

How to Talk to Kids About Microaggressions

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Microaggressions are the “everyday slights, indignities and insults committed against marginalized groups because of their membership in those groups” (Derald Wing Sue). Sadly, children are no strangers to microaggressions. They occur every day and can cause significant harm. So, what can adults do when we become aware that our children have either committed or been subjected to microaggressions? Here are some suggestions.

1. Breathe.
2. Ask. Don't Tell.
3. Cultivate Reflection and Empathy.
4. Take Action.
5. Offer Support.

1. Breathe!

It's easy to respond with knee jerk reactions when we learn that our child has possibly been harmed or caused harm. In situations like this, strong emotions abound; they are normal and to be expected. However, if left untethered, they can get in the way of finding optimal solutions to difficult problems. So, first and foremost, breathe! Secure your metaphorical oxygen mask first before helping your child.

2. Ask. Don't Tell.

When our kids are involved in situations involving harm, we might feel compelled to take immediate action, including telling them what they should do. This, however, robs our kids of an important opportunity to learn and grow so that they can resist microaggressions and prevent them from happening again. So, slow down and frame the conversation in a manner likely to optimize your child's learning and growth. Instead of **telling** them what to do, think or feel, start off by **asking** open ended questions such as, “What happened?” “How did that happen?” “Why do you think that happened?”

3. Cultivate Reflection and Empathy.

Once we hear the child's version of what happened, it's important to give them the opportunity to reflect. Even toddlers are capable of reflecting, which is all about being curious. So, give your child the chance to use and develop this important life skill. Again, ask open ended questions such as “Why do you think

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[Why & How to Talk to Kids about Microaggressions](#)



you did/said that?” or “Why do you think the other kid did/said that to you?” “How did/do you feel?”
“How do you think they felt/feel?”

4. Take Action.

Reflection and empathy are great. However, action is also needed. As such, help your child brainstorm ways to tackle microaggressions head-on. If your child is the one who has caused harm, even unintentionally, help them take responsibility. This might mean offering a sincere apology to the child who was subjected to the microaggression. If your child is the one who was harmed, help them speak up so that their experience is affirmed and validated. Dealing effectively with microaggressions means helping our kids develop capacity and skills for empowerment and accountability. If we don't acknowledge or take responsibility for the harm committed, then true repair, healing, and justice are not possible.

Once we hear the child's version of what happened, it's important to give them the opportunity to reflect. Ask open ended questions such as “Why do you think you did/said that?” or “Why do you think the other kid did/said that to you?”



5. Offer Support

Encouraging our kids to tackle microaggressions head-on is a big ask, especially when most of us adults struggle with it! However, in order to raise a thoughtful, informed, and brave generation, we must help our kids develop critical skills of empathy, accountability, and empowerment as early as possible. The good news is that kids of all ages are more than capable of doing this! They just need the right support and opportunity. So, offer support throughout this process. Be their advocates, especially in cases where responsibility is unacknowledged or denied by those who have caused harm. Support can also be offered as education. Teach them about microaggressions – what they are, how and why they exist, how we can unknowingly commit them, why we must take action against them, and how we can be brave together to learn, grow, and heal.

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