Talking with Children/Youth about Race: Strategies for Developing a Healthy Racial Identity

PREPARE YOURSELF & BE A ROLE MODEL

Be intentional in your everyday life about the messages you want your child/youth to receive from you about what it means to treat people with dignity and respect and how to be in the world. Start with your own personal journey towards cultural competence.

Personal Work

1. Learn about differences, racism and privilege.
2. Continually learn more about your own culture and history.
3. Identify subconscious biases, stereotypes, attitudes and beliefs about others and internalized oppression and/or superiority regarding yourself.
4. Educate yourself about the realities of institutional racism in education, healthcare, policy, judicial system, etc.
5. Read more about American history and race relations, including stories of people who have stood up against oppression.
6. Develop relationships with people from diverse ethnic and racial backgrounds.
7. Practice talking about differences, racism and privilege with other adults to increase your comfort level and develop skills.
8. Join with other people who are working on learning more about and acting on these issues in your community. Participate in social justice activism in the community.

Model for Children/Youth

1. Develop positive intercultural relationships with friends, acquaintances and people in your community.
2. Expose them to a wide variety of people and organizations working against discrimination by taking field trips and participating in community activities.
3. Invite parents, staff, or community members who actively work against racism into the classroom (or help your child’s teacher find these people) to talk about their experience.
4. Complain to the person in charge when you see injustice.
5. Notice white privilege and stereotypes out loud when you see this in television and movies.
6. Challenge any form of oppression. Openly disagree with racist comments, jokes, inequitable treatment, etc.
7. Advocate on behalf of others.
ACT ON TEACHABLE MOMENTS

Teachable moments usually happen in two ways. One is that they can come to you by surprise, often catching you off guard. This is when a child or youth says something that you may or may not be prepared for. It’s important that you try to address whatever was said or done as often and as soon as possible. Not responding sends a message. The second way a teachable moment can occur is when you see or experience something together. This presents an opportunity for you talk with your child/youth about what you see or notice. In either case, it is better that you try and help young people interpret their experiences rather than leave it up to them to try and make sense of what they see, hear and experience.

Suggestions:

1. Take incidents of racist talk or discriminatory behavior aimed at children/youth or perpetuated by them very seriously.
2. Say something, even if you don’t have all the information or don’t know the “right” thing to say. Don’t ignore what you heard.
3. You don’t have to respond immediately. Get ideas from colleagues and then go back and address the situation as soon as possible.
4. Assume your child/youth knows something about what they see and is trying to make sense of it. In other words, don’t assume they are blind to differences and don’t underestimate their ability to learn about race, racism, power, or privilege.
5. Bring in pictures and guest speakers to help educate.
6. Research together at the library, on-line, etc.
7. Help them see the difference between all and none type thinking—overgeneralizations.
8. Identify the behavior. Explore bad decisions vs. bad people.
9. Broaden their view of diversity amongst all groups; don’t use “diverse” as code language for people of color.
10. Encourage their curiosity.
11. Teach them about what bias and prejudice is in ways they can understand.
12. Look at the different complexions of skin color in your family and talk about how beautiful all the colors are.
13. Question! Question! Question!
14. Slow the conversation.
15. Help develop a vocabulary.
16. Look critically at how children/youth define normal in relation to race, gender, etc.
17. Initiate the conversation.
18. Don’t over-do it.
19. Validate when they show understanding, even if it is partial understand.
20. Build on what they do understand.

Scenario: You’re walking down the street and you and your child see a Muslim man praying (or you are on a fieldtrip with your students).
**Scenario:** You’re listening to the radio and they’re talking about Gov. Jan Brewer’s signing of anti-immigration bill SB1070 in Arizona, or you have students bring in newspaper articles about current events and one of your students bring in an article about anti-immigration laws.

**Scenario:** You’re carpooling with a group of children and one of them, a fourth grade African American boy notices that the police have pulled someone over. He makes a comment stating, “Man, the police are racist! They’re always pulling over Black people.” Or... Two boys are playing together on the playground. They want to play cops and robbers but the African American boy refuses to be the cop saying, “I’m not going to be the police, they’re racist!”

**Scenario:** A white 10 year old says, “My mom says when black people get pulled over by the cops they claim it’s because of racism and they’re just making excuses so they won’t get a ticket.”

**Scenario:** You are walking down the hall of a hospital with your 10 year old daughter and 12 year old son and stop to look at the pictures of nurses who have worked there since 1914. You notice that almost all of them are white with the exception of a few Asian nurses.

