

Talking to your Children about Current Events

This article was originally published for Madison Community Montessori School and has been edited for the Covenant Presbyterian Church community.

Dear Covenant Families,

This is a topic of conversation among families that has unfortunately come up much too frequently this year. Children are so aware of what is happening in the world. Even the youngest children in our community can be affected by the world's news, simply by absorbing our emotions and expressions as we sift through the difficult streams of information from news articles and social media.

You may be wondering when, how, and what are the right ways to communicate the information we're receiving with the children in your home. Below are some suggestions based on age level.

For all children:

- Wait for your child to ask the questions they have. You can start the conversation by saying, "what do you think about that?" or "How does that make you feel?"
- Before sharing any information, ask, "What do you already know about that?" and "What questions do you have about that?" You may be surprised that children "say" they knew what's going on (i.e. "I know someone died in Minnesota."), but they actually don't have more information than that. Use what they share with you, both facts they know and questions they have, as the jumping off point for your conversation.
- As adults, we often end up over-sharing, because we know what's going on from a different level than our children. We often jump to answering questions in more detail than the children actually need at the time.
- Often, children just want to see you, and feel you being supportive, knowledgeable, and calm. We must provide the steady direction for the children in our families, at least in front of them and within ear shot, in order to keep them self-regulated and feeling safe.

Tips for All Families:

- Watch the news or videos about the news when your children are asleep or outside playing.
- The conversations you have about current events that occur in front of your child should *include* your child, or at least be age-appropriate for their ears. They are likely picking up what you are saying and how you are saying it, even if they don't engage in the conversation.
- Reflect on your role as a parent. Adults must have courage to talk about these events with poise and honesty, depending on the age of their children. You have what it takes to be strong for your child and raise an ally, an advocate, and a seeker of justice.

For Infants and Toddlers:

- The main goal is to include people of color, people of different backgrounds, and people of different abilities in the images, books, songs, stories, and other information you share.
- Research has shown that, by the age of five, children are already attuned to race and skin color differences, and that they start to have preferences towards a specific group of people.
- Go out into the world and point out the beautiful diversity in our world. Keep the language positive and open-ended. This is an opportunity to raise your child to see the goodness in the world.

For young children, ages 3-8:

- As previously mentioned, children are acutely aware of parent conversations, biases, and emotions. Please check your own thoughts and feelings before sharing them in front of your child.
- As your child begins to mature and share curiosity, they might have more questions for you. Remember to only answer the questions you're being asked. Too much information, or information that the child isn't ready to hear, can lead to stress and fear for younger children.
- Continue to expose your children to the beautiful variety of people in our world. True books about people of color (historical figures, inventors, scientists, poets, etc.) are great places to start.
- Keep in mind that types of resources you use should not only show people of color in traditional, cultural clothing, clothing and ceremonies from the past, and the like. People of color and different abilities are living among us today and need to be depicted the same way as everyone else in your book and music collections.

For older children and adolescents, ages 9 and up:

- This group of children will be the most in-tune with what is happening in the world. However, understand your child's threshold for hearing difficult information. Are they already familiar with systematic racism? Do they handle information about violence and murder with maturity?
- Use your observations of your child before deciding how in-depth to go. That aside, it is important to be as honest and transparent as possible. Adolescents, high school aged children, and young adults are at the stage of development where they can become peacemakers in our communities. They are part of the empowered voices seeking change. Your child can definitely handle the introduction of difficult information at this stage of their development.

Below are some ideas of ways that older children can get involved in social justice. Thank you to Martha Reyes, my friend and a teacher at Highland Montessori in Milwaukee, WI, for sharing:

- Create a sign or sidewalk chalk message to display outside of your home that shows your support for Black Lives Matters, or your demand for justice and action against police brutality.
- [Click here](#) to watch the viral video of 12-year-old gospel singer Keedron Bryant singing an original song he recently wrote. Perhaps it will inspire you to create your own song, poem, drawing, video, or other artwork.
- Write a letter or sympathy card to the family of George Floyd. Cards can be send to:

The Estate of George Floyd
c/o Ben Crump Law, PLLC
122 S. Calhoun Street
Tallahassee, FL 32301
Attn: Adner Marcelin

- Ask your parents if you can donate money to one of the organizations / causes below. If you do not have money to donate, or would like to raise more, you can ask your parents if they would pay you to do a big chore at home or if you can set up a social distancing lemonade stand.

- [The Official George Floyd Memorial Fund](#)
- [NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund](#)
- [National Bail Fund Network](#)
- [Communities United Against Police Brutality](#)

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The information shared here is just the tip of the iceberg. There are some amazing resources that share tips for talking to your children at each age, websites for more information, and ways for children to get involved in the conversation. As a Montessori teacher, many of the resources I've found are based around this philosophy of education. However, they are wonderful for all families.

[How to Talk to Children about Racism - Article - Trillium Montessori Montessori for Social Justice Website](#)

[Article from Forest Bluff Montessori - Talking to Children about Life's Uncertainties](#)
[CNN's Suggestions for Talking to Children about Racism](#)

You can also find some book lists here. Representation of all cultures, colors, and abilities is crucial for every home. Perhaps now is a good time to invest in some new books for your home library!

[Family Resources for Books about Racism](#)

[Books for Parents and Educators](#)

[Picture Book Suggestions](#)

[Common Sense Media - Books about Race and Social Justice, Organized by Age](#)

At a parent of a four-year-old, these are my family's favorites:

[Let's Talk about Race](#)

[All the Colors We Are](#)

[Shades of People](#)

[I Like Myself!](#)

[Good People Everywhere](#)

Thank you for reading

Sincerely,
Kate Sargent