

Talking Racism with Black Kids

It can be hard to talk to your children about racism, even parents of black children; it can be hurtful when suffering from racism. Parents worry about exposing their children to issues like racism and discrimination at an early age, concerns how will it effect them, how will they perceive people in their own image, how will they feel about themselves, will it make them insecure?

Some parents may shy away from talking about racial discrimination when they themselves have suffered incidents of discrimination, racism and for a long time and fear burdening their children with the negative thoughts, or exposing too early to the effects of racism, quietly hoping their children will not suffer as they have living in different times, alas we know in reality we're far away from justice and equality for black and brown people. Some white patents of mixed heritage children might not fully understand or don't feel comfortable discussing racism, some feel their children are not "fully black" so may not be looked on a black and not effected as much; this is hopeful and wishful thinking. Children of black and mixed heritage begin to experience racism in primary years and simply do not have a choice to deny racism exists.

Parents of black children don't have the luxury of not "having that conversation" and all that entails from the educational system through to injustices in the criminal justice system.

Conversations about racism and discrimination will look different for each family as will experiences and to gender. While there is no one-size-fits-all approach, the science is clear: the earlier parents start the conversation with their children the better. This goes for all parents, regardless or colour, socially categorised race or ethnic group.

Babies notice physical differences, including skin colour, from as early as 6 months. Studies have shown that by age 5, children can show signs of racial bias, such as treating people from one racial group more favourably than the

other. Ignoring or avoiding the topic isn't protecting children, it's leaving them exposed to bias that exists wherever we live. Children, who encounter racism, can be left feeling lost while trying to understand why they are being treated a certain way, which in turn can impact their long-term development and well-being.

1) Being silent about racism cannot be an option

How to talk to your child about racism

The way children understand the world evolves as they grow, but it's never too early or late to talk to them about equality and racism.

Here are some age-appropriate ways to start that conversation and explain that racism is always wrong:

2) Under 5 years

At this age, children may begin to notice and point out differences in people they see around them, how they are different from many of their friends. As a parent, you have the opportunity to gently lay the foundation of their worldview, an opportunity to build up your child's positive self-image. Use language positive that's age-appropriate and easy for them to understand.

1. **Recognise** and celebrate their differences and others differences too, remark and celebrate the way they look – If your child asks about someone's skin colour, you can use it as an opportunity to acknowledge their skin and that people do indeed look different and that's a good thing because it's natural, it's how we're made, and point out things we all have in common.
2. **Be open** – Make it clear that you're always open to your children's questions and encourage them to come to you with them. If your children point out people who look different – as young children can often do from curiosity – avoid shushing them or avoiding engaging as this could signify something is wrong

and they start to believe that it's a taboo topic. And some will begin to feel something is wrong with them and their colour if non-white.

3. **Use fairness** – Children, especially those around 5, tend to understand the concept of fairness quite well, however negative effects being the recipient of racism has insidious way of causing self-prophecies, of value and doubt of worthiness compared to those who are not racially discriminated but in turn celebrates in society.
4. Talk about racism as unfair and unacceptable, they are not the cause and that's why we all need to work together to make it better.

It's OK not to have all the answers.

3) 6-11 years

Children this age are better at talking about their feelings and are eager for answers. They are also becoming more exposed to information they may find hard to process. Start by understanding what they know, how they are feeling about racism and themselves in relation.

Most parents of black and mixed heritage children would have by now experienced their children either coming home from school even in primary school and hearing something they feel is racist, maybe online, they may feel they are treated different by their teachers and these needs to be addressed.

1. **Be curious** – Don't shut them down nor be overly agitated by hearing what maybe an injustice, at act of racism, listening and asking questions in a calm composed manner is the first step to addressing the issue. For example, you can ask what they're hearing at school, on television and through social media, maybe ask them to write what they experienced.
2. **Discuss the media together** – Social media and the internet may be one of your children's main sources of information. Show interest in what they are reading and the conversations they are having online. Find opportunities to explore examples of stereotypes and racial bias in the media, such as "Why are

certain people depicted as villains while certain others are not?” And get your children to report racism online.

