

Strategies for Discussing Race, Racial Discrimination & Racial Trauma with Youth in 2020



The Mecca of Black Wellness



Updated August 2020

Research has indicated that youth experience racism, prejudice, and bias as early as preschool. For many, their interpersonal experiences of racism, prejudice and bias can be quite disorienting, and can influence functioning, particularly for youth who have experienced other traumas. As such, it is important that those connected to youth (parents, guardians, trusted family members, mental health/behavioral health providers, teachers and community) create spaces and opportunities to discuss race and race-related stressors with youth.

How you start the conversations depends on who you are

We have provided a few strategies to get you started on navigating discussions specific to race, experiences of discrimination, and racial trauma with youth. Review the strategies below. Remember these are only suggestions and additional factors should be considered such as age of the youth, level of maturity, trauma history, etc.

Mental Health/Behavioral Health Providers

Start the conversation with a direct question

- “I know that there have been a lot of discussions related to racial injustices recently, how are you dealing with it?”
- “There has been a lot of media coverage about race and police brutality in the news, what are your thoughts?”
- “Some people are reporting that they are having intense emotions related to the murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, how are you feeling?”
- How does your identity as a (insert known identities here) influence how you feel? How you cope? Your relationships?

Remember: Before having a conversation about race to assess your competency with addressing race and race-related stressors in treatment. It is also important to assess the needs of the youth (e.g., Are race-related stressors a source of stress? Does it trigger previous experiences of danger?) and using that to guide how you move forward in treatment.

Additional recommendations include:

- 1.) Listen without judgment or minimizing their feelings or experiences
- 2.) Follow the lead of the youth and do not force discussions that do not feel authentic, do not try to create an answer or explanation if there isn't one.
- 3.) Encourage healthy expressions of emotions (e.g., creativity, dance, writing, music, art) and the use of coping strategies. If indicated integrate discussions throughout treatment.

Parents, Guardians & Trusted Family Members

Be intentional with the conversation. Set aside a time to talk and be sure to minimize distractions and ask questions directly

- “How are you feeling about the racial injustices that are being replayed on the news?”
- “I’m feeling angry/sad about what happened to Ahmaud Arbery, George Floyd, and Breonna Taylor, how are you feeling?”
- “Do you ever worry about being harmed by the police?”
- “Have you ever felt that someone treated you differently based on your race or other identities?”
- “What is your understanding of what is happening?” (This is an opportunity to correct any misperceptions or misinformation)
- “What do you need from me? How can I support you?”
- “Do you want to do something together to make a change?” (Think about opportunities to connect with organizations that dismantle racism, and/or family-friendly demonstrations to protest police brutality and other injustices)

How do I prepare my Black child for racism and keep them safe, if I do not have the same lived experiences?

- Make tools available to increase a positive connection to Black legacies, people and history
- Listen to the youth as they share their personal experiences and challenges
- Acknowledge differences between your experiences
- Help youth identify different types of racism and how to cope and manage
- Join organizations that contribute to dismantling racism
- Connect with other friends or family who can help you build knowledge and positive experiences to build racial pride

Remember: Start conversations about race and racial pride at a young age and continue those conversations over time. Be creative and find opportunities that allow you to begin and continue discussions around race (museums, toys, family traditions, books). As your child gets older, the questions, concerns, and connections to racial stressors will change. Prepare yourself for these conversations. Think about your own experiences and share, as appropriate. Consult with friends and others on different approaches to having difficult conversations and remember to re-visit these conversations over time.

Teachers/Community

- Fill the classroom with culturally diverse books, pictures, and discussions
- Consult with other professionals regarding best strategies for culturally inclusive teaching, curriculum, and school structure
- Model for youth and families the importance of diversity and inclusivity through staff and teacher diversity
- Lead discussions on current events related to race and racial stress
- Invite community speakers to classrooms to enhance student exposure and collective knowledge and understanding
- Provide resources specific to coping with related to race-related stress to students if needed
- Name the thoughts and feelings you may be having related to race-related current events. Model for students the importance of naming feelings

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Resources

RESilience

Uplifting youth through healthy communication about race.

<https://www.apa.org/res>

One Talk at a Time

Providing support for Latinx American, Asian American, African American, and Black youth and their families to have conversations about race and ethnicity.

<https://www.caminoslab.org/onetalk>

Embrace Race

A multiracial community of parents, teachers, experts, and other caring adults who support each other to meet the challenges that race poses to our children, families, and communities.

<https://www.embracerace.org/>

Books and Videos

Sesame Street: Song -- I Love My Hair

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=enpFde5rgmw&feature=youtu.be>

Helping Your Child Cope with Media Coverage of Community Racial Trauma: Tips for Parents

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0Qtn2ZFx6ZM&feature=share>

Read Aloud: The Colors Of Us By

Karen Katz

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O58brpCvmRs>

37 Children's Books to help talk about Racism and Discrimination

<https://coloursofus.com/37-childrens-books-to-help-talk-about-racism-discrimination/>

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