

# How to Talk to Children About Race & Racism



**Stephanie Tam Rosas, MA**

LMFT (#116439)

[tamrosas.com](http://tamrosas.com)

[SchoolsForSocialJustice.com](http://SchoolsForSocialJustice.com)

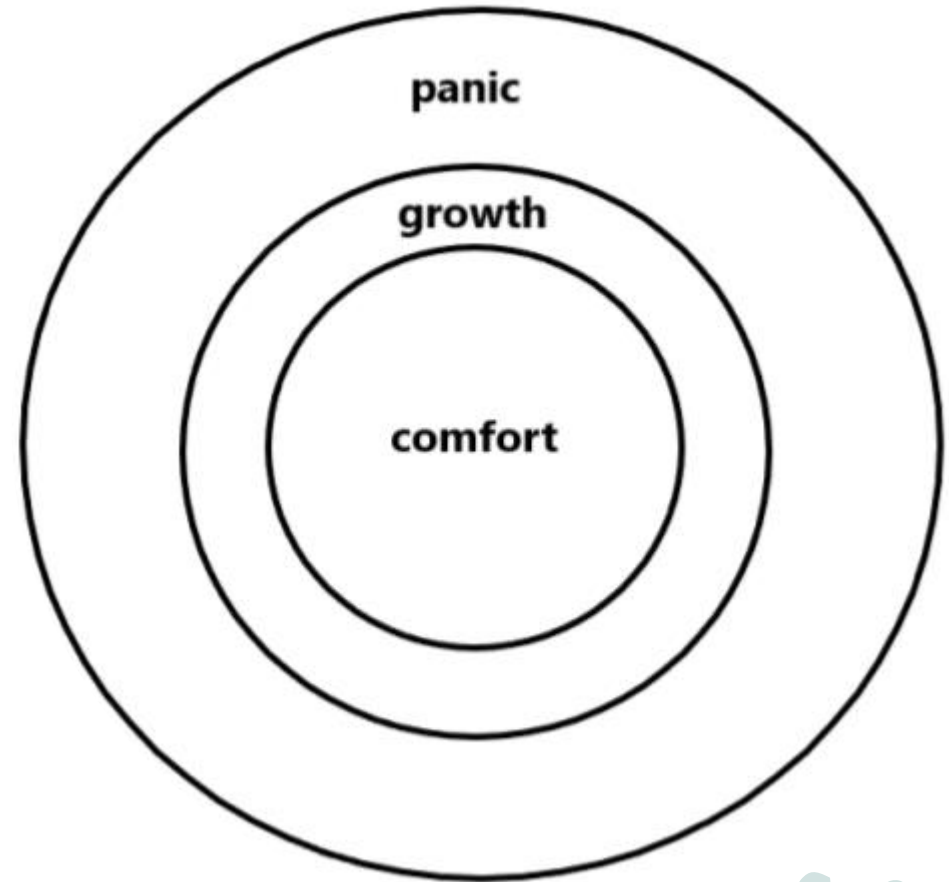
Equity Consultant



# How to Talk to Children About Race & Racism

## Group Guidelines

- 1. Speak from experience**  
“I find myself thinking...”  
“I find myself wondering...”  
“I notice that I feel...”
- 2. Brave space**  
(lean into learning; lean into discomfort)
- 3. Challenge yourself** to move out of your comfort zone
- 4. Take care of yourself**
- 5. Share the air (time)**
- 6. Listen to overall messages**
- 7. Move away from good/bad dichotomy**



# How to Talk to Children About Race & Racism

## Our bodies

Anti-racism work is experienced through our bodies, not just our thoughts

- **Informative: signs of discomfort**
- **Useful: integrate/release emotion**

-Breathe

-Body check

-Move your body



# How to Talk to Children About Race & Racism



**What are you worried/scared about?**



# How to Talk to Children About Race & Racism

| Our own ability   | Their (kids') understanding/emotions  |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Getting it right<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Sounding racist</li></ul></li><li>• Knowing what to say<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Having answers to big questions</li><li>• Unsure about what is developmentally appropriate</li></ul></li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• They won't understand</li><li>• They will get upset</li></ul> |



