

Shaping Tomorrow: Insights from a National Parent Survey on Children's Racial Learning

SUMMARY REPORT



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GRATITUDE

We are grateful to Dan Braker, Megan Faulkner, Sunny Fuller, and Pete Van Wert at Breakthrough Research for their generous pro bono partnership in conducting this survey. We would also like to acknowledge the contributions from research service providers Prodege, Forsta, and California Survey Research Services (CSRS).

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- Adiaha Spinks-Franklin

Finally, thank you to the parents and guardians who have shared their perspectives with us, and to all caregivers who work each day to raise children who are thoughtful, informed, and brave about race.

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INTRODUCTION

Against the troubling backdrop of a nationwide effort to suppress discussions about race and U.S. racial history in our public schools, in fall 2022 EmbraceRace commissioned a survey of 1,000 parents to 0-13 year-old children. Working with the custom market research firm, Breakthrough Research, we designed the survey to assess parents’ interest in resources and services that would help them promote healthy racial attitudes and behaviors in their children.

After engaging with parents and caregivers across the country over more than six years, we knew that there was an active demand for the kinds of materials and spaces EmbraceRace provides. But, among parents, how big was the potential “market” for children’s racial learning supports? 10 percent of U.S. parents? 20 percent? 50 percent? We didn’t know. Who were they, demographically speaking? What obstacles prevent many parents who say they want to engage their kids on race from doing so in meaningful ways? We wanted “hard data” from a nationally representative sample of parents to fuel more definitive answers than we had.

We were also curious about the claim among “anti-Critical Race Theory” campaigners that theirs was a movement for “parents’ rights” in education. The claim was reinforced in many ways. Groups with names such as Parents Defending Education, Army of Parents, and Parents’ Rights in Education became the public face of “anti-CRT” protests. The largest such group, Moms for Liberty, currently boasts some 300 chapters across the U.S. The first bill Kevin McCarthy formally announced as House speaker was the Parents Bill of Rights. The official name of the “Don’t Say Gay” bill Florida Governor Ron DeSantis signed into law in March 2022? The Florida Parental Rights in Education Act. At the district, city and county, and state levels, “parents’ rights” measures swept the country.

One message implicit in this “parents’ rights” drumbeat is that its proponents speak for a great many parents. We wanted to know if that was true.

Breakthrough Research fielded our survey in November and December 2022 in collaboration with Prodege, LLC, Forsta, and California Survey Research Services, Inc. We are grateful for our partnership with these organizations. In the pages ahead we summarize the survey’s main findings. We also invited a handful of thoughtful observers representing a range of professional sectors—pediatricians, education professors, game designers, and more—to reflect on how the findings relate to their own work and concerns. We appreciate their insights and think that you will, too.



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“ The easiest way to engage with your children in conversations about race and racism is by being honest. Even though it may be uncomfortable, it is necessary. We do not want our children to be blinded and become a victim so the earlier you have the conversation the better your children will understand it.”

BLACK MOM OF 4 IN GEORGIA

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Even in infancy, children’s responses to racial differences are influenced by their social environments (Bar-Haim et al., 2006). As they grow, children continue to learn about race and racism from many sources, including the many adults in their lives. Just as cognitive, social-emotional, and language development are facilitated by interactions with adults, the course of children’s early learning about race and racism depends on interactions with caregivers. Engaged and responsive caregivers can make a huge difference in the course of children’s beliefs and convictions about race.

Engaged and responsive caregivers can make a huge difference in the course of children’s beliefs and convictions about race.

Accordingly, EmbraceRace’s mission to support adults to raise a generation of children who are thoughtful, informed, and brave about race extends to caregivers in a variety of roles: from parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles, and other family members, to childcare providers, teachers, school leaders, and coaches, to friends, neighbors, pediatricians, and social workers. Yet we recognize the tremendous impact primary caregivers—typically, parents and guardians in the home—have on children’s developing racial sensibilities. They not only are direct sources of information, attitudes, and values that shape children’s thinking about race, but also have the opportunity to actively guide children in processing and making sense of messages about race coming from other sources.

Given the important role of parents in children’s racial learning, our 2022 National Parent Survey was designed with these goals in mind:

- To better understand the landscape of parent sentiments in the U.S. about children’s learning about race and racism;
- To document the regularity with which parents report actually engaging their children in learning about race and racism at different ages, and the most common challenges they face in doing so; and
- To gain insight into the demographics of parents who feel more and less prepared to engage children on race and racism.

We conducted the survey in partnership with Breakthrough Research with support from Prodege, LLC, Forsta, and California Survey Research Services, Inc. From November 22 to December 5, 2022, we fielded a 15-minute questionnaire to parents of children ages 0-13. The recruited sample of 1,000 parents was representative of the population of U.S. parents with regard to age, race, gender, and geographical region.

Key Findings

Overall, we found that parents were highly open to supporting their children’s racial learning, and were interested in supportive resources to help them:

- **84%** of parents reported being *extremely open* or *very open* to helping their children learn about race and racism.
- **61%** of parents felt that teaching children about race was *extremely urgent* or *very urgent*, given what is happening in the U.S. today.
- **65%** of parents reported being *extremely interested* or *very interested* in having access to resources to help them support children’s racial learning.

KEY FINDINGS

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61%

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children’s racial
learning

Racial Differences

In the report, we include information on responses from parents belonging to different racial groups, with the caveat that our sample sizes for some groups were relatively small (particularly the Native American/Indigenous subgroup, with only 11 respondents). Encouragingly, we found **moderate to high levels of openness, perceived urgency, and interest in resources across parents of different racial identities**. The differences we found across racial groups were in unsurprising directions. For instance, Black parents and Multiracial parents reported the highest sense of urgency to teach children about race and racism, while White parents were most likely to report feeling racial learning was “not at all urgent.”

Political Differences

We observed differences in levels of openness, perceived urgency, and interest in resources across the political spectrum, with liberal-leaning parents expressing higher levels of each than conservative-leaning parents. That said, we found that **substantial percentages of conservative-leaning parents were extremely or very open to helping their children learn about race (70%)**, felt that children’s racial learning was an *extremely or very urgent* issue (39%), and were *extremely or very interested* in supportive resources (44%).

The Attitude-Practice Gap

Alongside relatively high levels of openness, urgency, and interest among parents across the board, we found that **relatively few parents were “walking the walk” in terms of actually engaging their children in learning about race.**

When parents were asked the earliest age at which they would talk to their children about race, the most common response was 6 years old, with a mean of 7.03 years. Indeed, the percentage of parents who reported often engaging their children in learning about race was only 2% for children under 2; 11% for children ages 2-5; 22% for children ages 6-9; and 24% for children ages 10-13 (and there is some reason to think that these parent-report statistics may overestimate the depth and substance with which parents—particularly White parents—engage their children on race-related issues; see, e.g., Abaied et al., 2022, and Sullivan, Eberhardt, & Roberts, 2021). When asked about the challenges they face in engaging with children on this topic, the most commonly endorsed barriers were related to children’s ages and development: 29% of parents said “I don’t think my child notices race at this age”; 26% said “I think my child is too young”; and 19% said “I’m waiting until my child mentions race or asks a question about it.” The next most commonly selected responses reflected parents’ uncertainty about how to engage, with 19% acknowledging that “I’m afraid I might say the wrong thing” and 16% endorsing “I don’t know how to start.”

THE ATTITUDE-PRACTICE GAP

The percentage of parents who reported *often engaging their children in learning about race* was only:

2%

for children
under 2

11%

for children
ages 2-5

22%

for children
ages 6-9

24%

for children
ages 10-13

Implications

Insights from parents' responses to this survey suggest several directions for promoting parents' engagement with children around race, including:

- The need for educational campaigns to increase awareness about the early roots of children's developing racial sensibilities;
- The need to inform parents and caregivers about the crucial roles they play, and can play, in shaping children's ideas and practices around race;
- The need to share with parents and caregivers developmentally appropriate ways of engaging children in racial learning, starting early and continuing as they grow;
- The need for tools and guidance to help parents develop confidence in engaging with their children on race and racism;
- The need for resources that speak to the experiences and needs of families across racial backgrounds and across the political spectrum;
- The need for additional research to inform practice with caregivers and children to promote evidence-based strategies for healthy learning about race and racism.

The [commentaries contributed by our partners](#) highlight how these survey findings resonate with leaders in multiple sectors, from pediatrics and sociology to gaming and media, and point toward implications for practitioners in each of these sectors.