3. **Talk openly** – Having honest and open discussions about racism, diversity and inclusivity and trust with your children at the same time builds confidence to better deal with what racism is, where and why it exists. It encourages them to come to you with questions and worries. If they see you as a trusted source of advice, they are likely to engage with you on this topic more. Remember to point out they are not the problem, racist and racism in society is the problem.

4) 12+ years

Teenagers are able to understand abstract concepts more clearly and express their views, some more forthright than others, particularly when they themselves experience injustice in educational system. They may know more than you think they do and have strong opinion and emotions on the topic. Try to understand how they feel and what they know, and keep the conversations going. Don't brush injustices under the carpet or accept, challenge an incident on their behalf if at school, because they may not be able to address it alone.

1. **Know what they know** – Find out what your children know about racism and discrimination. What have they heard on the news, at school, from friends?
2. **Ask questions** – Find opportunities outside of your own view such as events in the news for conversations with your children about racism. Ask what they think and introduce them to different perspectives to help expand their understanding and what they may want to do about it.
3. **Encourage action** – Being active on social media is important for many teenagers. Some may have begun to think about participating in online activism. Encourage them to do so as an active but avoid in engaging in abusive counterproductive exchanges in ways of responding to racist and racial issues.

5) Celebrate diversity

Try to find ways to introduce your child to diverse cultures and people from different races and ethnicities. Such positive interactions with other racial and social groups early on help decrease prejudice and encourage more cross-group friendships.

You can also bring the outside world into your home. Explore food from other cultures, read their stories and watch their films. And expose your children to positive self-image of black and brown protagonist in each genres.

Be conscious of racial bias in books and films and seek out ones that portray black and brown people, different racial and ethnic groups in varied roles. Consider stories that feature minority actors playing complex or leading characters, champions, heroes and heroines in their likeness. This can go a long way in confronting racial and discriminatory stereotypes that even black children themselves are hardwired taking on society expected standards in practice, which is overvaluing white skin opposed to any other that creates a distorted belief about black people, black and brown skin, black culture and negative stereotypical image than needs to be debunked - racism is insidious.

If your children are in school, find out from their teacher about how racism is covered in class and school rules and regulations to prevent and deal with it. Join parents' groups to share resources and concerns with teachers and school leadership. Push the agenda to be fully represented in past historical event through the ages in the education system as well as positive stories of present.

Explore the past together to better understand the present. Historical events like the end of apartheid in South Africa, the civil rights movement in the United States, the British Empire involvement in slavery and those who supported and act of abolishment and other social justice movements for equality around the world remain symbols of a traumatic past that societies are still coming to terms with, pasts that requires to be acknowledged to be able to recover from.

Understanding all these things together can shine a light on how far we've come and understand how much further we still have to go. These shared

experiences can further help your child build trust, hope and openness to different perspectives and know that can create change in their lifetime.

There are no others, just other people

6) You are the example your child follows

Parents are children's introduction to the world. What they see you do or amplify is as important as what they hear you say.

Like language prejudice is learned over time. In helping your child recognise and confront racial discrimination and bias, you should first consider your own — does your friend circle or people you work with represent a diverse and inclusive group?

Take every opportunity to challenge racism, racial exclusion at the same time demonstrates kindness and stand up for every person's right to be treated with dignity and respect.

Most of all for positive self-image, mental health and wellbeing is important I your child knows very early on to love and their skin, hair, their image and celebrate their culture and that any negative stereotype and trope of any groups needs to be stamped out and does not represent them, but represent a society that needs to do more work to eradicate racism.

BLACKLIVESMATTER.UK are aligned with UNICEF advice on tackling Racism and has to a great extent used extracts and then enlarged on its pointers on talking Racism with Black Kids.

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