

Resources for talking to children about race and racism

A living document compiled with the support of the teachers of the Montessori Teachers Facebook group and the Montessori for Social Justice Facebook group.

Before you dig in...

My sincere and loving advice is make sure you yourself are clear on race and racism, white privilege, and the history of race relations in your own country and region as well as (to some extent because nobody can know it all) globally. Seriously. Educate yourself first or at least in conjunction. Our own attitudes will make the biggest difference in how the children we educate will view race.

This document is organized in four parts: Resources for supporting children, resources for ourselves, links to organizations with even more resources and curriculum tools, and diversity in Montessori and Montessori-compatible materials. Start where you need to start. You know what is most urgent in your own situation.

~ Andy

"...we must be humble and root out the prejudices lurking in our hearts. We must not suppress those traits which can help us in our teaching, but we must check those inner attitudes characteristic of adults that can hinder our understanding of a child."

-Dr. Maria Montessori, The Montessori Method

Resources for supporting children:

[Talking About Tragedy](#)

“What do you do when you can’t ignore it, and an outside tragedy simply has to be addressed in your classroom? There are a series of questions to guide you through the process of addressing fears, whether it is the questioning of a single child or a group of wary adults. Through the lens of these four questions, we can start to address the difficult work of talking about tragedy. For the purpose of unification of the article, the Philando Castile shooting will remain the primary (though not the only) example throughout.”

[What White Children Need to Know About Race](#)

“While white parents’ intention is to convey to their children the belief that race *shouldn’t* matter, the message their children receive is that race, in fact, *doesn’t* matter. The intent and aim are noble, but in order for race not to matter in the long run, we have to acknowledge that, currently, it does matter a great deal. If white parents want their children to contribute to what researchers Matthew Desmond and Mustafa Emirbayer describe as a “racially just America”² in which race does not unjustly influence one’s life opportunities,

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their children will need to learn awareness and skills that they cannot acquire through silence and omission.”

[6 Things White Parents Can Do to Raise Racially Conscious Children](#)

“Children experience race. They need our help to understand and contextualize it, to understand what it means, how it is used and misused, and how America’s current and historical racial constructs either benefit or harm them and their friends.”

[Explaining Charlottesville to my Seven Year Old](#)

Because of our work, my husband Marc and I are often personally and professionally impacted, making honest and clear communication with our children is essential. Charlottesville was no exception. By Friday evening, it seemed likely that we would need to talk with our seven year old daughter. When the car attack happened, we knew we would. It helps me to think about this part of parenting in steps. Often these moments are chaotic and charged, the opposite of what positive parenting requires. Here is our approach:

[Philando Castile Shooting: How Do Parents Talk To Children About Police Brutality?](#)

“Young people do not understand why all of this is happening,” Jonathan Newton, president of the National Association Against Police Brutality, said on a radio show in 2015. “The impact is really affecting our youth. We need to prepare our children for these circumstances.”

Castile's death is not – unfortunately – the first, so there is guidance out there. Here are three approaches to keeping your child calm and informed”

[Allison Briscoe-Smith How to Talk to Your Kids about Race](#) (Video)

“We actually, even while we live in places that have access to different groups, are actually living in pretty segregated ways.”

[60+ Resources for Talking to Kids About Racism](#)

“For us it has worked well to slowly keep adding to their understanding, we talk about racism from early on in the same way we talk about other sensitive topics - answering questions as they arise and addressing misinformation frankly and honestly, while at the same time exposing them to age appropriate materials and discussions that promote diversity and combat racism.”

[10 Ways Well-Meaning White Teachers Bring Racism Into Our Schools](#)

“Though I know there are actively racist teachers out there, most White teachers mean well and have no intention of being racist. Yet as people who are inscribed with Whiteness, it is possible for us to act in racist ways no matter our intentions. Uprooting racism from our daily actions takes a lifetime of work.”

[Race Conscious Strategies](#)

“**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.”

[4 Things We Should All Teach Kids About Racism Right Now](#)

“As informed, non-presidential black people have been saying forever, and as one presidential

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Black person, President Obama, recently said, too: anti-Black racism isn't just saying the N-word.

It's not just being in a hate group, either. Or being mean to people because of the color of their skin. It's way more complicated than that."

[How To Talk To Kids About Racism In America -- With A Picture Book](#)

"A new picture book, *Gordon Parks: How the Photographer Captured Black and White America*, takes on the admirable task of translating challenging material to readers ages 5 to 8. Written by Carole Boston Weatherford and illustrated by Jamey Christoph, the book traces Parks' journey from Fort Scott, Kansas, to Washington, D.C., as he nurtured his interest in photography as a way to document and expose oppression in the United States."