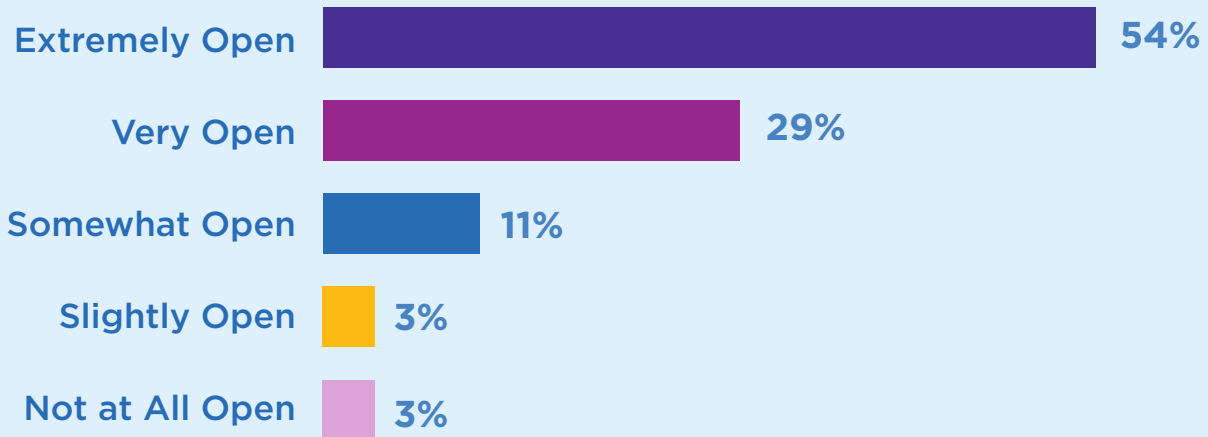




KEY FINDINGS

Nearly all parents are open to helping kids learn about race and racism.

Q: How open are you to helping your child(ren) ages 0-13 learn about race and racism?



84%

of parents are *extremely open* or *very open* to helping kids learn about race

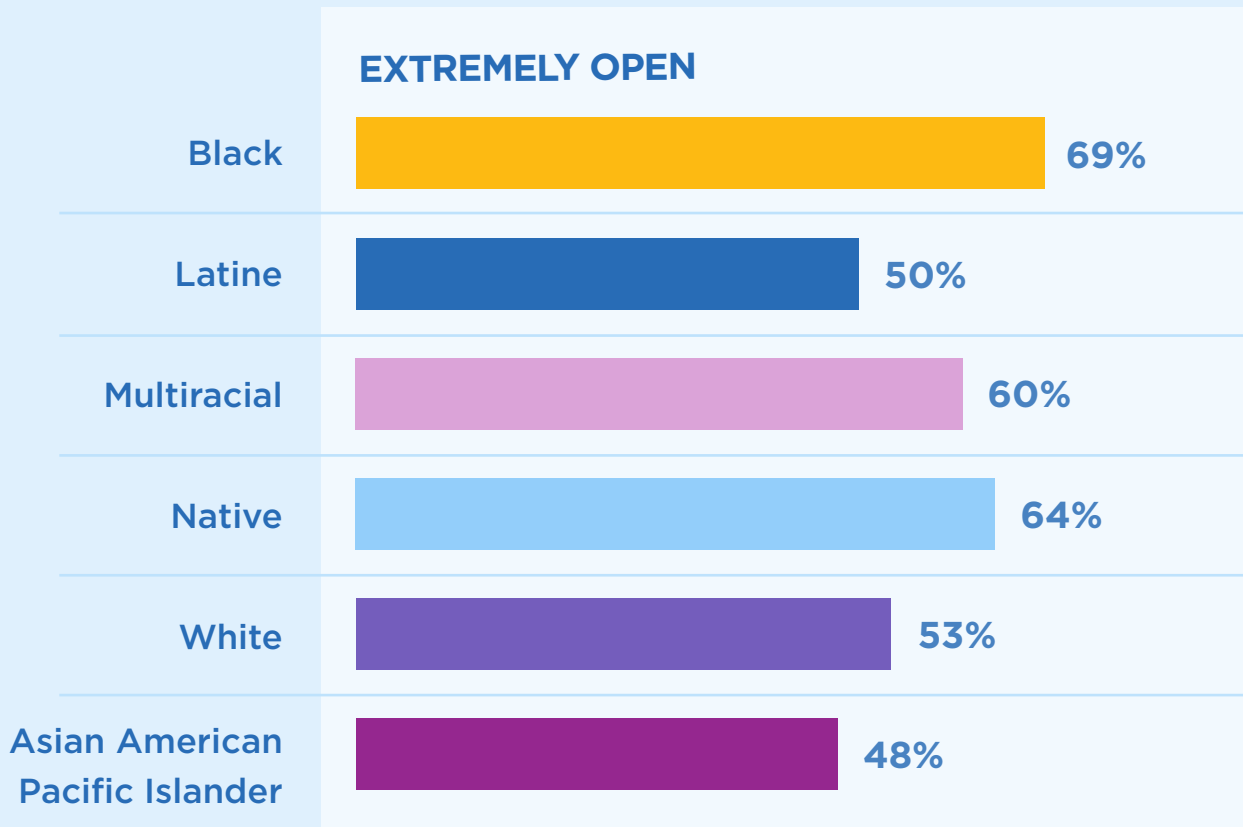
More than half of parents (54%) reported being *extremely open* to helping their children learn about race and racism; about 5 out of 6 (83.5%) were either *extremely open* or *very open*; and nearly all parents (95%) were at least *somewhat open*.

While the idea of what it means to help children learn about race and racism might be very different across families, these findings indicate a high level of receptiveness to conversations about engaging children on race among parents. These findings also complement recent polls indicating that, despite polarizing headlines and partisan divides about specific approaches, the majority of U.S. parents and other adults actually support teaching children about race and racism in schools (Ash, 2023; Jackson et al., 2022).

High levels of openness to helping children learn about race and racism were found across respondents of different racial backgrounds.

Generally, parents across racial backgrounds expressed similarly high levels of openness toward helping children learn about race and racism, with 85.5% of Asian American and Pacific Islander parents, 89.8% of Black parents, 86.5% of Latine/a/o parents, 83% of Multiracial parents, 90.9% of Native parents, and 81.9% of White parents indicating they are *very open* or *extremely open*.

Q: How open are you to helping your child(ren) ages 0-13 learn about race and racism?



See a more complete set of related data on page 35.



“

I think it's extremely important because they need to understand how society actually works. They need to see that even though you teach them to be respectful & accept others they might not get that back. ...they need to understand that racism does exist.

LATINA MOM OF 2 IN CALIFORNIA

I am incredibly open to helping children learn about race and racism because **it is essential for them to learn about their history as people of color, how far we have come, and where we want to be,** but how difficult it is to get there.

BLACK MOM OF 4 IN GEORGIA

I think it's **a real problem, and it's one that I would rather be a part of solving rather than pretending it doesn't exist.** I believe that teaching my child about how they are a part of everything is a vital part of helping.

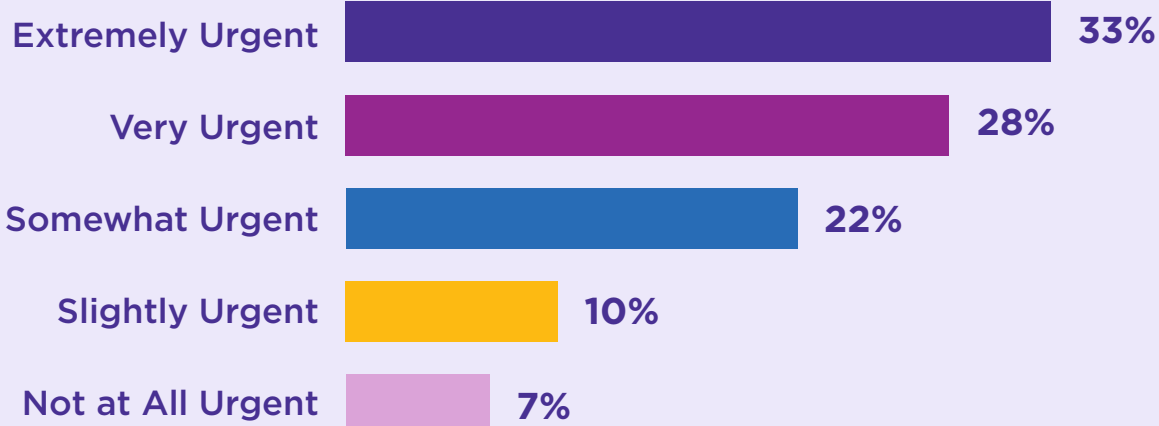
WHITE DAD OF 1 IN KANSAS

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Most parents feel a sense of urgency about teaching kids about race.

Q:

How urgent is it to teach children about race in light of what's happening in the U.S. today?



