

Scenarios for Reflection: Talking About Race and Racism with Children

The following resource has been developed with support from RECE Advisors¹, to provide a series of thought-provoking practice scenarios related to talking about race and racism with children. These scenarios were developed to accompany the [Talking About Race and Racism with Children](#) resource.

Because an early learning setting is often a child's first environment beyond the family, RECEs have a unique opportunity and integral role in advancing equity and social justice in their work. RECEs have a responsibility to pay attention to what is happening in the practice setting through an approach that centers equity, and constructively question any actions or dialogue that have the potential to harm any member of the community.

By having conversations about race and acknowledging the harms that racism causes, RECEs advocate for the interests of children, families, early childhood educators and the early years sector (Standard IV: C.5). Through their daily practice and interactions, RECEs take action to promote social justice, change, equity, inclusion and a sense of belonging for all.

How to use this resource

To support practice, reflection and dialogue related to talking to children about race and racism, the first set of practice scenarios includes responses from RECE Advisors on how they would respond when faced with that scenario.

Their authentic responses are intended to provide an opportunity for collaborative learning and can provide insight and perspective into how different individuals would approach that scenario, broadening thinking, understanding and reflection.

In working through these scenarios, take some time to first consider and critically reflect on the responses from fellow educators, and then consider how you might respond yourself. Remember, this work doesn't have to be done alone – use these scenarios as an opportunity for open dialogue with others in your learning community about why and how these examples might be harmful and how you could respond. Consider what resources you might need for support (e.g., your employer, a community of practice, a mentor, additional resources, self- and collaborative-reflection tools).

¹ RECE Advisors are members of the profession who volunteer to engage with the College to share their insights and knowledges on a variety of subjects.

“To respond to the scenarios or statements, RECEs might begin by posing the question ‘*Why? Tell me more about this so I can understand.*’ If we want to change, we need to have open dialogue and challenge, in a kind and respectful way. Asking why, from a place of curiosity, will create those open dialogues for the speaker as well as for yourself.”
(RECE Advisor)

Section 1: Modeled responses

This section includes short practice scenarios and example responses from RECE Advisors. As you’re reading and reflecting on the scenarios and responses, consider how you might respond in each circumstance. You can note your reflections and, if relevant, save them as documentation for your CPL Portfolio.

A child touches a Black child’s hair.

“Although it seems like a matter of curiosity on the part of the child who touched the Black child’s hair, it isn’t the same for the Black child whose hair was touched. It’s an invasion of personal space. RECEs or any adult observing such curiosity from another child towards Black hair, or different hair in general, should step in and help the ‘curious child’ seek permission and if the other child says no then let it be. The curiosity can lead to an exploration about different types of hair, hair styles, braiding etc. through books and other learning materials.” (RECE Advisor)

Resource suggestion:

Consider reading the scenario “My hair, my crown!” in the [Practice Guideline: Diversity and Culture](#) for an opportunity for further reflection.

Fillable space for your reflection

A child in your program proudly says to you, “Did you know I’m from Trinidad?”

“I would provide the time and space to hear all about it! I would ask them questions and encourage the other children to do the same. As well, I’d try and find photos online if the child doesn’t have any.” (RECE Advisor)

Resource suggestion:

Consider reading the article [Promoting a Positive Racial Identity in Young African Caribbean Children](#) (2019).

Fillable space for your reflection

You overhear your colleague say to a placement student who is going over to comfort a Black boy who is crying, “Ah don’t worry about it – he’s tough, he can handle it.”

“I would respond by encouraging the student who was going to comfort the boy, to continue to do so. I might say, ‘I think he does need you right now, please continue.’ I would ask the educator who described the child as ‘tough’ about her reasoning and might ask them: ‘What is it that you think makes him tough?’ I think I would plan a follow up conversation at a time when the educator was not with the children.” (RECE Advisor)

Resource suggestion:

Consider reading and reflecting on beliefs and biases with this [Pause and reflect on Dwayne’s experience](#).

Fillable space for your reflection

You overhear a colleague asking a child: “Do you have a nickname or English version of your name? It’s too hard for me to remember or pronounce your full name.”

“I would teach the colleague how to pronounce the name. That is what I have done before - taught my supervisor to pronounce a volunteer’s name.” (RECE Advisor)

Resource suggestion:

Consider reading the article [Why Pronouncing Students’ Names Correctly is So Important](#) (2021).

Fillable space for your reflection

Section 2: Try it yourself

Now, take some time to reflect on the following practice scenarios either independently or with others, and consider how you might respond in each situation:

While reading a story, you overhear a child whisper to another child, “I know this story, but the princess is not supposed to be that colour – she is supposed to have blonde hair and lighter skin.”

Fillable space for your reflection

During play a child says, “There is no space for her (a Black doll) in the house” and puts the Black doll down on the floor and tucks the white doll into the bed instead.

Resource suggestion:

Consider reading the article [The Black Baby Doll Doesn't Fit](#) (2016).

Fillable space for your reflection

During a conversation with a group of children a child says to you: “My mom says that virus comes from China.”

Fillable space for your reflection

While reading a storybook to the children, you realize that the Brown child in the story is depicted as a troublemaker.

Resource suggestion:

Consider reading the slides or watching the webinar [Reading Picture Books With Children Through A Race-Conscious Lens](#) (2023).

Fillable space for your reflection

You notice that a group of white children are consistently giving the role of robber to a child who is racialized in a game of “cops and robbers.”

Fillable space for your reflection

You hear a child say to another child, “You don’t look Indigenous.”

Fillable space for your reflection

Resource suggestion:

Consider reviewing page 7 of the [Reflection Guide on Beliefs and Biases](#).

A child asks you “Why is there a Black History Month?”

Resource suggestion:

Consider reading [Celebrating Black History Through Reflection and Action](#) and [Celebrating Black History: A Conversation with Rosemary Sadlier](#).

Additional resources to share with children can be found [here](#).

Fillable space for your reflection

Remember, you don't have to have all the right answers about race, racism and human differences. It is important, however, to generate conversations that cultivate insights and reflections. It's better to respond and say something than nothing at all. It's better to step in and show a child who may have been hurt that you care, just through your actions of noticing and being able to talk about it. That child in turn, is more likely to feel seen, safe and know that they are important.

Additional Resources to Support your Learning

- Embrace Race. (2024). [4 starting points for conversations about race](#).
- Escayg, K.A. (2019). [Exploring Anti-racism in Early Childhood Education: Teacher Identity and Classroom Practices](#). Exchange Press, May/June 11-13.
- Escayg, K.A., & Berman, R., & Royer, N. (2019). [Canadian Children and Race: Toward an Antiracism Analysis](#). *Journal of Childhood Studies*, 42(2), 10-21.
- Escayg, K.A., & Daniel B.J. (2019). [Special Issue: Young Children, Race, and Racism: Global Perspectives](#).
- Russel, N. (2024). [Talking to young children about race: Action guide](#). Embrace Race.

Other College Resources

- [Practice Guideline: Child Development \(2022\)](#)
- [Practice Guideline: Diversity and Culture \(2020\)](#)
- [Practice Guideline: Pedagogical Practice \(2020\)](#)
- [Practice Note: Beliefs and Biases \(2022\)](#)
- [Reflection Guide: Beliefs and Biases \(2022\)](#)