



One Talk at a Time: Four Types of Conversations

1. *No conversation at all.* We put this as the starting point because we recognize that this is the reality for some families, and we have sympathy for why that might be the case. Maybe you think the issue of discrimination is too sensitive or difficult, that racism doesn't exist, or that talking about it will make things worse. Maybe this topic was never discussed with you growing up, so you are just following that example. Whatever the reason, we want to encourage you to move beyond this point. The reality of the culture your children are growing up in is that race, culture, and ethnicity still matter and are a part of how your child is being perceived by others. Talking with your child and preparing him or her in any way you can will always be better than ignoring the topic or leaving it to chance. We are here to help you find a way to do that!
2. *Conversations about our common humanity.* Especially for parents who didn't grow up in the U.S. themselves, it might be tempting to believe in the American Dream and hope that your child will be treated just as fairly as every other child. It would be ideal if we were living in the time when our children

“will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character,” as Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. stated. However, we are not there yet. We can certainly tell our children that all human beings have worth and value, but if that is the only message we send, our children will be caught off guard if someone treats them differently. It is important that we share with our children that they should treat all people with respect, but we can appreciate the diversity that noticing that we all are indeed different and celebrate these differences as bring us strength.

3. *Conversations about having pride in our racial or ethnic group.* Part of helping children feel good in their own skins is showing them all of the strengths of their culture. This could include teaching children about their history, sharing customs and cultural practices, and emphasizing values important to our groups. It could also include positive messages about each child's unique beauty, strength, and ability to contribute. These conversations build self-esteem and help protect your child from the damage that can come from discrimination and bias.

4. *Conversations that prepare children for discrimination.* These types of conversations can happen in lots of ways—talking about the history of racism and injustice in the U.S. or more globally, reading books about bullying or bias, participating in civil rights and peaceful protests, talking about our own experiences as children, or reacting to things happening right now to you and your family. However, some messages about discrimination can be extreme and promote the idea that people different from us are not to be trusted. This is also not the balance that we are seeking. The world is not perfect yet, but it is also not without good hearted people who will be kind and fair.

A balance of the last two themes—racial, ethnic and cultural pride and preparation for discrimination— tend to result in the most positive, productive, and even protective messages that parents can transmit to their children. Research suggests that youth of color who have these conversations with their parents do in fact have better outcomes in terms of academics and well-being.



One Talk at a Time: Barriers to Conversation and How to Move Past Them

Not all of these barriers will apply to you—but look through the list and see if some of them might!

Understanding the barrier helps you minimize it so it doesn't stop you.

1. Some parents aren't sure where to start or what to say.

You don't have to say everything perfectly or know all the answers, but just listening is a great place to start! Look for moments when your child brings this topic up and try to see it from their perspective. Open ended questions can be really useful, especially for younger kids or when they ask hard questions. There is more than 1 conversation so even if you say something not exactly as you wanted, you can always try again.

2. Some parents feel it is too hard to talk about discrimination or it could upset the child.

Yes, racism and discrimination makes everyone upset and angry and even scared. In these conversations with our children, we don't want our emotions in the driver's seat (they can be in the back seat!) so that we can focus on our child, their experiences, and providing practical skills and guidance. So take a breath and remind yourself why this is important to you. Sometimes you may need more than 1 breath, but prepare yourself to listen and engage. Identify a calming phrase or positive image if that helps. You may need a quick break before you start—walk out of the room and do something different (splash water on face; read; say a prayer; listen to a song). Remind yourself that you want to control the messages your

child gets about these hard topics and you would rather they be prepared to handle them than be surprised by them.

3. Some parents think “our child is too young to talk about discrimination.”

Sometimes we want to shield our children from the pain of these conversations and topics because we wish them to live in a better world and maintain their childhood innocence. However, children recognize difference at a very young age. By focusing on your child and asking open ended questions, you can make sure that these conversations aren't overwhelming. If they do start getting a little upset, know that you can deal with it as a family and provide them with love and support. Balance is key! These conversations are most effective if you provide them with strengths from your ethnicity and culture as well as prepare them for potentially negative discriminatory experiences. This is where your emotions are important. The tone of these conversations can make a big difference, so try to have neutral and supportive tone to help children navigate these courageous conversations.

