



"How to talk to your kids about: *Race and Racial Slurs*"

In our second topic of the OH21 series we felt it was relevant and timely to broach the topic of racism and in particular, racial slurs. This document was developed with a diverse committee of individuals including Kelley Webb of Matching Peace and members from This is OH and Village Equity Alliance. Every day—from the schoolyard to the workplace—we hear biased language, including slurs, epithets, stereotypes and so-called “jokes.” We also see slurs written on walls, buildings, streets and in our social media feeds. Many people, especially those who have children, wonder what to do when they see and hear this kind of language. The truth is ALL children/students are affected by hate and bias so it becomes imperative that parents address these issues head-on. The following can be used by parents, be they Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) or white, to open conversations regarding racism itself and also be used as a guide to help all parents navigate through situations that their children may come across during school and beyond.

Question 1: My 5th grade child came home from school and was very upset. Someone at school called her a racial slur. What should I say and do?

Step 1 - STAY CALM.

- Even though you will likely feel a range of emotions, it is important to make sure your child knows they are not at fault and the emotions you have are not directed at them.

Step 2 - ASK QUESTIONS and be SUPPORTIVE

- Do you know what _____ means? Explain what it means. If you do not know, look it up. Research the origin. Explain where it came from and why it shouldn't be used and may be offensive.
- Explain that your child IS NOT THE SLUR.
- Ask, if your child thinks the person was trying to be mean or funny or teasing? Sometimes these things happen and there is no malicious intent, only ignorance and/or misinformation. If there is no malicious intent, it is good to look at the incident as an opportunity to educate.
- Who was around? Did anyone else hear? What did they say and what did they do? You are looking to see if anyone intervened, interrupted and/or stood up for your child.

- Did you tell the teacher? If he/she did not - please contact the administrator of your school. All incidents should be reported.

Step 3 - REPORT THE INCIDENT TO THE SCHOOL

- Call your school's administrator to discuss what happened: Ben McMurray or Darcy Browne for the junior and senior high schools, or Kori Kawczynski for the elementary school.
- The school, in conjunction with the victim's parent(s), will take appropriate action with the offending child.
- Your child should not take action alone.

Question 2: Yesterday, my 9th grade child overheard someone in the lunchroom telling racist jokes. What should I say and do?

When people use racist jokes, slurs, or stereotypes and get no objections, the impact is profound. Silence tacitly condones the words and, worse, laughter or agreement reinforces the words. It harms the people directly targeted and those who identify in that same way. It sends a message to others that they could be targeted next. It contributes to internalized oppression of those who are on the receiving end. It leads to an increasing escalation of hate, bias and injustice in society. If you find yourself in this situation with your child it is important to do the following:

Step 1 - STAY CALM

Step 2 - ASK QUESTIONS

- Ask if they understood the joke and explain why it was wrong to tell jokes like this.
- Who was around? Did anyone else hear? What did they say and what did they do? You are looking to see if anyone intervened and/or interrupted.

Step 3 - ADVISE

- Assess the maturity level of your child. If you feel that your child is not mature enough to handle the situation without adult assistance, call your school's administrator to discuss what happened: Ben McMurray or Darcy Browne for the junior and senior high schools, or Kori Kawczynski for the elementary school.
- Talk to your child about interrupting racism and other forms of bigotry. *Click [here](#) for more information and strategies.*
- First and foremost, have a discussion about how to assess the situation for safety. Is this something to which your child can safely respond to

immediately or do they need to walk away and address the matter in another way? Do they need to seek assistance or support from someone else to intervene? Personal safety is of utmost importance. Let your child know that if they do not feel safe interrupting that they can seek the help of a trusted adult (parents, teachers, coaches, school administrators, are some examples).

