



Addressing Race and Racism in the Early School Years

A Guide for Educators



Smooth Sailing Study



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Introduction

Racism, including prejudice and discrimination based on race, is deeply ingrained in our society, including our school system. There are consistent achievement gaps between Black and Latinx students and White students. Other disparities are the result of standardized tests that have a history of bias against Black and Latinx students (e.g., IQ tests); and punishment practices that disproportionately affect Black students¹⁻⁴. These disparities in schools are evident as early as pre-kindergarten (PK)⁵. Despite this data, there are many who believe that teachers in early school grades should not talk about race and racism in their classrooms because young children are “colorblind,” or in other words, they do not see differences in skin tone and appearance. However, this is a misconception, as children have an initial awareness of differences in physical attributes (e.g., skin color) from six months of age and have demonstrated understanding and experiences of racism as early as second grade⁶⁻⁹. Children in elementary school are experiencing racism, or at the very least, conceptualizing ideas about race, stereotypes, and prejudices.

Latinx: We use the term “Latinx” in order to be gender inclusive when referring to persons of Latin American descent, traditionally referred to as Latino or Latina.

Prejudice vs. Discrimination

A prejudice refers to an attitude or judgment about another person or group that is not founded in reason or experience. Discrimination refers to unjust actions and behaviors that are based on that prejudice (e.g., racial slur, differential treatment based on race).

Racism

Racism refers to prejudice that is held by a person with social and institutional power and privilege. In this sense, racism operates to maintain a system of advantage based on skin color. For more about defining racism, see recent advocacy for change from [Kennedy Mitchum](#) and [John McWhorter](#)

Did You Know...

Bias in School Discipline Starts as Early as Preschool?

Many people, including education professionals, are unaware of the practice of school suspension or expulsion for children in early childhood settings, thus preventing educational access ¹⁰.

The use of class exclusion (dismissal, suspension or expulsion) is not equitable. The U.S. Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights (2014) reported that Black children make up only 18% of preschool enrollment, but they comprise 48% of those children suspended more than once during the year ¹¹.

Some of the explanations for these high rates of school suspension or expulsion include biased disciplinary policies, inadequate training for teachers in positive behavioral supports, or teacher racial biases or perceptions. Teacher workplace stress is also highly related to school expulsion. Stressed teachers, and teachers who might also be unaware of their own biases, tend to expel children, particularly those of color ¹²⁻¹³.

The take-away here is that, nationally, boys and those of color are dismissed from early childhood settings at alarmingly high rates ¹⁴. This higher expulsion/dismissal rate is a larger reflection of bias facing Children of Color that is occurring all the time (e.g., harsher day-to-day discipline, more severe judgments of behavior).

People of Color (POC): We use the term POC or “of Color” to refer to individuals who identify with racial or ethnic backgrounds that are not White.

Additional Resources

- “Point of Entry: The Preschool to Prison Pipeline” by Maryam Adamu and Lauren Hogan (Center for American Progress, 2015)
- “Out of School Suspensions and Expulsions” (American Academy of Pediatrics Policy Statement, 2013)
- What’s Behind Preschool Expulsion? Briefing Highlights (Zero to Three, 2015)
- “Implementing Policies to Reduce the Likelihood of Preschool Expulsion” by Walter S. Gilliam (Foundation for Child Development Policy Series Brief Series, 2008)

The Challenges and Importance of Change

Race and racism are difficult topics for elementary teachers to discuss with their students, as well as with their parents; as a result, these conversations and questions are often avoided. There may be several reasons for this, including the fear or hesitation about saying something wrong and a lack of understanding of the social construct of race and systemic racism ¹⁵. For Teachers of Color, who are often expected to shoulder a disproportionate burden in educating students and/or other adults about race, talking about race can feel painful, undervalued, and/or taxing ¹⁶⁻¹⁷. For teachers who are White, race and racial issues may not be thought about frequently or may feel taboo or off-limits ¹⁵. They may be afraid they won't say the right thing and that a discussion will invite uncomfortable questions to which they might not have the answers.