More than 3 out of 5 parents (61%) felt that teaching children about race was *very urgent* or *extremely urgent* given what's happening in the U.S. today. Even more parents (83%) felt at least a moderate degree of urgency.

These statistics indicate a general readiness among parents to prioritize children's racial learning as an important aspect of their development. The current sociopolitical moment, in which national conversations about racial injustice and race relations are particularly heightened, may be engendering a sense of urgency among parents to prepare their children for experiences of racial bias and discrimination, to help them learn to empathize and form relationships across racial lines, and/or to raise them to be thoughtful change agents. What these statistics do not tell us is whether or how parents may be acting on these feelings of urgency.

61%

of parents feel that teaching kids about race is *extremely urgent* or *very urgent*

Overall, Black and Native parents felt the highest sense of urgency to teach children about race.

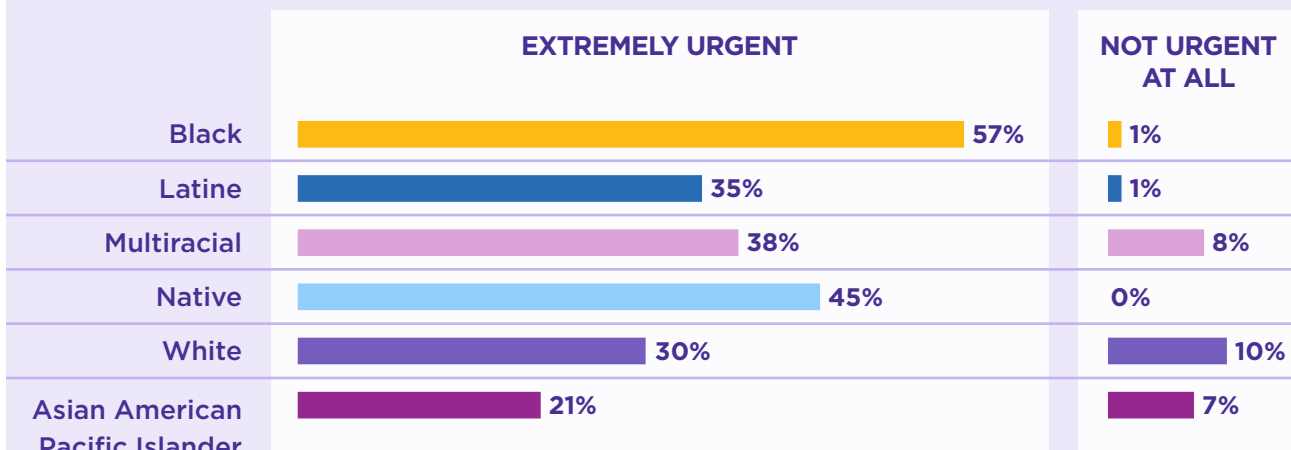
White parents were most likely to believe teaching about race is “not at all urgent.”

We observed greater variation by respondents’ race in relation to their feelings of urgency in comparison to their openness. Overall, Black and Native respondents felt the greatest sense of urgency (though we note that our Native sample size was quite small). That these groups felt the greatest urgency to teach children about race in the current moment likely reflects the longstanding legacy of racism, violence, and oppression experienced by these groups historically, as well as the reality that, on average, Black and Native children and adults continue to be most discriminated against today (Elenwo et al., 2022). Black and Native parents,

therefore, may be more likely to view racism as a major problem that their children will be affected by as well as something that all children can eventually have a role in ameliorating.

By the same token, that White parents were most likely to feel no sense of urgency about teaching children about race likely reflects the privilege and value linked to Whiteness in U.S. society. Still, it is important to note that most White parents (79.9%) felt at least a moderate sense of urgency, and well over half (57.2%) felt teaching about race was very urgent or extremely urgent.

Q: How urgent is it to teach children about race in light of what’s happening in the U.S. today?



See a more complete set of related data on page 35.

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Race and racism are important issues that **need to be taught to children at a young age before racism can get a hold in their developing minds.** The only change and advancement in race relations is through generational change and perceptions of young people.

ASIAN DAD OF 2 IN CALIFORNIA

As a Black American my child needs to know about race and racism at an early age **in order to live safe in this country.**

BLACK MOM OF 1 IN NORTH CAROLINA

Race and racism education is vital to make sure we don't repeat the past. **If we don't educate on these subjects, how do we try to do better than our ancestors?**

NATIVE MOM OF 1 IN OKLAHOMA

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Despite high levels of openness and urgency, fewer parents are actually “walking the walk” with their kids.

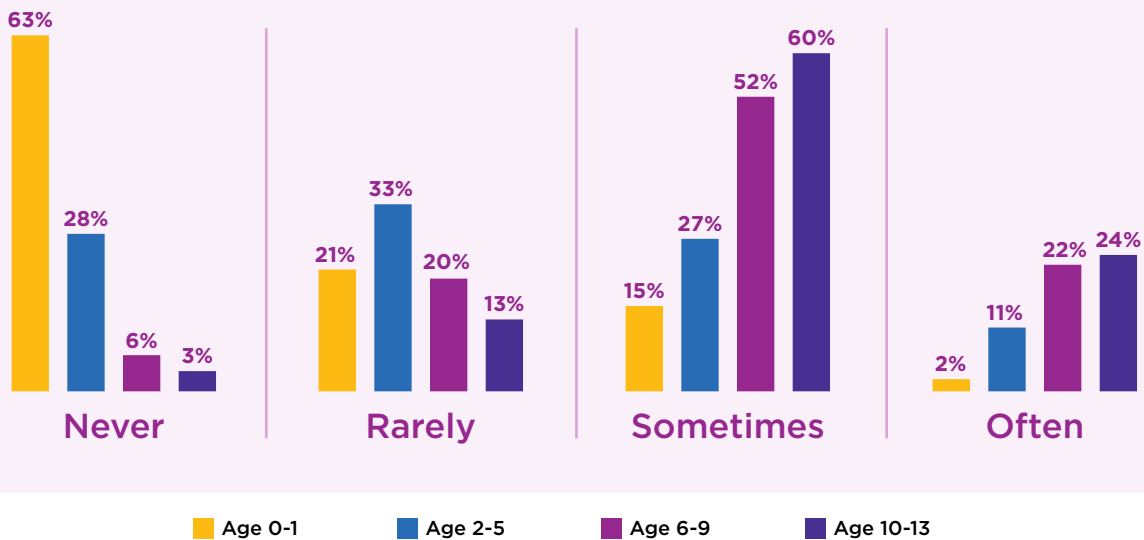
Unsurprisingly, parents are more likely to engage children in learning about race and racism as they get older. But even within the oldest age group (10-13 years), as youth are transitioning to adolescence, less than one quarter (24.1%) of parents report engaging their children *often* on race and racism.

Despite growing awareness of the scientific evidence indicating that children begin to notice race within the first year of life (e.g., Anzures et al., 2013) and develop racial biases by ages 3-5 (e.g., Dunham et al., 2013; Raabe & Beelmann, 2011), about 5 out of 6 parents (83.3%) report

that they *never* or *rarely* engage their babies ages 0-1 in learning about race. Additionally, the majority of parents (61.6%) report that they *never* or *rarely* engage in racial learning with their children between ages 2 and 5.

Overall, the discrepancy between high levels of openness and urgency espoused by parents and the low to moderate levels of actual practice is consistent with previous work (e.g., Kotler et al., 2019), and this gap suggests that parents could benefit from resources and programming designed to support them in effectively engaging children on race across age groups.

Q: In general, how often do you engage your child(ren) in the following age groups in learning about race and racism?

