

Discussion Guide for Module 14: “Racing” Towards Equality: Why Talking About Race is Good for Everyone

Module run time: 25 minutes

Estimated time to complete the module with discussion guide: 45-60 minutes

Below are recommended stopping points and suggested questions to use in your group’s discussion. Please feel free to follow your group’s lead and discuss topics and questions that are of greatest value to the group!

Key points:

- Race is meaningful in our social world and racism still exists today.
- Our actions matter - what parents *do* – or *don’t do* – is a strong indicator of children’s attitudes about race.
- Our words matter too! Research suggests that not talking about race with kids increases racist thinking and racism. But talking about race can be one of the best ways to counteract racism.
- Kids are aware of race, form racial identities and observe and integrate ideas about race from those around them and reflect it in their own attitudes and behaviors.
- Preventative and Reactionary ‘race chats’ are an effective way to discuss race and racism with children. These conversations with evolve and change over time, as a child grows.
- We do not need to have all the answers to have effective ‘race chats’ with children. We just need to be open, and be able to offer a safe space to talk.

Module synopsis:

Page 1: *Title Page – Why Talking to Your Kids About Race is Good for Everyone*

Page 2: *Acknowledgments*

Page 3: *Our Actions and Subtle Messaging Matters*

Page 4: *Our Words Matter Too*

Page 5: *The Problem with ‘Colorblind’ or ‘Colormute’ Approaches*

⦿ Recommended stopping point

- Our actions matter - what parents *do* – or *don’t do* – is often a much stronger indicator of children’s attitudes about race. Can you think of an example related to race when you may *say* one thing but actually *model* something different? What are some non-verbal actions that you could take to help support children as they develop their own attitudes about race?
- What we say is very important too. Not talking about race, or taking a ‘colorblind’ approach teaches children that race is taboo and that we shouldn’t notice it. With this approach, children learn to ignore or “not notice” racial inequalities. Why do you think being colorblind is so attractive to people? Reflect on your own thoughts and reactions to being colorblind. Share some of your reactions with the group.
- Children also fill in the missing gaps in their knowledge from the media or their friends. What are some ideas about race the children pick up from the media? How can you help them to process this (mis)information correctly?

Page 6: *Talking to Children About Race and Ethnicity*

Page 7: *Race Chats*

Page 8: *Early Childhood Race Chats – Preventative*

Page 9: *Early Childhood Race Chats – Reactionary*

🕒 **Recommended stopping point**

- Talking about America’s racial history with your 4-year-old before Black History Month and Martin Luther King Day is an excellent opportunity to have some preventative race chats. What are some other opportunities to have preventative race chats with young children?
- Have you ever heard a child say something that embarrassed or flustered you about race? For example asking why a child with dark skin is ‘dirty’ or that their hair is fuzzy and weird? What did you say, or how did you react at the time? What would you say if that same interaction happened tomorrow?

Page 10: *Middle Childhood Race Chats – Preventative*

Page 11: *Middle Childhood Race Chats – Reactionary*

🕒 **Recommended stopping point**

- Talking about family and racial history can help children as they develop their own racial identity. How might you incorporate race into a discussion about your own family history? How might you explore talking about racial or ethnic backgrounds that are different from your own?
- Talking about stories in the media about recent events is an excellent way to initiate discussions about race. Can you think of a recent event, or controversy in the news that you could discuss with a child? How would you start the conversation?

Page 12: *Race Chats - Examples*

Page 13: *Race Chats – Examples (2)*

Page 14: *Race Chats – Helpful Tips to Remember*

🕒 **Recommended stopping point**

- We do not need to have all the answers to have effective ‘race chats’ with children. Even if we are not always comfortable talking about race, it is still important to do so. Reflect on how you feel when race is brought up. What are some of the reasons that you’ve heard from others about why they avoid talking about race?
- We need to be open, and be able to offer a safe space to talk about race. What can we do to help create a safe and open environment for talking about race?
- Withholding judgment and welcoming any and all questions are important elements when having race chats with children. This can be a challenge, especially when a child says something that makes you uncomfortable. What are some strategies that you use when you talk with children about topics that you might not be comfortable with (e.g. race, sex, death, divorce, etc.)? Do you find that it gets easier to talk about these topics the more you do it?

Page 15: *Racing Toward Equality*

Page 16: *Talk About Equality*

Page 17: *Surround Your Family with Diversity*

Page 18: *Be a Positive Role Model*

🕒 Final discussion points

- We have covered a lot of ground today. What are some of the things that you have learned, or messages that you will leave this session with?
- What are some things that you will think about, say, or do the next time you talk about race with your children or the children that you work with?
- How do you think what you've learned today can be applied to other adults in your life (e.g., close friends, family members, co-workers, your child's teacher)?

To learn more about race and how kids learn about race, take a look at these resources:

This article discusses how not talking about race can lead to prejudice.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/parenting/wp/2015/07/06/how-silence-can-breed-prejudice-a-child-development-professor-explains-how-and-why-to-talk-to-kids-about-race/>

The Civil Rights website offers specific examples of how to respond to questions or comments children may have about race.

http://www.civilrights.org/publications/reports/talking_to_our_children/?referrer=https://www.google.com/

In a This American Life radio story, one dad puzzles through how to talk about racism with his 4-year-old daughter.

<http://www.thisamericanlife.org/radio-archives/episode/557/birds-bees?act=2>

We are constantly working to improve our materials. Do you have suggestions about topics to add to this guide? Did your group discuss something we didn't suggest? We'd love to hear from you! Please email your thoughts to us at ilabsout@uw.edu.