4. Some parents don't want to bias their children against other groups.

A certain amount of mistrust can be necessary, especially in contexts where negative experiences have happened. However, you can help children not make broad generalizations about other groups by asking them open ended questions about their experiences, like do all people who are X do this? Focusing on real examples and their context and help them figure out what are ways to know when people are more likely to support them and

treat them fairly or treat them unfairly.

5. Some parents worry that talking about race and ethnicity turns it into a big issue, and then it is harder to blend in and get along with the majority culture.

Unfortunately, we live in a society that is still race conscious. How you talk to your kid about race will help them understand and frame these experiences. Talk about positive aspects of your group experiences to keep a good balance. Don't minimize experiences where your kid may have been treated differently; take these opportunities to ask questions and talk to them about what they are feeling. They may need a release.

6. Some parents just find it hard to find the time or energy for these conversations on top of everything else they are trying to handle on a daily basis.

Yes, it can be hard to find the time to have big conversations! That is why we think the best way to talk about these topics with your children is during everyday interactions – driving home from the supermarket, walking around the neighborhood, over a shared meal, watching TV together, or any other time. These conversations don't have to be long but need to open the door by asking open ended questions or bringing it up. We find in our research that children do not always bring the topic up because they are worried about how their parent might react. If your child knows that the door has been open, they are more likely to come to talk with you if a situation does arise.



One Talk at a Time: Building Your Confidence to Converse with your Child

Having courageous conversations about race, ethnicity, and culture is like anything else—it is a skill that you can build on with practice. Don't worry if your first attempts (with your child or with a practice buddy) seem awkward—it is worth continuing to build your confidence so you can give your child some important tools for life. Here are some ideas to build your confidence:

1. Step by Step:

If you feel overwhelmed by all of the ideas you have seen and heard here, just try one. Make it a small one, and figure out how you could practice it until you get more comfortable. Remind yourself that “The journey of a thousand miles begins with one step” (Lao Tzu). Or remember that even LeBron James practices his foul shots almost every day. Pare it down until it feels like something you could manage, and then give that part a try.

2. Learn from Others:

Do you have a friend, a relative, or a neighbor who seems to have difficult conversations more easily than you do? Or someone whose strengths you admire who could help you overcome one of your barriers? It's OK to use other people as role models, and observe to learn from the example of what they are doing well.

3. Find your Support: We all need someone to encourage us when we are trying something new. Figure out who could be your support team in this project—someone you trust, someone who might also be a parent and can relate?

4. Manage your Emotions: The thought of these conversations may make you angry, or anxious, or terrified ... and that is OK. Just don't stop there. Spend some time figuring out why that is the case so that you can understand those reactions and not be controlled by them. We all have feelings, so it is natural.

5. Just do it! Sometimes our fear of a bad outcome keeps us from having hard conversations, but once we actually have a conversation, we see that it was not as a bad or scary as we thought. Start with an easy conversation starter that feels comfortable to you.



Purpose: Raising a happy and healthy child in a diverse and racially conscious world.

Ready: It is important to be **ready** by setting up a good foundation for communication with each child, by connecting with them and loving them every day. Being **ready** also means being prepared in advance to have these conversations about race and culture and being more purposeful about the messages we give our kids.

First, know yourself. How do you deal with issues of discrimination or being treated differently? Take care of your own needs before trying to address this with your child

Second, think about your message and boil it down to just a few sentences that your child will be able to hear and use. It doesn't have to be perfect—each conversation is a drop in the bucket, adding up to a larger amount.

Finally, are there any barriers that have stood in your way before when you have tried to do this? Are you hesitating because you don't know where to start, or it feels too hard to say everything you want in a few sentences? Are you worried about upsetting your child or causing your child to mistrust others? Whatever it may be, remember that children are better off when they are prepared to handle discrimination, so this matters. Look at our other handout on overcoming barriers.

Set: By **set**, we mean to find the time and moment to have these conversations and set these conversations to your kid's age, temperament, and experiences

in their context (schools, neighborhoods, peers). In other words, focus on the who/what/where.

We can actively create opportunities that feel relevant to our families to talk about race, culture, and discrimination. What times and places work for your family to have these conversations day to day? You also can set these moments through experiences like movies, TV shows, books, listening to music, a museum trip, etc.