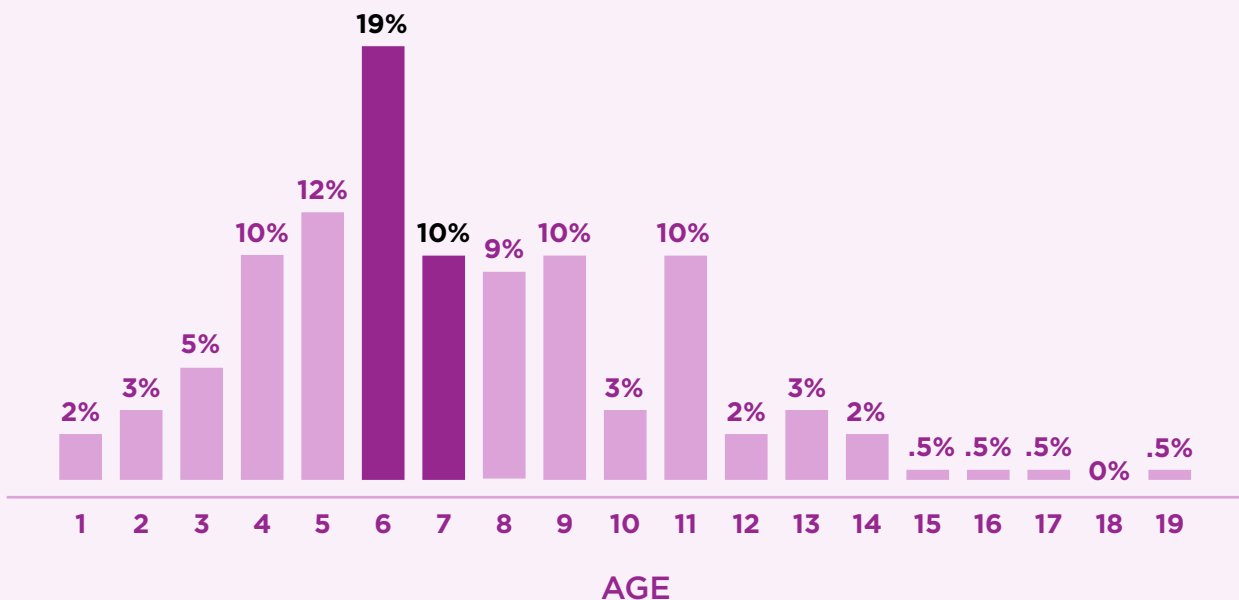


Note: Percentages are based on total number of parents who reported having children in each age group (ages 0-1 n = 96; ages 2-5 n = 402; ages 6-8 n = 427; ages 10-13 n = 461).

On average, the earliest age at which parents said they would talk to their kids about race was about 7 years old.



What is the earliest age at which you would talk to your child(ren) about race?



On average, the earliest age at which parents would talk to their kids about race was 7.03 years old. The most common response (18.5% of respondents) was 6 years old. These findings are similar to other recent research which found that adults were generally willing to have a first conversation about race with children around age 5 (Sullivan et al., 2021).

It is important to note the wording of this question. Parents were specifically asked the earliest age at which they would *talk* to their children about race. Thus, that the age at which parents are willing to talk about race does not align with the scientific consensus about when children begin to process race and develop racial biases may in part reflect a widespread emphasis on having “conversations” about race with children, and neglecting to share with parents and caregivers other developmentally-appropriate ways of engaging infants and toddlers in healthy racial learning.

When asked about the factors preventing them from discussing race and racism with their children, the most common barriers endorsed by parents related to children’s ages.

Q: Which of the following, if any, might prevent you from engaging with your children in discussions around race and racism?

I don’t think my child notices race at this age **29%**

I think my child is too young **26%**

See a more complete set of related data on page 36.

The rate at which parents endorsed these age-related barriers differed according to the age of their children: 43% of parents with younger children only (ages 0-5) and 12% of parents with older children only (ages 6-13) felt that their children were too young to discuss race/racism.

That the belief that their children do not notice race was a common preventive factor for parents reflects the findings of Sullivan and her colleagues (2021) that adults’ beliefs about when children process race were a key predictor of the age at which they were willing to have conversations about race with children. These trends point to the continuing need to raise awareness among parents of the early beginnings of children’s racial learning within the first years of life.



“

I am not sure that young children need to know about race or racism at this point of their lives. They won't even understand it. It is something we can teach later.

MULTIRACIAL MOM OF 1 IN IDAHO

I think it is healthy to answer all questions children have, however I am not going to make a big deal out of something that they don't even notice.

WHITE MOM OF 3
IN TENNESSEE

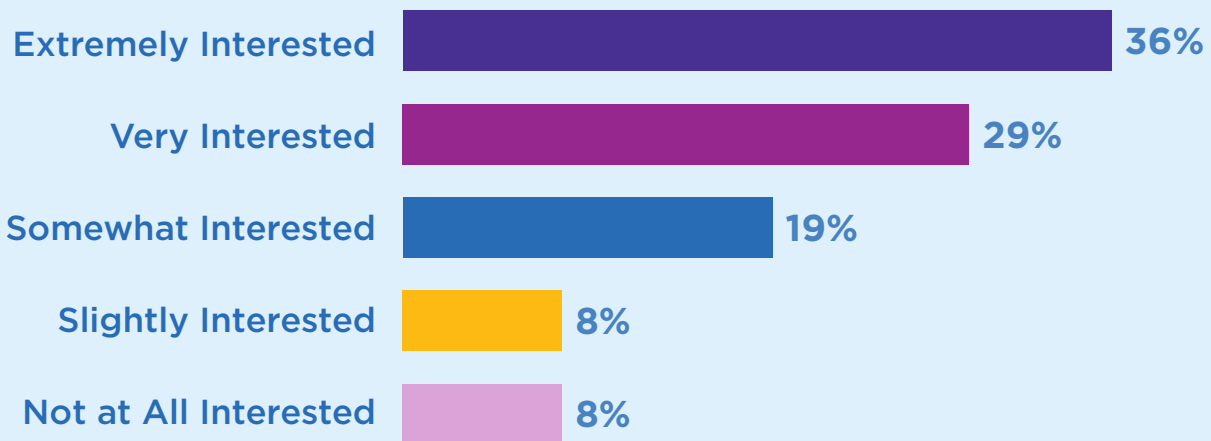
I would want my kids to understand racism but I don't want them to be overwhelmed with information.

BLACK MOM OF 2 IN TEXAS

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The majority of parents are interested in resources and programs designed to help them support their children’s racial learning.

Q: How interested are you in resources and programs designed to support you in helping any of your children aged 0-13 years old learn about race and racism?



65%
of parents are *extremely interested* or *very interested* in resources to help them support children’s racial learning

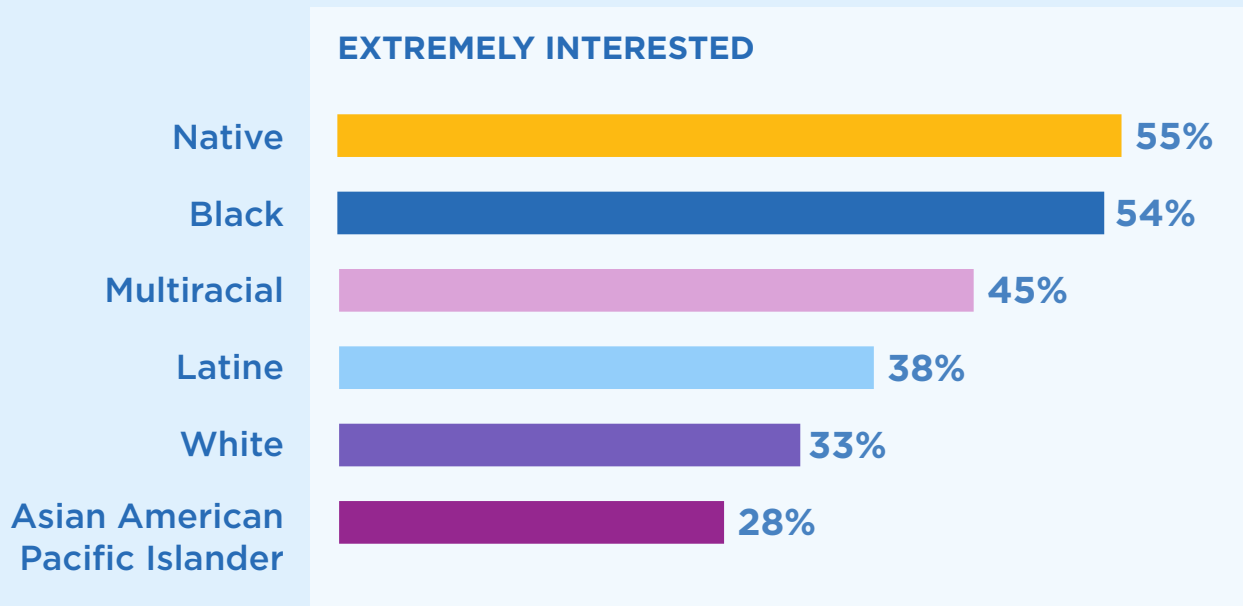
Encouragingly, two thirds (65%) of parents said that they were *very interested* or *extremely interested* in supportive resources and programs.

These results bolster our own convictions, based on years of interactions with parents, educators, and other caregivers, that there is a significant and ongoing desire for support in guiding children toward racial literacy. We continue to expand our offerings, including both creating and curating resources as well as facilitating communities of learning and practice, in order to deliver the support that parents are looking for.

Moderate to high levels of interest in resources were found across respondents of different racial backgrounds, with the highest average levels for Black and Native parents.

