Supporting Youth Who Experience Racism

Ideas for Parents and Caregivers

Watching children experience a racist world can be heartbreaking, but there are some powerful things parents and caregivers can do to help.

This handout includes three parts. Talk through them with your youth's counselor or another trusted person in your life. Or you can use these on your own and with your family:

Part 1 is to help you think about your family's experience so far.

Parts 2 and 3 give lots of ideas for helping youth cope with racism and build a healthy connection to their race or ethnicity.

These ideas come from the wisdom of generations of parents and caregivers of color, and from experts in the field. This approach has been shown to boost youths' self-esteem, decision-making and school performance. It also helps youth feel better about themselves and the world after they experience or witness something racist.

If you aren't doing these things already, don't worry—it's never too late to start!

Part 1: Questions to think about and discuss.

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What do you think your child or teen understands about racism? What have they experienced? What conversations have you had about racism? How else have you tried to prepare them?

How do you think knowing about or experiencing racism is affecting your child or teen? How do they seem to cope with it?

Do you see signs that your child or teen has come to believe negative things about their racial or cultural group, or their place in the world?

How are YOU coping as a parent or caregiver? How do you make sense of these things for yourself? Who do you go to for support? What gives you strength when you need it?

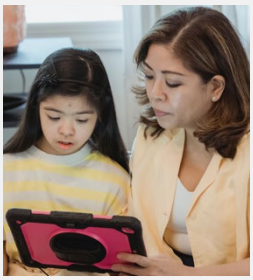
(Find links to the experts whose work informed this handout, and more great resources, on the third page.)

Part 2: Ideas for Helping Kids Cope with Racism

The ideas on this page focus on responding to racism when it occurs. In Part 3 you'll find ideas for building a positive identity and connecting with cultural strengths, which also boost kids' coping.

- Ask your child or teen about racism they have witnessed (in their community or online) or experienced themselves. Provide support, answer their questions, and share how you cope and make sense of the situation.
- Share ways you make sense of the world's unfairness and the ways you cope and find meaning.

- Find ways to take action, together. This might be supporting your community (shopping at a business owned by someone in your racial or ethnic group) or another form of activism you are comfortable with (such as organizing a peaceful protest, voting in a local election, or calling a district attorney).
- Prepare youth for what they can do in racist situations they are likely to face. Teach and practice skills they will need for those situations (like what to do or say). For many families, this includes practicing what to do during encounters with law enforcement.
- Let your kids see you managing stress: for example by talking to another adult, exercising to reduce body tension, doing activities that help bring your attention back to the present moment.
- Share about the history of your ethnic group, or your family history, including ways people have faced injustice, shown strength despite oppression, and achieved things you value.
- Talk with kids about upsetting current events you think they are likely to hear about. Be honest in answering their questions without over-sharing.
- Give youth messages about achievement in the face of barriers. One example is: "You will need to work twice as hard to be rewarded the same."
- Read books or watch shows together that involve race or racism, and use that as an opportunity to ask what your child noticed and felt, and share your own reactions.



- Celebrate other cultures and discuss the benefits of diversity. As a family, find ways to support other oppressed groups.
- When your stress about racism is high, consider talking to your kids about it. It can be hard to find ways that are age-appropriate to share about racist events, but even something as simple as "seeing people treated mean because of how they look makes mommy sad" helps kids see that you are not upset because of things they did, and it relieves some of the worry kids may feel. It also shows kids it's OK to have strong feelings, and they can learn healthy ways of coping by watching what you do.
- Encourage habits that can help your child or teen reduce stress levels, like getting enough sleep and regular exercise, or taking breaks from media.

This is a big list, so pace yourself! To start, pick just 1 or 2 things you'd like to try out now:

Part 3: Ideas for Promoting a Positive Identity

- Teach your kids about the historical and systemic causes of inequality, so they won't see inequality as being caused by individual racial or cultural differences. Books, movies and documentaries about history can help explain hidden causes of inequality.
- Tell your kids that racial stereotypes that exist are false, and draw their attention to counter-examples whenever you come across them.
- Expose your kids to your racial or ethnic heritage, for example by telling stories about your family history, visiting museums or traveling.

- Expose your kids to role models (past or present) from your racial or ethnic group who demonstrate your values and represent your culture.
- Participate in community activities with others from your racial or ethnic group.

- Cook traditional meals or sample traditional foods.
- Be on the lookout for new books, films, or media that relate to your race or culture to enjoy together.
- Teach them that all races are equal and should live together peacefully.
- Show your kids the ways you feel pride in your racial or cultural identity. For example, share your excitement about an artist, author or musician who shares your identity; call out clothes or hairstyles you admire; or comment on your family's talents and good looks.
- Connect with a religious community or with spiritual beliefs if that is a source of strength for you. Share your own beliefs and spiritual practices, or learn together about the beliefs and practices of your ancestors.
- When possible, build strong connections between your child and their extended family members. Is there a cultural tradition of involving extended family in child rearing? If so, that can be a huge source of strength.
- Share your values and cultural traditions.
- Using media, museums, or your own family stories, highlight examples of strength and determination shown by members of your group.

- Share ways your group has shaped the world or broader culture.
- If school textbooks don't cover your group's history, look for books that do. Some examples!
- Use this list of great books, articles, videos and websites, by age and with descriptions.
- For more resources on coping, promoting positive identity, and talking to children about racism, visit the Racial Trauma Guide.

Again, it's okay to pick just 1 or 2 things you'd like to focus on now. Write any ideas you have below:

This handout was inspired by this paper and created in consultation with Dr. Isha Metzger. Learn more about supporting resilience and healing in African American youth at https://www.drishametzger.com/care-package-for-racial-healing. Check out related resources from Riana Elyse Anderson and embracerace.org for help having "The Talk" with your kids. Sesame Street has a ton of great resources for families and you can find resources for Asian American parents supporting their kids during COVID in English, and several other languages.