**Possible Responses:**

1. Ask them questions about their understanding:
   - Do you know why that woman has a red dot on her forehead?
   - Why do you think that man is kneeling down on the ground?
   - Do you see that woman with a scarf on her head, do you know why she wears it.
   - Did you notice the dye on those women’s hands? Do you know why they do that?
   - Who are some black people we know that are not bad?
   - That’s a great question, I don’t know. Let’s see if we can find out when we get home.
   - Where did you learn that from?
   - Have you heard about that before? What’s your understanding of what’s going on?
   - Why might some people support that idea? (or believe, think or feel that way)
   - Why might one group get treated differently than another group?
   - Why might that happen?

2. Talk out loud about what you are observing:
   - That’s a beautiful saree that woman is wearing. I love the color.
   - I love the smells of East African foods. They have so many wonderful spices that we don’t use in our foods at home.
   - I wonder why they have Lisa speaking with an Asian accent on this show. Your friend Lilly doesn’t talk that way.
   - Notice how they are stereotyping police offers to all eat donuts in this movie.
   - I notice the white boy is the main character in all of these Magic School Bus videos, even though the class is really diverse.

3. Provide context for children/youth
- What was going on at the time?
- Why was that language used e.g., to dehumanize to justify oppression?
- Why is it going on e.g., power, resources?
- What are stereotypical beliefs about that group?
- Who did it harm, who benefitted and how?

Stop & Reflect:  How might you respond to one of the examples given above?
Think of a time your child/youth has made a race-based comment? How did you respond? What might you do differently?

**Provide a Counter-Narrative**
A counter-narrative is designed to counteract messages that lead to internalized racial inferiority and/or superiority. This is not necessarily in reaction to something a child/youth says, but rather built in to every-day conversations as a result of your awareness of the stereotypes about their group identity.

Both white and children/youth of color receive messages about their heritage. It’s important that you are active in countering these messages to help shape a positive identity and sense of pride in who they are and where they come from. While whites tend to receive more positive messages about being white, their ancestors received negative messages and consequences for their Irish, Scottish, Italian, Jewish, etc. heritage. In many cases, this caused assimilation whereby many white children do not know about their culture. At the same time, white children/youth are receiving messages in their environment that confirm a positive image of who they are. On the other hand messages conveyed to children/youth of color tend to evoke a ‘less than’ mentality. These hidden messages about their group identity can have a powerful negative impact on their sense of self-worth. It’s important that we expose all children to the richness of their heritage and counter disparaging messages that communicate superiority and/or inferiority.

Suggestions:
1. Move beyond celebrating a few famous people to find books and movies about common folks, especially children/youth in everyday settings.
2. Have conversations about the beauty and strengths of diverse groups of people including their own culture and heritage.
3. Expose them to books, role models, and movies that show historically marginalized and oppressed groups in positions of power, authority and competence outside of traditional stereotypical roles.
4. Take youth to race and social justice conferences or other events with you.
5. Provide them with opportunities to participate in heritage festivals.
6. Expose them to the art, music and other talents of their culture.
7. Teach them about the inventions and accomplishments of people from their culture.
8. Enroll them in school and recreational programs that serve a proportionate number of children/youth from their same ethnic background.
9. Stress the beauty of their culture and heritage.
10. Discuss the diversity within and between groups in positive ways.
11.Expose them to books written by authors from their same and diverse background.
12. Actively seek out professionals of color (e.g., to be your provide your child/youth’s dental and health care).
13. Provide different color paper and crayons for coloring people.

**Possible Responses:**
1. You have such pretty brown skin. I love all the different complexions that we all have. (To a child/youth with dark skin)
2. I like your hair style. Include a descriptor. (To a child/youth who wears his/her hair natural)
3. You should become a scientist because you’re so curious about... (To a Black, Latino or Native American child/youth)
4. You can do it. Even if you have a little trouble. When you stick to something you have a way of figuring it out. Remember that time you figured out how to... (To a child/youth of color)
5. You’ve worked really hard to solve that math problem. The best mathematicians are ones who stick with it when problems are tough. (To a young girl)
6. There are lots of ways to be intelligent and a lot of kids don’t get to be in gifted classes because these classes focus on one kind of intelligence. You are really smart, but that doesn’t mean you’re smarter than kids not in this class. (To a White child in a gifted program)

**Stop & Reflect:** What are some ways you provide counter narratives for your children/youth?

**TALK OPENLY ABOUT DISCRIMINATION**

Kids are teased every day for all kinds of reasons. Discriminatory teasing based on race, gender, sexual orientation, etc., is different from other forms of harassment because it is based on something being inherently wrong about a part of that person’s identity. Young people often need help finding ways to effectively deal with being the target of discrimination. They also need specific corrections and more information when they are using stereotypes to harass others.

**Engaging the child/youth who is the target of a racist or oppressive comment or action:**

Acknowledge and Explore his/her thoughts and feelings:
1. I would be hurt if someone said that to me.
2. It was wrong of Alicia to say that to you.
3. How are you feeling right now?
4. How are you feeling about what happened?
5. I understand why you are so upset about this.
6. Thank you for sharing your feelings with me.
7. Thank you for telling me. That was a really difficult experience to go through.
8. I imagine that you were feeling really angry about that.
9. Has someone said this type of thing to you before?
10. What do you think about what said to you?
11. Why do you think she/he said/did that?