However, research suggests that children **are** noticing and experiencing racism, and developing their own ideas about how differences between us affect how we treat one another. **By ignoring race, racial differences, and racism, or creating an environment that shuts down these conversations, we as teachers are inadvertently sending the message that talking about these topics is bad or unimportant, thus leaving children to develop their own assumptions and potential prejudices** ^{9, 18}. Although talking about these difficult topics can be challenging, uncomfortable, ambiguous, and even emotionally painful, it is necessary to foster critical awareness and change in your classroom ¹⁹. This guide is meant to encourage self reflection and help you to create a safe space to discuss, learn, and question concepts of race and racism, celebrate difference, and build an inclusive, accepting community that motivates children to challenge the racial discrimination and prejudice that is so prevalent in their society and world.

Goals

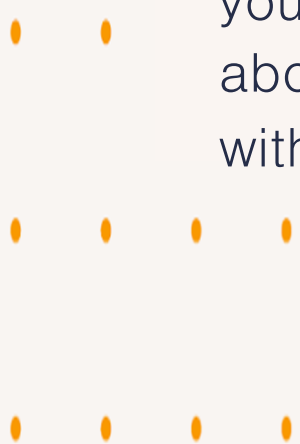
There is an overwhelming number of resources available to teachers on the topic of talking to children about race and racial issues. **The goal of this resource guide is to synthesize existing information, highlighting key concepts, resources, and practical strategies in an accessible format for educators.** The guide is tailored to educators of elementary (PK–5) students, including strategies and adaptations for the youngest of students, in pre–K and early childhood settings (K–2).

Audience

This guide is intended for elementary educators of all racial backgrounds and identities who teach students of all backgrounds and identities. Addressing race and racism with your students is important regardless of your own racial identity or your students'. Whether you are an Educator of Color or a White educator approaching this guide from an ally, accomplice, or advocate perspective, we hope that you will find this guide beneficial and helpful in providing tools and strategies to promote an anti–racist, inclusive classroom community.

Levels of Support

If you are unsure or apprehensive about gaining institutional or administrative support for building an anti–racist classroom, consider first speaking with trusted colleagues (e.g., teachers)²¹. Together, you may have a stronger voice than you do individually. You should feel empowered to reach out to sources you find in this guide, or to helpful colleagues, with questions about gaining support or how to approach these conversations within your school community.



Be Informed

Foundation for Creating an Anti-Racist Classroom

It is common for teachers to feel unsure about how to open a dialogue about racism with their students ²². The first steps are to become informed about (1) issues of race and racism and (2) one's own biases (including positions of power and privilege) and perceptions ²³.

Many of us have substantially different perceptions about racial inequity and the progress, or lack thereof, that has been made towards equity. This is, in part, due to our complex history of racial injustices and how they have contributed to disparities (including in education). Engaging and investing in your own education about history and current experiences allows you to (1) better understand your own perspectives on these topics and (2) have informed conversations with others about these issues (whether that be your students, colleagues, or other individuals in your life). There are many available resources to improve one's own awareness and knowledge around racism, inequity, and injustice in our society. A sample of these resources is presented below, which includes sources of information about the history and ongoing issues surrounding racial injustices, advocacy efforts for POC, and a range of perspectives. This is not an exhaustive list by any means. In an ever-changing world, it's important to keep in mind that the process of learning (and unlearning) takes time. Our task here is to be open, be aware, and make a concerted effort to help understand oppressive systems.

- [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People](#): Find information about current issues affecting, and advocacy efforts supporting, POC.
- <https://www.racialequitytools.org/home>: Tools for advocating for racial equity
- [Information on engaging in antiracist reform and resources for trauma and mental health](#)
- [UCR Resources to Better Understand Race, Racism, and Policing](#)
- Resources for Being an [Ally](#) or [Accomplice](#)

