

It can be hard to talk to your children about racism.

Some parents worry about exposing their children to issues like racism and discrimination at an early age. Others shy away from talking about something they themselves might not fully understand or don't feel comfortable discussing. Yet others, especially those who have experienced racism, simply do not have such choices.

Babies notice physical differences, including skin colour, from as early as 6 months. Studies have shown that by age 5, children can show signs of racial bias, such as treating people from one racial group more favourably than the other.

Conversations about racism and discrimination will look different for each family. While there is no one-size-fits-all approach, the science is clear: the earlier parents start the conversation with their children the better.

Ignoring or avoiding the topic isn't protecting children, it's leaving them exposed to bias that exists wherever we live. Children who encounter racism, can be left feeling lost while trying to understand why they are being treated a certain way, which in turn can impact their long-term development and well-being.

Being silent cannot be an option.

How to talk to your child about racism.

The way children understand the world evolves as they grow, but it's never too late to talk to them about equality and racism. Here are some age-appropriate ways to start that conversation and explain that racism is always wrong:

Under 5 years

At this age, children may notice and point out differences in people they see around them. As a parent, you can gently lay the foundation of their worldview. Use language that's age appropriate and easy for them to understand.

Recognise and celebrate differences - If your child asks about someone's skin colour, you can use it as an opportunity to acknowledge that people do indeed look different, but to point out things we have in common. You could say, "We are all human, but we are all unique, isn't that amazing!"

Be open - Make it clear that you're always open to your children's questions and encourage them to come to you with them. If your children point out people who look different - as young children can often do from curiosity - avoid shushing them or they will start to believe that it's a taboo topic.

Use fairness - Children, especially those around 5, tend to understand the concept of fairness quite well. Talk about racism as unfair and unacceptable and that's why we need to work together to make it better.

It's OK not to have all the answers.

6-11 years.

Children this age are better at talking about their feelings and are eager for answers. They are also becoming more exposed to information they may find hard to process. Start by understanding what they know.

Be curious - Listening and asking questions is the first step. For example, you can ask what they're hearing at school, on television and through social media.

Discuss the media together - social media and the internet may be one of your children's main sources of information. Show interest in what they are reading and the conversations they are having online. Find opportunities to explore examples of stereotypes and racial bias in the media, such as "Why are certain people depicted as villains while certain others are not?"

Talk openly - Having honest and open discussions about racism, diversity and inclusivity builds trust with your children. It encourages them to come to you with questions and worries. If they see you as a trusted source of advice, they are likely to engage with you on this topic more.

There are no others, just other people.

You are the example your child follows.

Parents are children's introduction to the world. What they see you do is as important as what they hear you say.

Like language, prejudice is learned over time. In helping your child recognise and confront racial bias, you should first consider your own — does your friend circle or people you work with, represent a diverse and inclusive group?

When it is safe to do so, take every opportunity to discuss racism, demonstrate kindness and stand up for every person's right to be treated with dignity and respect.

Useful links:

<https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/talk-about-race.html>

<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/support-for-parents/children-race-racism-racial-bullying/>

<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/support-for-parents/children-race-racism-racial-bullying/>

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/tiny-happy-people/how-to-talk-to-young-child-about-race-racism/zrgcf82>

Celebrate Ethnic Diversity

In this increasingly interconnected world, learning openness and appreciating differences is important to many aspects of modern life. And it's becoming critical to raising happy and successful children, too. Be watchful and take every opportunity to focus children's attention on what is similar between themselves and others, over what is different. Present the differences as interesting rather than scary.

Celebrate and learn about ethnic diversity while constantly observing our universal qualities. Here are some helpful strategies:

1. Read widely: Read children's books with characters from other cultures and talk to your children about what they see.
2. Watch actively: If your child watches television, sit with them and point out any stereotypes you observe.
3. Celebrate differences: Go to local ethnic festivals and introduce your child to friends who represent a variety of lifestyles, cultures, and religions.
4. Correct mistakes: Intervene if you ever hear your child makes remarks that are racist. Don't get angry, but don't let your child make the excuse that he or she was "just kidding," either.
5. Model tolerance: Make your home reflect cultural diversity by the art, music and books you display; the movies and television shows you watch; and the restaurants your family use.

OLSM Primary School

How you can help us support
cultural diversity in our
school.



No one is born hating another person because of the colour of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite.

Nelson Mandela