

**WHAT IS RACISM?**

Racism is the belief that a racial or ethnic group is inferior due to their race, ethnicity, or phenotypic characteristics (e.g., skin tone, hair texture). Racism provides advantages to the dominant group and disadvantages to oppressed groups. Racial discrimination and prejudices can occur between individuals or be ingrained in policies and practices within society.

**HOW DOES RACISM AFFECT KIDS?**

Racism and its effects can impact kid's mental and physical health. Experiencing racism can lead to anxiety and depression symptoms, and feelings of hopelessness and helplessness. Kids may feel fear, anger, and confusion about what's safe. Racism also affects a child's access to resources in schools, quality health care, and a clean environment. Due to racism, kids may have difficulty relating to one another in social settings and may have an impaired sense of self and trust in society.

**WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO TALK TO KIDS ABOUT RACISM?**

Children as young as three recognize and develop racial attitudes and biases. Acknowledging race and racism in a developmentally appropriate manner helps children better understand racism and reduces bias. Research shows that silencing conversations about race or taking a race-neutral approach creates more harm than good. When parents and caregivers don't create space for these conversations, then children don't know how to do it themselves.

**HOW CAN FAMILIES CREATE SPACE FOR RACE?**

With young children, provide books and art with appropriate cultural representation, share positive racial messages, and engage children in culturally diverse activities. Materials like books and other activities can be a jumping off point for a conversation with your child. Stay open to conversations about race—if your child comments on a stranger's race while you're in public, it may feel uncomfortable, but this can be an opportunity to show your child that it's okay to notice and talk about race.

With older children, begin to have a dialogue about the meaning of race in society and teach children about social justice. Point out racial stereotypes and racial biases in movies and television. When racist injustices are in the news, initiate a conversation with your child by asking, "How are you feeling about what's happening right now?" Go at your child's pace, providing them space to process traumatic events, ask questions, and express their emotions. These conversations will become more complex over time, but when parents convey that they are open to talking about race, kids are more likely to disclose their experiences and feelings about racism.

Explore your own experiences with racism. Have conversations with other adults about race and racism. Pay attention to the emotions that come up for you as you engage in these conversations, and reflect on your ability to help your children process race and racism. You can also be a model for your children in showing that even adults can learn more and grow from their experiences. Use this as an opportunity to research and learn together.



Embrace imperfection and connection. Instead of focusing on finding the exact right words to say or fearing making a mistake, focus on authentically connecting with your child. Hearing about racism may bring up big emotions for your child and for yourself. Reassure your child that they're loved and supported. If your child doesn't want to discuss race and racism, then revisit the topic when they're ready. These topics are difficult, so it's important to have conversations in a warm and supportive environment.

### WHAT ARE SOME BENEFITS OF TALKING TO KIDS ABOUT RACISM?

Making space for conversations about race normalizes topics about race and racism, both for your child and for your family. Having these conversations openly provides a space for your child to express and process their emotions, and for older children, validates their observations of the world. Conversations about race and racism help to create more culturally-sensitive and race-conscious children, better equipping your child and your family to engage in anti-racist practices.

### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

[psychologytoday.com/us/blog/diverse-development/202006/the-dangers-colorblind-socialization](https://psychologytoday.com/us/blog/diverse-development/202006/the-dangers-colorblind-socialization)

[pbs.org/parents/talking-about-racism](https://pbs.org/parents/talking-about-racism)

*Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria? And Other Conversations About Race* by Beverly Daniel Tatum

*Something Happened in Our Town: A Child's Story About Racial Injustice* by Marianne Celano, Maretta Collins, and Ann Hazzard

*Raising White Kids: Bringing Up Children in a Racially Unjust America* by Jennifer Harvey

*So You Want to Talk About Race* by Ijeoma Oluo

### EVIDENCE BASE (SELECTED)

Anderson, R. E., & Stevenson, H. C. (2019). RECASTing racial stress and trauma: Theorizing the healing potential of racial socialization in families. *American Psychologist*, 74(1), 63-75. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/amp0000392>

McNeil Smith, S., Reynolds, J. E., Fincham, F. D., & Beach, S. R. H. (2016). Parental experiences of racial discrimination and youth racial socialization in two-parent African American families. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*, 22(2), 268-276. <https://doi.org/10.1037/cdp0000064>

Umaña-Taylor, A. J., & Hill, N. E. (2020). Ethnic-racial socialization in the family: A decade's advance on precursors and outcomes. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 82(1), 244-271. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jomf.12622>

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