A Book about Whiteness, by Anastasia Higginbotham
- Of Thee I Sing: A Letter to My Daughters, by Barack Obama & Lauren Long
- Ruth and the Green Book, Calvin Ramsey, Gwen Strauss, & Floyd Cooper
- Stamped: Racism, Antiracism, & You, by Ibram Kendi & Jason Reynolds
- Additional books attached to this article:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/03/parenting/kids-books-racism.html?smid=fb-share&fbclid=IwAR1So9cFf5skU5RhISYXgL8tPLb2fN7iSiqlteOJROAvxk4itlI9CQxOc7o>

MOVIES AND TV SHOWS

- Daniel Tiger (ages 1-8)
- Elana of Avalor (ages 2-10)
- Ruby Bridges (ages 3-10)
- Moana (ages 3-18)
- Akeelah and the Bee (ages 6-18)
- A Wrinkle In Time (ages 6-18)

- See You Yesterday (ages 10-18)
- The Hate You Give (ages 12-18)
- Coming Together: Standing Up to Racism- A CNN/ Sesame Street Town Hall for Kids and Families: <https://www.cnn.com/2020/06/06/app-news-section/cnn-sesame-street-race-town-hall-app-june-6-2020-app/index.html>

APPS AND GAMES WITH DIVERSE CHARACTERS

- Commonsense Media: <https://www.commonsemmedia.org/lists/apps-and-games-with-diverse-characters>