



RACIAL EQUITY AND MENTAL HEALTH For School Professionals

November 3, 2020

Discussing Racism with Children and Students

“The worst conversation adults can have with kids about race is no conversation at all. Talking to kids about race needs to happen early, often, and honestly.” -Jemar Tisby, author

Children begin noticing racial differences as young as two years old, meaning it is never too early to discuss race with them. Talking about race early and often can help adults and children alike in becoming comfortable with having these conversations (Children’s Health, 2020).

Many parents and school professionals feel uncomfortable or unprepared addressing topics about race and equity. We hope that the following resources can serve as support during these times.

Resources for School Professionals

- [*Addressing the Mental Health Needs of Racial and Ethnic Minority Youth*](#) is a helpful guide for practitioners published by the American Psychological Association (2017).
- “[*Addressing Race and Trauma in the Classroom*](#)” is a resource guide for educators published by the National Child Traumatic Stress Network (2017).
- The National Association for the Education of Young Children put together [*a guide "Becoming Upended: Teaching and Learning about Race and Racism with Young Children and Their Families"*](#) (Cole & Verwayne, 2018).
- [*Creating Supportive Systems to Improve Mental Health Outcomes for Young African American Boys*](#) is a recorded roundtable discussion on behalf of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) in collaboration with the Office of Minority Health, the National Network to Eliminate Disparities in Behavioral Health (NNED). Read about additional resources boys [on NNED's website \(2018\)](#).
- Let’s Talk Teaching Tolerance’s [*Let’s Talk!*](#) (2019) is an extensive guide for educators for how to facilitate racial and equity-based conversations with students.
- Anti-Defamation League’s [*Race Talk: Engaging Young People in Conversations about Race and Racism*](#) (n.d.) list practical tips and strategies for educators as they navigate these tough subjects in a school setting.



Tips for Talking to Children about Racism (compiled from guides found in the next section)

Prioritize Tough Conversations: Emphasize that these topics deserve your attention and time. Prioritizing these concepts encourages children to do the same.

Not a One-Time Event: Be available for follow-up conversations and questions. When you both learn more or face uncertainty, there is room for future discussions.

Be Mindful of your Cues: Children are good at picking up on social cues (facial expressions, tense body language, tone of voice, etc.). Give yourself time to process the information or event first. It's okay to say that you're scared or frustrated, but make sure it's not overpowering the conversation.

Do a Self-Inventory: Consider your own biases (associations we unconsciously hold) and identities before beginning the conversation. This can help steer a neutral discussion.

Embrace the Unknown: Children will likely ask tough questions. Be clear and factual when you can, but don't be afraid to admit that you don't know the answer (or that there might not be one). If appropriate, do more research together to grow and learn.

Validate Their Feelings: Validating a child's concern can be a great way to build trust and understand what they are truly feeling. Assure them that feeling scared, frustrated, or anxious is normal.

Determine the Baseline: Children have probably already heard about current events and the concept of race through school, social media, or overhearing adult conversations. Ask them to explain what they already know to you. This can give you a chance to develop on or correct previous information.

Encourage Understanding: Try not to scold a child for inappropriate remarks. They are likely repeating what they have heard elsewhere! Phrases like "We don't say that" or encouraging "colorblindness" only temporarily corrects the situation. Instead, discuss why this information is not appropriate or accurate.

Encourage Further Learning: Encouraging children to learn more or diversify their media (and modeling this behavior yourself) can encourage a "growth" mindset for the future.

Limit Media Exposure: Media monitoring is recommended when traumatic news or footage may be circulating frequently. While it is important for children to stay informed, avoid overexposure:

- This article "[Avoiding the Media](#)" (Sesame Street, n.d.) provides a helpful introduction to the importance of media breaks for kids.
- This Instagram guide titled "[Helping Kids Handle the News](#)" (Child Mind Institute, 2020) provides easy tips to help answer those tough questions and help kids and teens be mindful of the media they're consuming.
- Positive Parenting's "[Guidelines to Limit Screen Time for Kids](#)" (2020) article expresses the importance of limiting screen time for kids
- Change the settings on your device to send you a screen time report at the end of each day or lock certain apps once your limit has been reached.



