

Talking to Your Children about Race, Racism, and the Current Social Movement: School-Age

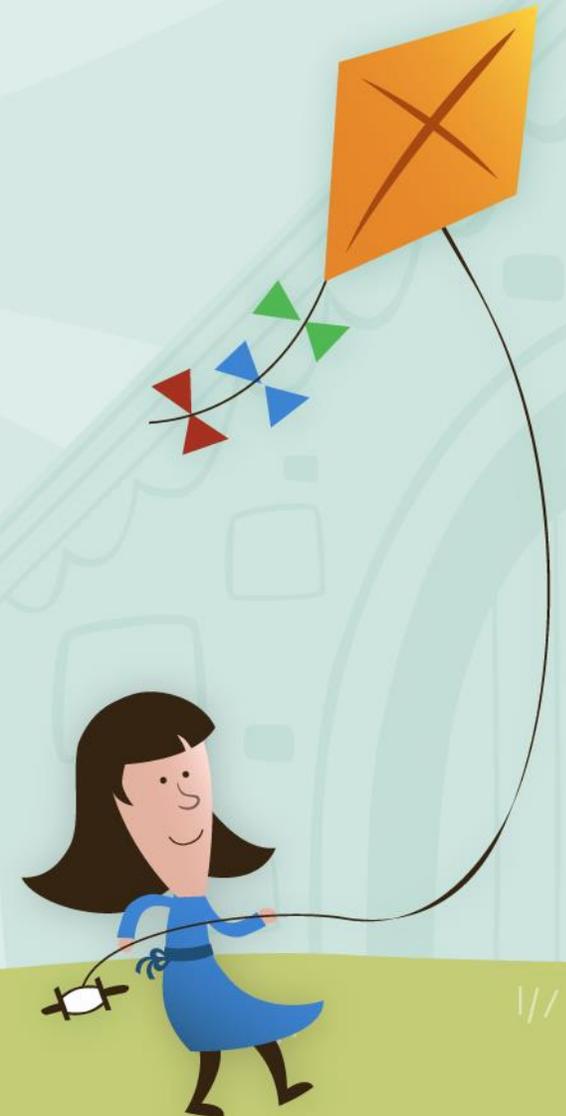
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Objectives

- Understand the importance of talking about race and racism
- Learn about the development of racial awareness and racist beliefs
- Identify ways to raise an antiracist child
- Learn how to have conversations about race, racism, protests, and the social movement
- Know how to discuss topics of riots, police brutality, and publicized murders



“race is the child of racism, not the father”

Ta-Nehisi Coates (2015)



They're not too young to talk about race!



At birth, babies look equally at faces of all races. At 3 months, babies look more at faces that match the race of their caregivers. (Kelly et al. 2005)

Children as young as two years use race to reason about people's behaviors. (Hirschfeld, 2008)

By 30 months, most children use race to choose playmates. (Katz & Kofkin, 1997)

Expressions of racial prejudice often peak at ages 4 and 5. (Aboud, 2008)

By five, Black and Latinx children in research settings show no preference toward their own groups compared to Whites; White children at this age remain strongly biased in favor of whiteness. (Dunham et al, 2008)

By kindergarten, children show many of the same racial attitudes that adults in our culture hold—they have already learned to associate some groups with higher status than others. (Kinzler, 2016)

Explicit conversations with 5–7 year olds about interracial friendship can dramatically improve their racial attitudes in as little as a single week. (Bronson & Merryman, 2009)

Young children notice and think about race. Adults often worry that talking about race will encourage racial bias in children, but the opposite is true. **Silence about race reinforces racism** by letting children draw their own conclusions based on what they see. Teachers and families can play a powerful role in helping children of all ages develop positive attitudes about race and diversity and skills to promote a more just future—but only if we talk about it!

Do some learning of your own to get ready for conversations with children.

Here are some good places to seek *information* and *training*:

- Teaching Tolerance — tolerance.org
- Raising Race Conscious Children — raceconscious.org
- Embrace Race — embracerace.org
- Teaching for Change — teachingforchange.org
- AORTA Cooperative — aorta.coop
- Fortify Community Health (CA) — fortifycommunityhealth@gmail.com
- Delaware Valley Assoc. for the Education of Young Children (PA) — dvaevc.org



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The Children's Community School
1212 South 47th Street, Philadelphia PA 19143
childrenscommunityschool.org



The Doll Test (Clark & Clark)

- 1940s study on the psychological effects of segregation on Black children
- Findings helped win Brown vs. Board of Education → desegregation of schools
- Read about it here: <https://www.naacpldf.org/ldf-celebrates-60th-anniversary-brown-v-board-education/significance-doll-test/>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PZryE2bqwdk>



Developmentally, school-aged children...

- Typically know more than we think they do
- Will pick up on your stress levels and changes in routine
- Are learning and hearing about race whether or not you talk about it
- Associate racial differences with hierarchy
- Understand science and history
- Learn through observation, repetition, your explanations, and reading



Some Things School-Aged Kids Have Learned (or Will Learn)...