[How to talk to your kids about prejudice with the help of 12 of our favorite books](#)

"While I've seen such a beautiful swell of love, support and compassion for all kinds of people all over my social media this past month, I've also talked to lots of moms who are wondering how to talk to kids about prejudice and racism. Because even as my kids help me pick out wedding presents for *all* our friends, prejudice most definitely still exists whether it's because of the color of your skin or the country your family came from. While I've seen such a beautiful swell of love, support and compassion for all kinds of people all over my social media this past month, I've also talked to lots of moms who are wondering how to talk to kids about prejudice and racism. Because even as my kids help me pick out wedding presents for all our friends, prejudice most definitely still exists whether it's because of the color of your skin or the country your family came from."

[Too Fly Not To Fly](#)

Too Fly Not To Fly serves as a socio-emotional learning tool for ages Pre-K-3rd grade to critically examine issues impacting their lives, through the lens of the black child. With corresponding questions for each letter of the alphabet, this reflective resource playfully explores societal and media representation, colorism, gender binaries, mental health and more!

[Teaching Young Children About Bias, Diversity, and Social Justice](#)

"As a society and within our educational institutions, discussions about bias, diversity, discrimination, and social justice tend to happen in middle and high schools. We've somehow decided that little kids can't understand these complex topics, or we want to delay exposing them to injustices as long as possible (even though not all children have the luxury of being shielded from injustice).

However, young children have a keen awareness of and passion for fairness. They demand right over wrong, just over unjust. And they notice differences without apology or discomfort."

[Combatting stereotypes: How to talk to your children](#)

"How can modern parents raise the next generation to be free from corrosive gender and racial stereotypes? By the time children start elementary school, gender and race shape their lives in many ways that parents might want to prevent. As early as first grade, girls are less likely than boys to think members of their own gender are "really, really smart." And by just

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age three, white children in the United States implicitly endorse stereotypes that African-American faces are angrier than white faces.”

[This artist brilliantly tackles the concept of 'being offended' in a colorful comic](#)

“But when a joke doesn’t sit well, it can do more than offend...”

[A Collection of Resources for Teaching Social Justice](#)

“The National Association of Social Workers defines social justice as “the view that everyone deserves equal economic, political and social rights and opportunities.” To study social justice is to learn about the problems that dramatically impact quality of life for certain populations, and how people have worked to solve those problems.”

[7 Ways Teachers Can Respond to the Evil of Charlottesville, Starting Now: An educator confronts the failures of an education system that breeds white supremacy.](#)

“This may seem too harsh on my colleagues at predominantly white schools. Let me be clear: first, this is not about blame. I write out of deep urgency that we address the cultural and systemic failures in our school system that are promoting white supremacy. I ask you to consider how it is that we’ve grown accustomed to narratives regarding the failings of segregated schools that serve students of color, but not the schools that educated those who defend and promote that segregation.”

Resources for Ourselves:

[Children Are Not Colorblind: How Young Children Learn Race](#)

“In fact, research clearly shows that children not only recognize race from a very young age, but also develop racial biases by ages three to five that do not necessarily resemble the racial attitudes of adults in their lives.”

[EVERYDAY ANTIRACISM IN EDUCATION](#)

“Anthropology, in its serious attention to the ongoing everyday activity of ordinary people, also helps educators think about how their own ordinary moves either reproduce or challenge structures of racial inequality. Educators need tools for analyzing the consequences of their everyday behaviors because they are often unsure which ordinary moves, in an already racialized world, are racist and which antiracist. Indeed, antiracist educators must constantly negotiate between two antiracist impulses in deciding their everyday behaviors toward students. © 2006 by the American Anthropological Association. All rights reserved. 2 Moment to moment, they must choose between the antiracist impulse to treat all people as human beings rather than “race” group members, and the antiracist impulse to recognize people’s real experiences as race group members in order to assist them and treat them equitably.”

[Bias Isn’t Just A Police Problem, It’s A Preschool Problem](#)

“New [research](#) from the Yale Child Study Center suggests that many preschool teachers look for disruptive behavior in much the same way: in just one place, waiting for it to appear.

The problem with this strategy (besides it being inefficient), is that, because of implicit bias, teachers are spending too much time watching black boys and expecting the worst.”