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**Talking about race does not reinforce racism**

**If we can't name it, then we can't dismantle it**



# How to Talk to Children About Race & Racism

## White Supremacy Culture

- A system of structural and societal racism which privileges white people over everyone else, **regardless of the presence or absence of racial hatred.**
- White racial advantages occur at both a collective and an individual level.
  - Prioritizes the feelings of white people over the dire needs of people of color
  - Assumes white culture should be the deviant culture in our country
  - Assumes that racism would be over if people of color just assimilated and acted more like white people





## Overt White Supremacy (Socially Unacceptable)

Lynching  
Hate Crimes  
Blackface The N-word  
Swastikas Neo-Nazis Burning Crosses  
Racist Jokes Racial Slurs KKK

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Calling the Police on Black People White Silence Colorblindness  
White Parents Self-Segregating Neighborhoods & Schools  
Eurocentric Curriculum White Savior Complex Spiritual Bypassing  
Education Funding from Property Taxes Discriminatory Lending  
Mass Incarceration Respectability Politics Tone Policing  
Racist Mascots Not Believing Experiences of BIPOC Paternalism  
"Make America Great Again" Blaming the Victim Hiring Discrimination  
"You don't sound Black" "Don't Blame Me, I Never Owned Slaves" Bootstrap Theory  
School-to-Prison Pipeline Police Murdering BIPOC Virtuous Victim Narrative  
Higher Infant & Maternal Mortality Rate for BIPOC "But What About Me?" "All Lives Matter"  
BIPOC as Halloween Costumes Racial Profiling Denial of White Privilege  
Prioritizing White Voices as Experts Treating Kids of Color as Adults Inequitable Healthcare  
Assuming Good Intentions Are Enough Not Challenging Racist Jokes Cultural Appropriation  
Eurocentric Beauty Standards Anti-Immigration Policies Considering AAVE "Uneducated"  
Denial of Racism Tokenism English-Only Initiatives Self-Appointed White Ally  
Exceptionalism Fearing People of Color Police Brutality Fetishizing BIPOC Meritocracy Myth  
"You're So Articulate" Celebration of Columbus Day Claiming Reverse-Racism Paternalism  
Weaponized Whiteness Expecting BIPOC to Teach White People Believing We Are "Post-Racial"  
"But We're All One Big Human Family" / "There's Only One Human Race" Housing Discrimination

## Covert White Supremacy (Socially Acceptable)



The  
Conscious  
Kid



# How to Talk to Children About Race & Racism

## Characteristics of White Supremacy Culture

- Perfectionism
- Fear of open conflict
- Sense of urgency
- Either/or thinking
- Right to comfort



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**What do we end up doing when we don't talk about race & racism with kids?**



# How to Talk to Children About Race & Racism

## Emotions

**OK: sadness, empathy, concerned**

**Less OK: overwhelmed, frightened, hopeless**  
-be aware of listening to the news near kids



# They're not too young to talk about race!



At birth, babies look equally at faces of all races. At 3 months, babies look more at faces that match the race of their caregivers. (Kelly et al., 2005)

Children as young as two years use race to reason about people's behaviors. (Hirschfeld, 2008)

By 30 months, most children use race to choose playmates. (Katz & Kofkin, 1997)

Expressions of racial prejudice often peak at ages 4 and 5. (Aboud, 2008)

By five, Black and Latinx children in research settings show no preference toward their own groups compared to Whites; White children at this age remain strongly biased in favor of whiteness. (Dunham et al., 2008)

By kindergarten, children show many of the same racial attitudes that adults in our culture hold—they have already learned to associate some groups with higher status than others. (Kinzler, 2016)

Explicit conversations with 5–7 year olds about interracial friendship can dramatically improve their racial attitudes in as little as a single week. (Bronson & Merryman, 2009)

Young children notice and think about race. Adults often worry that talking about race will encourage racial bias in children, but the opposite is true. **Silence about race reinforces racism** by letting children draw their own conclusions based on what they see. Teachers and families can play a powerful role in helping children of all ages develop positive attitudes about race and diversity and skills to promote a more just future—but only if we talk about it!