These patterns are important in that they remind us to reject the myth that families of color have this all figured out. Although families of color have provided the foundation for our understanding of racial socialization (e.g. Hughes et al., 2006), they should not be overlooked in our continuing efforts to support caregivers. As awareness of the need for resources to support families in raising antiracist White children grows, we must keep in mind that families of color will also benefit from resources that support their own antiracist caregiving practice—particularly resources that explicitly center the unique experiences of children of color.

Q: How interested are you in resources and programs designed to support you in helping any of your children aged 0-13 years old learn about race and racism?



See a more complete set of related data on page 36.

“

It would help if I knew what to say in the right way. I know people who tried, and the wording came out wrong, so they were called racist even though they were trying to help explain things.

WHITE MOM OF 2 IN ILLINOIS

I guess knowing what other parents of color say to their children about racism might **give me an idea of what I could say to my daughter.**

LATINO DAD OF 1 IN ILLINOIS

It definitely would be easier to engage in conversations about racism **if the educational curriculum discussed it.**

ASIAN DAD OF 2 IN MASSACHUSETTS

”



Differences in political orientation were strongly associated with perceptions on educating children about race and racism.

Still, considerable proportions of those identifying as politically conservative express high levels of openness, urgency, and interest in resources.

	Liberal (n=348)	Neither liberal nor conservative (n=362)	Conservative (n=290)
Extremely/very open to engage children on race	93%	85%	70%
Extremely/very urgent to teach children about race	80%	60%	39%
Extremely/very interested in resources	84%	63%	44%

These findings help to dispel another myth by highlighting that not all those who identify as or lean conservative politically are opposed to helping their children learn about race and racism. Of course, the messages parents want their children to learn about race do vary by political orientation (and we did see that conservative-leaning parents in our survey were more likely to endorse color-blind attitudes about race). Still, substantial levels of openness and interest indicate that there is room for conversation with many conservative families about how their children individually and the next generation collectively will benefit from open, honest, critical dialogue about race and racism.



“

It is important for them to know about discrimination and what steps they can take to help this country be better educated about it. It is also **important for them to know when it is happening and stand up for themselves and others.**

LATINA MOM OF 3 IN TEXAS IDENTIFYING AS POLITICALLY CONSERVATIVE

[It's an] important part of history and I feel **they deserve to know how it impacted people of color** today and back in history.

NATIVE MOM OF 2 IN NORTH CAROLINA IDENTIFYING AS POLITICALLY CONSERVATIVE

Our child will be going to school in a very cultural[ly] diverse city. I want to be able **to have open dialogue with him about these things in an age appropriate manner.**

WHITE MOM OF 1 IN CONNECTICUT IDENTIFYING AS POLITICALLY CONSERVATIVE

”



COMMENTARY



PROFESSOR OF EDUCATION AND DEMOGRAPHY

In the Supreme Court's recent decision effectively ending affirmative action programs at the nation's colleges and universities, the dissenting opinions authored by the Court's two female Justices of color noted the persistence of racial segregation and inequality. For example, Justice Jackson noted racial gaps in health outcomes while Justice Sotomayor described how the persistence of segregation in K-12 education gave college applicants very different pathways to becoming strong applicants. They both believed that universities' modest race-conscious policy efforts were needed to live up to one of the Supreme Court's most pivotal rulings, *Brown v Board of Education*.

After reciting the history of Supreme Court rulings that helped undermine the legal underpinnings of segregation in the 20th century, Chief Justice Roberts' majority opinion for the Court cast the decision to end affirmative action as one that extended this line of racial egalitarian decisions: **"Eliminating racial discrimination means eliminating all of it."**

As I delved into the EmbraceRace survey, I saw the divide within our nation's top Court reflected in the results. Like the Justices mentioned, who all agreed about the importance of *Brown* and eliminating racial discrimination, we see a lot of agreement about who we aspire to be as parents. Most of the respondents were quite open to learning about race with their children. That promising finding cuts across a range of demographic groups, but with important differences. Even within age bands of children, White parents reported "often" engaging with their children about race or racism less than parents of color did. White parents felt less urgency and were less comfortable talking about different dimensions of race and racism. Not surprisingly, White parents also were the most likely to note that their worry about saying the wrong thing was a barrier to having such conversations.

These responses layer on top of the persistence of segregation that Justice Sotomayor described. **White K-12 students are the least exposed to other-race students and less likely than students of color to have teachers of color, who may be more likely to talk about race.** This structural context underlines the challenge to addressing the gaps between aspiration and reality reflected in these survey results.

It is also a reminder that to realize the aspirations most parents share for the racial literacy of their children we must acknowledge the realities of our present and past. Educated in largely segregated schools, today's parents also had limited opportunity to learn healthy, honest lessons about race as they grew up. Youth activists around the country are asking for full and meaningful school integration, to include honest discussions about race and racism. It's time for us to take action to make their aspirations, and ours, reality.

ERICA FRANKENBERG (Ed.D., Harvard University) is a professor of education and demography in the College of Education at the Pennsylvania State University. Her research interests focus on racial desegregation and inequality in PK-12 schools, and the connections between school segregation and other metropolitan policies. At Penn State, Dr. Frankenberg was the co-founder and now director of Penn State's Center for Education and Civil Rights. Dr. Frankenberg has published widely in education journals, law reviews, and has co-edited five books.

K-12 EDUCATOR



EmbraceRace's 2022 Parent Survey Report showed me that the hope I have in the people of this nation is not in vain. Since I first became involved in discussions, debates, and organizing for racial awareness over thirty years ago, I have held out hope and belief that the United States was a place where we could face the past with courage, find unity in the present, and build a better future for generations to come. Twenty-five years ago, I became a teacher of history because I believed that we could come together and face difficult truths.

The survey report affirms the entire reason I became a teacher. Getting to know my students, working with their parents to set goals and plan the future, and visiting and interacting with their communities showed me that the overwhelming majority of parents want their students to become racially aware, historically informed, and learn to connect and cooperate with those different from them. Despite ill-intentioned messages to the contrary, **teaching, learning, processing, and addressing issues of racial inequality and injustice actually unites people, rather than dividing them.**

As a teacher, the 2021 Colorado Teacher of the Year, having spent a year representing and advocating for the 65,000 teachers in my state, this report inspires me and revitalizes my convictions, as I work toward creating the conditions for racial awareness and healing in our education system. As a manager of aspiring and new teacher programs and supports, I am excited for the moment when this information becomes available to the teachers and communities I support.

This report affirms what so many of us have spent our entire careers advocating for and believing in. Teacher-parent-student collaboration is the norm, not the exception. Parents show up to support their schools and teachers, and teachers work toward a future that is hard to see in this volatile and uncertain moment, when those who would make education a privilege rather than a right would rather that we all turn against each other and give up.

Most importantly, this report is a message to me, to teachers in our schools and those who have left the profession, that we were right, and that we cannot allow a vocal minority to dictate the terms of our democracy.

GERARDO MUÑOZ (he/him/él) manages all programs for aspiring and new teachers in Denver Public Schools. This is his twenty-fifth year working in public education, the first twenty-three years as a middle and high school social studies and Ethnic Studies teacher. Gerardo earned his Bachelor's Degree in History and Latin American Studies from the University of Colorado, and a Master of Arts in Education from the University of Denver. In 2021, he became the first Chicano-identifying individual to serve as Colorado Teacher of the Year. He has been an IRISE (Interdisciplinary Research Institute for the Study of (in)Equality) Visiting Scholar at the University of Denver, a Voices for Honest Education Fellow for the National Network of State Teachers of the Year, and has earned numerous awards and recognitions for his teaching, youth voice advocacy, and community engagement. He is the founder and executive producer for TooDope Productions, an independent media firm that produces the Too Dope Teachers and a Mic Podcast, seeking to "remix the conversation on race, power, and education." He is a third-year PhD student at the University of Denver, and is currently at work on two books.

DEVELOPMENTAL-BEHAVIORAL PEDIATRICIANS



84% of parents were very open or extremely open to helping kids learn about race and racism.

Wow.

As developmental-behavioral pediatricians (DBPs), we have spent the past six years providing education to DBP colleagues, general and subspecialist pediatricians, and other healthcare professionals, on how to talk to children and families about race and racism. To hear that such a high proportion of parents from a national sample want to help kids learn about race and racism speaks to the urgency of this need and supports the crusade that we have undertaken.

Healthcare professionals at our educational workshops and presentations cite the same reasons parents do for not having these discussions—fear of saying the wrong thing, not knowing how to start, not having resources, fear of being perceived as racist. We have taken wide-ranging approaches in our work with healthcare providers—emphasizing self-reflection and tackling implicit bias at the individual level to tackling race-based medicine and applying critical race theory to examine root cause of health disparities at the systems level.