- In an age-appropriate way, role play how this conversation could go if this happens again. Here is a suggested outline you can use for your role play.
 1. Make sure your child knows it is very normal to feel angry, however, anger is often met with anger. Advise your child that if they are feeling angry it is okay to walk away and come back to discuss the situation later or get assistance from the school or a parent.
 2. Tell your child that it is okay to assume good will. Many people who make offensive remarks do so out of ignorance. Because they do not intend harm, they often assume no harm is done. This is the time that the next step would be effective.
 3. Your child can talk to the person privately if they feel comfortable and safe doing so. By speaking to the offender one-on-one, you reduce the person's need to save face publicly or to defend their actions in front of a group.
 4. Practice/role play using, "I" statements versus "you" statements. Your child's goal is to let the offender know how their words were perceived.
 5. Make sure the focus is on the words themselves not the person delivering the words. Your child should know and understand that they are not saying the person is bad rather the joke is bad and hurtful.
 6. Help your child to choose words that will reduce the offender's need to defend his or her actions.
 7. Even with the best chosen words and setting there will be a variety of reactions to this type of feedback. Do your best to prepare your child for several reactions such as curiosity, regret, sadness, anger, defensiveness, or hostility.
 8. Let your child know that they do not have the right to dictate someone else's sense of humor. They do, however, have the right to expect that this type of humor not be used in their presence.
- Did you tell the teacher? If he/she did not - please contact the administrator of your school. All incidents should be reported.

Step 4 - REPORT THE INCIDENT TO THE SCHOOL

- Call your school's administrator to discuss what happened: Ben McMurray or Darcy Browne for the junior and senior high schools, or Kori Kawczynski for the elementary school.
- The school, in conjunction with the victim's parent(s), will take appropriate action with the offending child.
- Your child should not take action alone.

Question 3: I heard MY child using racial slurs and / or someone else overheard and brought this to my attention. What should I say and do?

Parents and caregivers need to be even more attentive to their personal language because their children are listening, absorbing and often-times repeating what is said. We need to make sure we are not using biased language ourselves—not in casual conversation, not as a joke and not among friends. The adults in children's lives are 24/7 role models. If young people hear adults using biased language, it becomes normalized and the children will think it's okay. It is also important that when we hear biased language, we hold each other accountable. We need to interrupt it when friends, acquaintances, children, parents/family members, peers, co-workers, neighbors and elected officials either make the comments themselves or remain silent, make excuses or defend biased and stereotypical language.

It is important that they know, through our words and actions, that slurs and other biased language are unacceptable. We need to actively confront that language when we hear it, refrain from using it ourselves and challenge biased language and encourage all around us—including our children—to do the same.

Step 1 - STAY CALM

Step 2 - ASK QUESTIONS and do not SHAME your child.

- Do you know what _____ means? Explain what it means. If you do not know, look it up. Research the origin. Explain where it came from and why it shouldn't be used and why it may be offensive.
- Ask your child WHY they chose to use that word? Were they intentionally being mean or funny? Sometimes these things happen and there is no malicious intent, only ignorance and/or misinformation. If this is the case, we should welcome the opportunity to educate.
- Discuss with this child (and your other children) what is expected in your family. Establish a set of family expectations. Be clear that they should NEVER use racial slurs because they are hurtful.
- DO NOT SHAME YOUR CHILD. We all make mistakes and now that they know better you expect them to do better.

- If this happened at school it will probably be reported and there will likely be consequences. STAY CALM. Kids make mistakes and our administrators know that. Prepare them to expect consequences such as Saturday school or a suspension.
- If your child needs further help in understanding the issues around this type of behavior, check out our comprehensive book list located below question 6.
- If these slurs were directed AT another person, expect your child to apologize. Help them come up with what to say and role play the situation to give them the confidence and courage to apologize. It is important for the apology to come from them, do not do it for them. It is in these very difficult situations that they often learn the most.

Question 4: Should we talk about the N word? What about with current hip/hop or rap music? Do NOT assume that your child knows to NOT use this word. Please read the following and discuss with your children.

Step 1 - DO NOT ASSUME THAT YOUR CHILD KNOWS NOT TO USE THIS WORD.

Step 2 - SET EXPECTATIONS

- Make sure your children know that this word exists. That they understand the roots of this word and why it is so harmful to the Black community.
- But they have heard Black people use the word, why can't we? This video of an interview with Ta-Nehisi Coates on the use of the N-word is a good resource.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QO15S3WC9pg&feature=youtu.be>
- It is NEVER ok to use the n...word towards another person...at all... ever.
- There is discussion of whether non-Black people of color can use this word... THEY CANNOT. Again, NO ONE.
- When it comes to music, you have to decide what you allow in your house and what you don't, but remember your child may choose to listen when you are not around, so please ARM them with the correct information.
- If the N..word is used in a song, no person, who is not Black, should sing or repeat that word EVER. Not when singing and not when talking. Do NOT DO IT. If your family is Black, you can discuss if your child can use this word in music. We have heard a mix of answers from BIPOC on this topic.

