

Supporting Children's Emotional Well-Being Amid Hate and Racial Trauma



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Children's Trust Fund
Protecting Michigan's Children



CPCAN
Council for the Prevention
of Child Abuse and Neglect

Hate and Racial Trauma

Hate is a very caustic powerful emotion. It can take many forms. Hate can be directed at any one regardless of gender, creed, or sexual orientation.

One form of hate is racism. Most Black children in the United States encounter racism in their daily lives. Ongoing psychological or physical injuries due to exposure and re-exposure to race-based adversity, discrimination, and stress, referred to as racial trauma, is harmful to children's development and well-being.

Events that may cause racial trauma include threats of harm and injury, hate speech, humiliating and shaming events, or any other form of individual, historical, or institutional racism. Children also experience racial trauma after hearing about or witnessing another person's direct experiences, often referred to as secondary traumatic stress or vicarious trauma.

To help protect children from these harmful effects, caregivers must start talking to them early: when children are very young and first developing a sense of racial identity. Outlined below are several steps that caregivers can take to have conversations with and support all children, especially those who have experienced direct or secondary racial trauma. Evidence strongly suggests that caregivers need a complete understanding of how, and in what ways, racial trauma impacts children and youth.

These steps focus primarily on anti-Black racism and the racial trauma experienced by Black children and families. However, these strategies can be utilized with any race or hate inspired abuse and can provide caregivers with a foundation for speaking with children about hate, racism and racial trauma.

Suggested Steps

Prepare Yourself Before You Talk

- Acknowledge and reflect on your own beliefs, biases, and experiences with racism
- White caregivers should gain a deeper understanding of their White privilege
- Educate yourself about Black history and racism
- Be able to accurately relay relevant concepts and information
- Make the pursuit of new knowledge an ongoing activity

Limit Exposure

- Graphic stories or media coverage
- Exposure to adult conversations

Please Do

- Adult self-care (social support, healthy sleeping and eating patterns, etc)
- Allow space for yourself to process difficult topics before involving children

Let's not forget: Children are watching this racism, the violence and our reactions



Tell Children About Racism

- As soon as children understand the concept of fairness (usually by age 3)
- Talk to children about hate, race and racism focusing on promoting resilience to discrimination
- Help them feel empowered and hopeful about the future
- Ongoing discussions are essential
- Such conversations can foster strength in the face of discrimination, healthy self-esteem, and self-efficiency

Speak Age Appropriate to Children

- Use language that children understand (fair vs. unfair) when talking on racism
- Define terms that may be unfamiliar
- Be honest and factual in discussions
- Talk about the histories of people from different races (Black, Hispanic, Native American, Alaska Native, White) how they differ in extent and type of discrimination endured or privilege afforded
- Continue talking to children and checking in routinely

Listen to and Validate Children's Feelings

- Caregivers should validate children's emotions and reactions
- Let them know that it's okay to feel the way they do and that others feel the same way

- It is essential to find out what children know already and to correct misinformation
- Help them think about how they might manage related experiences of racism or situations and feelings
- Help children identify and talk about racism they have witnessed or participated in
- Discuss how they can work against discrimination
- How they have benefitted from White Privilege

Younger children may focus how events will affect them and those they love, whereas older children may be focused on the broader contexts of racism, such as what's happening in their community and the world.

Reassure and Care for Children

- Stand up for children that are harmed and let them know you will fight for them
- Reassure children that caregivers will help keep them safe
- Help them manage strong emotions
- Caregivers can maintain regular routines for eating, sleeping, playing, and learning
- Caregivers can check in with children regularly during heightened periods of exposure to racism
- Address their feelings in sensitive, responsive, and nurturing ways

Focus on Hope and Positivity

- Talk about moving towards a better future
- Share stories that promote racial pride, triumph in the face of adversity, and the contributions of Black people to our nation's history
- Encourage children to take an active role in fighting hate and racism
- Celebrate the strengths of our nation's diversity
- Engage in community through activism and voting
- Support those who have been affected by racial inequities and racial trauma.

Be a GOOD Role Model

- Treat all people fairly
- Socialize with people of different racial groups
- Role model anti-racist beliefs and behaviors
- Seek opportunities to learn about racial injustice
- Let your children see how you are working against racism



Resources

- <https://nymag.com/strategist/article/anti-racist-reading-list.html>
- <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/09/22/books/23racebooks.html>
- <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smithsonian-institution/twelve-books-to-help-children-understand-race-antiracism-and-protest-180975067/>
- <https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/fall-2018/what-is-white-privilege-really>
- <https://www.racialequitytools.org/fundamentals/history-of-racism-and-movements/overview-and-timeline1>
- <https://www.nctsn.org/what-is-child-trauma/trauma-types/complex-trauma>
- <https://docs.google.com/a/cpcanjackson.org/viewer? a=v&pid=sites&srcid=Y3BjYW5qYWNrc29uLm9yZ3xjcGNhbWZ8Z8Z3g6NDBmNGQ5N2Q3MmY2MTYzNw>
- <https://www.pbs.org/parents/talking-about-racism>
- <https://people.com/parents/how-to-talk-to-children-race-privilege-george-floyd-death-homicide/>
- https://www.childtrends.org/publications/resources-to-support-childrens-emotional-well-being-amid-anti-black-racism-racial-violence-and-trauma? fbclid=IwAR2865_btFPrBg2fdwuYBhpwzSGLd92uYKQDxkiN_aaTSug69c7nmWz_sCU
- <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/nation/what-to-read-listen-to-and-watch-to-learn-about-institutional-racism>

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Authors: Dominique Parris, Victor St. John, Jessica Dym Bartlett

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Our mission is to educate and strengthen our community to prevent child abuse and neglect

606 Greenwood Place
Jackson, Michigan 49203

Phone: (517) 788-4239

Fax: (517) 788-4685

E-mail: CPCANJackson@cpcanjackson.org