We are struck by recurring themes of color evasiveness in the survey: almost one-third of parents (29%) endorsed “I don’t think my child notices race at this age” and “I am not going to make a big deal out of something [race] that they don’t even notice.” However, children notice physical differences in people during infancy and learn to identify racial categories at 4 years old. Parents endorsed 6 to 7 years old as the appropriate age to start talking about race, which is in sharp contrast with what we recommend for pediatricians—start these conversations with parents during infancy so they are comfortable well before age 6. At the same time, parents identified racism as “a real problem” and expressed responsibility in solving the problem—“It’s our job to teach them to do better and be better.” As parents and developmental-behavioral pediatricians working to dismantle racism, we couldn’t agree more.

Most importantly, this report is a message to me, to teachers in our schools and those who have left the profession, that we were right, and that we cannot allow a vocal minority to dictate the terms of our democracy.

IRENE M. LOE, MD, is an Associate Professor of Pediatrics and developmental-behavioral pediatrician at Stanford University. She serves on the Society for Developmental-Behavioral Pediatrics (SDBP) Board of Directors and is the co-chair of the SDBP Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee with her co-warrior sister, Dr. Adiaha Spinks-Franklin. Together, they are championing the training of pediatricians and other DBP professionals in addressing racism in clinical practice and medical education. In her spare time, she enjoys reading, crafting, and exploring food and neighborhoods in San Francisco with her family.

ADIAHA SPINKS-FRANKLIN, MD, MPH, FAAP is a board certified Developmental-Behavioral Pediatrician, wife, mother, and grandmother who is a life-long anti-oppression/pro-liberation child advocate. She serves on multiple national committees in the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), Society of Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics (SDBP), and the American Board of Pediatrics (ABP).

GAME DESIGN ENTREPRENEUR



Like most millennials, I grew up playing and loving video games. But being a brown muslim female, I felt there was limited representation in the video games industry for people like me. The first time I saw Arabic in a video game, it was in the context of a terrorist plot. When I saw women, they not only did not look like me, but were also often over-sexualized and objectified.

I realized that those who make video games decide on the narrative; so, unless we diversify the pool of people making video games, we cannot expect the content to be inclusive. And hence the ambition to democratize the process of making video games—so that everyone is able to tell their story in a fun and interactive way, irrespective of skills, money, and time.

Now while diversifying the pool of content creators is a step in the right direction, it is only a starting point. Over the past 8 years of leading a global team of graphic designers and game developers, I have realized that even among non-white designers, the comfort level of making white characters is way higher and very few are trained to draw the nuances of brown and black characters. Just because someone is brown does not mean they can draw brown. At our end, we have had to make a very intentional effort to ensure that characters are drawn in a visually representative way (think hair texture, facial features and body types) instead of a lazy change of skin color from the default white avatar.

One of the survey findings that shocked me was that 43% of parents feel their kids are too young to discuss race; and yet the race of characters in kid's content (think black Ariel) is a big point of debate in the current environment. **As a leader in the gaming space, I see this as a massive responsibility not only to diversify the creators of this content, but also to diversify the training materials used to train artists and designers, an area that is often overlooked in the discourse around race and racism.**

I am grateful to the EmbraceRace team for undertaking this research and shedding light on parents' thoughts/feelings about engaging their children in conversations and learning about race and racism. I will absolutely be drawing inspiration from the findings of this survey and foresee the report being an important piece to foster meaningful dialogue about race and racism in the gaming industry.

MARIAM NUSRAT is the Founder of GRID, a tech startup unleashing the power of video games for social change. Their platform Breshna.io, empowers users to create, share and monetize their own educational video games, with no code and at lightning speed; think Canva for video games. The team is backed by strategic investors including [Paris Hilton's 11:11 Media](#), Randi Zuckerberg, Bad Bitch Empire and [TABLE management \(Bill Ackman's family office\)](#). Mariam is a US-based Pakistani entrepreneur, with 7 years in the purposeful video games sector and 12 years of experience in the Edtech space, working at the World Bank across 22 different countries. For this work, she has been recognized on the [Forbes Next 1000 List](#) and is a recipient of the [Clinton Global Initiative University Honor Roll Alumni Award](#). Mariam is on a mission to empower the next 100m people to tell their stories through video games.

FAMILY WELL-BEING EXPERTS



Based on the headlines today, it's easy to think that any conversation about race, racism, and parenting is going to be highly polarized or charged. But EmbraceRace's recent groundbreaking survey of parents across the United States dispels that myth: **Most parents are curious, view racial learning as an important part of parenting that requires immediate action, and want information to help them parent their children to be thoughtful about race.**

As parents, we can harness this inquisitiveness and readiness to deepen our commitment by exploring how our children's racial learning goals align with our parenting sense of purpose. When we think about our child's future, what aspirations do we have for them? To be cultivators of cultures of healing, connection, and belonging for people from all races and ethnicities? What strengths do we hope they will possess and share with the world when they're grown? Are kindness, respect, compassion, humility, love for humanity among those strengths? What are we doing now to help nurture those strengths in our children and help them realize those aspirations?

At the Greater Good Science Center, one of our core beliefs is that our individual and social well-being are intertwined. Our children and family's well-being is bound up with the well-being of people of races and ethnicities different from our own. Our [Bridging Differences initiative](#) gleans insights from social science research over the past several decades to determine under what circumstances people from different groups can better understand and get along with one another. Inspired by this research and trailblazing practice, we share the principles for fostering positive relationships across groups.

The lesson we take from our Bridging Differences work is that it's not just a matter of good intentions, it's actually possible to make connections across race and ethnicity. Through social conditions we can foster and individual skills we can build, we can change the ways we act toward one another to nurture greater collective well-being. There's a real [how](#) to do this and we recently developed a small (and growing) [collection of Bridging Differences practices](#) for parents and caregivers, as well as educators, to support families and communities raise children who are bridge builders across race and ethnicity.

As parents, we don't have to go on this journey alone—nor should we. Racial learning goals are shared by many parents, and we can learn together and from one another about how to work to achieve them. Indeed, pursuing these goals with other parents can provide us the social support we need to bridge the gap between [saying](#) that teaching our kids about race and ethnicity is really important and [taking steps](#) to cultivate in our kids the skills they need to be brave about and begin to build strong connections with others across race and ethnicity.

MARYAM ABDULLAH, Ph.D., is the parenting program director of the Greater Good Science Center at the University of California, Berkeley. She is a developmental psychologist who writes articles for Greater Good and develops practical research-based activities for Greater Good in Action to support the social and emotional well-being of children, parents, and families. Maryam also supports organizations providing parenting education to help raise caring, courageous children and foster a compassionate society.

JASON MARSH is the executive director of UC Berkeley's Greater Good Science Center and the founding editor in chief of the center's award-winning online magazine, Greater Good. He is also the founding producer of the GGSC's online course and podcast—both called The Science of Happiness—and he co-created the center's Bridging Differences Playbook and companion online course.

DR. ALLISON BRISCOE-SMITH currently serves as the Diversity Lead of Student Life at the University of Washington, as the founder and principal of Soft River Consultation and as a Senior Fellow at UC Berkeley's Greater Good Science Center where she focuses on developing and implementing the science of bridging (connecting across our differences).

CHILDREN'S LITERACY SPECIALIST



Helping children and families celebrate their identities and explore the differences of our diverse world through children's books is something Raising a Reader has been committed to since our founding almost 25 years ago. EmbraceRace's findings from their recent National Survey on parents' attitudes towards teaching children about race complement and align with the stories and input Raising a Reader is hearing from our network of over 300 affiliates and partners.

EmbraceRace's National Survey finding that 61% of parents feel that teaching kids about race is very/extremely urgent demonstrates the need for resources to teach kids about race. An additional data point—65% of parents express very or extremely high interest for materials designed to support teaching children about race and racism shows that not only is there a need, but there is also the demand. We have heard anecdotally from our Affiliates and partners about this need and demand, so it is affirming that EmbraceRace's data quantifiably aligns with what we are hearing from the field.

Based on this need and demand, Raising a Reader has focused on building the capacity of our Affiliates, partners and the families they serve with additional resources on how to support conversations on identity, race, and belonging with young children. We are currently piloting a model that provides educators, pediatricians, and families tools and resources on how to use books to discuss identity, race and belonging using the 4 tenets of NAEYC's anti-bias education: identity, diversity, action, and justice. In our pilot, we specifically address several of the beliefs parents shared in EmbraceRace's National Survey:

- Children under 5 are too young to engage conversations about identity and race
- Young children do not notice race
- Parents fear saying the “wrong” thing

EmbraceRace's National Survey is a valuable contribution to the field, offering quantitative findings that underscore that parents and caregivers of young children feel a sense of urgency about having conversations with their children about race and racism and are looking for valuable resources to do so. Raising a Reader is excited to collaborate and partner with EmbraceRace and other organizations so we can take action based on these findings, supporting parents and caregivers in overcoming their fears, engaging in open and honest discussions, and providing resources and programs to enhance their children's understanding of identity, race, and racism.