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[EVEN BABIES DISCRIMINATE: A NURTURESHOCK EXCERPT.](#)

“They wanted their children to grow up colorblind. But Vittrup’s first test of the kids revealed they weren’t colorblind at all. Asked how many white people are mean, these children commonly answered, “Almost none.” Asked how many blacks are mean, many answered, “Some,” or “A lot.” Even kids who attended diverse schools answered the questions this way.”

[The Long-Term Effects of Social-Justice Education on Black Students](#)

“Transformative social-justice education is often viewed as a path to more equitable classrooms and cross-racial understanding, at a time when public-school classrooms are increasingly segregated. Most frequently associated with the Brazilian educator and theorist Paulo Freire, it is an approach growing in popularity and interest nationally. But for students from marginalized and disenfranchised groups—those most in need of upending the status quo—what is the payoff? And how can teachers steeped in this method affect their learning?”

[Reverse Racism](#) (video)

There is no such thing as reverse racism and here’s why.

[White People: I Don’t Want You To Understand Me Better, I Want You To Understand Yourselves](#)

“I may be coming across as arrogant but honestly, I’m just exhausted. From the moment I was born my life has been steeped in whiteness. Not just the MTV I grew up with or the Disney characters I loved, but the white history I learned from white teachers, the white art I learned to revere above all else, the beauty standards I knew I’d never live up to. I know what songs y’all like the most, who your biggest movie stars are, how you achieve the hottest hairstyles in your magazines, what fashion you’re appropriating. I know what your “ideal” family looks like, what your definition of “American values” is. I know what you find funny and romantic. I know your definitions of success.”

[The Five Things I need from White People Right Now](#)

“This is not an exhaustive list, but I am exhausted. I’m tired of having to write things like this. I have so many other things on my heart and mind these days, but every time something like this happens, I feel the need to say something, anything that might make a difference in a world where black people are being slaughtered. These are the things I need from you, white friends. I don’t think I’m alone and maybe your other black friends don’t have the energy to say these things to you. I hope that you can hear me...”

[How to Stop the Racist in You](#)

“But what explains the fact that police departments are more likely to use force against black suspects than white ones, at a time when so many departments are consciously trying to reduce these discrepancies? What could explain why companies explicitly committed to diversity show racial bias in hiring decisions? Why would caring teachers be more likely to punish black students more harshly than white students?”

[I AM RACIST, AND SO ARE YOU.](#)

“Here’s the deal. Racism isn’t just guys in white robes and Paula Deen shouting racial slurs. Racism is subtle, racism is insidious, and our culture is so deeply steeped in it that it’s impossible to grow up in the US and not be racist. It’s a kind of brainwashing: a set of default configuration files that come with the culture. It’s a filter, built up from birth, that alters our

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perception of the world. (Literally-racial bias makes people see weapons that aren't there.) Racism isn't just conscious actions; it's judgements that happen so fast that we may not even be aware of them. Even people who are horrified by the idea of racism see through this lens, have this default programming. Even you. Even me."

[Implicit Bias Is Real. Don't Be So Defensive.](#)

"Here's the first ground rule: "Implicit bias" isn't an accusation. It doesn't mean you're bad. It means you're normal. Animals prejudge one another based on appearance. Human beings are naturally tribal. So implicit bias, as a disposition, isn't something you learn. It's something you learn to overcome.

Here's the second rule: When somebody brings up implicit bias, **don't freak out**. Don't get defensive and shut down the discussion."

[5 Steps to Disrupt Racism](#) (video)

This short film from VideoRev offers five practical ways you can help combat racism and be an ally in times when people are under attack.

[What I Told My White Friend When He Asked For My Black Opinion On White Privilege: Nobody is Mad at you for Being White](#)

"I truly thank you for wanting to understand what you are having a hard time understanding. Coincidentally, over the last few days I have been thinking about sharing some of the incidents of prejudice/racism I've experienced in my lifetime - in fact I just spoke with my sister Lesa about how to best do this yesterday - because I realized many of my friends - especially the white ones - have no idea what I've experienced/dealt with unless they were present (and aware) when it happened. There are two reasons for this : 1) because not only as a human being do I suppress the painful and uncomfortable in an effort to make it go away, I was also taught within my community (I was raised in the '70s & '80s - it's shifted somewhat now) and by society at large NOT to make a fuss, speak out, or rock the boat. To just "deal with it," lest more trouble follow (which sadly, it often does). 2) Fear of being questioned or dismissed with "Are you sure that's what you heard?" or "Are you sure that's what they meant?" and being angered and upset all over again by well-meaning-but-hurtful and essentially unsupportive responses."

