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Navigating Issues of Race with Preschoolers

"Why bring it up?"

Because the values of white supremacy are everywhere and they are toxic. If I don't call them out, if I am silent on this subject, than these values will get communicated to my children unchallenged. So I bring it up. Because if I don't, then I am complicit."

Sachi Feris, RaceConscious.Org

"As explicit racism frequents our news and our communities, white parents have concerns about how to raise white kids who are kind, compassionate and, importantly, not racist. The advice they most often receive is simple: talk more to your kids about race and racism. This is certainly important. But I have seen first-hand that it is not enough.

White kids learn about race as a result of their own independent experiences — not just conversations. Their lived experience and their interactions with peers, teachers, neighbors, coaches, siblings and strangers matter greatly. The choices parents make about how to set up children's lives influence their kids' ideas about race and racism. The neighborhood they live in, the school they attend, and the activities they participate in set the parameters for how kids understand race. And this is true whether parents are consciously aware that these choices matter or not, & regardless of what parents explicitly say about race.

Everyday behaviors of white parents also matter: when to lock the car doors, what conversations to have at the dinner table, what books & magazines to have around the house, how to react to news headlines, who to invite over for summer cookouts, whether and how to answer questions posed by kids about race, who parents are friends with themselves, when to roll one's eyes, what media to consume, how to respond to overtly racist remarks made by Grandpa at a family dinner and where to spend leisure time. (Restaurants, vacation destinations & community events can be deliberately and by-default mostly white — or purposefully not.)

Parents may not even be aware that they are conveying ideas about race through these behaviors, but children learn from them all the time.

The conversations parents have with their white children about race and racism matter — it's just that so does everything else parents do. Rather than focusing solely on what they say to kids about race, white parents should think more critically and carefully about how what they do on an everyday basis may actually reproduce the very racist ideas & forms of racial inequality that they say they seek to challenge."

Dr. Margaret A. Hagerman, The Conscious Kid

Considerations in Talking to Young Children about Race

- Research has shown that even young children as early as infancy demonstrate awareness of racial differences.
- When issues of race are left unspoken, young children can develop negative racial biases, and begin to show preferences based on race.
- Children make meaning based on their experiences and based on what they see.
- Left on their own, they are guided by essentialism – the belief that those who look the same as them share the same qualities, while those who look different don't.
- By 2 and 3 years of age, children are beginning to form beliefs about race. Thus, this is a key developmental period to begin talking to children about race.
- When parents don't speak about race and skin color, children receive the message that this is not an okay topic to bring up.
- And they absorb the implicit messages and racial inequities that surround them.
- Expressing to children that all people are the same or equal on the inside is important, though not enough to counter implicit racial bias.
- When parents talk explicitly with their young children about race, it has been shown to be more impactful in helping to break down racial barriers and improving children's views towards people of color. This could involve:
 - Reinforcing ideas that people of any skin color could do and be anything
 - Recognizing instances of unfairness and discussing ways to step up and intervene to make things more just and fair
 - Opening up conversations about interracial relationships and friendships
 - Exposing children to some of the specific hardships that people of color have experienced because of their skin color
- The more interracial and intercultural experiences children have, the more inclined they will be to embrace children of other races in play and friendship.

When Children Ask Questions

- **Be honest** – speak what is truthful, yet to a degree your child can handle and that will not terrify them.
- **Acknowledge their experiences** – (e.g., If your child has been exposed to sounds or sights of protestors or violence – be it outside their window or on the news, it is vital to acknowledge what they've taken in. You could say for instance: *I see you're crying and your body's shaking and I wonder if you're feeling frightened by all the loud noises that we just heard?*)
- **Provide them some reassurance** - (e.g., *I know the noises are really loud and sound scary, and we're hearing banging and screaming, but we are safe. Our building is locked and our door is locked, and no one wants to hurt us. And you can sit with me and I can hug you and remind you that you're safe and I'll be here to help keep you safe*).
- **Clarify any misunderstandings** – (e.g., *Even though people have angry faces, and are yelling angry words and banging their fists in the air, they are not trying to hurt anyone. They are trying to tell people they are really angry...*)

Additional Ways to Support Children during a Crisis

- **Do not turn on the news when your child is around or in earshot** – the sights and sounds of what is going on can be terrifying and destabilizing for a young child. One violent incident played and seen/heard over and over can be experienced by a child as multiple distinct events. While a child may be unable to make full sense of what they've seen and/or heard, the tone and images can haunt them for a long time.
- **Taking action can promote empowerment and decrease anxiety and feelings of helplessness** – is there a positive action you could take with your child to decrease feelings of helplessness linked to the situation (e.g., making signs to hang in the window or on the wall to support fairness, kindness and respect for all people of color; reading a book that has a powerful message linked to standing up for someone of another race)?
- **Anticipate that these will be ongoing conversations over the years.**