MICHELLE SIOSON HYMAN As Senior Vice President of Program and Partnerships at Raising a Reader, Michelle is responsible for overseeing program development, growth and impact. Michelle has had a long-standing commitment to child development, both professionally and personally. She has worked within the philanthropic sector and across the public systems that are in place to support the education, health and well-being of young children as Deputy Director, Center for Early Learning at Silicon Valley Community Foundation and program officer for First 5 San Mateo and First 5 Santa Cruz Counties. Michelle has also worked directly alongside children and families a GirlVentures mentor, birth support doula and yoga teacher which has fueled her passion to ensure that family is at the center of both program and public policy decisions.



CONCLUSION

The findings from this late-2022 national survey provide a snapshot of how parents of 0-13-year-old children in the United States feel about supporting their children’s growing understanding of race and racism. **That large majorities of parents are so open to helping children learn about race and want support in doing so has implications for caregivers across a variety of sectors, including educators, media creators, healthcare practitioners, policymakers, and family-serving organizations.**

These findings do not speak to the specific ideas parents want their children to learn about race, nor do they touch on parents’ views on the role of schools in educating children about race and racism. Yet they reveal widespread openness and interest among parents, across racial backgrounds and even, to some degree, across the political spectrum, in helping their children learn about race and racism. Thus, the findings offer a counternarrative to political rhetoric positioning “parents’ rights” in direct opposition to open and honest teaching and learning about race. In reality, there is significant desire among parents for support in guiding children toward racial literacy.

Still, this survey highlights the gap between parents’ attitudes and their actual practice with their children, suggesting that additional support is needed to help align parents’ behaviors with their beliefs. Insights from the survey suggest several directions for work aiming to increase parents’ engagement with children around race, including:

- **The need to continue to raise public awareness about the early development of children’s noticing racial differences, making meaning of racialized patterns in the world around them, and developing racial biases.** Despite their openness, parents commonly believe that their children are “too young” to notice race or learn about it. Yet developmental science research is clear that the roots of children’s racial learning begin to grow within the first years of life. Popularizing the idea that children’s racial literacy is a key domain of their early development may motivate more parents to “walk the walk” earlier in their children’s lives.

- **The need to share with parents and caregivers developmentally appropriate ways of engaging children in racial learning, starting early and continuing as they grow.** Messaging has largely focused on “talking” to children about race, and while back-and-forth conversations are critical, there are many other actions parents can take, even with preverbal babies and toddlers. Ensuring there is racial diversity among children’s toys and pointing out and naming racial differences when sharing picture books are two such strategies. Furthermore, there is an opportunity to highlight ways to learn about race that spark joy, pride, fun, and family closeness—countering the notion that learning about race must always be a heavy, emotionally taxing experience.
- **The need to support parents and caregivers across different racial backgrounds.** Our findings clearly show high interest in supportive resources and programs among White parents and those from diverse communities of color. Over the past few years, since the “racial reckoning” of 2020, awareness of the need to support families in raising anti-racist White children has grown. Though we see this as a positive development, we strongly believe that the needs of families of color must be prioritized as well. We must continue to create and disseminate resources and create community spaces that explicitly center the experiences of children of color.
- **The need for additional research to inform practice with caregivers and children.** Funding streams and partnerships are needed to accelerate research on resources and programs that can increase caregivers’ readiness to engage their children on race, as well as evidence-based tools and strategies that caregivers can use to engage effectively with their children.

Finally, these findings raise additional questions: What are parents’ motivations and goals for engaging their children on race? How do those motivations and goals differ by parents’ and children’s racial identities, children’s ages, and political orientation? What helps move caregivers to take action? How can communication and collaboration between families and schools mutually increase capacity for teaching and learning about race? What roles can actors in diverse sectors (e.g., education, media, healthcare, philanthropy, and research) play in building a robust field of children’s racial literacy?

At EmbraceRace, we will continue to dig deeper into understanding the particular types of resources and community spaces that caregivers believe will be most supportive to them in engaging children around race and racism. We will continue to bring together multi-sectoral coalitions to respond to the needs caregivers are identifying. We will continue our efforts to raise a generation of children who are thoughtful, informed, and brave about race, with the knowledge that millions of parents share this aspiration.

Survey Methodology



15-minute
online
questionnaire



N=1,000
national
sample



Fielded from
Nov. 22 -
Dec. 5, 2022

Sample

In order to be eligible to participate in the survey, respondents had to be at least 18 years old and be the parent of at least one child between 0-13 years old.

Quotas set so that the sample was representative (within +/- 5% of quotas) of the U.S. parent population regarding:

- age
- gender
- race/ethnicity
- region

Target and actual percentages are presented in tables to the right.

Most parents in the sample shared their race/ethnicity with their children (see table below).

Age Range	Target %	Actual %
18-35	44	50.9
36-45	45	40.7
46+	11	8.4

Gender	Target %	Actual %
Female	54	57.7
Male	46	41.7
Nonbinary	-	0.5

Race/Ethnicity	Target %	Actual %
Black	13	8.9
Asian	7	6.9
White	73	65.1
Hispanic/Latine	19	12.6
Native/Indigenous	-	1.1
Multiracial	-	5.3

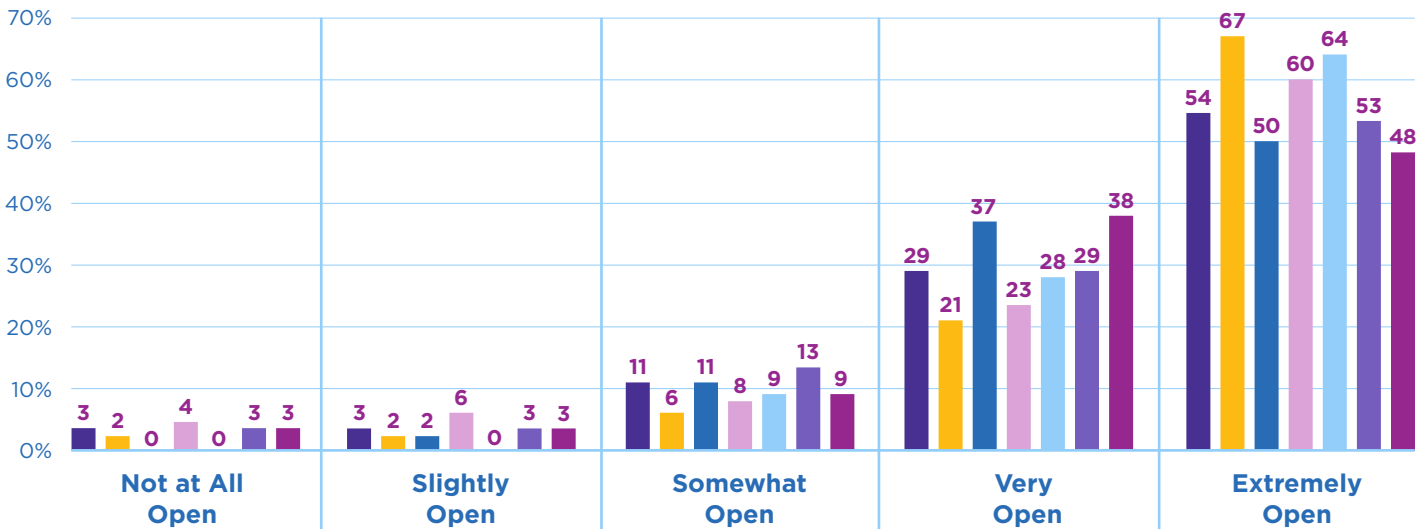
Region	Target %	Actual %
West	19.5	16.4
Midwest	20.6	23.3
Southeast	25.8	28
Southwest	12.8	11.5
Northeast	21.4	20.8

PARENT RACE	Have AAPI kids	Have Black kids	Have Latine kids	Have Multiracial kids	Have Native kids	Have White kids
AAPI (n=69)	60	2	3	3	0	5
Black (n=89)	4	83	6	7	4	4
Latine (n=126)	2	4	112	6	1	37
Multiracial (n=53)	10	15	19	21	11	19
Native (n=11)	0	0	1	0	11	3
White (n=649)	15	23	31	21	12	621

