



How to talk to your kids about race

FIRST, LOOK INWARDS.

You have to know where you yourself are starting from, when you decide to talk with your kids about racial discrimination. We are all somewhere on the racist spectrum, and diving into the conversation unprepared is like having the talk about sex with your kids without first thinking about your own attitude towards sex and what you want them to learn about it.

Ask yourself questions like:

- How comfortable are you talking about race?
- How do you react when confronted with racist behavior?
- What do you want to learn more about?
- In what ways have you ignored this behavior in the past?
- Why is it important for everyone to work towards ending this injustice?
- How do you handle conflict?
- What are you committed to doing outside of social media to end racial discrimination and racial oppression?
- What examples of your past ideals, mistakes, assumptions, etc. about race can you think of to share with your children - because honesty works better than denying your privilege.

You can also reference any of [these resources](#) to educate yourself before or as you dive into these conversations.

THEN, PULL UP YOUR SHIRTSLEEVES.

Literally, pull them up and put your arm next to your child's arm and point out any subtle differences in your skin tone or skin type. Point out to them that every person has their own skin tone, even within your own family, and that you love each other regardless. We celebrate differences in our family because we believe that being different makes us stronger. Right?

Then follow up with a quick comment pointing out that everybody has different skin color out there, that there's a huge range, and that there's a history in this country that means that some people think people with darker skin aren't as good as people with lighter skin. If they have questions, great; if they go back to what they're doing, leave it. You've planted the seed.

Remember that this opens the door to the long-term process - fighting racial disparity is NOT a one-time conversation, but a commitment to learning and reflecting and interrupting patterns that have been ingrained in our lives. That is, have been ingrained until this point, where you've brought it to your consciousness.

ONCE YOU OPEN THE DOOR, KEEP IT OPEN.

Kids will come to you with questions and observations, because you've told them you're open to the conversation so don't shy away when they do. If they tell you they heard someone saying the n-word at school (and they will, in elementary school, don't kid yourselves), don't just tell them that's a bad word and walk away; tell them that's a word that hurts people of color to the core, that there's no equivalent word that could ever hurt white people in the same way, that it's tied into the period of slavery when black human beings were owned by white people and that that is never, ever okay for them to use the word. Similarly, if they tell you that they made a comment about someone's race, you need to tell them that those aren't words that we use in our family when we talk about people, and that we treat everyone equally because we are all fundamentally the same on the inside. By using phrases like "in our family," you can reinforce your expectations for them, which may counter some of what they are seeing amongst friends, classmates, and in society, especially as they get older.

On top of that, it's up to you to use the opportunities you can to interject comments about race and racial injustice. COVID19 news reports? Talk about how black people are disproportionately affected right now because of things like where they live, the jobs they have - and how it's all a repercussion from slavery, and red-lining. See someone wearing a Howard University shirt? Tell them it's a Historically Black College/University (HBCU) which means it was founded before the Civil Rights Act of 1964 primarily for black people, and what a choice that must be to decide to go somewhere where they see people who look like them vs the schools that your own kids can go to where they'll still be in the majority (i.e. almost anywhere). The point is, encourage critical thinking in your children by pointing out race-related thoughts whenever you can; opportunities are everywhere.

READ WITH YOUR KIDS.

There are additional ways to talk about race and racism without making it explicit - and an easy entry is by having books in your house that feature characters of different races, abilities, and religions.

If you've got super young kids, this is a good one:

<https://akidsbookabout.com/products/a-kids-book-about-racism>

If you've got pre school or school aged kids, pick up basically anything the Conscious Kid puts together: <https://www.theconsciouskid.org/>

For upper elementary and middle school kids, they can dive into novels about all sorts of characters to expose them to history and difference. *Chains* and *One Crazy Summer* can be good places to start.

And for all age groups, peruse the Coretta Scott King Book Award Winners:

<https://www.commonensemedia.org/lists/coretta-scott-king-book-award-winners>

WATCH THINGS TOGETHER.

“The Talk”

<https://www.pbs.org/video/talk-race-america-its-never-early-talk-your-kids-about-race/>

Sitcoms that you might previously not considered watching - *Blackish* is a great one to watch together, using the pause button to interrupt with conversation

<https://abc.com/shows/blackish>

For older kids, [Just Mercy](#) is a great way to unpack some of the systemic racism that affects not only our justice system but our outlook on society as a whole.

AND AGAIN, KEEP THE CONVERSATION GOING.

Kids see differences ([from a very young age](#)) and that’s fine; it’s society that puts value on those differences, and they WILL pick up the messaging from society if you stay silent. Keep up the conversation and engagement in your own work, and in your conversations with them, and together, your family can move forward in creating a more anti-racist society.

[Dear White Women](#) is an award-winning podcast dedicated to starting *real* discussions about racial and social justice. The weekly podcast is co-hosted by two half-Japanese, half-White mothers with very mixed race children, who believe that when we learn about our nation’s history and look more deeply at our personal experiences with race and identity, we gain the power to effect personal and systemic change.

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