

Talking To A Child About Racism

Parents and caregivers may find themselves struggling to talk about the concepts of race, descent and racism with a child. What is discussed depends on a family's make up and the community in which they live. It is important for everyone to talk about it. You may not have all the answers. You can look them up and learn together!

Where to start

- Educate yourself about race and racism. If caregivers feel uneasy or feel that they do not know about a topic, they are more likely to stay away from it.
- Read a few articles or books, watch a few factual films or videos or listen to podcasts about race and racism.

The age to start talking to a child

- Caregivers should begin talking about race and racism before the child enters preschool.
- Children are learning and hearing about race whether parents talk to them about it or not. As early as 6 months of age, a child sees skin color (just like they see other physical differences). By 2 to 4 years of age they are already getting ideas about racial bias.
- Not talking about race teaches children that they should not talk about it. This could and possibly does strengthen racism later in life.
- Keep in mind their level of development. Start by asking questions to understand what they are currently thinking, how they are feeling and what they want to know.
- Follow their lead. If they ask follow-up questions, they are showing you they are ready for more.
- Caregivers can give more detailed information as children grow.
- Remember, talking to children should be ongoing and should not be a one-time event.

What to say

- The first step in talking about racism is to talk about race itself. Let a child know that there is nothing wrong with noticing different physical features and actions. Be careful not to make negative judgements based on those differences.
- Talk about the positive ways being different is good and ways things are not always the same in all groups. It is good to be different.
- Teach them about how some groups are thought to do the same thing. Remind them that not all people in one group do act the same.
- Talk about historical and established racism (e.g., slavery, Jim Crow laws, civil rights and the ongoing struggle for social justice). Knowing history can help you explain why certain words or statements are hurtful and why current events may be happening. Remember to point out that racism is not just a thing of the past.
- Discuss that people are sometimes treated unfairly because of the color of their skin (children understand fairness really well). With older children, you can have deeper talks about the systems that help keep things unequal for some groups.
- Use tools to get children to talk. Books are helpful tools that appeal to children while they explain ideas (Picture 1).
- Talk about how children can make change. Topics can include being kind to all people of all backgrounds, as well as listening to and understanding the experiences or feelings of others who are different.



Picture 1 Books are helpful tools.

What to do

- Be a good role model. Have many different friends, attend different community events and use different media, such as books, shows, movies and videogames in your home.
- Point out heroes of color.
- Talk about how people are made to look on TV, movies or news and different stereotypes.
- Let your children see you talk to other adults about race by doing this around them.
- Pay attention to what is trending online and what teens are exposed to.