

HOW TO TALK TO YOUR CHILDREN ABOUT THE VALUE OF DIVERSITY AND THE PROBLEM OF RACISM

June 3, 2020

Dear Parents:

As physicians, psychologists, nurses, and child health specialists, we know that parents may find themselves at a loss for how to talk to their children about the tragic deaths of George Floyd, Breanna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery and a long list of African Americans before them. It is difficult for all of us to process the resulting protests, the violence that occurred at the protests, the police response, and the intense emotions surrounding all of these events. At the same time, we know that children are keenly aware that something is up. We want to help them understand the issues that our society is facing. We want them to detect racism in their own hearts and in the world around them. We want to show in our words and actions that they can have a role in promoting respect for all human beings within an open society that values diversity.

We have written the script below as a suggestion for how parents can talk about these issues with their children. We believe that children learn best if we provide a positive frame. We want them to learn what to do in tough situations, not just what not to do. We want them to understand the principles of social justice. We want them to feel that they can contribute to eliminating racism in our society.

The words you use to talk about these issues with your child will be different, depending upon your child's age and experience. The way you describe the events may be different, depending upon your family's culture, traditions, and values. We hope that you will find these ideas useful as a starting point. Feel free to edit. Feel free to share. Feel free to provide us with feedback for another edition.

Sincerely yours,
Developmental-Behavioral Pediatrics
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Everyone Has Value, Everyone Belongs

People are different in so many ways.

- *Some are short, some are tall and many are in the middle.*
- *Some have brown eyes, some blue eyes, some green eyes or mixed colors.*
- *Some have light skin, some have dark skin, and many have shades in between.*
- *People work as artists, teachers, farmers, plumbers, chefs, gardeners, doctors, scientists, and many other jobs. Some adults focus on raising children and others focus on earning a living; many do both.*
- *Some speak English, others Spanish, Mandarin, Tagalog, Hindi, Urdu or another of the 6500 languages on the earth.*

- *Some are quiet, some loud; some adventuresome, some cautious. Some usually follow the rules, some are willing to break the rules.*
- *Some learn quickly, some learn slowly. Some read well and struggle in math; others have difficulties in reading and sing on tune, or score 3-pointers, or master computer games, or bake chocolate chip cookies, or are good friends and excellent listeners.*
- *Some are confident and self-assured; some are prone to worry or to sadness.*

The bottom line is: All of us have value, all of us belong on this earth.

People are like the flowers in a beautiful garden. We are different colors and shapes. We bloom at different times, have different scents, thrive under different conditions. The garden is beautiful because of these differences. It might not even grow with just one type of flower.

Unfortunately, some people do not appreciate human differences. They may try to make us all the same. They may devalue those of us who are different. For many people, being different results in fewer choices for school, work or friendship; limited social acceptance; bullying, isolation; and, sadly, outright violence. This situation is known as racism.

We—in our family, our school, neighborhood, and community—we want to move steadily toward an appreciation of human differences. We want to end racism. It will be hard. We may make mistakes. We must stay committed. In the end, our human garden will be more beautiful if we learn love, compassion, generosity, and acceptance.

Let's make a plan to show that we know that everyone has value and that everyone belongs.

Here are a few activities that would show our commitment to this point of view. Let's choose one or more for our ourselves and our family:

- *We will play with all of the children in our school class. We will welcome everyone who wants to play. We will never say, "you can't play with us."*
- *We will read about groups of people who live in different countries, speak different languages, wear distinctive clothing, or practice religions that are different from our own. We will be respectful when we talk about what we learn about these groups with our friends and family.*
- *We will find ways to meet people who are different from us. We may invite them to our home, our place of worship, or our clubs or activities. We will show them respect. We will honor their dignity.*
- *If we notice a difference, we will check with the person or an adult if it is ok to talk about that difference with the person. We will ask questions, listen to the answers, and learn. We will not judge them because of the difference.*
- *We will study the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted on December 10, 1948, by the General Assembly of the United Nations. We will memorize Article 1, which reads: "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood." We will read all 30 Articles in the Declaration.*
- *We will donate our time, effort, and/or money to causes that promote peace and justice for all.*