

CONVERSATIONS
THAT CREATE
CHANGE:
TALKING TO KIDS
ABOUT INJUSTICE

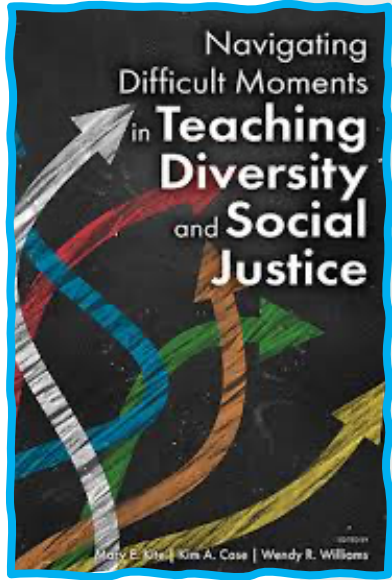
DR. SALENA BRODY

Center for Children & Families Talk | February 26th, 2021

1

ABOUT ME

- Background and training
- 20+ years experience navigating difficult conversations in the classroom
- Community work focused on anti-racism and other prejudice reduction initiatives
 - Schools
 - Justice system
 - Trainings



2

ABOUT THIS TALK

GOAL: To help children make sense of inequality, to give them the language and skills necessary to engage and thrive in diverse environments

- Children's awareness of race as they develop
- Parent/child conversations about race within the home
- Race-focused curricula at school
- Real world interventions aimed at reducing bias

Land acknowledgment: I acknowledge that we, UT Dallas, are on the sacred traditional land of the indigenous people of the Caddo Nation.

The content in this presentation reflects the author's professional expertise and does not necessarily reflect any official policy or position of The University of Texas at Dallas.

3

A GOOD RETURN ON INVESTMENT!

Children who learn the skills to talk about race and ethnic heritage constructively show **positive intergroup outcomes:**

- Develop empathy for others (Aboud et al., 2012)
- Learn new perspectives (Bigler & Wright, 2014)
- Understand their own identity better (Phinney, 1990)
- Show less racial bias (Aboud & Doyle, 1996)

4

Children's awareness	Parent/child conversations	Race-focused curriculum	Real world interventions
<h2>TAKE YOUR BEST GUESS!</h2> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• At what age do you think that humans first prefer faces from particular racial groups? _____• At what age do you think that humans can categorize faces based on race? _____• At what age do humans first start associating perceived low-status racial groups with negative traits? _____• At what age do you think humans first start associating particular racial groups with status (e.g., social status, wealth, power, etc.)? _____			

5

Children's awareness	Parent/child conversations	Race-focused curriculum	Real world interventions
<h2>WHEN DO CHILDREN NOTICE RACE?</h2> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 3 month old infants notice differences<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Evidence for 3 month old babies showing a visual preference for own-race faces (Bar-Haim, Ziv, Lamy, & Hodes, 2006)• By 9 months, they are really skilled at recognizing own-race faces			

6

Children's awareness	Parent/child conversations	Race-focused curriculum	Real world interventions
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WHEN DOES RACE CONSCIOUSNESS DEVELOP?

- **By age 3**, U.S. children perceive some racial groups as low status and pair them with negative traits (Dunham, Chen, & Banaji, 2013)
- **By age 4**, children reflect an adult understanding of racial status & associate whiteness with high status markers like wealth (Olson, Shutts, Kinzler, & Weisman, 2012)
- **By age 5**, children notice that racial groups are treated differently and that there is a social hierarchy (Baron & Banaji, 2009)
 - By this point, some children have internalized group status

7

Children's awareness	Parent/child conversations	Race-focused curriculum	Real world interventions
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{Exchange between two white American 4 year olds and an Asian American 3 year old at a multiracial preschool}

{Renee has her hands on her hips and frowns at Lingmai}

“No, no. You can’t pull this wagon. Only white Americans can pull this wagon.”

{Lingmai tries again to lift the handle of the wagon} Renee again insists that only **“white Americans”** are permitted to do this task.

(excerpt from sociologist Van Ausdale’s *The First R: How Children Learn Race and Racism* featured in *Raising White Kids* by Jennifer Harvey)

Where did Renee get this racist idea?