Ask questions to figure out how to problem solve:
1. Do you want to tell them how that made you feel?
2. How are you thinking about handling this situation?
3. What would be most helpful to you?
4. Would you like me to help you think of some ways to address this with her/him?
5. Would you like me to go with you when you talk to him/her?
6. What is it that you would like from me? How can I help?
7. What can you do to make this situation better?
8. Would you like to role play how you could respond next time?
9. What do you think would happen if you told him/her how you felt?

Together come up with creative suggestions for how to respond:
1. I like my hair the way it is.
2. This is who I am, and I’m comfortable with it.
3. I’m proud of being African American, always have been, always will be.
4. What does that mean, ‘too’ ethnic?
5. Where does ‘too ethnic’ begin and ‘not ethnic enough’ end?
6. Why do you think that joke is funny?
7. When you did/said... I felt... I would like...

8. Teach them to respond with one word come backs like “hurtful” or “really???”

Engaging the child/youth who made the racist or oppressive comment or action:

Young people’s inappropriate behaviors can be reinforced when we don’t do anything to intervene. Try to respond in a way that gets them to explore why what they said was wrong, harmful and hurtful.

Talk about feelings:
1. How do you think Jessica felt when you called her “beaner”?
2. Has anyone ever called you a name before? How did it make you feel?
3. How do you think your grandmother would feel if she knew you...
4. How do you think Jessica’s parents would feel if they knew you...
5. How are you feeling about what you said/did?
6. Is everything okay with you? That’s not usually like you to say hurtful things.
Ask questions so they develop deeper understanding of their actions:

1. [When it’s unintentional] When is it okay to call people names?
2. What makes that joke funny?
3. What was your intention when you said that? Were you trying to hurt him? Why?
4. How might that be insulting or disrespectful to that person and also other people who are Native American?
5. Why do you think she responded the way she did to what you did or said?
6. What are other ways you could express your anger without labeling or stereotyping?
7. Why is using a stereotype or hate speech worse than other insults?
8. How might using a stereotype insult an entire group of people?
9. That’s a powerful statement. Say more about what you mean.
10. What can you expect from Jessica based on what you said to her?
11. I’m surprised to hear you say such a mean thing to Jessica. I have always thought of you as someone who is considerate of other peoples’ feelings. Is this new behavior for you or is this just something new I’m learning about you?

Talk about why it’s not okay:

1. When you say hurtful things people don’t usually forget. They may carry it with them even when you apologize.
2. It leaves a scar on the inside.
3. It’s bullying and may make others think it is okay to say those things, too.

Talk about the history of oppression:

1. What is your understanding of their experiences around race/racism?
2. What messages do you get about that group? Where did you get those messages from?
3. How does what you said reinforce those stereotypes?
4. What experiences have you had in the past that have led you to believe this?
5. Share how your ethnic group had been treated in the past. When your great great grandparents first came here from Ireland it was hard for them to find work. They were called savages and treated really badly.

Problem solve together:

1. What can you do to make this situation better?
2. What do you need to do now?
3. Do you want to turn this situation around?
4. What might you say to turn this situation around?
5. What can I expect from you in the future?
6. Do you want me to go with you when you talk to Kim?

PATHWAYS TO CONNECTED CONVERSATIONS

The following questions and sentence starters are designed for times when you overhear a conversation or want to address a pattern of discriminatory behavior you’ve noticed in a young person. They are useful when the two of you have had a conflict, such as a youth calling you racist, or if you are asked by a teacher or other adult to talk with a young person regarding his or her behavior.

Explore where each story comes from

“My reactions here probably have a lot to do with my experiences in a previous . . . “

Share the impact on you

“I don’t know whether you intended this, but I felt very frustrated when . . . “

Take responsibility for your contribution

“There are a number of things I’ve done that have made this situation harder. . . . “

Work together towards a solution

“What can we do differently so this doesn’t happen again?”

