

## LifeAdviser Special Edition

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# How to Talk to Your Kids about Racism



### Help is Available

Recent protests are sparking questions from children. This moment in time provides an opportunity to have important conversations with your child about race, racial differences and racism. Experts say that how you answer could shape your children's feelings about race for years to come.

We hope these tips and resources help you talk openly and honestly with your child. However, if you or your child need further assistance, consider contacting Concern for support. Our counselors are here to help you manage these challenging times and develop strategies consistent with your personal values.

Call 800-344-4222 or go to our website at [employees.concernhealth.com](https://employees.concernhealth.com). Calls are answered 24/7.

As protests spill into a second week, many parents are struggling with the need to protect their children from seeing the worst of the violence while at the same time trying to explain the consequences of racism. Whether from social media, talking with friends, or overhearing conversations, children know what's going on. This might be a good time to start a conversation so that they don't have to navigate their feelings alone, and to keep the conversation going when we're not in a crisis mode.

### Getting Started

Create space for your child to feel whatever they need to feel about what you're discussing. They may be angry, sad, scared or confused. The process could begin with stories using age-appropriate books or films. Let your child's age and level of development be your guide.

- **Preschool age children.** Children as young as three years old are aware of race and skin color. Talk with them about racial differences in a calm, positive tone. For example, say how wonderful it is that the world has so many different kinds of people. Use toys to point out various physical attributes: "This one has dark skin, that one doesn't."
- **Elementary age children.** Once you assess what your child knows about the protests, have a conversation without being too explicit. Reassure them that you're there to keep them safe, but also explain why people are protesting. You could talk about how unfairly black and brown people have been treated throughout history, because fairness is something that all children can understand.

**Tweens and Teens.** Ask if they've seen anything online about the protests, what they think, and what about it was upsetting or inspiring. Some teens have already begun participating in online activism. Reposting, retweeting, expressing how they're feeling, chatting with friends is an active kind of coping response. You might use movies or documentaries that can educate older teens on the history of discrimination. Avoid preaching about right or wrong. It's better to have a conversation where they can come to their conclusions.

### **Don't make the conversation a one-time event**

You don't have to set up time to talk about race. Conversations can occur naturally. Pay attention to what your child is saying and be aware of ways that unconscious bias can slip in. For example, if your child is wondering why there aren't any black people on a particular series, talk about what might make the show more representative. Encourage critical thinking and invite your child to share more about what they notice. You can also look for ways that you as a parent can call out disparities.

### **Don't pretend to have all the answers**

Remember, there is no one "right" way to have these conversations. Like other situations, you might find yourself wishing that you'd answered the question differently. It's okay - own it. Show your child that these are hard conversations to have, but also important ones.

### **Keep it going**

Not shying away from conversations about race is the first step in raising an anti-racist child. The conversations need to start early and keep happening. But while these conversations are important, it's not enough to just talk about racism. Parents must model the behavior they wish to see in their children. Make space, speak up, amplify issues of inequity and injustice. Children see everything.

## **Resources**

Control + Click to access online links

- [Books to read to children](#)
- [Books to help you explain racism](#)
- [The ABCs of Diversity: Helping Kids \(and Ourselves!\) Embrace Our Differences](#)
- [Embrace Race - 7 Ways to Highlight Resistance Efforts When Discussing Oppression with Children](#)
- [Movies that inspire kids to change the world](#)
- [Movies that explore racism](#)
- [Teaching Tolerance](#)
- [Child Development Institute - How to Teach Your Kids About Tolerance](#)

## **Sources**

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[National Geographic](#)—Talking to Kids About Race

[The New York Times](#) - Talking to Kids About Racism, Early and Often

[The New York Times](#) - These Books Can Help You Explain Racism and Protest to Your Kids

[CNN](#) - How to Talk to Your Children About Racism