

## INCLUSIVE AND EMPATHETIC

# 3 Powerful Ways to Enrich Your Child's Life with Racial and Ethnic Diversity



Research tells us that the most powerful way to reduce prejudice and bias is through direct experience with others from different backgrounds. This experience helps nurture inclusivity and appreciation for diverse perspectives. Research also shows us that adapting to different cultures and encountering people who challenge stereotypes may help us become more flexible problem-solvers and creative thinkers. Some of the most important anti-racism work we can do as caregivers is to enrich children's lives with racial and ethnic diversity – here's how.

1. Choose diverse communities.
2. Expand your friend groups.
3. Immerse children in diverse images and stories.

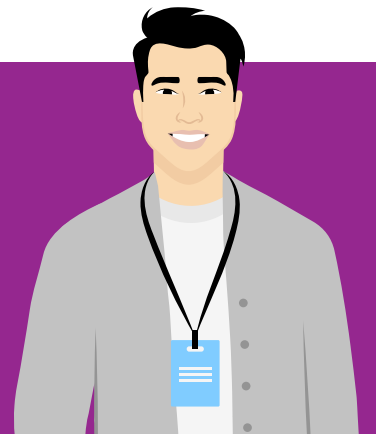
## 1. Choose diverse communities.

Despite entrenched patterns of racial segregation, our individual decisions collectively have the power to create diverse environments for ourselves and our children.

- Prioritize neighborhood diversity in choosing a home. Even though Americans are more mobile and growing more diverse than ever before, we still tend to live in neighborhoods that are racially segregated. In particular, White Americans, even those who express a preference for integrated neighborhoods in principle, typically gravitate toward "White" neighborhoods in practice. This [interactive demonstration](#) shows us how residential segregation decreases when individuals make choices based on preferences for diverse neighbors. Diverse communities allow children to see what the 'real world' looks like, to learn about cultures beyond their own, and to make friends across racial lines (more on that below). Diversity won't just come to us – we have to seek it out and make choices to create it. If you do happen to live in a part of the U.S. where racial and ethnic diversity is limited, consider other ways to introduce diversity into children's lives – check out the other suggestions in this guide!

- Really prioritize diversity in choosing a school for your child. As far as racial segregation is driven by individual families' choices, it is a phenomenon largely driven by the choices of White families, and anti-Blackness and anti-Brownness among all fams also plays a role. Many families say they value diversity, but then end up making decisions based on other factors. Push beyond easy narratives about 'good schools' and 'bad schools,' based on metrics like test scores, that often coincide with school funding and disparage schools serving many students of color. Consider what really makes a good education, and what we want to teach children about equal opportunity. For deep dives into this issue, check out the [School Colors](#) podcast from Brooklyn Deep and the [Nice White Parents podcast](#) from the New York Times. Again, if diversity in your area is very limited, consider how else you can bring diverse experiences and cultures into your child's life.
- Support policies that create inclusive and diverse communities as well. Speak out and organize to support diversity, equity, inclusion, [integration](#), and belonging efforts in schools. Welcome affordable housing, immigrants, and refugees to your neighborhood.

When you know better, do better — as your circumstances allow. While you may not engage in all of these practices consistently, if we hold ourselves accountable to routinely doing what we can, our kids, families, and communities will all do better.



## 2. Expand your friend groups.

We're talking about both adults' and kids' social circles.

- Diversify your circle of friends. Kids of all ages notice who adults interact with, and how. Do a mental audit of your relationships. Who do you socialize with? Who are you close to? Who do you trust? Who do you love? Who do you hug? Recognize any tendency to gravitate toward people who share your background and/or experiences and push beyond that comfort zone. Look for authentic ways to connect with people across racial lines by identifying common interests and values. Building close and authentic relationships takes time and can't be manufactured. It might take some effort, but it's worth it!
- Encourage children to make friends with others from different backgrounds. As caregivers and educators, we have a huge influence on young children's opportunities for social connection. If those opportunities aren't emerging organically, make an effort to connect with diverse families by researching playgroups, parent organizations, and cultural events near you. As an educator, thoughtfully create opportunities for students of different backgrounds to engage in meaningful interactions. Helping kids build authentic relationships with a racially diverse set of people will require intention, commitment, and open heartedness. Again, it's worth it!

- With older kids, we can ask them about their friendships. How close do they feel to particular friends? How much do kids at their school tend to cluster together by racial groups? What do they think about that? What new perspectives does their current friend group offer them?
- Living in a homogeneous, mono-racial community? Get creative with programs that connect people across geography and culture. Educators can check out [Empatico](#) to connect with other classrooms around the world.
- As you help create opportunities for kids to build authentic interracial connections, also be mindful that as all kids move through the process of racial identity development, they may experience a stage in which they wish to be surrounded by people who share their same skin color. This may mean different things for kids of color vs. White kids, given the different impact that racism has on those who are marginalized vs. privileged by it. If/when this happens, help kids grow their self-awareness of being in this stage by asking and answering questions, by maintaining open lines of communication, and by reflecting on and sharing your own journey of being in this stage and what followed this stage for you.

Some of us live in regions where racial and ethnic diversity is limited. If that's you, think creatively about how to connect across racial lines with others in different places, and find other ways to include authentic representations of diverse people in your child's daily life.



### 3. Immerse children in diverse images and stories.

- Read #ownvoices books, which feature characters from marginalized groups written by members of those groups. Engaging kids with [books](#) that offer diverse and authentic racial and cultural representations and stories sends the message that you value diversity and opens up space to have great discussions about race and difference. Remember that reading the books is not enough; the key is engaging in conversation with kids about characters, images, and emotions, explicitly noting connections to race.
- Create enriching home and classroom environments for children that include representations of different racial and cultural backgrounds (while keeping in mind the difference between [cultural appreciation and appropriation](#)). In addition to the bookshelf, the toys, decorations, and media that make up children's worlds can inspire an appreciation for human diversity and cultural difference. For example, have activities at school that celebrate different holidays, attend a friend's family/cultural event (e.g., Lunar New Year celebration at a friend's house, Kwanzaa, etc.) Giving kids opportunities to "experience" other people's culture interactively and viscerally can be powerful.

- Don't be afraid to ask friends and family to prioritize diversity when giving gifts to your children (for example, think dolls and art supplies that reflect a wide variety of skin tones or clothing style/attire!).
- Make a routine of bringing children to museums and cultural events that reflect different cultures – especially those that emphasize the present-day, lived experience of people from different backgrounds!

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