“...naming race is an effective way to challenge Whiteness as the default, unnamed race and to bring race into ordinary daily conversations. We can start talking about race even if we don't have all the answers. We can start talking about race even if we are afraid we will say the wrong thing. It is inevitable that we will make mistakes – that's part of the process. But if we commit to collectively try to talk about race with young children, we can lean on one another for support as we, together, envision a world where we actively challenge racism each and every day. It starts one conversation at a time.

Raising Race Conscious Children

Anti-Racism Books for Children

- A Kids Book About Racism by Jelani Memory
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LnaltG5N8nE>
- Let's Talk about Race by Julius Lester
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zoDUJY9u9Jw&t=3s>
- Something Happened in Our Town: A Child's Story about Racial Injustice by Marianne Celano, Marietta Collins, and Ann Hazzard (ages 5+)
- Yo? Yes! By Chris Raschka
- The Day You Begin by Jacqueline Woodson & Rafael Lopez
- The Big Umbrella by Amy June Bates & Juniper Bates
- Strictly No Elephants by Lisa Mantchev & Tae-eun Yoo
- Wings by Christopher Myers
- All are Welcome Here by Alexandra Penfold The Other Side by Jacqueline Woodson & E.B. Lewis
- Be Kind by Pat Zietlow Miler
- Brown Sugar Babe by Charlotte Watson Sherman & Akem
- I Love the Skin I'm In by Mayma Raphael
- Happy in our Skin by Fran Manushkin

- Sulwe by Lupita Nyong'o
- The Proudest Blue: A Story of Hijab and Family by Ibtihaj Muhammad
- Where Are You From? by Yamile Saied Méndez
- Dreamers by Yuyi Morales
- Mae Among the Stars by Roda Ahmed
- Alma and How She Got Her Name by Juana Martinez-Neal
- The Day You Begin by Jacqueline Woodson
- Hair Love by Matthew Cherry & Vashti Harrison
- Crown: An Ode to the Fresh Cut by Derrick Barnes
- Looking Like Me by Walter Dean Myers & Christopher Myers
- The Color of Us by Karen Katz
- The Other Side by Jacqueline Woodson
- Skin Again by Bell Hooks & Chris Raschka
- A Sweet Smell of Roses by Angela Johnson
- We're Different We're the Same by Bobbi Kates
- Same, Same Different by Jenny Sue Kostecki-Shaw
- Not My Idea a Book about Whiteness (6/7+)
- Hidden Figures: The True Story of 4 Black Women and the Space Race
- The Undefeatable by Kwame Alexander (6+)
- We're All Alike, We're All Different by Cheltenham Elementary School Kindergarteners
- Green Bean by Elizabeth Blake
- It's Ok to Be Different by Todd Parr
- When I Care About Others by Cornelia Maude Spelman

80 Books with Characters of Color

<https://www.common sense media.org/lists/books-with-characters-of-color>

Children's Books Celebrating Black Boys

<https://www.theconsciouskid.org/black-books-matter-childrens-books-celebrating-black-boys>

Upcoming Town Hall for Children and Parents

CNN and 'Sesame Street' to host a Town Hall Addressing Racism Saturday, 6/6/20, 10:00AM

<https://www.cnn.com/2020/06/02/us/cnn-sesame-street-standing-up-to-racism/index.html?fbclid=IwAR2C-PvEZbB5mlkM1Bdr61zRXpQLZj7-LvPihBFG2vhLfU2mAtyp0pPOxl>

Video for Kids

A Kindergarten Teacher Explains Racism to Young Kids: "You Have the Voice"

<https://www.popsugar.com/family/kindergarten-teacher-explains-what-is-racism-video-47529956>

Article Resources for Parents

Teaching Tolerance – “Beyond the Golden Rule”

https://www.tolerance.org/sites/default/files/general/beyond_golden_rule.pdf

Even Babies Discriminate

<https://www.newsweek.com/even-babies-discriminate-nurtureshock-excerpt-79233>

Anti-Racism For Kids 101: Starting To Talk About Race

https://booksforlittles.com/racial-diversity/?fbclid=IwAR39vJQqYcNhfF0m66o67GnGgR9BuWclmDQJXBQuUwznf1-YxaZxSzM_l4

