



## TALKING TO KIDS ABOUT RACISM AND DISCRIMINATION

*by The Hearts & Minds Committee*

The sorrow and outrage expressed in response to the killing of George Floyd by police officers has reignited important conversations about race, discrimination, and equity. To honour his memory, the memories of all Black and Indigenous women and men who have been killed by police officers, and all the students, parents, and staff within our TDSB community who continue to experience racism first-hand, it's our duty to embrace this important conversation with our children.

Some caregivers may have questions about how to talk to your children about racism and discrimination, but these conversations are necessary for our children's healthy social and emotional development, to help strengthen their resiliency, and to create a safer and more fair society for everyone. Research has shown that children begin to think and learn about race as early as six months of age, when they begin to notice skin tone and other ways that people differ from one another.

Some parents may hesitate to have this conversation, out of discomfort, or fear of upsetting their children, or fear of saying the wrong thing. While there may be no single "right" thing, the wrong thing would be to ignore it, to remain silent, and to not have this conversation. Think about what kind of conversation you need to have with *your* family, given *your* lived experience and *your* concerns for them. By having these conversations with our children, we can aim to raise a generation of children who are more compassionate towards people, regardless of their culture, race, religion, gender, or sexual orientation.

1. Don't try to cover such a big topic in a single talk. Instead, have regular conversations around these topics. Take advantage of natural opportunities for "teachable moments" as they come up, such as when your children are watching movies, reading books, talking with their friends, or discussing what's happening around them. Having these conversations doesn't have to stop, even when your children grow into adults.

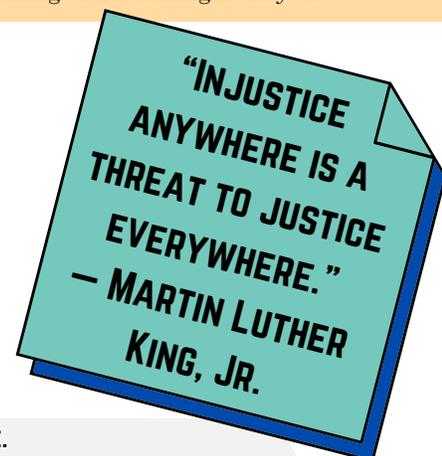
2. When your child asks you a question about race or discrimination, remember that they may not yet know what is or isn't "okay" to say. If you hear your child make a comment that is insensitive or prejudiced, use that moment to teach them better, being careful not to judge or shame them. These moments can be an opportunity to help change their perceptions about right and wrong, good and bad, and even to correct some of their biases, so try to respond as sensitively as you can. It's alright to say that you are unsure about something or that you are still working something out yourself. In all honesty, no one has the answers. If we did, this would not still be an issue. In these moments, it can help to say something like "This is a really good question, we should learn more about it together."

3. Help them empathize with others, by talking and imagining the challenges faced by people from different backgrounds, and who have different lived experiences. Talk to them about how they could respond when they hear someone say something that may be racist or discriminatory, such as "This is not a kind comment.", "What you just said is wrong, and wasn't fair or kind." We can all stand up for each other. Research shows that bullying stops within approximately 30 seconds when a bystander steps in. Encouraging our children to be an ally for each other is a necessary way to help improve such situations. As caregivers, it's important to let your children know that you are proud of them and will always support them when they take action against racism.

4. Last, but not least, don't forget that children behave the way they see their elders behave. Be a role model for your children and help them make a better world by demonstrating respect and dignity towards others, no matter who they are. We can learn to recognize our biases, and how they can influence our actions and our treatment of others. Develop awareness of *your* biased actions, (for example, avoiding people from diverse backgrounds, or minimizing the differences between yourself and others), so you can change them and not pass them on to your children. Remember, your child is watching and learning from you.

Every parent wants their child to feel safe. We can help make the world a more caring, compassionate place for all of us by learning more about each other. Explore other kinds of lived experiences than your own by reading books, watching culturally diverse movies, and attending different kinds of cultural events and celebrations. Connect with people from different backgrounds than your own, and encourage your child to befriend people who are interested in learning about their unique culture and traditions. On the next page are some resources to help expand your understanding of other people's lived experiences, and help prepare you to talk with your children about racism and discrimination.