Be Informed

Self-Care and Support for Educators of Color

Educators of Color are a critical asset to our increasingly diverse schools and students. Unfortunately, Educators of Color also leave the education profession at much higher rates than White teachers ²⁴. Colorblindness, racial **microaggressions**, and overt acts of racism within schools can lead to a hostile workplace for Educators of Color ²⁵. Educators of Color are underrepresented in schools, possibly due to lower salaries, licensure tests that disproportionately screen out minorities, and/or burn out and frustration ^{26–27}. Further, Educators of Color often face intense pressures to perform at high levels immediately upon their entry into the profession ²⁴. They are wrongfully made to feel as though they need to defend their competence and right to the education space, unlike their White counterparts ²⁸. In addition to the day-to-day duties of an educator, Teachers of Color often face the heavy burden of responsibility to combat racial stereotypes and educate not only their students about race and racial issues, but also their colleagues ²⁹. Further, they may share more experiences surrounding race and racial issues with their Students of Color than teachers who are White, which can be personal and painful. For Educators of Color who face institutionalized racism within school systems, talking about race and racism in the classroom may also include unpacking internalized racism (i.e., conscious or unconscious acceptance of a racial hierarchy), which can be a distressing, difficult process ³⁰.

These heavy disproportionate burdens facing Educators of Color can lead to heightened stress and burnout. For this reason, taking time for self-care, establishing support systems, and developing self-efficacy, resilience, and persistence can be essential ³¹. A sample of resources for Teachers of Color are included here, although this list is not exhaustive.

Self-Care, Mental Health, and Resilience Resources

- [Mindfulness and Acceptance-Based Coping](#)
- [Mental Health Resources for and By People of Color](#)
- [UGA Racial Trauma Guide](#)
- [MGH Mental Health Resources for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color \(BIPOC\)](#)
- [Harvard Resources for Self-Care](#)
- [Back to School: Survival Guide for Teachers of Color](#)
- [Self-Care Tips for the New Teacher: The Black Immigrant Perspective](#)

Microaggression

A microaggression is a statement or question that reflects indirect, subtle, or sometimes unintentional discrimination against a member(s) of a marginalized group. Microaggressions are often harmful, uncomfortable, and/or insulting to the victim.

Be Informed

Implicit Biases

All educators constantly need to make quick decisions within stressful and demanding classrooms. Under these conditions, it is often difficult to manage and recognize one's own implicit biases. *Implicit biases are the judgments, attitudes, or stereotypes that result from subtle, unconscious thought processes and automatic mental associations* ²¹. Our brains often use implicit associations to cluster like concepts (e.g., semantic associations) and thus serve as an efficient processing tool ³². However, implicit biases among teachers can result in inequitable behavior towards students, whether they are aware of it or not. Implicit associations become concerning when they have a negative effect on minoritized groups ³³⁻³⁴. Notably, race is not the only topic for which we are all susceptible to developing implicit biases. For example, we may develop implicit biases against minoritized gender identity, disability status, and/or religious groups. In order to create a truly inclusive classroom, it is important that educators assess their implicit biases surrounding not only different racial groups, but all minoritized groups with different life experiences and perspectives from their own.

Fortunately, implicit biases are malleable. Reducing negative implicit associations has far-reaching benefits for students, including improving classroom climate, fortifying minority students' sense of classroom belonging, increasing students' engagement, and enhancing academic outcomes ³⁵. In order to change moment-to-moment decision-making in the classroom, it is critical that educators take time to reflect on their own beliefs and feelings about persons from other groups and identities (e.g., racial, disability status) that may have developed over time.

Be Informed

Self Reflection

Implicit biases and associations can generalize to educational exchanges. They are more likely to manifest when we are unable to devote sufficient cognitive resources to inhibiting behaviors and decisions based on these implicit biases (for example, when we are focused on teaching a class of 20–30 students) ^{35–36}. By acknowledging and examining our own implicit biases through self-reflection we can begin to develop an awareness of our perceptions, attitudes, stereotypes, and prejudices towards minoritized groups (racial groups or otherwise). This is important for all educators, regardless of their own racial identity or the racial identity of their students. Although a challenging process, self-reflection can help educators take a big step towards building an anti-racist, inclusive classroom. Importantly, our perspectives and perceptions evolve over time, so we encourage you to think of self-reflection as an ongoing, continuous process rather than a one-time event.

