



Tips for Parents: Racism

The United States recently elected its first African-American as President. Children in schools across the country are engaging in arguments about what kind of President they think he will be; often these arguments are based on comments they've overheard their parents say. And all too often, these comments reflect an attitude of racism.

What is Racism?

The Webster's New World Dictionary defines racism as "a doctrine or teaching, without scientific support, that claims to find racial differences in character, intelligence, etc., that asserts the superiority of one race over another or others, and that seeks to maintain the supposed purity of a race or the races." In everyday life, racism is often experienced as violence against people of another race, jokes about people of another race or ethnicity, and/or the denial of opportunity based solely on race. In schools and playgrounds, racism often takes the form of bullying, or making a child of a different race feel unwelcome and rejected, regardless of their character.

Racism is Hurtful

It's easy to see how being the brunt of a joke or the victim of bullying can be harmful. And it's not difficult to see how being denied job, housing or educational opportunities can have lasting and painful repercussions. But what many people don't realize is that perpetuating racism is also harmful to those who participate.

By harboring racist ideas, we deny ourselves the opportunity to gain meaningful relationships with others, learn more about the world we live in, and show compassion, empathy, and respect. These values, outside of racism, are highly regarded across society; and when you try to teach them to your children, but also teach them, either openly or by your jokes and comments to other adults, that racism is okay, you confuse them.

I'm Not Racist, but...

Ever heard yourself make that comment? It's pretty much a guarantee that the next thing you say will be racist. There's a big gap between people such as those in white supremacist groups, and the average person that makes comments beginning with "I'm not a racist, but..." You probably don't mean to teach your children discrimination, but by engaging in this kind of behavior, you likely are.

Encourage an Attitude of Interest and Respect

The best way to teach your children love and respect for all people is to model this behavior yourself. Show interest as a family in the cultures and beliefs of others by:

- visiting multicultural events
- watching television or video programs about other races and cultures
- reading books and stories about different societies in America and around the world

- volunteering at organizations that support those living in poverty, the elderly, or people with disabilities
- realizing that others may not have had the same opportunities for success as you have, and refrain from passing harsh judgments about people in front of your children

In The Classroom

Teachers can also discourage racism by offering activities that teach students about other cultures and highlight the contributions people of other races have made to our country's history. Give every student an equal opportunity to learn and succeed in the class.

For More Information

[Teaching Young Children About Racism Helps Change Racial Attitudes](#) by Patty Oh. Associated Content, November 16, 2007.

[Video: Why Kids Hate](#) by The Learning Community

[Video: Talking with Your Child About Prejudice](#), by The Learning Community

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