

Tips for Teaching and Talking to Kids About Race

Presented by Hoover-AHEAD

(Ambassadors for Hoover Equity and Diversity)

Tip #1- Start Early

- **Let your child know that it's perfectly okay to notice skin color and talk about race.**
- **Start talking about what racial differences mean and don't mean- Aim for "Color Fairness", Not "Color Blindness"**

Tip #2- Encourage Your Child

- **Encourage your child to ask questions, share observations and experiences, and be respectfully curious about race.**
 - **If your child makes a surprising or offensive comment, don't ignore or hush her. Instead respond in a non-judgmental way (Let's talk about that for a minute...What made you notice that?)**
- **Expose your child to difference cultural opportunities- photographs, films, books, or cultural events- and discuss the experience afterwards.**
- **Be honest about what you know and work with your child to find accurate information.**

Tip #3- Be Mindful

- **You are a Role Model to your child. What you say is important, but what you do is likely to have a bigger impact (for example, the diversity of your friendship circle).**
- **Choose a diverse school and afterschool activities. Choose books and toys that include persons from different races and ethnicities. Visit museums with exhibits about a range of cultures and religions.**

Tip #4-Face Your Own Bias

- **Let your child see you acknowledge and face your own bias**
- **We ALL have biases- explore your own biases through training/resources.**

Answers to Common Questions

"What race am I?" Others might ask your child this question, or it could come up as part of a school project about where families come from. Use family photos and a globe or map to talk about where your child's ancestors once lived, what they looked like, what language they spoke, and so on. This might get more complicated in multiracial families, but 5- to 8-year-olds can process the idea of belonging to more than one group.

"Why aren't I brown like Dad?" This question may come up in multiracial and adoptive families. Start off by saying "Every family is different." If your child is multiracial, talk about how she looks a bit like both her parents and her grandparents. If her skin color is different than yours, point out that her nose or her smile is similar and that you both like to read and play cards. Adoptive parents can talk about how children and parents don't have to "match" to be a family.

"Can I be white?" This question might come as a shock, but try not to show it. Grade-school kids want to fit in – if your child is in the minority in her school, she may have picked up on messages that some look down on her race. First find out why she's asking, then calmly talk to her about her heritage and what it means to you, using family photos, books, art, or music to reinforce a positive image. The bottom line is, no, you can't be white, but here are all the wonderful things about being the color that you are.

- We are less likely to pass on biases we identify and work to overcome. Give your child an example of a bias that you hold or have held.
- Share things that you do to confront and overcome that bias.

Tip #5-Know and Love Who You Are

- Talk about histories and experiences of the racial, ethnic, and cultural group you and your family identify with.
- Tell stories about the challenges your family has faced and overcome.

Tip #6- Develop Racial Cultural Literacy

- Study and talk about the histories and experiences of different racial/ethnic groups.
 - Lift up stories about “freedom fighters” and tell stories of resistance and resilience.
- Ensure that your child understands that there is diversity within racial groups and across them.

Tip #7- Be Honest

- Be honest about bigotry and oppression.
- Help your child understand that the struggle for racial fairness and equity is still happening and that your family can take part in the struggle.
 - For example, a high school student in CA noticed that the contributions in her community were absent from the courses being taught so she and other students became active in creating a new ethnic studies curriculum
- Children are amazing at noticing patterns (for example, neighborhood patterns and who lives in their neighborhood versus their friends’ neighborhoods). Explain how oppression is sometimes a big part of those explanations.

Tip #8- Be Active and Engaged

- Help your child understand what it means to be a change agent- connect the conversations to the change that you and your child want to see.

Adapted from MomsRising.org, babycenter.com, Susan Linn’s *Talking to Children about Racism, Prejudice, and Diversity*

What Else Can You Do?

Surround your child with diversity. Arrange playdates and sleepovers with kids from racial groups she doesn’t normally interact with.

Be proactive about teasing and excluding. In elementary school, the first conflicts involving race may arise. School-age kids, particularly girls, often segregate themselves by race as early as kindergarten. According to child development research, by age 6, many children already harbor racial prejudices. A psychologist’s (Wright) daughter came home to say that another child didn’t want to play with her because she was “brown.” Wright talked it over with her, then invited the other girl over for a playdate. She also spoke to the school about the incident, and the teacher brought it up in class without mentioning which children were involved.

Encourage diversity at school. Find out what books are read in your child’s school library. Suggest diversity where there is none, with books like *The Story of Ruby Bridges* or *White Socks Only*. Parents at some schools form diversity committees to organize workshops, trips, and multicultural potlucks or festivals. And Wright suggests that parents get actively involved in recruiting students and faculty of other races.

Make talks routine. This is a topic that you should plan to revisit repeatedly, in many different ways over time.