Examples of self-reflection questions to help explore perceptions of race, specifically, include:

- Do you have dolls, action figures, or classroom signs/posters that depict many different racial backgrounds in your classroom? Why or why not?
- Do you have books featuring characters of many different racial backgrounds in your classroom? Why or why not?
- Do you feel that you can you effectively teach children if you do not understand their lived experiences?
- Have you ever discussed racism with your students? How comfortable do you feel talking about this subject?

Additional Resources for Self-Reflection

- [Project Implicit](#) includes online self-assessments that span topics of race, age, sexuality, gender, and disability.
- [Rethink, Reconnect, Reimagine](#) is a concept started by the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO) to evaluate, self-reflect, and initiate conversations in hopes of creating a more equitable and discrimination free community, school, and society.
- [Let's Talk!](#) is a guide from Teaching Tolerance that has tips and guidance on how to prepare and discuss topics on race, privilege, discrimination with colleagues and students. It includes self-reflection and professional development resources.
- [McIntosh's Invisible Knapsack of White Privilege](#) includes a list of statements that reflect present racial hierarchies and advantages that may aid in introspection. McIntosh developed this list to help process "unearned race privilege and conferred dominance."

Talk About It

No child is too young to discuss race. Young children (even infants!) notice differences among people, such as hair color, eye color, or skin color ⁸. It is important to discuss this with children even if they do not initiate this conversation. The sooner this conversation begins with children, the sooner it helps to reduce the taboo associated with this topic. One goal is for children to feel comfortable, at any age, discussing the differences among people ^{6, 37–38}. The following five strategies have been recommended to discuss race with young children in the classroom but can also be adapted and utilized by parents outside of the classroom. These strategies can also help facilitate parent home–school collaboration about cultures and traditions (e.g., inviting parents to speak with the class about their own cultures and/or traditions).

1. Create a safe, respectful, and supportive tone in your class.

In order to create a safe, supportive, and predictable classroom, make class rules at the beginning of the year. These might include guidelines like “call people by their preferred names,” and “listen to others when they are speaking.” You can also have students contribute to creating the classroom rules ³⁹. During difficult conversations, emphasize to your students that participation is voluntary and it is acceptable to “pass” on their turn ²¹. Check in with your students and their comfort level during these conversations regularly.

- *Encourage empathy.* Provide opportunities for students to hear the thoughts and feelings of people of other races or who have experienced discrimination or oppression. This may mean intentionally selecting stories, and videos featuring Characters of Color, or texts or in–person conversations that bring in the perspectives of people with diverse racial identities.

2. Model language that is accurate and age-appropriate.

It is important to emphasize appropriate language and to define terms using developmentally–appropriate language. Although the racial inequity is often discussed as a part of history, it continues today. As such, racism and other social inequities should be presented in a way that communicates its ongoing presence in society today rather than a chapter of history ³⁸. Further, it is important that teachers model for children, by speaking about skin color like any other physical attribute. For instance, you might say, “What is the boy with the dark brown skin doing here in this picture?” Or: “You’re noticing that the girl with white skin who is frowning seems to be feeling sad to be at school.”

3. Have an open conversation with children.

The worst thing educators can do is ignore, disregard, or shrug off the topic of race with children. If a question or conversation is ignored (e.g., a child makes a comment about another person's skin color and the adult tries to quiet them or pretends to not have heard the comment) this may imply the topic is taboo, that differences are shameful, and the topic is not to be discussed. Instead, to encourage conversation and open space for dialogue, educators can pose open-ended questions (e.g., "What do you think about the way Jayden is being treated in this picture?"). Closed-ended questions that require only one-word responses (e.g., "But we are all equal and should be treated fairly, right?" "Are all people equal regardless of the color of their skin?") may subtly discourage conversation ^{15, 37-38}.

- Teachers should utilize active listening (e.g., nodding head when students are speaking), summarizing or paraphrasing what a student has said in other words, and/or validating what a student has said ²².
- Jasmine Bradshaw recommends talking to children about melanin to explain skin tone differences. Check out her podcast episode from [First Name Basis](#) for more details about her approach to discussing difference.
- Educators may be hesitant to have these conversations for fear that students might say things that reflect negative views around race. If this occurs, use it as a learning opportunity to discuss why these negative views exist, how they are formed, why they are inaccurate and harmful, and brainstorm ideas about how students can respond if they hear similar negative perspectives from peers.

