

CONVERSATION TIPS

What if children bring up racism, or how people with different skin colors are sometimes treated differently?

You can tell them – that’s absolutely right! In many cultures, including the United States, people with darker skin are often not treated fairly. Others might say hurtful things to them or hurt their bodies, and they are often denied chances to get good jobs and houses, to make money, and to live healthy lives—just because of their skin color. That’s not fair at all! That unfairness and harm is what we call racism. Ask children how that makes them feel, and what they think we can do about it. For more tips on discussing racial injustice with children and supporting their activism, check out the EmbraceRace action guides, "[8 Tips for Talking to Your Child about Racial Injustice](#)" and "[7 Ways to Support the Young Activists in Your Life](#)." If you would like to extend the conversation about systemic racism, please check out [this video](#) for ideas and support.

What if children say it's racist to talk about skin color or "how brown" someone is?

Over time, children start to pick up on the anxieties that many adults have about talking about race. They begin to internalize the idea that race is a 'taboo topic' and that mentioning race is racist. Instead, we can assure children that noticing and naming skin color and race is part of how we can honor and celebrate all of our differences human beings. While it's not respectful to tell someone "how Black" or "how White" they are, it is not racist to name differences in skin tone (e.g., darker and lighter brown) and talk about racial identity — it's just honest!

What is the difference between race and ethnicity?

Children may bring up words related to ethnicity, like "Mexican American" or "Korean American" or "Italian American" to identify themselves racially. Race and ethnicity (and nationality) are related, but they are not exactly the same. Racial categories tend to be very broad, while ethnicities are more specific. For example, someone who is African American and someone who immigrated recently from Haiti might both identify as "Black." We also group many different Asian ethnicities under the "Asian American" racial category, including East Asian ethnicities like Chinese, Japanese, and Korean, and South Asian ethnicities like Indian or Pakistani. Similarly, people who identify racially as "White" might have Italian, Irish, German, Polish, or other ethnicities. Most people have multiple ethnicities, and some people have multiple races. It is ok to use both race terms and ethnicity terms to identify yourself!

What if children ask “Didn't we all come from Africa?”

Children may have heard that all humans originally came from the continent of Africa. That's right! Our first ancestors all lived in Africa and had darker skin. Over a long, long, LONG time, some people moved around the world and their bodies changed to adapt to those different environments.