

RAISING RACE CONSCIOUS CHILDREN

STRATEGIES

The following strategies have been modeled on Raising Race Conscious Children (raceconscious.org/strategies):

Name race/Whiteness: Use children’s books, media, advertisements to proactively “see” race with our youngest children. A toddler may not be able to understand what White privilege is but adults can already play an important role in making sure Whiteness is not invisible. See *Why I talk about race when I read with my toddler* or *What I say about a children’s book when all the characters are White* for an example of what this sounds like.

Affirm children’s questions/comments about race: When children bring questions/comments about race to you, make sure they know that you value their questions/comments and encourage future conversations. As a first step, say, “Thank you for sharing that, I’m glad you are thinking about these issues.” Then do your homework and figure out how you can continue the conversation (see additional strategies for ideas!).

Speak to images/words that make you uncomfortable: This might be as simple as saying, “I don’t like this” or “That makes me feel uncomfortable.” Even if that is all you say—you can counter the negative images/words children see and hear by adding your thoughts and opinions. And you can always return to the image/word that bothered you and explain why! See “‘Madeline,’ race, and the problem with ‘good versus bad.’”

Challenge stereotypes: Point out stereotypes when you see them. Say “I don’t like this image” when you see a stereotype reinforced. Using simple, concrete language, try to explain why.

Consider feelings: Feelings are a huge part of how we talk about race. Explore your child’s feelings. Share your own feelings. Think about the impact of the words you use on others’ feelings.

Explore through play: Use play, whether role-playing or pretend play, to engage your child in many of the strategies above. Enable your child to make mistakes, solve problems, and “try things on,” through their play. As a parent, use play to model for your child. Use a bear’s or a doll’s voice to talk about injustice or express feelings or start a protest!

Talk about fairness/unfairness: The concept of fairness is a daily part of a child’s life—so it is an accessible and natural way to frame conversations about equity with our youngest children (including toddlers!). Be honest with your child when you see something in the world that isn’t fair. Inspire them to want to work toward “fairness” both in their play and in the world.

Show your children how they can be activists and how they can create change: Move your conversations about race and inequity toward creating 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 with you and your family. Start by educating yourselves and learning more about the issue you have been talking about. Tell your child that you need to learn more about this issue, too, so you are going to do an internet search...or get a library book...or interview someone you know about this topic. Start small. But start!

Pare down the various issues: Many times, there is more than one factor at play in how we as adults synthesize what we want to say to young children about a particular topic. It is helpful to separate these issues to arrive at a conclusion about what exactly we want to say (and don't want to say).

Acknowledge the difference between public and private spaces: As stated in the Guidelines for Comments, “The words one uses in the privacy of her/his home versus in public may sound different.” Allow yourself to bring conversations with your child about race into the privacy of your living room. You do not have to have the whole conversation with the whole train overhearing you.