

# 10 WAYS TO WORK TOWARDS AN ANTI-RACIST CLASSROOM



Read this article, it's a great starting point on how to talk to kids about race:

[www.theconsciouskid.org/how-to-talk-to-kids-about-race](http://www.theconsciouskid.org/how-to-talk-to-kids-about-race)



Consider race when selecting books, stories, tv/online shows, and movies, representation matters.

[www.edutopia.org/article/how-audit-your-classroom-library-diversity](http://www.edutopia.org/article/how-audit-your-classroom-library-diversity)



Select activities and resources that are developed, taught, and includes Indigenous, Black, and People of Colour (IBPoC) (i.e online yoga, online programs, guest facilitators, etc...).



When the opportunity arises to discuss #BlackLivesMatter, take the time to explore together with the students to learn and brainstorm ways to support the movement.

CBC Kids:

<https://youtu.be/is6ERFDsQv4>



Include culturally significant dates and celebrations in class calendars and encourage the class to learn about them together.

<https://ccdi.ca/Multicultural-Calendar-2020>



It's okay to make mistakes or not to know... acknowledge it and try to research it or ask someone.



"When engaging with students, think about them as whole people and keep an eye out for implicit bias." - Anti-Racist Pedagogy, deltalearns.ca

<https://deltalearns.ca/antiracism/>



Incorporate more diversity in names and subject matter when designing math problems, activities, assignments, etc...



Review BCTF suggested **Ways to Challenge Racism and Act on racist remarks.**

<https://bctf.ca/SocialJustice.aspx?id=17630>



Allow a safe space for students to point out racist things they have read, witnessed, or experienced. If you come across content that is racist, note it as racist to the students and take the opportunity to include a discussion about it.

# how to talk to kids about race

hearing? What kind of artwork is hanging up on the walls? Are the main characters in the books they read predominantly white? How about the shows and movies they are watching? What race is their pediatrician, principal, and teacher?

Be intentional about seeking out, valuing, and supporting creators, authors, colleagues, neighbors, professionals, and educators of color. You can tell kids “Black Lives Matter” and to value “diversity”, but it won’t mean much unless your actions show it.

## **Name Whiteness and White Supremacy**

It is important to name whiteness and for white people to identify as “white”. Not naming or claiming the word “white” masks whiteness, white supremacy, and white privilege, power, and history as members of the dominant racial group. When white kids learn about racism, they may experience being white as a source of shame or guilt (Tatum, 2017). Share with them examples of white people who have utilized their power and privilege to take action against racism and oppression, and how they can commit to doing the same (Tatum, 2017). Ask them their ideas on how they can speak up and take action against racism and support them in incorporating this as an ongoing practice and action.

We can’t fix a problem until we name it. Naming systems of inequity, such as white supremacy and racism, is key to disrupting their impact on the development of young children. Naming not only brings about an awareness of longstanding, systematic racism, but positively affirms the identities and resistance

of oppressed communities (Freire, 1970; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Richerme, 2016). Naming also empowers young children with the vocabulary and shared language needed to identify inequity and take action on their own as they become more experienced around issues of race and social justice.

## **Silence Reinforces Racism and Racial Bias**

Having open conversations with children about race creates opportunities to provide them with accurate information so that when they see stereotypes or hear misinformation, they have their own foundation of factual knowledge and understanding from which to draw (Tatum, 2017).

Shaming, shushing, or shutting down young children for asking questions about race, even if they make a comment that is inaccurate or racist, doesn’t make the questions go away, it just means they go unanswered and unchecked (Tatum, 2017).

A best-practice approach is to probe deeper on the assumptions behind the questions and comments so you can understand your child’s thought process, provide factual information and answers, and correct any misinformation (Tatum, 2017). If you get asked a question that you are not sure how to answer, you can model that it’s okay not to have all the answers, ways to go about obtaining the information (i.e. do an internet search/look it up), and even do this together (Tatum, 2017).