1. Shift from, “I understand” to “Can you help me understand . . . ?”
2. What do you think would be most fair for everyone in this situation . . . ?
3. How can I help you be successful with . . . ?
4. It’s not like you to respond in this way, what’s going on . . . ?
5. How do you see it differently?
6. What do you think is the best way to handle this situation . . . ?
7. Where do you suggest we go from here . . . ?
8. Say more about why you think this is unfair.
9. What is causing you to react this way . . . ?
10. I wouldn’t push you so hard if I didn’t care about . . .
11. I wouldn’t ask this of you if I didn’t think you could do it.
12. I have high expectations of you based on what you have shown me in the past so I’m not going to quit trying to get you to . . . because I know you can do it.
13. What would it mean to you if that happened?
14. I’m wondering if it’s possible to . . . ?
15. I’m wondering if it would make sense . . . ?
16. I need you to help me understand where you are coming from on this.
17. Is it fair for me to let you . . . ?
18. How would I being showing you that I care about you if I let you . . . ?
19. What would your grandmother say if I asked her about the choices you are making today?
20. If I talked to (someone important in their lives) what do you think they would say about...?
21. If I asked your teacher about why she sent you here, what would she say the reason is? (For a student only presenting her own perspective.)
22. Your reaction surprises me. I’m not sure why but I feel like I may have disrespected you in some way. Can we talk about what is bothering you?
23. Have I disrespected you in some way that I’m not aware of? (If they say no) Then I expect for you to show me respect as well.
24. Whether you believe it or not, I care a great deal about you and so I’m going to continue to expect the best. That’s not going to change. If I didn’t care or if I thought you couldn’t do it, I wouldn’t constantly be on you about this.
25. What makes you unique as an individual? (After they name a couple of things) I see those things in you too and I don’t want them to be wasted. It’s what makes you special.
26. I’m wondering whether we could talk about how we each reacted to this situation and discuss ways we both could have handled it better. (Adult starts with what they could have done differently and then invite student to do the same).
27. It’s important to me that we resolve this issue but maybe I haven’t been going about it in the right way. So let’s talk about what I could be doing to help you improve as well as what you could do differently.
28. At first I was thinking that you just didn’t care but now I’m starting to wonder if you have been trying to tell me, in your own way, that you are struggling with understanding... But I don’t want to guess, why don’t you tell me what is going on for you so we can figure out what to do about it together?
29. You may think that I’m a racist and I’m willing to talk with you about it, however, I care about you and know that you can do better than what you are currently demonstrating. I believe that it would be racist of me if I didn’t have high expectations of you. So... we can talk about it, however, I still expect for you to e.g., rewrite this paper, follow directions. (When a student says you’re being racist.)
30. I think of you as someone who treats others with a lot of respect. I’m surprised to hear you say something like that to another person.
31. That’s not like you to be so hurtful or react like that. I’m guessing something must be bothering you right now for you to say/do... What’s going on?

**IDENTIFY WHITE PRIVILEGE**

Peggy McIntosh defines white privilege as “an invisible package of unearned assets that I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was ‘meant’ to remain oblivious.” Identifying white privilege helps children/youth make sense of what they are seeing and/or experiencing as well as provides them with language to better communicate. They begin to understand barriers and access to opportunities based solely on skin color. This minimizes meritocracy in their thinking and opens up their perspectives of their own struggles and successes. In other words, internalized inferiority and superiority are challenged. Talking about white privilege empowers youth of color and can improve cross-cultural interactions for whites.
**Student White Privilege List:**
Adapted from White Privilege in Schools by Ruth Anne Olson published in Beyond Heroes and Holidays (2008)

1. Whatever topics I choose to study, I can be confident that I will find materials linking people of my race to accomplishments in that area.

2. I know that I will see people of my race liberally represented in textbooks, posters, films and other classroom materials.

3. When we talk about celebrations, holidays or family observances in show-and-tell or in other informal exchanges at school, I know my teachers will have experienced similar events and will be able to reinforce my stories.

4. I can be confident that musical instruments, harmonies, rhythms and artists from my race will be generously recognized in the uses of music in my school.

5. I can be confident that visual design forms and visual artists from my race will be generously recognized in the uses of visual art in my school, from art classes to artwork in the hallways.

6. I can be confident that dramatic traditions and theater from members of my race will be represented in my school’s theatrical productions and curriculum.

7. Because of the color of my skin, most adults have positive or neutral assumptions about me when they see me in the hallway or meet me for the first time.

8. The vast majority of adults in my school share my racial background.

9. I have never been called on to tell the class about my race, culture or special ways my family has of celebrating events.

10. When talking about Thanksgiving, the Civil Rights Movement, immigration reform, Japanese Internment or other events focusing on people of color, I am not singled out by the teacher or looked at by everyone in the class to share my racial or cultural perspective.

11. I am never asked to speak for other members of my race and when I do share my ideas, it is assumed I am talking from an individual perspective.

12. I am not assumed to be a member of a gang because of the style or color of my clothing.

13. When my parents or guardians visit my school, they are welcomed and school staff reserves judgment about their economic class, level of education, or reason for being in the school.

14. I can take for granted that crayons, paints, bandages or other items described as “flesh tone” will more or less match my skin.

15. When I stand in the hallway or sit in the cafeteria with other students from my race, we are rarely suspected of misbehavior.
16. I can take for granted that the tests used to judge my achievement and determine my placement in special classes were developed by groups that included a significant number of adults who share my racial background.

