



Peace & Justice Center

Talking with Kids about Racism:
Five Strategies

In a 2019 recent study:

- 10% of parents surveyed responded that they 'often' discussed race or ethnicity, and 28% indicated 'sometimes'. This was especially true of White parents
- Parents of color were much more likely to indicate that they talk about race or ethnicity 'often' or 'sometimes' (61% of Black parents, 56% of Asian parents, and 46% of Hispanic parents)
- Teachers surveyed also indicated a relatively low rate of discussion about race or ethnicity; only 39% felt it was appropriate to discuss this topic with students.

Talking and not Talking About Race

Lingras K. A. (2021). Talking With Children About Race and Racism. *Journal of health service psychology*, 47(1), 9–16. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42843-021-00027-4>. Based on (Kotler et al., 2019),

1. Let them choose what they learn about



Ask open-ended questions. For example if they comment on a BLM protest, ask what they already know about Black Lives Matter. **Clarify terms for them.** For example, they may not know what “police brutality” is, but they may have heard about the fact that some Black people are afraid of being pulled over by the police. Stay up to date on current events. **Teach them to be critical readers and viewers by asking questions** like “who gets to be considered ‘pretty?’ after a movie.

2. Start with self-reflection and do your homework



Understand your own biases. What history, privilege, stereotypes, biases, and preferences, are you bringing to this conversation? **Don't assume kid's racial-ethnic identity – it's complicated.** In interracial conversations you're likely to bring your baggage. **There is a tendency to comfort the White child** in interracial conflict. Catering to white fragility is common in White but also BIPOC adults. **Do your homework and practice.** Being prepared is half the work -that's why we're here!

3. Validate their emotions and create a safe space



Tough conversations and experiences bring up strong emotions like anger, sadness, confusion. Kids who have seen or experienced racism may have even stronger feelings or fears. **Validate their emotions.** It's okay to be scared, confused, or angry about a racial incident, and we can't fully process info until we process our emotions. **It helps to share your own feelings** in a healthy way, like, "I feel sad right now and that's OK. I won't always feel this way." **Don't make assumptions** about their emotions, especially of kids of a different race.

4. Silence is the wrong message




Don't let your own embarrassment at the situation overwhelm your response. If a child makes a comment like 'dark skin looks dirty,' don't quiet them or change the subject. Instead, take the comments and questions seriously, ask questions, and then explain. **Don't shush or shut them down.** Both White and BIPOC kids are often shut down when they bring up race - White kids because they're not 'supposed' to bring it up and BIPOC because we want to reassure them. Adults should be very careful about passing on their own biases and prejudices through embarrassed silence.

5. Find the positive or the hope



Remember, diversity is something to celebrate! With the idea that some people get treated unfairly based on their skin color, culture or religion, also tell them stories that bolsters the idea that people can make a change based on their actions. **Change is important to emphasize when talking to kids about injustice so that they feel empowered.** Monitor your own emotions when a child mentions something racial and **try not to always react with a negative emotion** – as this can associate race as something inherently negative.

A woman with her arms raised in celebration, wearing a teal blazer, surrounded by a shower of colorful confetti. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

“I was at a supermarket and this little girl, who must have been about three years old, said to her mom, ‘Mommy, look at the brown lady.’ They were white. Her mom said, ‘Oh, yes, and isn’t she beautiful?’ I thought, that’s a smart mom, celebrating difference instead of calling it out and saying ‘Isn’t it wonderful that we’re all different?’”



[Talking to Kids About Race and Racism \(for Parents\) - Nemours KidsHealth](#)