[FROM WHITE GUILT TO WHITE RESPONSIBILITY](#)

"White guilt paralyzes us and maintains the norm. White responsibility motivates us and disrupts the norm.

I was recently asked whether it was acceptable to use white privilege for good. My response was that it is not ours to use; once we know that, we can never use it alone again. We must first gather around the table with those who do not carry white privilege, who we trust to hold us accountable. We must then empty the backpack onto the table, and ask the community how we will use what is rightfully communal property."

[Curriculum for White Americans to Educate Themselves on Race and Racism-from Ferguson to Charleston](#)

"There are no doubt complexities that come with White Americans working for racial justice. White privilege can lead to a chronic case of undiagnosed entitlement, creating poor

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listeners, impatient speakers who talk over others, and people unaccustomed to taking orders. Nevertheless, the movement for racial justice needs more White Americans to get involved. And it's our responsibility to help each other get involved-and get involved *productively*.

I compiled this list to help White Americans do so. One positive to emerge from these difficult times is the wealth of resources now available for White Americans. Never have I seen so many ideas, options, and concrete steps to take action against racism. And we are making progress: Looks Like White Americans Are Finally Starting to Come Around on Race and Policing. A few police officers are even being held accountable-finally-for their devastating decisions.”

[70+ Race Resources for White People](#)

“It's not the job of the African American community to teach white people about racism, so we must intentionally and humbly lean in, listen and learn how white culture is killing black lives. Specifically, they want us to grasp our role in the visible and invisible structures that are threatening to crush them.”

[RACISM IN THE KINDERGARTEN CLASSROOM](#)

“In a series of studies, a University of Iowa research team led by [Andrew Todd](#) finds images of the faces of five-year-old black boys are sufficient to trigger whites into heightened-threat mode. “Implicit biases commonly observed for black men appear to generalize even to young black boys,” the researchers write in the journal *Psychological Science*.”

[Being a Young Black Male Teacher](#)

“I've skirted from this topic for the longest time. I guess my preoccupation with fitting in to the career was part of my hesitation. Honestly, my passion for education converges with my experience of not only being a student but now my identity as an educator. And not to put race aside, but when I started out, I wanted it to be known that I was not “the new gym teacher” in the building, but instead the teacher who was at the school because of my double honors degree in English and History. I have never ever been able to avoid the microaggressions of racism. Becoming a tenured teacher was merely one high road I travelled on through the journey of being a human while black. I guess it is what it is when you're a young black male teacher...”

[Race-Based Silence is Violence](#)

“Too many urban schools, populated by an overwhelming number of White teachers, simply do not have enough people in leadership who can speak from an authentic place about race. A person who has only ever lived in the eye of a tornado cannot easily talk about the damage one leaves. The silence that follows has lasting effects on minority staff members and the children that education reform is under serving. This silence creates a physical discomfort, an emotional chasm that is empty and full at the same time. Teachers, with the best intentions, sell children on the lie that striving for college will change their lives. Teachers do a poor job telling black and brown children about the world that succeeds in stealing their lives and then excusing the theft as a natural disaster.”

[It's My Job to Raise Children Who Are Not Only Not Racist But Actively Anti-Racist](#)

“What a luxury. What a privilege as a mother to be able simply to ignore race and racism if I

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wanted to, if it were too uncomfortable to discuss, if I just didn't know what to say.... But the real reason is that I'm afraid, because I'm not even sure how to begin. We have many black friends, including several close ones, but none whom we see on a regular basis. We live in a predominantly white town, and our kids go to a very small, mostly white preschool."

[#EdtechBlackout To My POCEdtech Community](#)

"There was something empowering in the hours of seeing people share story after story of invisibility in tech with some sharing how they hire diverse talent...because you should, you know. There were also stories of people disputing Facebook's hiring theories by sharing their stories of job denial and exclusion."

Links to organizations with even more resources and curriculum tools:

Note: when bringing any additional materials/curricula to a Montessori classroom, it is essential to ensure that these can be applied without compromising the work towards normalization/valorization, which is the root of education for peace. Some programs will require adjustments to fit well in a Montessori environment.

[Montessori for Social Justice: Social Justice Education Resources](#)

Montessori for Social Justice is a network of educators, parents and community members committed to offering Montessori for all students, particularly in underserved communities. We hope to:

1. demonstrate that Montessori is effective at **enrolling** a diverse population of students in its public district, magnet and charter schools
2. **show that public/non-profit Montessori schools can result in high achievement for students of color and help close the opportunity gap**
3. increase the number of **Montessori teachers of color**
4. increase the **cultural competencies of all Montessori teachers** so that Montessori is **culturally responsive to students of color**.