Children start receiving explicit and implicit messages about the meaning of race from birth and begin to show pro-white/anti-Black bias by age three (Baron & Banaji, 2006).

To counter anti-Black bias and racism, experts recommend naming and taking action against racism with kids as early and as often as possible.

This guide shares some key points and research-based best practices parents and caregivers can use to promote positive racial identity development in children, support conversations about race and racism, and move from conversation to action.

## **It’s Never Too Early to Talk About Race**

As early as 3–6 months, babies notice and respond differently to people based on race (Kelly et al., 2005). By age 3, children categorize and express bias based on race, and may even use racist language intentionally (Van Ausdale and Feagin, 2001). Before your child can talk, they are already learning about the world, and about race, through your actions.

Who is coming over to the house to visit? Who do they see when they are out and about in the neighborhood? What music are they

**Listen.**

While having conversations with young children, make sure you aren't the only one talking. Interact with children and hear their perspectives and how they are perceiving and taking in events and issues. Kids interacting and speaking about issues of race is a sign that they are engaged in the topic and that deep learning is taking place.

**Engage in Ongoing Work Around Race**

Black and Brown caregivers can work to find spaces of resilience, continue to strengthen our understanding of race and resistance, and process our own race-related stress and trauma. Racism impacts the mental, physical, and emotional health of our kids, however, if we are intentional and addressing it adequately, race can become a framework of dignity and resilience. When speaking of Black communities and communities of color, conversations about race are not a choice. These conversations begin at birth, and can be a tool for both survival and persistence. Deepening our critical understanding around experiences of race that we endure helps to create resistance and navigational capital that can be passed down to future generations (Yosso, 2005).

If you are white, can you talk about and explain what that means? And not only what it means, but the ways in which you perpetuate and benefit from white supremacy at the expense of Black people and people of color. While it's important to not put the responsibility of your education about race on the shoulders of Black and Brown communities, it is still important to

value and compensate the expertise and experiential knowledge of people of color.

**Talk About Anti-Blackness and Colorism**

There is a specific and pressing need to have conversations about anti-Blackness with children. No matter where you are on the globe, when speaking of racial hierarchies, Blackness is at the bottom. This is mainly because of colorism that intersects with race. Even within communities of color, the darker the skin (or cultural practice or associated with dark skin), the more negative the perceptions are of that person or practice. And it's not just a matter of perception: darker-skinned people experience limitations on social, economic, educational, and relational opportunities based on skin color. Darker-skinned girls are three times more likely to be suspended from school than their lighter-skinned peers, dark-skinned women are less likely to be married, darker-skinned Black people are perceived as less intelligent, and darker-skinned Black men make less money than lighter-skinned Black men (Greenidge, 2019; Goldsmith, 2007).

Blackness intersects with all communities, including communities of color. The anti-Blackness within each of our individual communities perpetuates white supremacy and the continued violence against the Black community, and it is everyone's responsibility to resist it (Park, 2020).

When speaking to children about race, it's important for white people and non-Black people of color to communicate positive affirmations about Blackness and identify and speak up against the anti-Blackness present in themselves and their communities.

**Teach Kids about Structural Racism**

Racism is not limited to the individual choices of "bad people." It is structural and embedded into all aspects of society, including laws, institutional policies, dominant cultural norms, and our very own consciousness.

"Without a structural analysis of racism, it is impossible to understand why, and the extent to which, race continues to matter. Understanding structural racism helps change the conversation from one of individual culpability to one in which we are all heavily influenced by our position within a system of racial stratification" (Michael and Bartoli, 2014).

The Unequal Opportunity Race is a short educational video produced by the African American Policy Forum (founded by Kimberlé Crenshaw and Dr. Luke Charles Harris) to demonstrate how inequity is built into the very framework of our society. This video is a great visual way to teach kids about structural racism.