4. Encourage question-asking.

Prompting students to ask questions (e.g., "think of one question about this situation") and opportunities for conversation can be built into existing curriculum material or included as supplemental lessons and activities. All questions that are asked by children should be taken seriously. Educators should take the time to pre-plan moments in lessons and book read-alouds to pause and allow students to comment, reflect, and generate questions about the experiences of people and characters of different racial identities. All questions asked by students should be answered with respect and a tone of seriousness ¹⁵.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

- An approach to teaching introduced by Gloria Ladson-Billings that emphasizes:
 1. Academic success of all students
 2. Helping students develop positive ethnic and cultural identities
 3. Supporting students' understanding of social inequalities
- Read [The Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African-American Children](#) by Gloria Ladson-Billings for more about culturally relevant teaching
- See [Understanding Culturally Responsive Teaching from New American](#) for an overview of culturally relevant pedagogy and culturally responsive teaching

5. Incorporate books that include the topic of race directly or indirectly.

Teachers should include books that highlight race or address themes of fairness or power within its readings. It is important that each of your students (1) feels represented and important, regardless of their racial identity and (2) has access to voices and perspectives of characters with racial identities that are different from their own ⁴⁴. It is important to include books about Characters of Color doing everyday things rather than only including books that feature Characters of Color specifically within the context of their race (e.g., their hair, their experiences with discrimination). Conversations should be rooted in the needs and experiences of our students ^{39–40}. See the following section “Create Your Space” for specific book suggestions.

- When you read a text ahead of time, you may wish to plan for teachable moments by preparing open-ended prompts, anticipating questions that may be asked, and reminding yourself to pause ^{9, 15}.
- **Draw on existing resources for reading lesson plans; see Teaching Tolerance**

6. Include parents.

Educators should be intentional about developing relationships with parents and guardians of all students, and especially parents of Students of Color. Parents of Students of Color may be at-risk for poorer-quality parent-teacher relationships and lower parent participation in school than other groups of students ⁴¹. Some proposed reasons for this include both overt and subtle effects of racism, differences in perceptions of behaviors, goals, and values between teachers and parents, financial/time strains, and parent distrust of teachers and schools ^{42–43}. With the integral role that parents have in students’ success, teachers should purposefully aim to overcome these barriers by working to develop positive parent-teacher relationships with parents of Students of Color and promote parent participation in school.

- Communication with parents should be regular, positive, and direct, rather than relying on students to transmit messages (e.g., notes sent home with the student). For example, teachers can have weekly positive phone calls, emails, or newsletters that highlight students’ accomplishments and successes.
- Deliberately include parents in conversations about goals, values, and expectations for students.
- Create opportunities for parents to be included in conversations about race, racism, and culture. This can include inviting parents to speak to the class about their experiences, traditions, values, and culture or to lead book-reading activities.
- Scheduling: Prioritize parents’ schedules in communications with parents (e.g., conferences, meetings, phone calls) and in opportunities for parents to participate in the classroom (e.g., volunteering, after-school events).
- Read Other People’s Children: Cultural Conflict in the Classroom by Lisa Delpit for more on how teachers can be more effective educators for Students and Parents of Color

To see more tips on how to best discuss this topic with children, please refer to: National Association of School Psychologists guidelines, NPR discussion, Save the Children, Let’s Talk! By Teaching Tolerance, NBC Parent Toolkit, and the New York Times.

Create Your Space

Resources to Add to Your Classroom

Classroom discussions about diversity and race promote students' awareness of different racial identities, experiences, and racism, as well as self-reflection about perceptions of other races and social injustices ⁴⁵⁻⁴⁶. Many anti-racist teachers will actually aim for their classroom literature to include a *majority* of books that center Characters of Color, in order to compensate for the overwhelming whiteness of literature that children will encounter in other settings. The following is a selection of book lists, activities, and videos that educators can use to facilitate these discussions with their students. These resources may also be relevant for parents.

