

Stepping Stones for Conversations About Race and Injustice with Kids

[RE]Rooting Consulting

1. Name race (including whiteness!)

With young children, use descriptive colors and racial constructs (Black, Latinx, White, Asian). When we pretend we don't see race, we erase a central part of someone's identity -- something that is both an important part of their family's history and has a significant impact on how they experience the world.

2. Affirm children's questions/comments about race

Make sure kids know that you value their questions/comments and encourage future conversations. This models that it's OK to notice race and to talk about race.

3. Talk about the difference between public and private spaces

The words one uses in the privacy of their home versus in public may sound different. It's important that even in public, we send the message that it's OK to notice race and other identities. Use language that is empowering and positive. Save the lengthy explanation for home, where you can stumble through things and be more honest.

4. Challenge stereotypes

Call out stereotypes as false. Seek out accurate information about a particular group in order to counteract the stereotype (e.g., racist stereotype of indigenous peoples) or tie in a personal connection (e.g., "Not all Black men are good at sports. We know women like Anne who play basketball. We know Black men like Eric who are artists."). Holidays like Halloween and Thanksgiving provide plenty of opportunities to challenge stereotypes and seek out accurate information.

5. Diversify representation.

Find media that represents racial and cultural diversity, and intersections of identities (women of color, queer folx of color, BIPOC with disabilities, etc. Pay attention to who wrote the book and whether they identify as someone belonging to the group which they're writing about.

6. Fill knowledge gaps.

Connect to history, do research, and learn together. Be transparent about your own lack of knowledge and talk about why you might be uninformed (consider the content of your history books growing up, conversations in your family, segregation in your community).

7. Build on existing concepts but "complicate" things

Kids need to be given information about racism where the concepts are broken down to build on concepts they already understand, but it's important that we don't oversimplify issues. We might build on the concept of fair/unfair, but encourage them to question who makes the rules/laws and who they benefit. Challenge the binary of "good guys/bad guys" that's prevalent in TV shows, movies, and books.

8. Name the role of white people in enacting racism

Education about enslavement frequently neglect to emphasize the role of white people who enslaved Black people, or White colonizers of indigenous lands. White families can have honest conversations with our children about the role our ancestors likely played in violence and oppression by talking about the ways that we're committed to living our values and breaking patterns that have caused harm.

9. Connect history to current racial justice issues

There are many opportunities to talk about racism in the history of the US. We might read children's books about the Civil Rights Movement, attend Martin Luther King Day events, or participate in activities during Native American History Month. It's important to make connections between historical events or movements and contemporary movements, such as Black Lives Matter, Standing Rock, refugees seeking asylum at the U.S./Mexico border, among others. Without these connections, children may think racism and indigenous oppression are issues from the past that have been resolved. We also miss opportunities to become involved in issues around race that are impacting our communities today.

10. Empower children

Include narratives that don't paint Black and non-Black People of Color as victims and don't only show White people as the oppressor. Construct a narrative of explanation that emphasizes people's power to transform injustice. Show your children how they can be activists and how they can create change. ("What can we do, right now, to try to change something that we find unfair?") De-mystify what it means to be a social activist. Start by educating yourselves and learning more about the issue you have been talking about.

Be vulnerable. You won't be perfect! Make mistakes, learn, and keep going!

[RE]Rooting Consulting
ReRootingConsulting.com
ReRootingConsulting@gmail.com

