



How do I talk to young children about the racial injustices happening right now?

1. Above all else, **reassure the child that they are loved** and the adults in their life are doing their best to take care of them. Notice I did not say safe. We cannot keep our children safe from racial injustice. People of color have always known this. White people are catching on, slowly.
2. Your best is good enough. **Do not be afraid to say the wrong thing.** There is no perfect answer.
3. **Help children find words** to describe their wonderings and worries by asking questions. Are you worried about the car you saw on fire? Are you wondering what made me and auntie cry last night?
4. Keep the concepts **simple**. For now, share the least amount of information necessary to reassure the child.
5. Use phrases that are **familiar**. For example, if the child does not yet know what race is, stick to skin color. If the child understands “went to heaven” rather than death, use this language. If the child knows the concept of “bad guys” then talk about who the “bad guy” is in this context.
6. End the conversation with love, **reassurance**, and redirection. You need this as much as the child does. Do something together to reassure the child that it is ok to keep going. For example: read a book, sing a song, build a tower, toss a ball, color a picture, make a snack, or play a game.

No really, what do I say?

No one can tell you what to say because only you know your family. We can only offer sample language. You are the one who knows how to make the language fit your family. And the truth is, what seems like the right thing today might not feel right tomorrow. Again, we're aiming for **good enough not perfection**.

Here are some examples:

Why are people so mad they are burning cars?

- People are upset because a police officer hurt a man so badly he went to heaven/died and can never come back.
- People are tired of living in a world where people are treated badly because they have black and brown skin.
- Those people you saw are so mad they think the only way to be heard is to start a fire.

For more information:

Visit massaimh.org and ecmhmmatters.org or contact us asubramaniam@mspcc.org and ecmhmmatters@bphc.org



When I was angry you told me to take a timeout. Those people should take a time out.

- When you were mad at Bobby and you hit him, I wanted you to take a time out to calm down so you could ask Bobby nicely for your toy. You did a great job using your words. This is a little different.
- The people on TV already tried a time out and used their words many, many times. Now they are very angry and trying something else. It is important for them to keep trying to help the people being hurt because they have black and brown skin.
- Starting a fire is very dangerous and if you are ever so angry you want to hurt something or someone, you must find an adult/grown-up to help you.
- Sometimes people get so upset they do things without thinking about what will happen next. Like when you were upset and knocked down your brother's block tower. Your angries bubbled out before you could stop them. Those people had their angries bubble out.

Why do the police hurt people who aren't bad guys?

- That police officer was not a nice man. He was a mean man. I don't know why he was so mean. I hope he goes to jail for a long long time.
- Most police are helpers and work to keep us safe. But some police only keep people safe if they like them. Those police should get in trouble and not be able to go to work anymore.

My friend Gina has brown skin. Will the police hurt her?

- I hope not. Gina does everything she can to stay safe.
- You're right. Gina's skin is beautiful and brown. If you ever see someone be mean to Gina because of her skin I want you to stand next to her and say "Gina is my friend. You leave her alone." Then I want you and Gina to go get an adult/grown-up to help.

Are the police going to hurt me?

- I don't want you to worry about the police. It is my job to make sure you don't get hurt.
- If you feel afraid when the police are around you can hold my hand. I am here and you can always come to me when you are feeling worried.
- I say a prayer (make a wish) every day to keep that from happening. Do you want to hear it?



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Resources for talking to young children about racial injustice

Are your kids too young to talk about race?

Nope. Silence about race can reinforce racism by letting children draw their own conclusions.

<p>0-1 year</p> <p>At birth, babies look equally at faces of all races. At 3 months, babies look more at faces that match the race of their caregivers.</p> <p><small>Kelly et al, 2005</small></p>	<p>2 years</p> <p>Children as young as 2 use race to reason about people's behaviors.</p> <p><small>Hirschfeld, 2008</small></p>	<p>2.5 years</p> <p>By 30 months, most children use race to choose playmates.</p> <p><small>Katz & Kofkin, 1997</small></p>	<p>4-5 years</p> <p>Expressions of racial prejudice often peak at ages 4 and 5.</p> <p><small>Aboud, 2008</small></p>
<p>5 years</p> <p>Black and latinx children in research settings show no preference toward their own groups, as compared to white children at this age, who are more likely to be strongly biased in favor of whiteness.</p> <p><small>Dunham et al, 2008</small></p>	<p>5 years</p> <p>By kindergarten, children show many of the same racial attitudes held by adults in our culture. They have already learned to associate some groups with higher status than others.</p> <p><small>Kimzler, 2016</small></p>	<p>5-7 years</p> <p>Explicit conversations with 5-7 year olds about interracial friendship can dramatically improve their racial attitudes in as little as a single week.</p> <p><small>Bronson & Merryman, 2009</small></p>	<p>Adapted from work by the Children's Community School.</p> <p>More info at childrenscommunityschool.org/social-justice-resources/</p> <p><small>Design provided by prettygooddesign.org</small></p>

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Remember that these links are starting points for conversations rather than final destinations.

Step 1. Help children process their feelings in this moment

- [Once I was very very scared](#) by Piplo Productions is a free online book that helps kids talk about scary feelings, what they feel like in your body and things that help them feel better.
- [Supporting Kids Of Color in The Wake of Racialized Violence](#) - an interview to help caregivers get an understanding on the impacts of radicalized violence on young children and how they can help them.
- From [PBS](#) you can find more information on how to help children process information that comes forth in the news around tragic events
- [The National Child Traumatic Stress Network](#) (NCTSN) has developed a simple table that can help caregivers respond and help young children dealing with traumatic grief.
- [Zero to Three's article](#) applies a child development lens to guidance for talking to young children about racism and violence.

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Step 2. Talk about race and racism consistently and take action

- [Wee the People](#) is a Boston based social justice project for children age 4 to 12 launched by two black mothers and offers workshops that explore activism, resistance, and social action through the visual and performing arts for both kids and caregivers.
- [Embrace Race](#) is a great source of helpful information. In this article find out 8 ways to talk to young kids about racial injustice.
- [HealthyChildren.org](#) also has tips around talking to young children about racial bias.
- [Books for Littles](#) is a website with diverse book recommendations on how to talk to children about race.
- For educators, the [NCTSN](#) has also developed materials on how to address race and trauma in classrooms.



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