\*As always, please contact your school administrator if you'd like to follow up with your school mental health professionals about any of the information provided\*.



# RESOURCES

Please note that these are only a few of the available resources. Our communities, and Toronto 211, are full of great resources, as well.

## TDSB Resources

- Recommended [books and resources](#) from the TDSB Equity and Well Being Department
- "[Six key points about having a conversation with your kids about race and racism \(which are not the same thing\)](#)" by Hemal Shroff, Ph.D., C.Psych. (TDSB Psychologist)
- "[Talking with White, Non-Black and Non-Indigenous Children and Teens About Recent Events Involving Anti-Black Racism and Police Brutality](#)" by Javier Davila, TDSB Student Equity Advisor

## Community & Mental Health Resources

- "[Culturally Responsive Mental Health Supports](#)"
- "[Women's Health in Women's Hands](#)" is a community health centre for women
- [LGBT Youth Line](#) is a Queer, Trans, Two-Spirit youth-led organization
- [The Hope for Wellness](#) Help Line offers immediate mental health counselling and crisis intervention to all Indigenous peoples across Canada
- [Across Boundaries](#) provides equitable, holistic mental health and addiction services

## Further Reading

- "[Talking to children about racism](#)" by the American Psychological Association
- "[Talking to kids about racism, early and often](#)" from the New York Times
- "[Whiteness](#)" from the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture
- [Resources](#) about how to talk to children about social justice issues, by the Children's Community School
- "[Racism and Violence: How to Help Kids Handle the News](#)" by the Child Mind Institute

## CONNECTING WITH YOURSELF BEFORE RESPONDING TO YOUR CHILD

by Dessy Marinova, Ph.D., C.Psych.

When parents are stressed out, their emotions can get in the way of talking calmly with their child. Thus, parents' knee-jerk emotional reaction (quick, automatic response) may set off their child's knee-jerk reaction. This may result in misunderstandings, unresolved conflicts, and hurt feelings.

**Research shows that awareness of our emotions is the first step in changing our reactions to our children's behaviours.** When we learn to notice our feelings in relation to our children's wrongdoings, we can naturally cool off our emotional brain. Thus, we gradually develop a habit of responding calmly rather than reacting emotionally to our children's misbehaviours.

In the next several weeks, try to:

- 1 Learn to notice when you are feeling anxious, irritable, or impatient when your kids do not listen to you, misbehave, or are just being silly.
- 2 Label your feelings ("I am noticing that I am annoyed").
- 3 Slow down your breathing. Take a deep breath, hold it, and breathe out fully, letting go of your emotions.
- 4 Then connect with and validate your child's feelings (see "Ask the Expert" article on the next page for more information).

Notice if your child becomes more receptive to talk about their experience. Notice when you are able to remain calm. **Forgive yourself when you can't. Acknowledge small successes along the way.** Give yourself time to develop this skill. Set daily reminders to help you use this skill.



## DID YOU KNOW?

by Stephanie Schecter, Ph.D., C.Psych.

Play is serious business: The United Nations Convention on the Rights of a Child recognizes play as a [right of every child](#) - it is *that* important to child development.

Through unstructured, "free" play (not organized or directed by an adult, and does not have a goal), children learn about themselves and their surroundings. **By simply playing, children learn to problem solve, think flexibly, manage emotions, try new things, and make sense of their world.**

However, due to increased academic pressures and hectic schedules, the amount of play time has been steadily decreasing. Current school closures and upcoming summer months provide an ideal time to encourage this essential activity.

**PLAY IS NOT RESERVED FOR YOUNG CHILDREN ALONE. ADOLESCENTS – AND ADULTS, TOO – BENEFIT FROM UNSTRUCTURED "PLAY."**

In these challenging times, play can be especially important as a catalyst to relieve stress. While parents are busier and more stressed than ever, dedicating time for child-led play can be helpful in fostering healthy parent-child relationships, soothing anxiety, and promoting resilience.

For teens, incorporating humour into relationships is important, as is finding opportunities for playfulness in creative activities (e.g., cooking, art, and music).