- Justice
- Peace
- Prejudice
- Discrimination and oppression
- Racism
- Activist
- Protest
- Bullies and allies
- Voting and elections
- Stereotypes
- Segregation of schools
- Slavery
- Rosa Parks
- Harriet Tubman
- Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
- Malcom X
- Nelson Mandela
- Black History Month
- Emancipation proclamation
- Civil Rights Movement



Talking about Race and Racism

For K-2nd grade, this video is a great place to start (search for 'Let's Talk About Race' on YouTube by the TuTuTeacher)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1vHymutysWU&t=243s>

- “There have been stories about White people being mean to Black people. What have you heard/What do you know?”
- “When someone is mean or unfair to someone because of the color of their skin, that’s called racism.”
- “Tell me what you know about racism.”
- “Have you ever seen someone do or say something racist?”
- “What questions do you have about racism?”
- “How do you feel about racism?”
- “When you see someone doing or saying something racist, it’s important to say ‘That’s wrong!’”
- “It’s important to tell me or another grown-up when you see racism happening.”
- Role-play scenarios



Talking about Race and Racism

- Have conversations about racial discrimination and social injustices
- Make it clear that racism is wrong and that Black people are not dangerous
- Be mindful of your own language
- Use naturally occurring experiences as teaching moments
- Debunk stereotypes
- Point out systemic and structural racism, and say it is wrong
- Talk about racism within the context of history
- Tell them they can always come to you with questions



Other Ways to Teach Race and Racism

- Read books, watch videos, play games, and do puzzles that positively portray diverse characters and are created by diverse authors
- Point out stereotypes and use it as an opportunity to teach
- Have dolls and figurines with diverse faces
- Talk about and celebrate differences as things that make us special and unique
- Do things with your child that focus on positive aspects of their racial identity
- Identify ways to be allies as individuals and as a family

- Be a **model**



Be a Model

- Body language
- Ways you interact with others
- Social groups
- Talk about race and racism
- Call out/point out racism—Don't be a bystander!
- Vote for antiracist policies and politicians
- Be an antiracist consumer
- Openly acknowledge when you make a mistake
- Be receptive to feedback
- Keep learning



Talking about Current Events

- Talking about current events will not traumatize your child, but Black children are going to need a lot more reassurance and focus on hope
- Don't avoid the conversation---they will be learning about George Floyd and the movement in school
- Limit media exposure (It's okay to show some!)
- Avoid showing images of violence



Let the following be your guide:

- Developmental level
- Personality
- Knowledge they already have
- Their questions

Give honest, factual, and specific information that does not overwhelm nor underwhelm your child.



Talking about Black Lives Matter

- “BLM stands for Black Lives Matter”
- “Black Lives Matter is a group of activists that started in the Black community to fight against racism and violence towards Black people.”
- “BLM brings attention to the problem of police brutality towards Black people”
- “Black Lives Matter doesn’t mean that *only* Black Lives Matter. It means that for hundreds of years Black lives have not mattered enough to stop racism and violence toward Black people.”
- “When people say Black Lives Matter, they are saying that Black people need help, because White people keep treating Black people unfairly.”
- Show signage and peaceful protests chanting ‘Black Lives Matter!’
- Celebrate progress being made!



Talking about the Social Movement and Protests

- Show images of peaceful protests and leaders speaking at the protests
- “It’s awesome to see the whole world coming together to say racism is wrong and that Black Lives Matter”
- “When people come together and use their voices to say something is wrong, that’s called a protest. Everyone in the United States has a right to protest and use their voice to make a change.”
- “They’re saying the names of Black people who have been killed by White people”
- “What do you notice in this picture/video of the protest?”
- “What questions do you have about the protests?”
- “How do you think the people protesting are feeling?”
- “How do you feel about the protests?”



Talking about Riots

- Talk about the history of Black people protesting peacefully and those outcomes
- “A riot happens when people who are protesting get so mad that they destroy things.”
- “What do you think you would do if you were trying to tell someone something and they didn’t look at you or answer you?”
- “What do you think you would do if you told lots of people that something unfair was happening and no one listened to you?”
- “How would you feel if people were ignoring you when you had something important to say?”
- “Black people have been saying for a very long time that racism is wrong, that racism is unfair, but not enough people have been listening.”
- “Lots of people are mad about racism right now.”
- “They’re trying to get attention because no one has been listening to them”
- ”What questions do you have about riots?”
- “How do you feel about the riots?”