17. When taking tests, I don’t feel additional pressure to prove the intelligence of my race.

18. When talking to a counselor, I can assume my race will not work against me in scheduling or planning for my future.

19. I am never told by my peers that I don’t act enough like other members of my race.

20. I can cheat or skip school and feel confident that my behavior will not be attributed to the bad morals of my race.

21. I am not likely to hear anyone suggest that problems at my school are caused by members of my race.

22. Adults in my school rarely, if ever, confuse me with someone else from my race.

23. I have never been falsely accused of a crime at school (stealing, cheating, graffiti, etc.) because of my race.

24. Policy decisions that affect my school experience are made by groups full of people who understand and appreciate my racial history and culture.

**Common Expressions of White Privilege in Schools:**

1. **Dominating the Conversation:** Dominating the conversation is where white students talk more often in class, are usually the first to raise their hands and the first to be called on.

   **Counter:**
   
   - Take data on who speaks and for how long in class. Share and discuss this data with students, asking for their perspectives on why this is the case. Have students write their thoughts, as they may not be comfortable sharing them in front of peers.
   
   - Following class discussions, ask who’s voice and what perspectives were privileged in the discussion. What voices were silenced? How and why?
   
   - Invite students who have not shared to voice their opinion.
   
   - Mix up how discussions are run. Allow for overlapping/interrupting in some conversations, going around the whole group one by one in others, talking in pairs or small groups, writing their thoughts before responding, etc.
   
   - Remember, you don’t have to call on the first person to raise their hand. This is about equity, not traditional definitions of “fairness”.

2. **Invalidating:** Invalidating occurs when students deny skin color effects how people are treated thus affording privileges to some and not others. This normalizes white experiences and perspectives and invalidates other experiences.
**Scenario:** A white youth says to her peer, "The reason why there aren’t more students of color in our honors classes is because they don’t work as hard as we do in school."

**Counter:**

- Use instructional materials (books, DVDs, etc) told through a variety of cultural lenses, comparing, contrasting, and learning multiple perspectives.
- Have young people rewrite or retell a page from a story they are reading from the perspective of different characters.
- Encourage questioning what is considered “common sense”.
- Ask students to write the “unwritten” rules of the school. Discuss who is most likely to know these rules without being told.
- Explicitly discuss institutional racism, privilege and colorblindness and how this shapes different ways of experiencing the world.

3. **Environmental:** Books, curriculum, what’s on the walls, who is in charge, teaching styles, norms, etc. all make up a part of the environment that validates white culture as normal or standard. This has the effect of making whiteness invisible.

**Scenario:** A teacher says to a white student “Do you really want to be doing that right now?” White students will generally know that the teacher is communicating to stop the behavior where a student of color will often see it as a genuine question.

**Counter:**

- Vary pedagogy so to utilize different cultural styles.
- Explicitly tell students what is expected (such as raising hands or calling out) so they don’t have to guess.
- Make sure curricular materials and pictures on the walls reflect the students who are in the class.
- Invite diverse family and community members in for classroom interviews or to present on topics related to your current studies.
- Teach students to notice whiteness in media and/or in the school environment.

4. **Relationships:** White students benefit from the trust teachers and staff have of their intentions, regardless of their behaviors, actions and motives.

**Scenario:** A group of boys of color standing together in the hallway are thought to be breaking rules while a group of white boys are ignored or approached in a way that assumes positive intent.

**Scenario:** A student of color who is perpetually late to class is reprimanded while a white peer with the same tardy behavior goes unnoticed.
Counter:

- Examine your discipline data and/or that of the school. Make note of who you discipline, for what offenses, and how frequently. Is it racially predictable?
- Make intentional effort to build relationships with students of color and their families.
- Check your assumptions: Take time to ask students what they are doing, why they are late, etc.
- Hold a whole-class discussion about discipline and race. What have they seen in the school? In your class? What changes would they like to see?
- Other examples: ____________________________________________________________

**Increasing Young People’s Understanding of White Privilege:**

1. Name the privilege.
2. Discuss the history of privilege and oppression in the U.S.
3. Work with schools to challenge curriculum that promotes the myth of meritocracy.
4. Invite multiple perspectives in the conversation.
5. Help children and youth develop their vocabulary.
6. Question, question, question.
7. Insist on critical thinking about unfairness. Discuss what fairness would look like e.g., equity vs. equality.
8. Validate feelings.
9. Meet young people where they are at in their understanding.
10. Explore solutions for the individual situation as well as consider systemic approaches.
11. Reframe the conversation from, “What are the barriers...?” to, “What are the advantages...?”
12. Explore what’s within their control.
13. Initiate the conversation i.e., wonder/notice out loud the white privilege you are seeing.
14. Be comfortable with not having all the answers. Learn with young people.
15. Involve parents/families and community in the conversation.

