

Six Building Blocks for Engaging Young Children in Conversations About Race

Color-Brave Caregivers can use these language “building blocks” to help break down concepts about race and racism into ideas that young children are familiar with and capable of understanding.



1 Skin Color & Melanin

Melanin is tiny little grains of brown coloring in our skin. It's there to help protect our skin from the sun. The darker your skin is, the more melanin you have. The amount of melanin you have is based on where your ancestors lived a long time ago – if they lived in a part of the world with lots of sun and heat, or a part of the world with less sun and heat.

2 Fairness & Unfairness

Young kids are very attuned to what is “fair” and “unfair” – who gets to have more, who gets to go somewhere, and who doesn't. We can use this concept to explain racism and connect past events in history with racial inequality (or rules or situations that are unfair) in the present.

3 Hurting & Being Hurt

Children are very aware of being hurt physically and emotionally. We can use this concept to explain some of the consequences of racism that hurt people's bodies and hearts. We can also talk about stories that we might hear about groups of people that are not true and are hurtful to them.



4 Power & Control

Children experience following instructions and routines set by adults and the joy and pride that comes with making their own choices on a daily basis, so they can understand the ideas of power and control. Power is when

I get to say what you can and cannot do. Power is who is in charge and who makes the rules. Racism is a way that people keep power over others. In the U.S., it has been White people who have had power for a very long time and still have power.

5 Equality & Equity

Even young kids can begin to appreciate the difference between equality and equity. **Equality** is when everyone gets exactly the same (e.g., crackers, Legos, Play-Doh). **Equity** is when everyone gets what they need. Some people need glasses to see and some people don't. Sometimes someone needs a bigger snack because they didn't get breakfast, and you might not want a big snack because you're not that hungry. Because things have been unfair for people of color for a long time, we need to think about solutions that create equity, not just equality.

6 Standing Up for What is Right

Standing up for what's right is like making a good choice. Standing up for what is right is sometimes hard and not always fun, but it helps someone else and makes the world safer and happier for everyone.

