



Know! To Talk About George Floyd and Racism With Youth

Teachers, we encourage you to share this Know! Teachable Moment with your parent networks. The following Know! Teachable Moment deals with the killing of George Floyd. It may be difficult for some parents to read. George's death has affected all of us. Cultural diversity, competence, and humility is a foundational component to effective and impactful prevention services, and that mission cannot be fully realized while certain members of our communities are purposefully harmed by systems of oppression and violence that have been in place for far too long.

For our full statement on the George Floyd death, visit:

[https://preventionactionalliance.org/our-statement-on-the-george-floyd-protests/.](https://preventionactionalliance.org/our-statement-on-the-george-floyd-protests/)

There remains a great deal of apprehension and uncertainty in our country as we move forward in life amidst a pandemic. However, just as life seemed to be moving in a more positive direction, we were hit again by a virus of another type, one that has plagued our nation for generations—racism. It most recently reared its ugly head through the death of George Floyd. The amount of anger, anguish, and unrest many Americans are feeling has reached epidemic levels—and rightfully so. Our young people are watching and learning. The question is, what are we teaching them?

Discussing racism can be extremely uncomfortable, even when talking to our children. How do we get the conversation started, what do we say, and how much do we tell them?

While these are all good questions, it is important to keep in mind that we do not have to have

all the answers. What matters is that we talk at an age appropriate level; we push through the discomfort and talk about the unjust death of George Floyd and others, and we address the racism that still exists in our country.

Experts say we do a disservice to our children by avoiding the topic of racism and that it would be naïve of us to think we're somehow protecting children by not talking to them about it. Experts also say we'd be naïve to believe that our children are unaware of the incidents surrounding George Floyd's death, including the peaceful protests, and unfortunately the destructive and violent riots that have followed. Chances are, our adolescent children are well-aware of what happened, and if they have access to a smartphone, may have even watched the full recording of George Floyd's death.

What is a parent to do?

Talk about it: Be their information filter. Children may come to harmful conclusions about race when it is not talked about openly. Keep in mind that if your tweens/teens aren't hearing about it from you, you can rest assured they are hearing it from others who may not share your family's same morals and values.

Keep the conversation calm and factual: Children take cues from their parents. You do not have to be void of emotion, but do not allow anger, frustration, or sadness to overshadow the message you are trying to get across to your child. Share the truth but keep it age-appropriate.

Validate their feelings: This will look different for every child. Some may fear for themselves, friends, or family members, or they may fear the riots they are witnessing on TV. It is important to acknowledge whatever anxieties, anger, or other negative emotions that may come up for them.

Encourage questions: It can sometimes be challenging to engage young people in conversation, especially when the topic is uncomfortable. However, if you give them space and help them feel comfortable, they might surprise you.

Here are a few questions you can ask to get the conversation started:

- What were you thinking and how did you feel when you first heard about what happened to George Floyd?
- What are people saying about racism on social media or among your friends, and how has it impacted you?
- In your opinion, what do you think should happen next?

While it is true that we don't have to have all the answers, we can and should take steps to educate ourselves so that we can best teach our children. It is also critical to be aware that as parents, our words and actions on race weigh heavily on the influence of our children. Clinical Psychologist Howard Stevenson, who works with educators and families to understand the trauma and stress of race-based hate, took it a step further by adding, "Children watch what their parents don't do during racial moments as much as what they actually purposely teach." In other words, a parent's inaction carries as much weight as their action.

The bottom line is this, have a conversation with your children now, whatever that looks like in your family. It's ok if you don't have all the answers. Simply do your best to answer with empathy, compassion, and honesty, and considerate it an opportunity to learn together with your child. Open the lines of communication on this topic, and keep it going.

Sources

- [Anti-Defamation League \(ADL\), Table Talk - Family Conversations about Current Events: George Floyd, Racism and Law Enforcement.](#)
- [Child Mind Institute, Harold S. Koplewicz, MD, Child Mind Institute: Talking to Kids About George Floyd. June 1, 2020.](#)
- [Good Morning America, Family-Parenting: How to talk to kids about race, privilege amid George Floyd protests. June 1, 2020.](#)
- [The New York Times, By The Associated Press: Parents, Educators, Experts Talk to Kids on Race Amid Unrest. June 3, 2020.](#)

About Know! Teachable Moments

Everyone has a role in prevention. By reading this Know! Teachable Moment today, you're doing your part to prevent substance misuse and create a healthier world for all.

We created these free tips to empower teachers and educators like you to protect your students from alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs. However, we rely on donations from people like you to provide these tips. If you found this tip interesting or helpful, [please consider donating at preventionactionalliance.org/donate](#).

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[Know! Parent Tips are also available in Spanish at the Know! archives.](#)

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