Step 3 - GIVE EXAMPLES

- **EXAMPLE 1** - My son is 19 and on a college campus. He is very offended if he hears anyone use the N...word. He found a way to “interrupt” the use of that word in his own way. When he finds himself at a frat house or another type of student gathering and a non-Black person is using the n..word, he says “hey dude...Listen...you need to NOT say that. Where I come from, you would get seriously smacked down, if someone heard you. I’m just looking out for you man, do not use that word.”
- **EXAMPLE 2** - A freshman at a local university was there on a scholarship. She was filmed at a party singing a hip-hop song and she was singing ALL of the words. Someone stopped her and said, “you should not be saying that, and she said, no it’s ok it’s in the song...” She was being video recorded on a phone. The video got posted on social media. The University got wind of the video and took away her college scholarship for singing the n...word at a party. DO NOT DO IT.

Question 5: How do I help my child respond to inappropriate racial remarks in on-line gaming and/or on social media?

Step 1 - STAY CALM

Step 2 - ASK QUESTIONS and OFFER GUIDANCE

- Address this 1 on 1 with your child even if you have not witnessed this behavior yourself. It may be going on and your child does not know how to bring it up.
- Ask your child if they have ever seen a post or message or heard inappropriate racial remarks online. Ask how your child felt about the remark and how they reacted. Ask how others who were involved reacted.
- Review the section on giving your child the "power to interrupt." Explain to your child how IMPORTANT it is to interrupt these actions on Social Media. Empower and support them in taking action.
- Help them write a response.

Step 3 - GIVE AN EXAMPLE

- My son was on XBOX live and someone in the game used an extremely offensive racial slur. He immediately stopped the conversation and said "hey, we don't use that word in here." The other person said, "Chill. I wasn't calling anyone that. I was just saying it." My son said, "I don't care. DO NOT use that word." Guess what, they just kept playing and no one used the word again. That is an example of interrupting bigotry.

Hopefully that child learned that his words were offensive and not acceptable.

Question 6: My child is starting kindergarten in the fall. What conversations should I have with him or her regarding race prior to starting school?

Step 1 - MAKE IT A NORMAL PART OF YOUR CONVERSATIONS

- Discussing race with your child is extremely helpful and beneficial at every age. Discuss with your child that people come from all different countries and parts of the world. People come in all different colors. They may have skin and hair that is different than yours. They may wear clothes that are not like yours. They may eat food that is not like what you eat.
- Some families don't discuss race and they tell their kids "we are all the same", but we are not. Teach them to be interested and appreciative of other cultures and races. We are all equal, but we are not the same.
- Celebrate the differences, grow, and learn.
- Examine your social circles. Do the people you interact with reflect the community around you? We can all benefit from genuine relationships with people of a multitude of ethnicities, races, religions, and backgrounds.

Step 2 - MAKE SURE BOOKS, TOYS, MEDIA REFLECT DIVERSITY

- Get age appropriate books to read with your child that feature characters of different races and ethnicity.
- Watch television programs and movies with characters that show a variety of types of people and abilities.
- We recommend the [attached](#) list of books, videos, and resources.

Question 7: My 2nd grade child came home from school and said “I can’t believe the Chinese brought this virus to our country.” I was shocked that she heard that from a classmate. How do I talk to my child about the racism or xenophobia that COVID-19 may bring up?

The spread of the new strain of coronavirus that causes COVID-19 has become racialized, so it’s critical that parents confront and guide their children in addressing racist tropes. Since the virus began to spread, people who identify as Asian American or Pacific Islander have been subjected to racist comments and jokes online and in person. Additionally, many Asians have experienced isolating behavior from those who are afraid of catching the virus. Times like these remind us that we must continuously disrupt and address issues of hate and bias, which often find their way into schools.

