



Empowering Children for Conversations about Race and Skin Color



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Parenting Culture

5 Tips for discussing race and skin color

“CHILDREN NOTICE RACE-BASED DIFFERENCES BY 6 MONTHS OF AGE, PARENTS ARE THE ONES WHO FEEL UNCOMFORTABLE WITH THESE CONVERSATIONS” - DR. FERGUSON

- 1 Validate you child's thoughts.** Children notice differences early and want language to understand the world around them. Welcome their curiosity and validate their experience e.g; “You’re right, your skin color is different from your friend’s!”
- 2 Avoid shaming.** Be mindful of your response when children ask questions out of curiosity. We may feel ashamed or uncomfortable, but avoid critiquing and shutting down these conversations. If we have a large negative response, children may associate negativity with discussions about differences.
- 3 Celebrate differences.** Teach children to welcome differences and celebrate them. Expose them to different type of media and toys, talk about how each form is special and unique. e.g.; "Our differences make us special, they are what make us unique." "All differences are welcomed in our home."
- 4 Find commonalities that are not culture- or race-specific.** Teach children that there is more to a person than their skin color. Ask them what they have in common with peers like activities, interests, and beliefs. "You and your friend do have different colored skin, AND you both like to play football."
- 5 Steer clear of "Colorblindness"** . Sometimes people think saying things like "I don't see color" are helpful approaches to discussions about race and skin color, but these statements ignore the experiences of marginalized groups. For children, it invalidates their experiences with understanding these differences and teaches them to avoid meaningful discussions about race. Instead, teach acceptance. "Differences exist and are welcomed."

Conversation Starters for Race and Skin Color



TOODLER AND PRESCHOOLERS:

Use play activities to show that differences on the outside do not impact who we are on the inside

- **Egg Activity:** Give your child one white and one brown egg. Talk about how they are different colors on the outside. Then crack the eggs and show them they are the same on the inside
- **M&M Activity:** Give your child several different colored M&Ms. Talk about how they are different colors on the outside. Then let them taste the M&Ms and talk about how they taste the same.

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ELEMENTARY-AGED CHILDREN:

Use books and TV shows that demonstrate diverse content to spark discussion.

- Have you ever noticed any differences between you and your friends? What are they?

Response: “You’re right! We can have lots of differences in how we look, act, and think from our friends. Differences are OK!”

- How do those differences make you feel?

Response: “Our differences make us unique, they are what make each of us special.”

- What do you and your friends have in common?

Response: “We choose our friends based on what we have in common and how they treat us. How someone looks doesn’t tell us who they are as a person. Someone’s skin tone doesn’t tell us what kind of person they are.”



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OLDER CHILDREN:

With older children like middle schoolers, you can help make more explicit connections to daily experiences

- **Have you ever felt different because of the color of your skin? Can you tell me about it?**
- **Do you notice other people treat you differently because of your skin color?**
- **Have you noticed any kids at school being treated differently because of their skin color?**
- **Why do you think this happens?**
- **Let's come up with a plan for what we can say if someone comments about skin color to you or a friend**

TEENAGERS:

- **Allow open discussions about racism, microaggressions, power/privilege**
- **Discuss how current events may be impacting your teen**