Click [HERE](#) to learn more about play during a time of crisis.



OUR ARTICLES, TIPS, AND SUGGESTIONS DO NOT CONSTITUTE TREATMENT ADVICE.

IF YOU OR A FAMILY MEMBER IS IN CRISIS, PLEASE CONTACT [KIDS HELP PHONE: 1-800-668-6868](#) OR THE DISTRESS CENTRE: 416-408-4357



# ASK THE PSYCH EXPERT

By Lauren Batho, Ph.D., C.Psych.

## Question: "How can I help my child or teen manage their big emotions?"

One way to help your child or teen cope with their big feelings, including fear, sadness, and anger, is to use **Emotion Coaching** and "validating", which lets them know that you acknowledge their feelings and understand why they're feeling the way that they are (whether or not you agree with their emotion in that particular situation).

Emotion coaching involves the following steps:

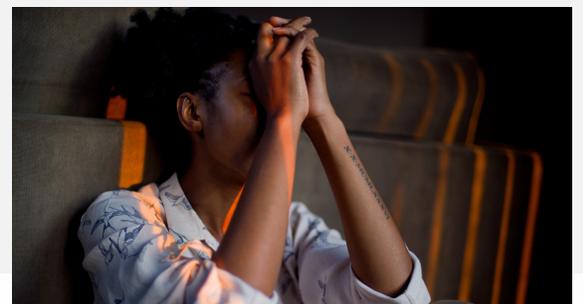
➔ **Step 1:** Strong feelings can be validated by replacing the word "BUT" with "BECAUSE" when you notice and comment on their emotions. This step is especially helpful when you can pair validation of the emotion with three reasons why that emotion makes sense ("I can understand why you feel \_\_\_\_\_ because (x3)" and "No wonder you're \_\_\_\_\_ because (x3)").

*For example, instead of saying, "I can see you're frustrated BUT you have to get this work done," you could say in a calm voice, "No wonder you're frustrated, BECAUSE you tried hard to figure this out, and it's a tricky question, and it's taking a lot of time."*

➔ **Step 2:** After the feeling is validated, you can meet their emotional needs by providing comfort if they're sad or letting them express their concerns if they're angry.

➔ **Step 3:** If necessary, you can move on to helping to solve their problem, by helping them email the teacher to ask a question or helping them figure out the answer.

The order of the steps is important, as children may be more resistant to problem solving until they feel validated and that their emotional needs are met.



## THE LEARNING SPACE

### Building Independence in Young Children

by the Hearts & Minds Committee

Using visuals, such as photos or words, can help young children and some children with special needs know what to do throughout the day when they are unsure of what is expected. By giving them their instructions in the form of a visual list, they can feel more confident and independent.

These lists, which can be used for any routine, help children feel they are able to complete activities on their own, and reduce their "what's next?" questions for you. When creating visual lists, try these tips:

- **Personalize your lists.** If you can, take pictures of your child actively engaged in the tasks you are putting on the list and use them in the final product.
- **Allow your child to be part of the list-making.** Ask them to draw pictures, write words, or give examples of activities that should be part of the list.
- **When teaching them how to use the list, consider using language such as:** "check your list" or "go see what comes next on your list." You might want to use a dry erase board for your child to check off each task.
- **Make sure that your child is able to complete each task independently** before adding it to the list. If a task is too hard, they may become discouraged and struggle to continue.
- **Make the last item something that the child wants** to do so they are eager to finish. It might be a snack, a hug, or some time to play. Always praise a job well done!

## RESOURCES

**VISUAL SCHEDULES**  
[Templates, pictures, & visuals from the Geneva Centre](#)

[Pre-made visual schedules for daily routines](#)

**MANAGING BIG EMOTIONS**  
[Steps to Emotion Coaching](#)

[Validation of kids' feelings](#)

[Self-Validation](#)

## CONNECT WITH US

If you are looking for support from TDSB Psychological Services for your child, please contact your school's administration.

[@TDSB\\_Psych](#)

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[TDSB Mental Health & Well-Being](#)

This month we're celebrating a few important events. To learn more, click [here](#).