**Do some learning of your own** to get ready for conversations with children. Here are some good places to seek *information* and *training*:

- Teaching Tolerance — [tolerance.org](http://tolerance.org)
- Raising Race Conscious Children — [raceconscious.org](http://raceconscious.org)
- Embrace Race — [embracepace.org](http://embracepace.org)
- Teaching for Change — [teachingforchange.org](http://teachingforchange.org)
- AORTA Cooperative — [aorta.coop](http://aorta.coop)
- Fortify Community Health (CA) — [fortifycommunityhealth@gmail.com](mailto:fortifycommunityhealth@gmail.com)
- Delaware Valley Assoc. for the Education of Young Children (PA) — [dvaevc.org](http://dvaevc.org)



# How to Talk to Children About Race & Racism

## **Name it**

- Name race explicitly
- Affirm children's questions/comments
- Speak to images or words that make you uncomfortable





# How to Talk to Children About Race & Racism

## **Narrate it**

- Talk about your feelings
- Make a personal connection
- Challenge stereotypes
- Connect to history as well as to the present



# How to Talk to Children About Race & Racism

## Complicate it

- Talk about fairness unfairness
- Show your children how they can be activists who can create change



# How to Talk to Children About Race & Racism

## Remember to

- Ask questions
- Let it go unresolved (for a time)
- Unanswered questions are ok



# How to Talk to Children About Race & Racism

**Teach Terms:** List below is from ["An Educational and Engaging Family Toolkit on Ending Police Brutality"](#)

- **(Social) Power** - Having control over what happens to ourselves and others.
- **Harm** - Hurting someone's body or feelings, or taking away their **power** (even accidentally)
- **Consequences** - What happens because of our actions.
- **Conflict** - A disagreement between two people or groups who care about the **consequences**
- **Justice** - Taking action to recover from a **harmful conflict**
  - **Punitive Justice** - Punishing people who do **harm** so others will be afraid to copy them
  - **Restorative Justice** - **Listening** to people who have been **harmed**, those who harmed them, and anyone else affected - and taking action to help everyone feel safe again
  - **Transformative Justice** - **Restorative Justice**, plus finding out what caused people to enter a conflict, and support them so it doesn't happen again

# How to Talk to Children About Race & Racism

## Book Lists for Kids and Teens

- [18 Powerful Children's Books about Race and Racism](#)
- [15 books to help kids and teens understand why we say the words Black Lives Matter](#)
- [Social justice books \(with descriptions and ratings\)](#)
- [Books that demonstrate an appreciation of African American culture, by Black authors and illustrators](#)
- [Chapter books about Black, Latinx, and Asian kids living everyday life \(ages 6-12\)](#)
- [No White Saviors: Kids Books About Black Women in US History](#)
- [Children's Books By Brilliant Black Women: #OwnVoices Authors & Illustrators](#)
- [Books, Activities and Media to Help you Talk with Kids About Race and Racism \(categorized by age group\)](#)



# How to Talk to Children About Race & Racism

## Read Alouds

[The Colors Of Us by Karen Katz](#)

[Let's Talk About Race by Julius Lester](#)

[Something Happened In Our Town: A Child's Story About Racial Injustice](#)

[Woke Read Alouds: stories read by Ki](#)

[Virtual Bookshelf: videos of books on activism and racism being read aloud](#)





# How to Talk to Children About Race & Racism

## Self reflection

- Keep learning—but don't wait
- This is an ongoing process, **not a “jumping off point”**