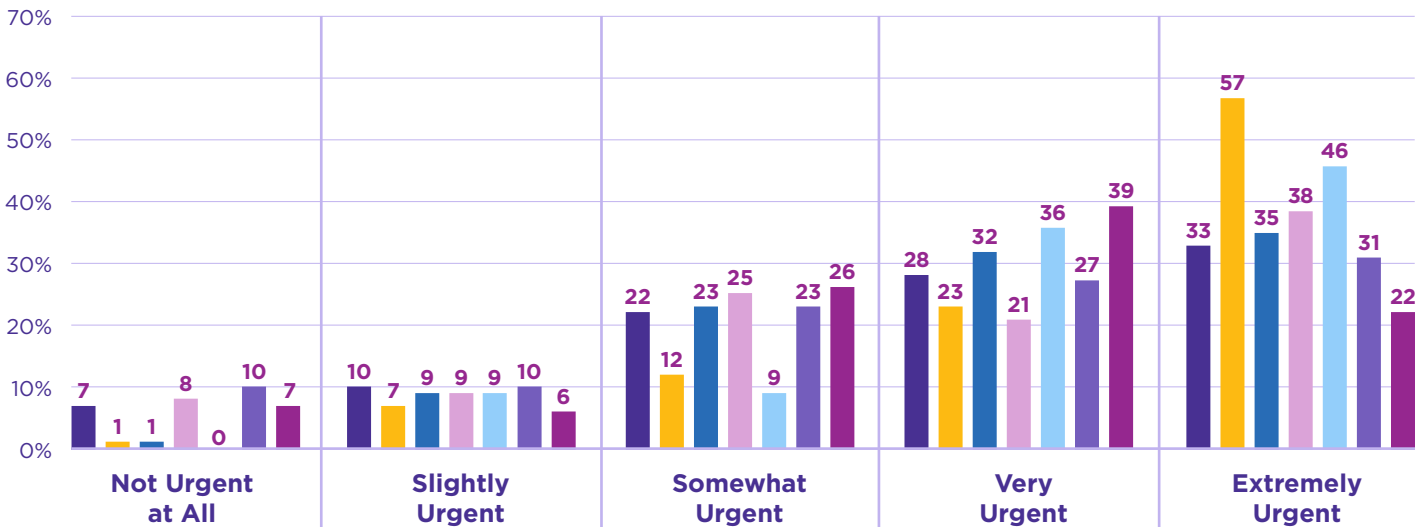
Additional Data



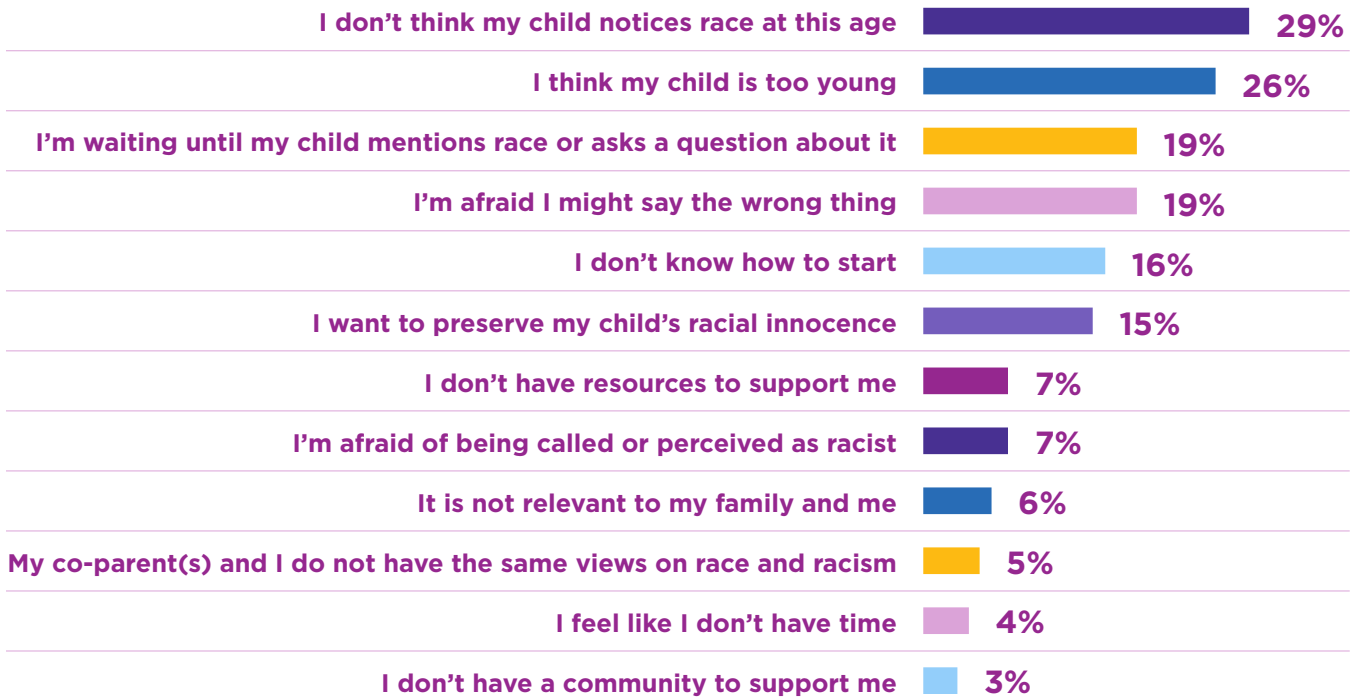
How open are you to helping your child(ren) ages 0-13 learn about race and racism? (Page 11)



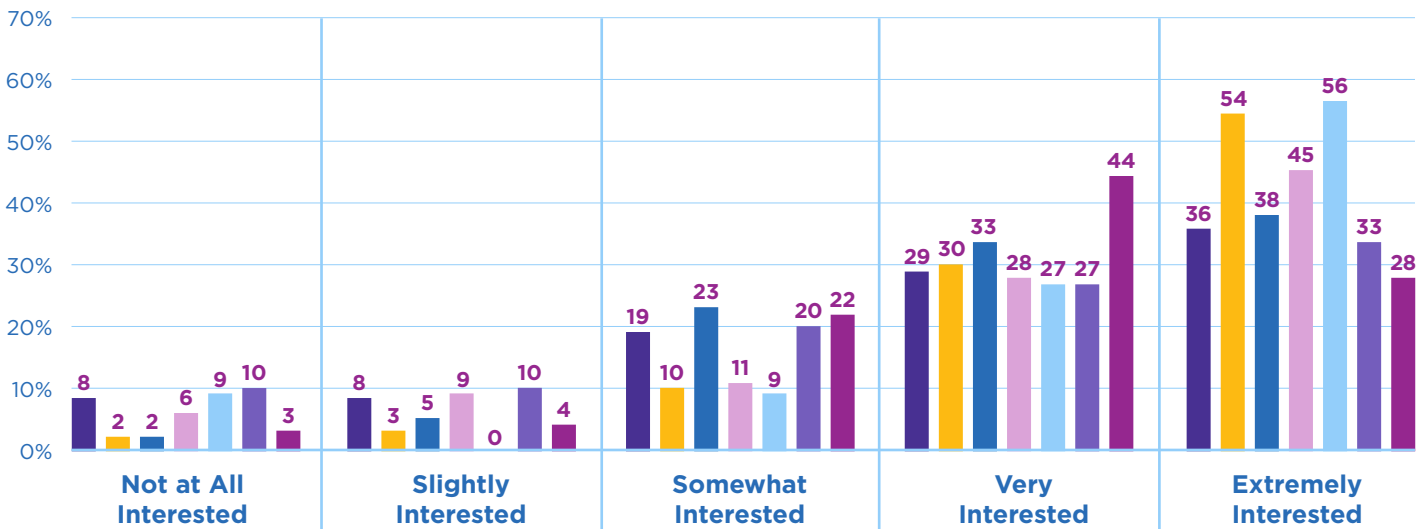
How urgent is it to teach children about race in light of what's happening in the U.S. today? (Page 14)



Which of the following, if any, might prevent you from engaging with your children in discussions around race and racism? (Page 18)



How interested are you in resources and programs designed to support you in helping any of your children aged 0-13 years old learn about race and racism? (Page 21)



Total (n=1000)
 Latine (n= 126)
 Native (n= 11)
 Asian American Pacific Islander (n= 69)

Black (n= 89)
 Multiracial (n= 53)
 White (n=649)

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EmbraceRace is a national nonprofit that supports parents, guardians, educators, and other caregivers working to raise children who are thoughtful, informed and brave about race so that multiracial democracy in the United States can thrive. We identify, organize, and create the tools, resources, discussion spaces, and networks needed to nurture resilience in children of color, nurture inclusive, empathetic children of all stripes, raise kids who think critically about race, and support a movement of kid and adult racial justice advocates for all children. Founded in 2016, *EmbraceRace* is now well-established as a national leader in the space of children's racial learning and socialization.

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