For More Information about the Tips

- Cincinnati's own organization, 1N5, has compiled a list of resources for how to discuss race and racism with children. View their ["Racial Inequity and Mental Health"](#) guide for resources, videos, and media suggestions (1N5, 2020).
- The video titled ["How to Talk to Kids about Race"](#) (The Atlantic, 2018) touches on the importance of starting these conversations early and having honest discussion and learning opportunities in your own community. An Instagram guide with the same title can be found [@TheConsciousKid](#) (2020).
- For real-life demonstrations on discussing race and racism with kids, use the [PBS half-hour long special](#) (PBS KIDS, 2020). The program is kid-friendly, so they can watch along with you!
- Children's Health has released a ["How to Talk to Children about Racism" guide](#) (n.d.) for how to discuss race and racism with children broken down by age.
- Save the Children has created a list of tips for talking to children about racism and social justice. They warn that these conversations are not easy, and are typically not a one-time occurrence. Access the tips and more information [on their website](#) (n.d.).
- PBS streamed a talk about ["Talking to Children Authentically about Race and Racism"](#) in June 2020. Watch the recording of the hour-long conversation with experts for more information.
- CNN published an article ["How to Talk to Your Children about Protests and Racism"](#) in light of recent events (LaMotte, 2020).
- Safe Space Radio's ["Talking to White Kids about Race & Racism"](#) (2019) answers the questions HOW and WHEN to talk to children about race. You can listen to the episode or access their tips and guide sheets on their website or SoundCloud.



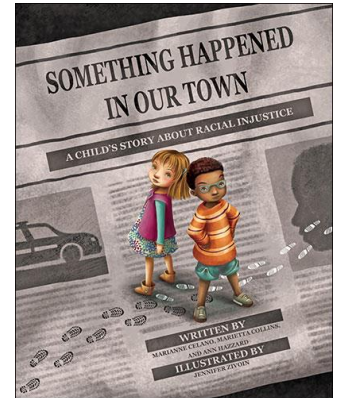
Sesame Street Resources

- Sesame Street's short video ["Comforting Children through Stressful Times"](#) (n.d.) can be a good starting point to starting conversations about what makes us sad or scared.
- The [article and video on Community Violence](#) (Sesame Street, n.d.) recommends allowing children to explain what they have heard and talk about what is confusing or uncomfortable.
- **Empathy** is when you are able to understand and care about how someone else is feeling. While most of us may have been affected in one way or another by community violence or racial injustice, some of us may be discriminated against or sad more often than others. While some children may not feel as affected by these social issues, they can still understand and care about how someone else might be feeling. Mark Ruffalo and Sesame Street take on the meaning of empathy in this [How Others Feel](#) video (n.d.) with real-life examples.



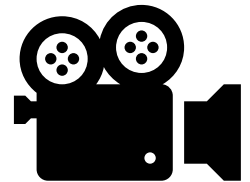
Reading Materials

- “*Something Happened in Our Town: A Child’s Story of Racial Injustice*,” published by the American Psychological Association, follows two families - one White and one Black - after a Black man is shot in their community by the police. The book follows both sets of parents as they attempt to answer the questions their children have after the traumatic event. It can help jumpstart your real-life conversations.
 - Watch a [recorded Zoom meeting](#) hosted by EmbraceRace (n.d.) *Addressing Racial Injustice with Young Children* with all three authors as they discuss the book and ideas that unfold within the story. The authors also provide [8 Tips for Talking to Your Child about Racial Injustice](#) and [discussion tips for educators](#).
- For applicable tips and guidance, check out PBS KIDS’ article “[How to Use Children’s Books to Talk About Race and Racism](#)” (2020).
- Brightly’s article goes further with “[How to Talk to Kids About Race: Books and Resources That Can Help](#)” (Rhuday-Perkovich, 2019) suitable for all ages.



Additional Media for Teens Wanting to Learn More

- *The Hate U Give* (2018) follows Starr Carter, an American teen who lives in a predominantly black neighborhood, but attends a predominantly white high school. After witnessing the shooting of her childhood best friend by a police officer, Starr struggles with finding the balance between justice for her friend and following the status quo at her school.
- *Black-ish* (2014) offers a more lighthearted feel, following the Johnson family and their encounters with personal and sociopolitical issues.
- For a more historical approach, *13th* (2016) is a documentary following the patterns of the United States prison system, focusing on its impact on minority communities.



References Available Upon Request