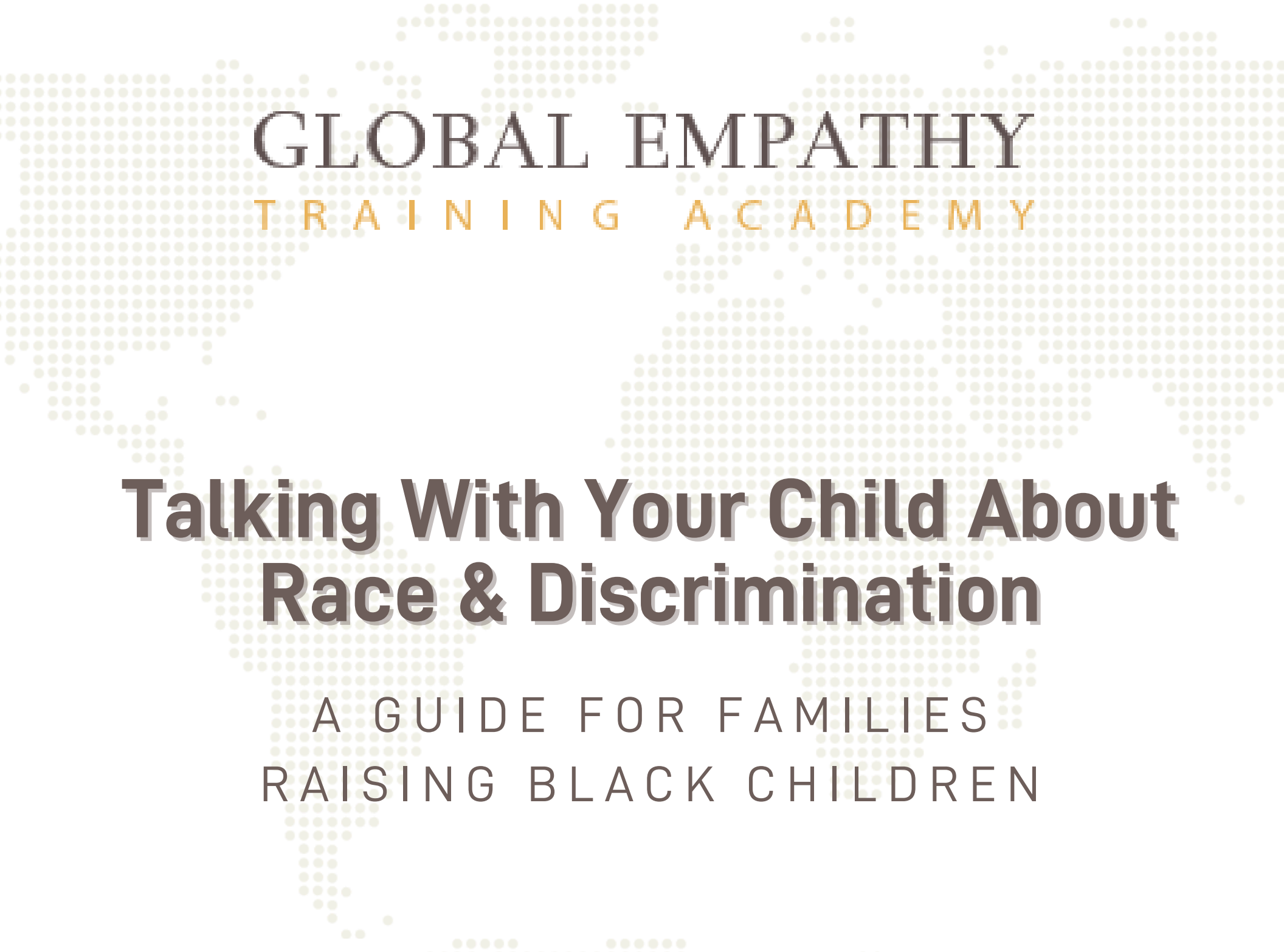




GLOBAL EMPATHY
TRAINING ACADEMY

Talking With Your Child About Race & Discrimination

A GUIDE FOR FAMILIES
RAISING BLACK CHILDREN



By: Dr. L. M. McKenzie

A GUIDE FOR FAMILIES

Raising Race- Conscious Children

*A parent's guide to talking openly about race,
discrimination, and resilience*

This booklet was created to support families in having honest, age-appropriate conversations about race. These conversations are not easy, but they are necessary. You don't have to have all the answers. What matters is that your child knows they can come to you.

Foreword

I came to the 2026 community listening sessions as a mother and a witness. While I am also a clinician and a scholar who has spent years studying trauma, healing, and human development; none of those credentials came with me into that room, my truth as a parent did. I brought with me a lens that was shaped long ago as a young Black girl on the South Side of Chicago. I learned early that difference exists, that it causes harm, and that ignoring it only deepens the wound. No degree, no title, and no clinical framework shields' a parent from the weight of watching their children navigate anti-Black harm inside a system that is hurting as well.

Our children's presence is mandated, but their humanity is not. That is the reality of navigating these spaces. In spaces where marginalized communities could be standing in solidarity against shared oppression, we as Black people too often face colorism, classism, and division from those who can be allies. It is a heavy truth to carry, but when I spoke out in those sessions, I was not speaking from a place of defeat. I was naming the truth that sits in the quiet corners: the racism, the status, and the indifference that constantly breach our ability to simply be.

Let me be clear: true liberation is not about doing more to survive a broken system. Doing and having are survival tactics; being is liberation. Being is not forcing a way through hostile doors, it is the truth, the path, and the unyielding recognition of our inherent worth. The real work of liberation begins when we refuse to let harm define the boundaries of our joy, our children's joy, our safety, our potential, and our capacity to exist fully as we are.