- [BrainPOP](#) – Lessons with videos and activities for different grade levels (i.e., K-3 and 4+) to learn and recognize leaders who fought for racial equality (*note that only certain lessons are free without a subscription*)
- [Hair Love](#) – An Oscar-winning short film by Matthew A. Cherry about an African American father learning to do his daughter's hair for the first time that can be used to promote conversation about the voices and experiences of POC
- [Something Happened In Our Town](#) – An animated storytime video by Marianne Celano, Marietta Collins and Ann Hazzard to explain racial differences, systemic racism, and promote interracial friendships
- [Here Wee Read Book List 2018](#) – A list of racially inclusive and representative books for students of different ages
- [Diverse Bookfinder](#) A searchable database of children's books featuring children and adults who are Black and Indigenous People and People of Color (BIPOC)
- [Colours of Us Book List](#) – 37 Children's Books to help talk about Racism and Discrimination
- [Today's Parent Book List](#) – 30 books to help you talk to parents and teachers talk to children about racism

Create Your Space

Representation, Inclusion, and Friendship

In addition to talking about race and differences, modify the physical environment to support the pedagogy of an anti-racist classroom in a developmentally-appropriate manner. Educators should aim to (1) ensure that your materials reflect the diversity of our world and (2) promote collaboration between children from different backgrounds ²⁰.

Including diverse groups or people within books, videos, songs, toys, and posters has been demonstrated to reduce levels of racial biases in the early school years ⁴⁶. Teachers should aim for the materials they prepare and present within their classroom to depict children of all backgrounds. For example, all images should feature children of diverse racial backgrounds and sufficient, representative arts and crafts supplies should be available to children (e.g., for coloring self- or family portraits).

Further, facilitating interracial collaboration and group activities may increase interracial and intergroup friendships, lead to better cultural understanding, promote social and emotional development, and decrease individual prejudices in students ⁴⁸⁻⁴⁹. For example, teachers can use strategic pairing or groupings during group work to provide students with opportunities to work or play with children from different backgrounds. Admittedly, this can be challenging in many classrooms, given that more than half of U.S. schools are racially concentrated with more than 75% of children being either white students or Students of Color ⁵⁰. Teachers can also facilitate intergroup friendships by creating a psychologically and emotionally safe classroom, modeling and sharing stories of their own friendships, and interrupting incidents of prejudice ⁵¹.

The following are examples of toys, games, and activities to help educators create an inviting and inclusive climate for students to feel comfortable, confident, and represented.

Inclusive Arts and Crafts Supplies:

- [People Colors Crayons, Markers, Pencils](#)
- [People Colors Face Shapes](#)

Games and Activities:

- [I Never Forget a Face Matching Game](#)
- [Children of the World Puzzle](#)

Inclusive Dolls:

- [Pattycake Doll Company](#)
- [Wondercrew Dolls](#)

More Toys:

- [Colours of Us Toy Lists](#)

Sample Lesson Plans and Structured Activities:

- [Scholastic Teaching Diversity: A Place to Begin](#)
- [Teaching Tolerance](#) – Filter by subject, topic, and/or grade level

Neurodiverse Learners

Considerations for Neurodiverse Students

It is important to talk about these matters not only with typically-developing students, but also with students with disabilities (i.e., **neurodiverse** learners). Neurodiverse Students of Color are at heightened risk of experiencing discrimination, barriers to services, bullying, and harsh discipline (e.g., suspension, expulsion) ^{52–53}. When considering the intersectionality of race and neurodiversity, teachers should be aware that Black and Latinx children often receive some diagnoses later and at a lower rate than White children, missing out on opportunities for early intervention and subsequent special education services ^{54–57}. For example, Black and Latinx children with neurodevelopmental disabilities are often misdiagnosed as having a conduct disorder ⁵⁸. Further, Black students with disabilities are more likely than other children with disabilities to receive harsh discipline such as suspension from school, and research suggests that more missed days of school increases the likelihood of future dropout ⁵⁹. Discriminatory or biased practices against neurodiverse Students of Color can start early when children are misdiagnosed, do not receive a timely diagnosis, and/or when they encounter barriers to accessing services. For example, Black students are disproportionately identified as having Emotional Disturbance (ED) and Intellectual Disability (ID) in schools ⁶⁰. Teachers must remain mindful of potential personal biases when evaluating and responding to the behavior of neurodiverse Students of Color.

