

Talking to kids about racial inequality and other tough topics

Racial inequality and discrimination are hot topics - in the United States and right in the Quad Cities. There seems to be something in the news every day - from debates about refugees and immigration to demonstrations and even riots.

But this can be a scary topic to talk to your kids about. And these aren't new issues.

"There's a tie between past and present," explains Latrice Lacey, director of the Davenport Civil Rights Commission. Her organization handles discrimination complaints and conducts community outreach, education and training.

"If we don't talk about racial differences and historical inequalities, we could be raising the next generation to be uninformed."

But where to begin? Here are a few tips.

Talk about it.

Talking about racial inequality can be as difficult as bringing up the birds and the bees.

"Talking to kids about race can be uncomfortable," Latrice concedes. "But probably more so for parents than kids." Kids want to understand the world. And they have a higher threshold for talking about tough topics than we give them credit for. Maybe as a parent, you are afraid you will say something wrong. Or that bringing it up will bring more focus on differences.

"We have tried to ignore differences and be 'color blind,'" Latrice says. "But it's a myth. Our differences don't go away if we ignore them."

That's why we need to talk to kids about our differences - to encourage them to embrace diversity around them.

Be open.

The goal is to build a family where racial inequality and other difficult issues are discussed openly. By talking about these topics, we are also able to learn more about our kids' concerns.

This starts at a young age. Patrice says talking to kids about race should begin as early as possible.

Here are a few ideas to help you start the conversation:

- Talk about things that make you and your family different from others - perhaps your family's culture or religion makes you unique. Celebrate the differences!
- Talk about how friends all look different. Encourage kids to talk about what they love about their friends' and family members' differences.



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- Choose books that discuss race and feature characters who look different than your kids.
- If your child comments on different skin colors, don't be dismayed. Children naturally begin to notice differences at a young age, and this is a great opportunity to talk about it.

And as kids get older, the conversation should go deeper.

"We should talk to older kids about the things our country has done historically to further racial inequality," Latrice suggests. "It's important to discuss what has happened in the past and what we can do to create change."

This history - including policies like school segregation and housing discrimination, still have a large impact on minorities today. School history books often skip or gloss over these complex issues, which means it's up to parents to talk to kids.

It's important because these historical policies, in many ways, led to a race divide that exist today. And this could help your kids (and you) have a better understanding of the problems we face.

"There's a feeling that people (minorities) just need to work harder to be in a better place," Latrice says. "But that's not really how it works."

Expose your children to diversity.

The efforts to talk about racial differences can be much simpler if you are exposed to diverse people. But the truth is, this doesn't always happen.

"People don't want to step out of their comfort zone and talk to people who are different," Patrice says. "This often means that your race impacts your friendships, employment and education."

If your neighborhood or school district aren't diverse, surround your child with books and artwork featuring children of other races. And take your kids to events where they can interact with a variety of people and cultures. (The Quad Cities has a lot of wonderful cultural, religious and ethnic events that are open to the public.)

Be proactive.

One study has found that by age 6, many children already internalize racial prejudices.

From a young age, humans seek to create patterns and make sense of the world. In the absence of conversation, kids are going to make snap judgements about people who look different than they do. This can lead to bullying and other issues in school. When you hear your child speak about this topic or notice bullying happen, it's important to take action. Talk to other parents, the school and the teacher to make sure issues are addressed.

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Walk the talk.

If you have friends and colleagues from different backgrounds and if you speak highly of diversity, it's more likely your child do the same way.

On the opposite side, if your child hears you talk about other races or religions disrespectfully, no amount of talking about tolerance will make an impact.

now what? | **KEEP CONNECTING.**

We want our kids to grow up in a world free of hatred and inequality. The good news? We can help make this change right inside our homes.

We can do this by starting a conversation and embracing diversity around us.



Originally posted on the Now What? Blog 12/16/15. The Now What? Blog served for nearly 7 years to

- 1. Normalize parents seeking support and help as a manner of child abuse prevention*
- 2. Engage community in how they can work to prevent child abuse*
- 3. Work to build resiliency in families through promotion of the 5 protective factors*

Maybe you coach a baseball team or you help care for the neighbor kids from time to time. You are investing in the safety and security of the children in our community. Because it truly does take a village to raise our children, we want to offer the tools needed to bring awareness and education to preventing child abuse.

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