Step 1 - STAY CALM and PAUSE

- Interrupting technique can work well here. Interrupting means taking a time out. It shows the person you're talking, texting or chatting with that what they've said is important enough to pause your conversation to address—that you need to talk about the racism before you talk about anything else. Here are a few phrases to try for older kids:
 1. "Hang on. I want to go back to what you called the virus."
 2. "Just a second—let's get into your point that the virus is somebody's fault."
 3. "Before we talk about that, I want to talk about the language you just used."

Step 2 - ASK QUESTIONS and OFFER GUIDANCE

- Ask your child about the context around the classmate's sharing of the origins of the virus like who was there and how did people react.
- Let your child know that when things happen like this virus, it's common for a group of people to be blamed for it. With the new strain of coronavirus that blame is directed at the country where it was first discovered, China. Let your child know that this is **WRONG** and goes against what you value in your family.
- Here is a link explaining **WHY** we do not name diseases after certain races or cultures
<https://www.nbcnews.com/news/asian-america/reason-viruses-aren-t-named-after-locations-because-progress-experts-n1165366>

Step 3 - HISTORICAL CONTEXT

- Explain that coronavirus is actually a whole family of different viruses that cause many different diseases. The new strain of coronavirus causes COVID-19 which stands for CO(rona)VI(rus) D(isease)-(number) 19.
- It is actually not common anymore to name a disease after its place of origin. There is a long, bad history of associating diseases with specific groups of people who experienced severe prejudice and social consequences as a result.
- The name COVID-19 was chosen very carefully to avoid repeating those unintended, harmful mistakes.
- This could lead into a discussion about commonplace stereotypes and prejudices.

Click [here](#) to get to the **Ottawa Hills Schools Student Handbook**. The schools are currently working on a new section of the handbook on racism. That will be released in the 20/21 school year.

We highly encourage all parents who have any encounters with racism in the Ottawa Hills School District to discuss the matter with the appropriate administrator (Ben McMurray or Darcy Browne for the high school; Kori Kawczynski for the elementary school). They will guide you as to what will happen and how to file a formal complaint if you deem necessary.

DEFINITION OF TERMS USED IN THIS ARTICLE

<p>Racism</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A belief that <i>race</i> is the primary <i>determinant</i> of human traits and capacities and that racial differences produce an inherent superiority of a particular race 2. A doctrine or political program based on the assumption of racism and designed to execute its principles 3. A political or social system founded on racism 4. Racial prejudice or discrimination <p>Source: Merriam Webster, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/racism#other-words</p>
<p>BIPOC</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>BIPOC</i> is an acronym that stands for <i>Black, Indigenous, and People of Color</i>. <p>Source: Dictionary.com https://www.dictionary.com/e/acronyms/bipoc/</p>
<p>Bias</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. An inclination of <i>temperament</i> or outlook <i>especially</i> a personal and sometimes unreasoned judgment 2. An instance of such prejudice 3. Bent, Tendency 4. (1) Deviation of the expected value of a statistical estimate from the quantity it estimates (2) Systematic error introduced into sampling or testing by selecting or encouraging one outcome or answer over others <p>Source: Merriam Webste, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/bias</p>
<p>Implicit Bias</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Bias that results from the tendency to process information based on unconscious associations and feelings, even when these are contrary to one’s conscious or declared beliefs <p>Source: Dictionary.com, https://www.dictionary.com/browse/implicit-bias</p>

Stereotype	<p><i>Noun</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Something conforming to a fixed or general pattern <i>especially</i> a standardized mental picture that is held in common by members of a group and that represents an oversimplified opinion, prejudiced attitude, or uncritical judgment <p>Source: Merriam Webster, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/stereotype</p>
Prejudice	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Injury or damage resulting from some judgment or action of another in disregard of one's rights <i>especially</i> : detriment to one's legal rights or claims2. (1) Preconceived judgment or opinion (2) An adverse opinion or leaning formed without just grounds or before sufficient knowledge3. An instance of such judgment or opinion4. An irrational attitude of hostility directed against an individual, a group, a race, or their supposed characteristics <p>Source: Merriam Webster, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/prejudice#h1</p>