Talking To Children About Racism, Police Brutality and Protests

<https://www.ahaparenting.com/ask-the-doctor-1/talking-with-children-about-racism-police-brutality-and-protests>

An Interview with Dr. Howard Stevenson – “Talking to Children after Racial Incidents

<https://www.gse.upenn.edu/news/talking-children-after-racial-incidents>

Why Bring It Up? Pushing back against White Supremacy

<http://www.raceconscious.org/2018/12/bring-pushing-back-white-supremacy/>

Becoming Anti-Racist

<https://nmaahc.si.edu/learn/talking-about-race/topics/being-antiracist>

It’s Time for White Parents to Have “The Talk” with Their Children about Police Brutality

<http://thesaltcollective.org/whiteparentspolicebrutality/>

Your Kids Aren’t Too Young To Talk About Race

<https://www.prettygooddesign.org/blog/Blog%20Post%20Title%20One-5new4>

Talking to Children about Racial Bias

<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/healthy-living/emotional-wellness/Building-Resilience/Pages/Talking-to-Children-About-Racial-Bias.aspx>

Safe Space Radio: Can We Talk? Talking to White Kids About Racism

<https://safespaceradio.com/talking-to-white-kids-about-race-racism/>

Tips and Strategies: Talking to White Kids about Race and Racism

<https://safespaceradio.com/wp-content/uploads/RR-Tips.pdf>

100 Race Conscious Things You Can say to Your Child to Advance Racial Justice

<http://www.raceconscious.org/2016/06/100-race-conscious-things-to-say-to-your-child-to-advance-racial-justice/#blmwhitepriv>

Activity Book for African American Families Helping Children Cope With Crisis

https://www.nichd.nih.gov/sites/default/files/publications/pubs/Documents/cope_with_crisis_activitybk.pdf

7 Reminders for White Parents Talking to Their Kids about Police Killing Black People

<https://www.yesmagazine.org/democracy/2017/07/10/7-reminders-for-white-parents-talking-to-their-kids-about-police-killing-black-people/>

How White Parents Can Use Media to Raise Anti-Racist Kids

<https://www.common sense media.org/blog/how-white-parents-can-use-media-to-raise-anti-racist-kids>

Videos for Parents

These 8 Videos about Racial Justice are Essential Viewing for People who want to become Effective Allies

<https://www.wellandgood.com/good-advice/videos-about-racial-justice/>

A Conversation about Growing up Black – Young Black Men Explain the Particular Challenges they Face Growing up Black in America

<https://www.nytimes.com/video/opinion/100000003670178/a-conversation-about-growing-up-black.html>

Conversation With My Black Son – Parents Reveal their Struggles Telling their Black Sons that they May be Targets of Racial Profiling by the Police

<https://www.nytimes.com/video/opinion/100000003575589/a-conversation-with-my-black-son.html>

Toni Morrison Takes White Supremacy to Task

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6S7zGgLSuw&t=2s>

TED-X - Is My Skin Brown Because I Drank Chocolate Milk by Dr. Beverly Daniel Tatum

<https://tedx.stanford.edu/lineup/beverly-daniel-tatum>

Robin DiAngelo speaking about White Fragility

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=45ey4jgoxeU&t=356s>

TEDx - How Studying Privilege Systems can Strengthen Compassion by Peggy McIntosh

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e-BY9UEewHw>

Anti-Racism Books for Adults

- White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk about Racism by Robin DiAngelo
- Me and White Supremacy – Layla F. Saad
- Why are all the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria by Beverly Daniel Tatum
- How to be Anti-Racist by Ibram X. Kendi
- Raising White Kids by Dr. Jennifer Harvey

- Between the World and Me – Ta-Nehisi Coates
- White Rage – Carol Anderson
- Just Mercy – Bryan Stevenson
- The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness
by Michelle Alexander

Some People to Follow on Social Media to Continue Learning

@rachel.cargle

@thegreatunlearn

@amberkgoodwin

@mspackyetti

@blackandembodied

@cleowade

@berniceaking

@theconsciouskid

@tamikadmallory

“It’s not enough to just say “I’m not racist” if you aren’t doing the work. It’s hurtful to see people being silent about the never-ending murders and oppression of black people in the US. I don’t care how many followers you have, non-black people should be spreading awareness, educating themselves, sharing anti-racism resources and donating if they have the means to do so. It’s also imperative to understand it is not our job to teach you how to not be racist. Finally: Check in on your black friends!”

Chrissy Ford