However, sometimes you have to be ready to respond when your child brings up something that happened at school or something that was on the news or social media.

What is your child like in terms of how s/he processes experiences or expresses feelings? What communication style works best for him or her?

What are things about your child that might influence how others treat them that would be important to address in these conversations (like skin tone; gender; accent; size; name; hairstyle).

Where might your child encounter this type of treatment? Who might be the people involved? Is it peers, teachers, friends, store managers, police? The type of response your child may enact should be specific to the people involved.

Talk: This is the doing part!

Start the conversation. You can do this by doing something together (like reading a book, watching a movie, going to a museum) or by just talking to your child about a message you want to share. You can also do this by asking questions about

their day or if they saw anything at school or in the neighborhood.

Focus on your child. Ask open ended questions to see what worries or concerns they have or for them to tell you about any situations. Remember to listen to them first, as they may have some feelings they need to express about their experiences. If your child brings up a distressing situation, stay calm so your child feels safe at this difficult moment, and try to get all of the information from their point of view. Try to stand in their shoes and be sympathetic to their feelings. If you are bringing something up, ask them how they see it or understand.

Remember to help them find a way to cope or feel empowered. Problem solve and role play how to respond or what to say in difficult situations. Who can they look to for help? If you are discussing difficult subjects, remember to connect them to cultural and community strengths. We have suggestions, but you should find the way that works for you.

Troubleshoot If they say something that surprises you, turn it back to them and ask "Why do you ask that?" or "What do you mean?" If they ask a question you are not quite sure how to answer, it is OK to pause the conversation and come back to them.

Check out our quick tip handouts for specific types of messages.



Ethnic Racial Socialization

Messages by Age

GRADE/ STAGE	MESSAGES		
	<i>Pride</i>	<i>Prep for Bias</i>	<i>Egalitarian</i>
<i>Grades K-3 / Early Elementary (Ages 4-9)</i>			
	Teaching about heritage through cultural holidays, traditions, food, house decor, language, history and storytelling	Kids may pick on you for different reasons and how do you respond	People come in many shapes, colors, and sizes but all belong to one human race
	Talk about family and community members	Staying safe and setting boundaries with others (e.g., personal space)	Everybody should be treated the same and help one another
	You were made to be unique and special (consider family, spirituality, faith, religion)	You are safe and your family loves and protects you	How our skin colors and cultures get to be different and respecting and appreciating differences in people
<i>Grades 4-5 / Late Elementary (Ages 9-11)</i>			
	Love yourself and who you are	Different racial slurs and how do you respond	Celebrating and learning about other groups
	Appropriate labels and terms to describe your ethnic group	Presence of stereotypes around racism and discrimination (including discrimination based on skin tone) and how to respond	
	Interdependence and strong family bonds	How to deal with bullies for self and conflict resolution	
	Highlighting role models and sources of strength in own family and extended family	How to stand up for others when being bullied	
	Highlighting celebrities, athletes, authors, historical figures, etc. from your ethnic-racial group	Be aware and observant of the dynamics in the spaces you are in	

<i>6-8 / Middle School (Ages 11-15)</i>			
	Continue highlighting celebrities, athletes, authors, historical figures, etc. from your ethnic-racial group	How to behave with authority figures and adults that may demonstrate bias and advocating for self	There are more differences within groups than there are between groups
	Finding others that have shared cultural and life experiences	Navigating peer relationships that undermine who you are	
	Continue to foster family bonds and unity	Being able to read different environments and situations, identify racial dynamics, and responding flexibly in a way that honors who you are	
<i>High School (Ages 14-18)</i>			
	Highlighting successful, accomplished members of your ethnic-racial group	Discussing historical and structural inequalities. Understanding power privilege, and implicit bias and bringing this understanding to reading situations and environments that might be harmful	Celebrating diversity over "color-blindness", or ignoring race/ethnicity; Being open to learn from interethnic dialogue
	Love yourself self-confidence and self-discipline	Civic engagement and social justice; empowerment through activism	Accepting others for who they are and their limitations in thought; recognizing differences
	Continue connecting with others that have shared cultural and life experiences and finding allies	Racial profiling and how to respond to authority figures (i.e, police and ICE). Safety protocol in community settings	Teaching tolerance for others and their own racial exploration process