

Common “Color-Blind” Views*

Our Color-Brave View**

What is race?

- Race is about biological, physical and cultural differences.
- Race is important only because we keep talking about it.
- Race is about discrimination, inequality, hatred, reverse racism, old wounds that never heal - ugly, hard stuff.

- Race is about the values, judgments, and meanings we associate with physical and cultural differences.
- Ideas about race shape a wide range of crucial outcomes for people, families, communities, and for our society.
- Race is about our experiences as people and community members. The story of race is full of pain, hardship, and injustice, but also of joy, pride, solidarity, and resilience.

What is racism?

- Racism is mainly about personal biases, attitudes, and behaviors.
- Racist people (“racists”) commit racism through their intentional choices of prejudicial words and discriminatory behaviors.
- Racism will end when people stop holding racist beliefs and stop engaging in racist actions.

- Racism is mainly about the ways that past and present injustices shape our present reality, affecting people in areas that include housing, education, health, wealth, criminal justice, interpersonal relationships, and more.
- We can all behave in ways that perpetuate racism, often without meaning to do so.
- Racism will end when we work together to change the social systems and structures that maintain racial injustice.

What is antiracism?

- A person is antiracist if they have little or no bias against people of other races.

- Being antiracist is about reflecting on our own attitudes and biases, working to do better, and supporting policies and actions that promote equity and justice.

What do children think about race?

- When it comes to race, children are blank slates; they do not notice or make judgments about race unless adults talk about it first.
- Talking about race and racism with young children is developmentally inappropriate and can cause harmful emotions like guilt, fear, distrust, and confusion.

- Just like in other areas of development, children are little scientists when it comes to race; they notice and assign meaning to racialized differences based on patterns they observe around them. This is true whether or not adults explicitly acknowledge and talk about race.
- Talking about race and racism with young children helps them develop healthy racial identities, skills and empathy for cross-racial relationships, and critical thinking about race.

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How do children learn about race?

- Children’s beliefs and attitudes about race reflect what their parents and other adults tell them.
- Children become racially biased when they hear adults, especially parents, say prejudicial things and see them act in discriminatory ways toward other-race people.

- Parents and other caregivers are important sources of messages about race. So are peers, teachers and schools, neighborhoods, media, and more.
- Children develop biases and anxieties about race when adults are silent about race and do not actively help them make sense of it.

What role do caregivers play in children’s racial learning?

- Caregivers’ role is to preserve children’s innocence and protect them from harmful ideas about race.
- If caregivers do talk about race, we can keep children from being biased by emphasizing that we’re all equal in our humanity and stressing the importance of treating everyone the same regardless of skin color.
- When children express curiosity about race, it is best simply to remind them that we are all the same.

- Caregivers are sources of information about race and can be guides who actively help children process information about race from other sources.
- Caregiver practices can both minimize the biases that children develop and help them become actively anti-racist.
- Caregivers can respond to children’s curiosity about race, and be proactive and intentional about prompting race conversations.

How can we move toward a better future?

- Racism is no longer a big problem.
- By teaching children to love everyone equally and ignoring race, we can make it – and all the ugliness associated with it – disappear.

- Racism continues to impact all our lives in countless ways.
- Only by talking honestly about race can we raise a generation of children who are thoughtful, informed, and brave enough to help create a truly equitable, multiracial society.

* We acknowledge concerns about the ableism inherent in the term “color-blind.” We use it here advisedly, with quotation marks, because it is used in the research literature much more often than terms like “color-evasive,” and is much more familiar to most people than any current alternative.

** The components of this “color-brave” view are supported by social science research (see citations below). The term “color-brave” has been used previously by others as a contrast to traditional “color-blind” ideology, most notably in Mellody Hobson’s great TED talk, “Color blind or color brave?”

Citations

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