

How to Have The Talk: Anti-Black Racism With Kids

This morning I approached my wife about wanting to have a discussion with the boys about anti-black racism. She was against it saying that they are too young (7 y.o. & 6 y.o.). I explained to her that they are not babies anymore and they at least have to be notified of what's going on. She hunched over and cried, saying "it's not fair." Which I totally understand, because it's not. However, at some point you go from being the cute little cub that people want to adopt to be a Lion. It happens in an instant. All of sudden the looks change and for a young kid it can make you feel like you're the wrong player in a video game. There's nothing wrong with your player. The game is rigged, and these conversations are the cheat codes. You have to be aware, and you have to move different.

As we prepared for this conversation, we wished we had a guide to follow. I remember when my mom told me about how there are two strikes against me. I hated that conversation but eventually I was glad we had it. My wife is right, it's not fair but we can't afford to play fair anymore. Below I share somewhat of an outline of the conversation we had our 6- and 7-year-old sons. As you approach the idea of having your own conversation with your kids, pray for wisdom. If you think it's too early to have this conversation, you're right! However, if you don't... you run the risk of someone else telling them what to believe about other races, or worse themselves.

1. **Be sober minded.** This is not a conversation you have after watching a black person being murdered, police brutality or anything that's going to trigger your emotions. Your disposition should be to inform not to invoke fear.
2. **Ask Your child this Identity Question:** "What do you know to be true about yourself?"
3. **Affirm your child with what you know:** "I know you to be...." (smart, handsome, beautiful, kind, generous, caring, protective, brave, honest, etc.)
4. **Explain the sad truth:** "People don't know these truths about you from just looking at you. Some people will guess the opposite of these things just because of the color of your skin."
5. **Check Point.** This would be a good time to check in to see how your child is feeling so far in the conversation. Help them to understand their feelings, but also be ok if they are not able to articulate those feelings at this time. They may need more time to process.
6. **Explain why:** They judge you because of your skin based on their own fears and/or what the media promotes. Try to find context based on your child's interests. For example, our kids love superheroes. We asked Theo to name superheroes who look like us. He was only able to name one, and from there we were able to talk about how the media portrays black and brown people as villains sometimes. An example for girls would include asking her to name Disney princesses, and discussing how the media is sending a subliminal message of what is celebrated.

7. **Check Point #2:** Again, this would be a good time to check in to see how your child is feeling at this point in the conversation. Help them to understand their feelings, but also be ok if they are not able to articulate those feelings at this time. They may need more time to process.
8. **Ask your child:** “What questions do you have?” Open the conversation for them to be able to ask clarifying questions about their understanding of what you’ve shared so far.
9. **Leave the door open:** Make sure your child knows you are always a safe place for them to have these hard conversations.
10. **First of Many:** This is not the last time you will have this conversation. As your child grows and gets older, the conversation will evolve based on age, maturity and environment.