

# Drawing Connections 101:

## Talking to Children about Racism And Preventing Sexual Violence

Sexual harassment, abuse, and assault are widespread problems. In the United States, almost 35% of women reported first being victimized between ages 11-17 and almost 30% of men reported they were first raped between ages 11-17 (Basile et al., 2022).

Like all forms of oppression, racism is among the root causes of sexual violence. We can help build safe communities for all people by fighting against racism, educating ourselves, and having conversations about these issues with our children and young people in our lives. As a parent or guardian, you can use these tools and resources to build trust and have open communication with your child about sexual violence and racism. We can all work together to prevent future sexual assault and racial bias.



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### **BODILY AUTONOMY**

- *Bodily autonomy* is the ability to make choices about your own body.
- Parents play a critical role in teaching their kids about consent, respect, and boundaries. One of the most impactful ways that parents can teach kids about their bodily autonomy and respecting the boundaries of others is by modeling examples of everyday consent.
- Respect your child's right to make choices about their body. For example, don't make them hug or kiss someone they don't want to.
- Although it's important to teach your child that everyone's body, bodily autonomy, and limits should be respected regardless of their age, gender identity, sexual orientation, race, ability, or other factors- it's also critical to acknowledge how this is not the current reality in our society. Talking openly about how racism and other forms of oppression devalue the bodies, voices, and boundaries of people from many groups is important to challenge the bias and mistreatment they may have seen others experience or have experienced themselves.

### **GROOMING: WATCH OUT FOR THE SIGNS**

- *Grooming* is the process in which people who sexually offend try to see how far they can push boundaries and exploit someone's trust.
- Grooming can take place in person and online.
- Typically, it is used by a member of the victim's family or another person in their circle of trust, such as a coach, teacher, youth group leader, or another person who regularly interacts with the victim.

- Parents and guardians can help kids identify red flags that indicate grooming such as:
  - Asking to keep the relationship secret
  - Making conditions on their relationship. For instance, saying they will only continue to talk to the child if the child does something in return for them, like sending photos
  - Asking the child to close the door when speaking with them, only wanting to chat at certain times (like at night), or asking if their parents are around.
  - Asking the child to only contact them on certain apps

## **OPEN COMMUNICATION BETWEEN PARENTS/GUARDIANS & YOUTH**

- Be a role model for respectful boundaries regarding touch and affection. For example, asking someone if they would like a hug before giving one.
- Teach your child the correct names of all their body parts, including their genitals. This information empowers children to know their bodies and better understand development.
- Talk to your child about what they see and hear on TV, the internet, and social media. Frame conversations in a positive, open way. Be patient, do not interrupt; smile and nod to show with body language you are interested in listening. Encourage children to tell you about things that happen to them that make them feel scared or uncomfortable.
- Teach your child to embrace their racial identity. When young children feel good about their identity group, it helps them in numerous ways. For example, a difficulty could be learning how to feel good about oneself and to be able to handle and recover from unfair treatment.
- Discuss with your child how to embrace diversity. As a parent you can actively ensure that their children are exposed to environments and opportunities that value and appreciate diversity. Emphasize the positive aspects of differences and be open about the instances in which people are treated unfairly because of their differences.

## **TALK ABOUT RACE IN AGE-APPROPRIATE WAYS**

For each household, discussions on racism and prejudice will take different forms. The earlier parents start the conversation with their children, the better.

Children who experience racism may get confused while attempting to comprehend why they are being treated in a particular way, which can harm their long-term growth and well-being. Studies have shown that when a child's stress response is activated for long periods of time it can impact learning, behavior, and physical and mental health (Allen et al., 2020).

**Under 6 Years:** At this age, your child may begin to notice and point out differences in the people around them. By the age of two, children begin to show a strong preference for people from their own race. A child's environment also plays a role in understanding race and differences (Allen et al., 2020). For example, selecting books that represent diversity and highlighting positive role models of different races and ethnicities, having friends from different racial groups, and modeling ways to talk about differences in a positive way. For instance, if your child asks about someone's skin tone or hair texture, take advantage of the chance to acknowledge that everyone looks different while highlighting our shared traits. For example, you could say, "We are all human, but we are also all unique! Isn't that amazing?"

**6-11 Years:** It is important to have honest conversations about race, diversity, and racism with your child at this age. Listening and asking questions is the first step. For example, you can ask what they hear at school, on television, and through social media. Look for opportunities to discuss racial prejudice and stereotypes in the media, such as “Why are certain individuals portrayed as villains while others are not?” Having honest and open discussions about racism, diversity, and inclusivity builds trust with your children.

**12+ Years:** Teenagers can understand abstract concepts more clearly and express their views. Ask what they think and introduce them to different perspectives to help expand their understanding. They may know more than you think they do and have strong emotions on the topic. Social media is important for many teenagers; encourage them to respond to harassment and racial issues by reporting or telling an adult.

## REFERENCES

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## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

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