Talking about Police Brutality

You can start with this video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lcOhOFGcWm8>

- “There have been stories about White police officers hurting Black people. What have you heard about it?”
- “Some White police officers have hurt/killed Black people just because they’re Black. That’s racist, and it’s wrong.”
- “When a policeman hurts someone, that’s called police brutality.”
- “People are protesting about White policeman who hurt/kill Black people. They are protesting against police brutality.”
- “That police officer pushed that man because he was speaking out against racism. That’s police brutality, and that’s wrong. Everyone is allowed to protest and use their voice.”
- “Police officers should be arrested for police brutality, but that doesn’t always happen.”
- “When might it be okay for a police officer to hurt or kill somebody?”
- “What do you think/feel about police brutality?”
- Show footage of peaceful protests chanting out against racist police



Talking about Publicized Murders

- “Have you heard about/What do you know about George Floyd/Ahmaud Arbery/Breonna Taylor?”
- “George Floyd was a Black man who was killed by a White police officer while being arrested because he was Black.”
- “They were killed because they were Black. That is racist, and that’s wrong. Their deaths brought the whole together to protest against racism and police brutality.”
- “A White policeman killed George while arresting him.”
 - Why was he arrested?—“He was trying to use fake money to pay for something.”
 - How did the policeman kill him?—“He kneeled on this neck which kept George from being able to breathe.”
- “A White man shot Ahmaud while he was jogging. He thought that just because Ahmaud was Black that he was dangerous.”
- “A White policeman shot Breonna in her home”
 - Why did the policeman go to her home?—“They were looking for someone else and went into the wrong house”
- “If they were White, they wouldn’t have been killed. That’s one way racism hurts people, and it’s wrong.”
- “What do you think/feel about Black people being killed because they are Black?”

Show footage of protests where people are chanting names of victims and “I can’t breathe,” point out signs that say their names and “I can’t breathe.”

- “They’re saying ‘I can’t breathe’ because that is what George said and nobody listened.”



Emotional Support

- “How do you feel about...?”
- Expect strong emotions
- Validate and relate--Let them know that it is okay to feel whatever they are feeling and share your own emotions
- Explain that we have big/strong emotions when we really care about something and that these feelings motivate us to do things to help Black lives
- Encourage questions— “That’s a great question!”
- Engage in activities you know have helped your child in times of stress in the past
- Talk to your child about things you do to cope with strong emotions and model those behaviors
- Remind your child that you all are safe and the ways you keep each other safe
- Focus on hope
- “You can come to me anytime to ask questions and talk.”



Some Ways Kids can Help

- “What do you think we can do to make sure Black Lives Matter? How can we show our support?”
- Speaking up when they see someone being treated unfairly (role-play together!)
- Writing letters to their schools, government with their ideas on how to help and/or to ask what they are doing to fight racism and police brutality
- Making signs for your yard and/or windows
- Talking to friends about their thoughts and feelings about racism and the movement
- Encourage them to reach out to their Black friends and facilitate that process. “I bet it would mean a lot to your friend to know you care how she is feeling, how much you care about Black lives, and how unfair you think racism is.”
- And so many more!



Warning Signs

- Nightmares
- Changes in sleep and/or eating patterns
- Traumatic themes in play/drawing/writing
- Excessive discussion of current events
- Avoidance of material/reminders related to current events
- Changes in mood (irritable, anxious, sad)
- More 'clingy' or withdrawn
- Somatic complaints

If you have any concerns about your child, reach out to your pediatrician to see if further evaluation is warranted.



Crisis Numbers

- Dauphin: 717-232-7511
- Cumberland: 717-763-2222
- Lancaster: 717-394-2631
- Schuylkill: 877-993-4357
- Lebanon: 717-274-3363
- Juniata: 800-929-9583
- Perry: 866-350-4357
- Snyder: 800-222-9016
- York: 717-851-5320
- Berks: 610-236-0530

National Suicide Prevention Line

Phone: 800-273-8255

Text: 741741

Trevor Project

866-488-7386



Books

- Let's Talk About Race, by Julius Lester
- Something Happened in Our Town, by Celano, Hazzard, & Zivoin
- <https://www.charisbooksandmore.com/books-teach-white-children-and-teens-how-undo-racism-and-white-supremacy> (some of these are more tween/teen appropriate but lots of good stuff for school-age and advanced readers and are appropriate for children of all races)

Antiracist Parenting

- 40 Ways to Raise a Nonracist Child, by Barbara Mathias and Mary Ann French



Websites with Excellent Resources

- <https://www.embracerace.org/>
- <https://www.readbrightly.com/anti-racist-resources-for-kids/>
- <https://mashable.com/article/raising-an-antiracist-child-resources/>
- <https://www.pbssocal.org/education/at-home-learning/talk-kids-anti-racism-list-resources/>
- <https://parentinfantcenter.org/news/anti-racism-resources-families>
- <https://www.mother.ly/child/talking-to-kids-about-racism-age-by-age/>
- <https://www.parenttoolkit.com/social-and-emotional-development/advice/social-awareness/how-to-talk-to-kids-about-race-and-racism>
- <http://www.raceconscious.org/2016/06/100-race-conscious-things-to-say-to-your-child-to-advance-racial-justice/>