**ADDRESS SYSTEMS/INSTITUTIONAL LEVEL**

*When talking about racism, try not to refer to it as the behavior of “bad” people or “sick” individuals, but rather something that is part of the larger society that needs addressing. Straight talk about the social world often makes a child’s life less confusing because it more clearly explains their experiences. For example, if a teacher targets students of color more often for discipline, but is also a very engaging, fun teacher, he is not a bad person. His discriminatory behavior needs to change.*
When we talk about institutional racism, we are educating children beyond the immediate messages they are getting from their surroundings and addressing their assumptions, even when these are not stated. This helps them learn to look beyond what they see.

Examples:

1. There are good and bad people in all groups.
2. Do you know what institutional racism means?
3. We’re here at the immigrant rights rally because laws are in place that target and discriminate against Latino people.
4. We are going to write our Senator and tell him/her about our concerns about.... Does anyone have thoughts about why it would be important to write our government representatives about things we have concern about?

Reframing to Identify Institutional Oppression:

1. Lack of resources in a school vs. inequity in funding for different neighborhoods.
2. Person being a criminal vs. racial profiling, stereotypes and discriminatory laws.
3. Choosing an unhealthy diet vs. access to healthy food.
4. They’re lazy vs. community resources and job opportunities.
5. They’re drug addicts vs. who is convicted, for how long and why.
6. They’re not as smart vs. stereotypes/low expectations and access to quality education.

Provide them with books, movies and other media that reflect racial diversity in positive ways & critically analyze books and media together

Asians are known for more than karate and are good at things other than math. Blacks have talents other than dancing and sports. Native Americans don’t walk around wearing traditional clothing or live in teepees. Latinos aren’t all immigrants and do work in diverse professional roles. Media continues to exacerbate these and other stereotypes. Be intentional about ensuring children/youth receive much broader messages about diverse groups of people.

Children/Youth can develop the skills necessary to critically analyze books and media on their own if you help them grow in this way. Talk with children/youth about the books they read, ask them questions that get them to develop tools that will assist them in being critical thinkers.

Suggestions:

1. Watch movies and read books that grow you and your child/youth’s understanding of the history of race relations.
2. Move beyond celebrating a few famous people to find books and movies about common folks, especially children/youth in everyday settings.
3. Do not limit the stories to those with a happy ending or present people of color as always winning battles against unfairness and oppression. It is not easy to fight racism and we don’t want to give the idea that victory is just around the corner.
4. Have conversations about the strengths of diverse groups of people.
5. Notice out loud when stereotyping occurs in movies, cartoons, and books.
6. Observe common themes you notice in the roles characters are commonly given based on race.

(See Resource List)

Questions to ask children/youth about books and media:

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<tr>
<th>Topics to Discuss</th>
<th>Strategies for Discussion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Are the nonwhite characters too good to be true?</td>
<td>Do any of the people you know live like this? What seems realistic about these characters and what seems too good to be true? What might be some problems that these characters would face that weren’t talked about in the book?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How and why does the author define race?</td>
<td>What are they telling us about Asian kids? Do you know many/any Asian kids like the one in the story? What are the Asian kids that you know like? What do we know to be true about Asian kids? Why do you think that’s the message the author wants to portray?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is the cover art true to the story?</td>
<td>When you saw the cover, what did you think this book would be about? What do you see on the cover? Does that happen in the book? Are those people on the cover in the book? Why do you think it’s different?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who are the change agents?</td>
<td>Who are the sheroes/heroes? Who are the &quot;bad guys”? What are they wearing (colors)? What’s the message?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How is beauty defined?</td>
<td>Who is beautiful in this story? What does he/she look like? Are there other ways outside this book that this message of beauty is reinforced? What are some other ways that people are beautiful that is not shown in the story?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Prepare Children/Youth with Multiple Strategies to Respond to Bias

Adapted from Responding to Everyday Bigotry
You can help children/youth develop the skills to interrupt bias at an early age. Keep in mind that it won’t be easy and you don’t want them to think it will be either. Given the complexity of race and social justice issues, it’s important that we help children and youth develop their skills in responding to bias when it occurs.

Be Ready
Help prepare them for speaking up by talking with them about courage. Remind them of a time when they were courageous or of someone they know who did a courageous act. This does not have to be race related. Draw on the feelings they experienced, e.g., “It was scary but you felt good in the end.” You can also talk to them about why they want to speak up, why is it important to them or why is it the right thing to do. They can practice talking about what they would say in a variety of different situations, role playing if possible.