[Anti Bias Montessori Downloads](#)

Anti-Bias Montessori is dedicated to providing information and resources about Anti-Bias, Anti-Racist, Social Justice Montessori education. You will find resources and downloadable lessons plans, games, and activities which may be used in the classroom (both, Montessori and traditional) and among staff.

[SPL Center Teaching Tolerance](#)

Our Teaching Tolerance project combats prejudice among our nation's youth while promoting equality, inclusiveness and equitable learning environments in the classroom. We produce an array of anti-bias resources that we distribute, free of charge, to educators across the country - award-winning classroom documentaries, lesson plans and curricula, Teaching Tolerance magazine, and more.

[ADL Education and Resources](#)

As a leader in the field of anti-bias education, ADL provides current, relevant curricula and customizable, interactive training programs that incorporate the latest research.A

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CLASSROOM OF DIFFERENCE™ has trained thousands of educators, counselors and administrators, and reached thousands more families and students, from grades pre-K through 12. The Peabody Award-winning program has led to A CAMPUS OF DIFFERENCE™ and A COMMUNITY OF DIFFERENCE™, which address bias at colleges and universities and in community settings. All these programs are part of ADL's flagship A WORLD OF DIFFERENCE® Institute.

[Raising Race Conscious Children](#)

The primary purpose of Raising Race Conscious Children is to support parents and teachers who are trying to talk about race and diversity with young children. The goal of these conversations is to prepare young people to work toward racial justice.

[Teaching Tolerance](#)

Teaching Tolerance provides free resources to educators—teachers, administrators, counselors and other practitioners—who work with children from kindergarten through high school. Educators use our materials to supplement the curriculum, to inform their practices, and to create civil and inclusive school communities where children are respected, valued and welcome participants.

[Border Crossers](#)

Border Crossers utilizes creative and interactive pedagogy to engage educators in explorations of race and racism with K-12 students. We believe that if educators have a strong racial justice analysis, and are prepared to have meaningful conversations about race and racism, students will be better equipped to interrupt patterns of racism and injustice in their own lives and thrive in a multicultural society.

[EmbraceRace](#)

EmbraceRace is a multiracial community of parents, teachers, experts, and other caring adults who support each other to meet the challenges that race poses to our children, families, and communities.

[EduColor](#)

EduColor seeks to elevate the voices of public school advocates of color on educational equity and justice. We are an inclusive cooperative of informed, inspired and motivated educators, parents, students, writers and activists who promote and embrace the centrality of substantive intersectional diversity.

[We Need Diverse Books](#)

We Need Diverse Books™ is a grassroots organization of children's book lovers that advocates essential changes in the publishing industry to produce and promote literature that reflects and honors the lives of all young people.

Diversity in illustrated Montessori and Montessori-compatible materials:

Note: Please take care when using images depicting traditional dress to also use images that are representative of the culture's current daily lives just as when we study countries we take

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care to show rural, urban and untouched areas. When we limit our presentations to one aspect, one view, one image, or one perspective, we essentially reduce the entire identity of a people to that one thing, perpetuating stereotype even when we have the best of intentions. Similarly, it is best to include imagery of variable ability and variable family groupings whether or not these are represented in our school communities. To include diverse representations of human life, and to do so naturally within the lessons we already present creates a sense of inclusion - of welcoming difference.

Also note that some Montessori materials are best left without human representation at all, especially in the 6-12 age group, as explained below by an experienced 6-12 guide.

“The Fundamental Needs Chart should not have people on it because it's meant for the children to apply to a variety of peoples across the globe and throughout time. I think the intention of History --especially-- materials to be scant is to encourage the elementary children to research a LOT of different groups. So, the lack of human representation on the materials is significant precisely because it allows for application to diverse cultures.

Because of that, it's very important for the guide to introduce and provide (limited) resources for the children's exploration, to introduce a broad range of literature, representative of diverse cultures, their mythologies and beliefs.

The Story of Our Alphabet, Spoken Language, and our Numerals each include a variety of cultures.

Sometimes, we look for what's there. The brilliance here is: These structures can be applied across time and space because of what's not there. (Even in imagining an extra-terrestrial group or if we discover one.)” ~ Jen Stoll

[Diamond Montessori](#)

[Montessori Images](#)

[I Love The Way You... Multicultural Cards](#)

[Montessori Children around the world Cards](#)

[Lakeshore Block Play People - Complete Set](#)

[Material World - A Global Family Portrait](#)