Neurodiverse: We use the term “neurodiverse” to refer to students who have learning differences, including but not limited to students with developmental and learning disabilities.

Many students, including neurodiverse students, may have difficulty understanding the concept of race and racism. For example, students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) often have concrete patterns of thinking, and struggle to grasp abstract concepts such as race and racism. Some of the resources in this section provide strategies and supports that facilitate learning these abstract concepts, specifically aimed to support neurodiverse students. While these strategies are targeted for students with disabilities, **you will likely find that many of these strategies and resources support all students in the classroom**. Lastly, there is no “one size fits all” approach, especially for neurodiverse students. It is important to individualize different supports or approaches to your student(s) with disabilities.

Neurodiverse Learners

Considerations for Neurodiverse Students

Strategies to Support Conversations and Learning about Race and Racism with Neurodiverse Students

- *Being specific* and using relatable examples may be a helpful way to make the more abstract concept of racism more relatable to the child's everyday life ⁶¹.
- *Repeating the information* or concept more than once may ensure that students have different opportunities to process the information; breaking down the information into smaller chunks will also help students ⁶¹.
- *Using different teaching formats and/or modalities* (such as reading a book, looking at a social story with pictures, drawing a picture, or watching a video) will also accommodate different learning styles and ensure that children are engaging with the material in different ways ⁶¹.
- *Social stories* are short, personalized stories that convey social information concerning a situation that is potentially distressing or confusing for the student ⁶². Social stories can help tell the essential aspects of the circumstances: the who, what, when, where, and why. Many social stories are available for free online and/or included in inexpensive story bundles for teachers to use in their classrooms on the topics of racism/anti-racism and inclusivity (see below for examples). This format can help explain a complex subject like racism with visual aids and easy-to-understand language and can illustrate concrete strategies like expressing respect and acceptance. Topics that might be explained in a social story include: racist beliefs, the purpose of protests, differential treatment by police, historical concepts like segregated buses and drinking fountains, current inequities in housing and school quality, or standing up for someone being treated unfairly.
 - [Autism Society](#) has free social stories on racism and protests. These are geared towards slightly older students but may still be helpful.
 - [Teachers Pay Teachers](#) is an excellent source of both free and paid social stories. Some examples of relevant social stories include:
 - "[What is Racism](#)" by The Special Magnolia
 - "[Social Story about Racism](#)" by School Social Working It
 - "[When to Use the Word Racism](#)" by Sarah Mitchell
 - "[Guided Discussion about Racism](#)" by Moodle Doodles Education

Additional Resources

- [Suggested Action Plan by Extreme Kids & Crew](#) – A supportive community for kids with disabilities with resources about talking to neurodiverse children about current events about George Floyd and the Police
- [Conversations about Race with Young, Concrete Thinkers](#) by Hope Nataro, MA, LMHC

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About Smooth Sailing

We are a team of researchers and clinicians in education, school psychology, and clinical psychology at the University of California, Riverside and the University of Massachusetts, Boston with the goal of supporting young students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), their parents, and their teachers during the early school years. As part of this mission, we aim to provide early elementary teachers with tools, training, and resources for supporting the development and success all students, including their students with ASD. We hope educators will find this guide helpful in building supportive, inclusive classroom communities for all students.

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Content authors (equal contributions):

Ainsley Losh, M.A.
Yasamin Bolourian, Ph.D.
Megan Ledoux Galligan, M.A., BCBA
Michelle Heyman
Tricia Choy
Katie Fullerton
Lana Andoni, M.S., BCBA
Looknoo P. Thammathorn, M.Ed.
Ingrid Hastedt, M.A.

Content editors:

Jan Blacher, Ph.D.
Abbey Eisenhower, Ph.D.
Raquel M. Rall, Ph.D.

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Contact Us

Address correspondence to:

SEARCH Center
Smooth Sailing Team
Graduate School of Education
University of California, Riverside
Riverside, CA 92521
(951) 827-3849
searchcenter@ucr.edu