8

Children's awareness
Parent/child conversations
Race-focused curriculum
Real world interventions

Racism is the **"smog in the air"**
– Dr. Beverly Tatum

The conversations we **are** having with children are as important as the conversations we **aren't** having.

Age group	% of parents reporting they discuss race sometimes / often
3– 5 year olds	30%
6 – 9 year olds	41%
10 – 12 year olds	40%

(Kotler, Haider, & Levine, 2019)

9

Children's awareness
Parent/child conversations
Race-focused curriculum
Real world interventions

EXPERIMENTAL WORK

(Vittrup & Holden, 2011)

Response	Pretest (%)	Posttest (%)
Yes	56%	81%
No	4%	0%
Don't Know	40%	19%

Comparatively, 94% of children said their parents liked White people, and 6% said "No."

Fig. 3. Discussion group children's reports of whether their parents like Black people, before (pretest) and after (posttest) the intervention.

10

Children's awareness	Parent/child conversations	Race-focused curriculum	Real world interventions
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PARENTS UNDERESTIMATE KIDS!

Parents **delay conversations about race** because they underestimate what kids are capable of processing.
(Sullivan, Wilton, & Apfelbaum, 2021)

Parental sense of what is “developmentally appropriate” is as much as 4.5 years later than developmental averages

11

Children's awareness	Parent/child conversations	Race-focused curriculum	Real world interventions
----------------------	-----------------------------------	-------------------------	--------------------------

RACE TALK & BLACK PARENTS

“As an African American woman with five brothers my parents had to pull us to the side and give us “the talk.” The talk is how we are to behave when we are pulled over by a police officer ... I always wonder ... did other races have this talk with their kids?”

- “Joy,” a Psychology of Prejudice student

12

Children's awareness	Parent/child conversations	Race-focused curriculum	Real world interventions
----------------------	----------------------------	-------------------------	--------------------------

RACE TALK & BLACK PARENTS

- Parents of color practice **race-conscious parenting**, valuing culture, traditions, achievements, and history (Allen, 2016)
 - Black parents explicitly talk to their children about interactions with police and racial violence
- Parents of color tend to see race conversations as a **protective practice for living in a world that devalues those who are not white** (Allen, 2016, Winkler, 2012)

“The Talk”

- Where to keep hands
- Tone and manner of speech
- Posture

13

Children's awareness	Parent/child conversations	Race-focused curriculum	Real world interventions
----------------------	----------------------------	-------------------------	--------------------------

RACE TALK & WHITE PARENTS

White American parents tend to prefer a **“colorblind”** approach and/or avoid race-specific talk with their kids (Apfelbaum, Sommers, & Norton, 2012)

Colorblind ideology: Ignore group differences to achieve group harmony; focus on universal human experiences

14

Children's awareness	Parent/child conversations	Race-focused curriculum	Real world interventions
----------------------	----------------------------	-------------------------	--------------------------

RACE TALK & WHITE PARENTS

“Parenting during Ferguson: Making sense of white parents’ silence”
(Underhill, 2018)

- Most of the white, middle class parents did not talk to their kids about racism – even when the news was saturated with stories of police brutality and racial tension
 - Why? → Protect their kids / keep a worry-free childhood

15

Children's awareness	Parent/child conversations	Race-focused curriculum	Real world interventions
----------------------	----------------------------	-------------------------	--------------------------

RACE TALK & WHITE PARENTS

Parent of young children: “I prefer to keep my child in a little bubble”

Parent of 4 & 7yo: “My sons get very scared of things. I’m still trying to shelter them both. I don’t want them to have bad dreams. I want to keep them kids as long as I can. The only thing they should worry about is going outside and playing.”

Parent of pre-teens: I don’t want my kids “worrying about things they don’t have to worry about”

Parent of four: Did not speak with her children about racial protests in Ferguson because she did not like to “foster the negative.” She and seven other parents pursued a “no-news” policy in their household and car.

16

Children's awareness
Parent/child conversations
Race-focused curriculum
Real world interventions

RACE TALK & WHITE PARENTS

A response to Joy's question...