**Affirm Black Kids and Kids of Color**

Research shows that Black kids and kids of color have better psychological, physiological, behavioral, and academic outcomes when parents instill a combination of pride and preparation in their children: pride in their sense of identity and preparation for discrimination experiences and threats to their safety and well-being (Okeke-Adeyanji, et al., 2014). Preparing youth for the bias and racist experiences they will inevitably face can buffer against the negative impact of racism and

should include strategies for coping and taking action. Not having these conversations with Black children and children of color can lead to more distress due to the shock of unexpected racism (Dunbar, 2017).

Beyond conversation, when children of color are committed to, and supported in, taking action against racial inequity, research shows that it can replace feelings of isolation and self-blame for their experiences, and increase academic engagement and achievement (El-Amin and Seider, et al., 2017).

It's important for children of all races, including white children, to see positive affirmations and narratives surrounding people of color, and Blackness in particular. Research shows that messaging surrounding race, whether it be positive or negative, shape children's racial attitudes (Wilson, 2014).

### **Empower Kids to Take Action**

It's not enough for kids to know how to talk about or identify racism, they need to know what they can do about it (Tatum, 2017). Provide children with models and examples of the work that people of all races are doing towards racial equity and start to engage them in actions they can start taking. If they enter their preschool or elementary classroom and see that all of the books only feature white characters, ask them why they think that is, and what might be done to change it. Brainstorm and work together on ways to address inequitable representation, for example, by writing a letter to the teacher or school administrator to advocate that the classroom materials and curriculum acknowledges and reflects that over 50% of children in

the United States are children of color and that 88.5% of the global population are people of color.

### **Actions Speak Louder than Words**

Talking to kids about race is a means, not an end. It should be done with a goal of moving towards action and disrupting individual, internalized, and structural racism.

What you say as a parent is not nearly as important as what you do—and everything you do, from where you choose to live, work, eat, travel, shop, enroll your child in school; who you choose to spend time with; and what you choose to read, watch, listen to, play, and buy—are all teaching your kids about race and who and what you value, regardless of what you say or what your intentions are (Hagerman, 2018). More importantly, the actions you take on a daily basis are either reinforcing or disrupting racism. Hold yourself accountable as the primary teacher and model for your children on race and racism. Equity has to become a daily practice in all actions and interactions.

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## Ways to challenge racism

1. Inform yourself - browse suggested resources, readings, and websites.
2. Ensure your local office or district has resources that address racism.
3. Advocate for anti-racism training workshops within your local or district.
4. See BCTF Social Justice calendar. GET ACTIVE and BE INVOLVED!
5. Act on racist remarks: How to handle harassment in the hallways.
  - Stop the racist remark.

Do not pull students aside for confidentiality unless absolutely necessary. It is important that all students—onlookers, potential victims, and potential harassers—get the message that students are safe and protected in your school. Make sure all the students in the area hear your comments.
  - Identify the racist remark.

Label the racism. "You just made a racist comment." Do not imply that the victim is a member of that identifiable group.
  - Broaden the response.

Do not personalize your response at this stage. "We, at this school, do not use racist comments against people." "Our community does not appreciate hateful or thoughtless behaviour."  
Re-identify the racist behaviour. "This racist comment is hurtful to others who overhear it."
  - Ask for change in future behaviour.

Ask for accountability. Even if she or he was "only kidding," the oppressor must realize the ramifications of the action/comment. A major goal is to take the spotlight off the receiver of the racist comment and turn the focus to the behaviour. Students should realize what was said, regardless of what was meant (e.g., kidding).
  - Check in with the victim at this time.

Reassure the receiver that he or she should not dismiss racist comments. "If this continues, please tell me, and I will take further action. We want everyone to be safe at this school." Again, be sure not to treat the receiver as helpless or a member of any target group. Rather, plainly give her or him responsibility on behalf of others.

Actions have been adapted from Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Youth Program, Central Toronto Youth Services Rainbow Resource Centre, Winnipeg, Canada, 2002.