Identify the Behavior

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Talk to the child/youth about the importance of not manifesting the same behaviors they don’t like in the other person when responding to bias. Teach him/her to avoid labeling and name-calling. Describe the behavior; don’t label the person.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Labeling the Person</th>
<th>Identify the Behavior</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jason you’re stupid for calling Marsha a chink.</td>
<td>Jason, name-calling and using racial slurs hurts people’s feelings and it’s not a nice thing to do.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You can call me darkie all you want but at least I’m no dummy.</td>
<td>There’s nothing wrong with having dark skin but the way you say it, makes it seem like something’s wrong with it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You’re an idiot for saying those things.</td>
<td>It’s disrespectful and hurtful to say those kinds of things about people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You’re such a racist.</td>
<td>That was a mean thing to say.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who are you to talk? You’re a retard.</td>
<td>That wasn’t nice and I don’t appreciate your saying things like that to my friend.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Appeal to Principles**

This works best if you know the person and can honestly identify positive qualities about them.

1. I think of you as someone who treats others with a lot of respect. I’m surprised to hear you say something like that to another person.
2. I can’t believe you just said that, you seem more considerate of others than that.
3. That’s not like you to be so hurtful. I’m guessing something must be bothering you right now for you to say something so mean to another person.
4. It seems like that joke makes fun of people who are different. You’ve always been someone who talks about valuing differences.

**Interrupt Bias and Set Your Boundaries**

Let the young person know they can’t control another person but they can let them know what they’ve said or done is not okay with you. Instead of laughing along uncomfortably, pretending you didn’t hear it, or walking away without saying anything, say something, even if it’s not much. Don’t wait for someone else to say they are offended, step up and interrupt bias. If the person they’re interrupting won’t change, they have the right to tell them not to do the behavior around them or to walk away.

1. If you keep it up, I’m outta here.
2. Let’s leave Alecia. We don’t have to stay around for this.
3. I’d like it if you didn’t use that word around me.
4. I don’t find that very funny and I’d appreciate if you’d keep those types of statement to yourself.
5. I don’t like people saying jokes about Black people. Please don’t tell those types of jokes when I’m around.
6. Why would you all laugh about something like that? Stereotypes are unfair and harmful. I’m not going to continue to hang out with you if you’re going to continue to demean people in that way.

7. What do you mean by that? What are you saying about Mexicans?

Find an Ally/Be an Ally
Peer pressure is a strong motivator to go along with what others are saying or doing, even when it’s wrong. Encourage youth to join organizations like the Gay/Straight Alliance or Black/Latino/API Union in their school. It’s important they be around like-minded people who can support them when they’re frustrated or things don’t turn out the way they hoped. It’s also good for them to be an ally and provide support for others.

**TEACHING RACIAL LITERACY IN A GROUP SETTING**
Adapted from Bolgatz, *Talking Race in the Classroom*
Those who work with children or youth in a classroom or other group setting have a unique opportunity to bring up and engage in discussions about race. Helping young people develop racial literacy means helping them notice and talk about subtle forms of racism and privilege by better understanding the social and political context of words, images, and events. Racial literacy also entails the capacity to counter various forms of discrimination.

Communicate and Gain Support
Talking about race can be controversial. It is important to have clear communication with families and institutional support. Not everyone will get behind what you’re doing, but it will be much easier to handle controversy when there are no surprises.

1. Find out what the school and district policy is regarding discrimination, bullying, or other kinds of bias. Build a written statement using this language as a foundation and ask for administrative feedback or collaboration in this process.

2. Make a list of all the reasons you think talking about race and privilege is important.

3. Work with other educators and/or parents of your students to craft your mission and vision in regards to conversations about race.

4. Tell parents about what you’re doing and why during conferences, open house, and via letters home. Update them when potentially controversial subjects arise and ask for their perspective.

5. Think about how you frame the message. For example, in early childhood you might tell parents, “Children get all kinds of messages about race and gender and who they should be from the world around them. We’re going to be talking about this in order to help them interpret the messages in a way that counters bias. That way, they won’t be left to draw their own conclusions. We’d love to hear about the conversations you have at home about these topics, too.”

6. If something difficult comes up, talk with your supervisors before they hear it elsewhere.

Create a Respectful Atmosphere
Conversations about race will often be uncomfortable and people will disagree. Teach young people how to practice engaging in personal, often emotional conversations with respect for one another.

1. Ask them to define respect and emphasize that respect may look different for different people. Just because someone is showing emotion doesn’t mean they are disrespecting someone else. The modified golden rule applies, “Treat people how they want to be treated.”

2. Work together to create, establish, and enforce group norms.

3. Name and discuss examples of respectful disagreeing during the conversation. For example, “I noticed, Shanice, your voice got really loud when you were talking and you made a number of points about why you disagreed with Veronica. At the same time, you didn’t call her names or belittle her perspective. That is what respectful disagreement looks like when we feel strongly about something.”

**Initiate Conversation**
Don’t wait for students to bring up the topic of race. Even if they’re not talking about it in class, race is coming up in their everyday life.

1. Introduce video clips, articles, and other media to examine stereotypes. Encourage them to notice the number of depictions of white people and people of color (quantity) as well as the types of depictions (quality).

