

Guided Conversations Help Reduce Kids' Racial Bias

OVERVIEW

Experts encourage parents to have open conversations about race and racism with their kids, but many White parents fail to have them—sometimes because they fear that talking about race will make their children more biased. When they do have these discussions, parents often use colorblind language that downplays the importance of race, rather than taking a color-conscious approach that acknowledges the existence and history of racism.

In a study published in *Developmental Psychology*, IPR psychologist **Sylvia Perry** and her colleagues examine how guided conversations between White parents and their kids about race affect their children's attitudes toward Black people. They find that when parents used color-conscious language to discuss videos depicting incidents of subtle and blatant racism with their 8- to 12-year-old kids, their children's anti-Black bias decreased. The study is one of the first to show that guided discussion prompts about prejudice can immediately reduce racial bias in White families. The research shows how critical it is for parents to communicate honestly with their children about race and racism—even when they are young.

POLICY TAKEAWAYS

- Despite parents' fears about discussing race, having honest conversations about racism can lower their kids' racial bias.
- Color-conscious language is more effective at reducing racial bias than colorblind messages.
- Providing kids with examples of prejudice can help them understand bias interactions and develop empathy for those who experience racism.



IPR psychologist **Sylvia Perry** studies conversations about race and racism between White parents and their children.

FINDINGS

White children and their parents were much less biased toward Black people after the guided discussions. Children's implicit bias score, which ranked their racial bias, decreased from 0.41 to 0.16 and parents' implicit bias score dropped from 0.53 to 0.34. The findings show that these conversations reduce anti-Black bias in children and parents.

When parents talked to their kids using color-conscious language that acknowledged racism, the children's racial bias declined sharply. In contrast, when parents used colorblind messages that downplayed race or blamed racial incidents on external factors like TV or other media a child consumed, their children's racial bias did not decline as much.

When parents and their kids talked about subtle examples of racism, kids' racial bias dropped significantly. When parents discussed examples of blatant racism, there was not a significant difference in the children's racial bias. The researchers suggest that messages about subtle racism may be more effective at reducing racial prejudice because subtle racism is more common and less likely to be discussed by White Americans compared to overt racism.

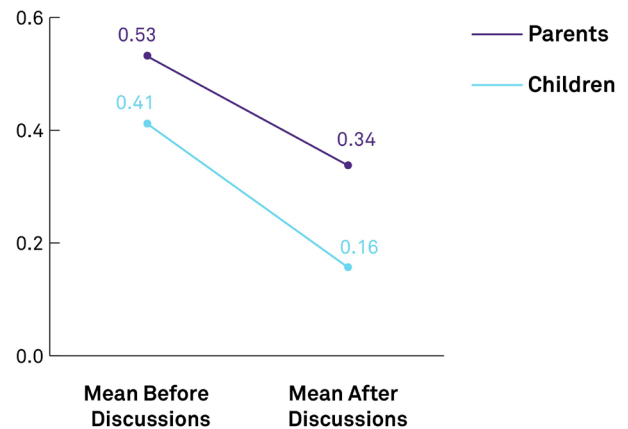
Guided Conversations Reduced Racial Bias in Kids and Parents

Between mid-2018 and early 2020 in Chicago, **84 White parents and their 8- to 12-year-olds** watched videos of racist interactions between a Black child and a White child.



Using guided prompts, they discussed what they saw.

Implicit Pro-White Bias Scores



After the guided conversations, both children and parents showed less racial bias.

METHODOLOGY

Between July 2018 and March 2020, the researchers recruited 84 self-identified White parents and their 8- to 12-year-old children in Chicago, Illinois. After watching videos of a Black child and a White child interacting in different scenarios, including depictions of subtle and blatant prejudice, parents were given a set of guided questions to ask their child. Structured prompts were provided to facilitate discussions using color-conscious language. Parents and their children completed an Implicit Association Test (IAT) to measure their anti-Black/ pro-White biases before and after the study.

REFERENCE

Perry, S., D. Wu, J. L. Abaied, A. L. Skinner-Dorkenoo, S. Sanchez, S. F. Waters, and A. Osnaya. 2024. [White Parents' Racial Socialization During a Guided Discussion Predicts Declines in White Children's Pro-White Biases](#). *Developmental Psychology* 60(4), 624–36.

FACTS AND FIGURES

- Nearly all parents (92%) and children (95%) used color-conscious messages during the guided conversations.
- Only 6% of parents avoided talking about race during the discussions, showing a greater openness to the topic compared to previous studies.
- Overall, 38% of parents and 36% of children attributed prejudice to external factors. For example, after watching one video, a parent suggested the child's family may have taught him to be racist.