Penelope, a white mother of three white sons explains:

“I think there’s a lot of anger there that I couldn’t even begin to understand. When I think about the conversations black parents have to have with their sons, you know – ‘this is how you need to behave with the police.’ I know I will never have to do that. So I don’t know how I would address Ferguson.”

17

Children's awareness
Parent/child conversations
Race-focused curriculum
Real world interventions

RACE-FOCUSED CURRICULUM

Despite offering training, schools do not provide strong guidance in these conversations. Most teachers report that their school leadership neither encourages nor discourages them from discussing the various identities in their classrooms.

Topic	Encourage a Lot or a Little	Neither Encourage or Discourage	Discourage a Little or a Lot
Race and Ethnicity	27%	67%	5%
Country of Origin	23%	74%	2%
Family Make-up	20%	74%	4%
Religion	17%	60%	21%
Gender	14%	80%	5%
Social Class	8%	79%	11%

Q: Does your school's leadership encourage, discourage, or neither encourage nor discourage you from discussing each of the following with children in your class?

(Kotler, Haider, & Levine, 2019)

18

Children's awareness	Parent/child conversations	Race-focused curriculum	Real world interventions
----------------------	----------------------------	--------------------------------	--------------------------

RACE-FOCUSED CURRICULUM

NEWS > EDUCATION

Judge halts Carroll ISD's diversity plan after opponents win temporary restraining order

The interim superintendent of the Southlake district says the move aims to 'derail this important work'

19

Children's awareness	Parent/child conversations	Race-focused curriculum	Real world interventions
----------------------	----------------------------	--------------------------------	--------------------------

RACE-FOCUSED CURRICULUM

“Content Analysis of Textbooks via Natural Language Processing: Findings on Gender, Race, and Ethnicity in Texas U.S. History Textbooks”
(Lucy, Demszky, Bromley, & Jurafsky, 2020)

- Analyzed 15 top U.S. History Textbooks used in Texas public schools using Natural Language Processing (NLP) methods & found:
 - Most common historical figures are White men
 - Latinx people rarely mentioned
 - Language about Black people associated with low agency, low power
 - Women discussed in the context of domestic activities
 - Conservative counties tend to adopt textbooks with lower representation of women and Black people

20

Children's awareness	Parent/child conversations	Race-focused curriculum	Real world interventions
----------------------	----------------------------	-------------------------	--------------------------

INTERVENTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Can improving adults' scientific literacy increase their willingness to talk to children about race?

YES!

HOW DID YOU DO?

- At what age do you think that humans first prefer faces from particular racial groups? **3 months**
- At what age do you think that humans can categorize faces based on race? **9 months**
- At what age do humans first start associating perceived low-status racial groups with negative traits? **36 months**
- At what age do you think humans first start associating particular racial groups with status (e.g., social status, wealth, power, etc.)? **47 months**

21

Children's awareness	Parent/child conversations	Race-focused curriculum	Real world interventions
----------------------	----------------------------	-------------------------	--------------------------

INTERVENTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Increase parental scientific literacy**
- **Employ race-conscious parenting**
 - Continuous intervention
 - White racial socialization
 - Acknowledgment that identities shape experiences & that racism and other forms of injustice are real
 - Allow children to notice difference and use an opportunity to guide and normalize race conscious conversations
 - Not all race talk is racism talk!
- **Get involved in your school district's (and state's) discussions on diversity, equity, and inclusion**
 - Ask questions about representation in textbooks
 - Supplement curriculum at home

22

Children's awareness

Parent/child
conversationsRace-focused
curriculumReal world
interventions

INTERVENTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Intergroup contact**
 - Reflect on the diversity of your own friend groups and your children's friend groups
- **Extended contact effects**
 - Television, books, and current events offer opportunities for discussion

23

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24

Children's awareness

Parent/child
conversationsRace-focused
curriculumReal world
interventions

MANY THANKS

➤ The Social Justice League

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Mia Sustek | Minnie Froese | Shalini Patibandla | Tanner Hausman

- Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, Anti-racism (IDEA) group & all UTD colleagues / friends / scholars committed to hard conversations and meaningful change
- Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues
- ...and all those committed to creating an anti-racist world