2. After going on a field trip, such as attending a play, ask what they noticed about race.

3. Discuss the ways race is or is not talked about in the curriculum (both fiction and nonfiction).

4. Help them connect current events to the history of race relations.

**Question! Question! Question!**
One of the best possible ways to engage students in conversations is to ask them questions. The moment we start to lecture rather than listen, a child may shut down.

1. Ask what they mean by different words and phrases such as, “He’s racist.”

2. Help them interrogate their own thinking. For example, if a young person says, “That’s so gay!” ask questions about who they are insulting, why that word is an insult, and who else is hurt by that comment.

3. Try to avoid asking questions with one right answer or with an expected “correct” response.

**Meet them Where They’re At**
Asking questions is a great strategy for finding out what students already understand and extending beyond that point. Like any other topic, when we can connect discussions about race to the personal experiences of young people, it will make more sense and create a foundation for new learning.

1. Start by having them pair share or write about personal experiences related to the discussion topic.
2. For young children, use language they are familiar with such as fairness to introduce new language such as equality or justice.

**Slow the Conversation**
Sometimes you have to let go of your agenda to respond to a comment or action regarding race. Although you may just want to move on because of the tension involved, it is important to recognize not everyone can or will move on with you. When a child of color is still thinking about a comment another student said and the lecture has continued, it contributes to a gap in the opportunity for learning.

1. “I noticed the room just got really quiet and I felt like there was some tension around Malik’s comment. Did anyone else feel that?”
2. “We’re going to put the water cycle on hold for a few minutes so we can talk about what just happened.”
3. Actively facilitate a conversation between two or more students, having them take turns listening and responding to questions.

**Develop Vocabulary**
Sometimes you need to slow the conversation because students don’t understand what you’ve said or have the words to accurately express themselves. Take the time to define important terms like stereotypes, racism, privilege, etc.

1. Pause if a word you used brings up questions. For example, “I heard some giggles when I used the word sexism. Is that a new word to you?”
2. Spend time up front talking about examples of what is or is not a stereotype. Ask the students to categorize images or statements according to the definition.
3. Post words about race on a vocabulary chart and include them in spelling tests.
4. If a student uses a word such as “oriental” or “colored”, give them another word to use and talk about the history of those words. Discuss why derogatory slurs are particularly hurtful.

**Use Your Own Style and Be Real**
We each have our own style of communicating. For some, humor comes easily while others tend to be more serious. Some talk slowly and deliberately while others speed through. This style is developed through the cultural norms of our families and communities. It is important to recognize our own habits and adapt for different audiences, while still coming from a place of our authentic selves.

1. Don’t try to appropriate the style of speech of different racial groups in order to appear to better understand their perspectives.
2. Speak from your own experiences, rather than telling other people’s stories (bring them in or use videos/books, etc. to share different experiences).

**Notice Group Dynamics**
Practice noticing who is or is not participating in conversations about race.

1. Name the group dynamics out loud. For example, “I’ve noticed we’ve heard a lot from the boys in the classroom, what do some of the girls think about this?”
2. Notice your own patterns in how you facilitate discussions.

3. “Whose voices and what perspectives were privileged in that conversation? Who was silenced? Why do you think that happened?”

4. Ask what the class is noticing about the group dynamics and why they think that is happening. Is it different from other topics of discussion?

5. Ask for written feedback after a discussion including things they wanted to say, but didn’t, and what they noticed about the group.

**Use Racial Identity Caucusing**

Racial identity caucusing is a powerful tool for both youth and adults to discuss race in our daily lives. It is important to have a clear understanding of why you want to have caucusing and discuss this with families and other staff members before implementing.

1. Caucusing allows people to explore issues they have in common, such as specific forms of discrimination facing their racial group.

2. Caucusing allows people to explore intra-group differences. For example, what does it mean to “act black”? How does gender or class or sexual orientation impact our experiences?

3. White youth can explore their own ethnic identities as well as the ways they have internalized white superiority.

4. Youth of color can discuss the impact of internalized racism on how they think about themselves and each other.

5. Youth may feel freer to express their opinions in a racially homogenous group.

**Be Comfortable with Not Knowing and Continue Learning**

If a group is looking to you for an answer, it can be difficult to tell them you don’t know, especially since we’ve been socialized to see teachers as people with all the answers. However, this models the willingness to learn you are asking of the group. Your credibility will be better established if you admit you don’t know and try to figure out the answer, than if you take a guess.

1. Offer extra credit to anyone who finds the answer to the question.

2. Stop and do some research together, modeling where they can go to find answers to their questions.

3. Keep a list of questions the group has asked in a public space and revisit it when they or you find an answer.

**REFERENCES:**


*Responding to Everyday Bigotry: Speak Up!* http://www.shepherd.edu/alliesweb/resources/speak_up.pdf