This Parent Guide is not an academic exercise, nor is it a theoretical cure. It is an anchor. It was created because families needed raw honesty, real language, and actionable strategies to protect their children without losing themselves in the process. I joined this project as a peer reviewer, and in doing so, I found something I did not expect. I found community. I found hope. I found people who refuse to ignore what is happening to Black students and who are committed to building something better. If you are holding this guide, know this: you are not walking this road alone. You do not have to shrink, appease, or exhaust yourself to protect your child. Let these pages serve as a mirror of your strength, a tool for your advocacy, and a reminder that our presence is rooted in power, clarity, and purpose. We are not here to adjust to the harm—we are here to stand in our full humanity and set our children free.

Be Well,

Dr. Theresa Everett, Ed.D., LCPC

A WORD FOR YOU, DEAR PARENT

You are doing something courageous simply by having the conversations. You may not have all the answers. You may stumble over your words. You may feel uncertain, overwhelmed, or heartbroken at what your child must navigate. And yet—you show up. You listen. You affirm. You prepare. That is enough. That is everything.

Your child does not need a perfect parent. They need a present one. One who says: I see you. I believe you. You are loved. You belong. And no matter what happens out there, you always have a home in me.

You've got this.

Why These Conversations Matter

Research shows that children notice race by age 3–4 and can absorb biases without guidance, potentially internalizing harmful messages about who they are and where they belong. By age 5, many children have already formed racial attitudes based on what they see around them in media, in their neighborhoods, and in the adults they trust most.

As a parent raising a Black child, you are your child’s first and most powerful teacher. These conversations are not a one-time talk. They are an ongoing, loving practice of affirming your child’s identity, building critical thinking, and preparing them to navigate a complex world with confidence and dignity.

WHY IT MATTERS

Silence does not protect Black children from racism. Without guidance, children fill in the blanks themselves, often in ways shaped by stereotypes and bias. Children who receive open, affirming conversations about race show higher self-esteem, stronger cultural identity, and greater resilience in the face of discrimination. When you name race openly, you give your child the language, the context, and the confidence to understand their world.

Talking about race doesn't create racism. Silence does.

You Are Not Alone

Many families carry the weight of these conversations protecting children while nurturing joy, pride, and belonging. Global Empathy Training Academy (GETA) provides research-based, community-centered tools to support you.

GETA TIP

Every conversation you have plants a seed. Even when the words feel imperfect or the moment feels hard, you are teaching your child that their identity deserves to be named, protected, and celebrated. What matters most is your presence and your willingness to keep showing up.

Children need to know that racism is real, that it is wrong, and that they are not alone. These conversations build identity, resilience, and critical thinking. These are skills your child will carry for life.

What Children Observe

Children are perceptive. Long before they have the words to describe what they see, they are noticing who is represented in books and on television, who holds positions of authority, who is profiled because of race, and how adults around them react.

Children notice:

- Who is in positions of leadership in their school and community
- Racial differences in skin tone, hair texture, and features
- How adults react to people who look different: tone, body language, what is left unsaid
- Media representations: who is the hero, who is the villain, who is not included
- Treatment disparities: who gets called out, corrected, or disciplined more quickly than others for similar behavior
- Messages about beauty, intelligence, and worthiness embedded in everyday culture
- History and curriculum: whose stories are centered and whose are omitted
- Microaggressions directed at family members and self

PARENT REFLECTION

Think about a time your child noticed something unfair or unkind at school or in a story. How did they describe it? What did their reaction show you about how they understand fairness and empathy?

Why Silence Can Hurt

When caregivers avoid talking about race, children fill the silence with confusion or shame. Speaking openly, even imperfectly, signals that your child's identity is worth celebrating.

Children learn from what they see, hear, and feel around them. As a parent raising a Black child, your voice helps them make sense of the world with clarity instead of confusion or shame. When you talk openly about race, fairness, and belonging, you show your child that awareness and empathy are part of being empowered citizen. These small, honest conversations build confidence, honor, and connection that support your child throughout their life.

How Discrimination Affects Children

Experiencing or witnessing discrimination has real emotional and developmental consequences for children. These effects can appear as anxiety, anger, withdrawal, low self-esteem, or diminished academic engagement. Additionally, children who experience racial discrimination without a supportive framework to process it are at greater risk for chronic stress. Over time, this stress can negatively impact their cognitive development, mental health and physical well-being.

Academic & Behavioral

Research shows that repeated experiences of discrimination can lower academic motivation, increase school avoidance, and make it harder for children to trust adults in authority. Early, honest conversations act as a protective buffer that supports both academic engagement and healthy learning behavior.

Physical Health

Racial stress is linked to elevated cortisol, sleep disruption, and long-term health effects. Belonging and affirmation are essential for health and not optional. Therefore, pay close attention to shifts in behavior, mood, or identity expression that may signal your child is carrying this burden.

Signs Your Child May Be Carrying This Burden:

- Reluctance to go to school or engage in social activities: Reluctance often signals that something at school or in peer spaces is causing emotional discomfort.
- Sudden changes in mood or behavior: These shifts often reflect internal conflict. Your child may be trying to make sense of unfair experiences or hurtful comments.
- Statements suggesting shame about their identity: These statements are important signals that a child is absorbing negative messages about race.
- Withdrawal from cultural connections: Child not wanting to wear their natural hair or shy away from other parts of their identity that once brought them joy. These shifts happen when racial stress makes a child question whether their identity is safe or valued.
- Nightmares: These can be dreams or changes in sleep. Your child may experience more distractions around bedtime, increased wakefulness, changes in mood during the daytime.
- Anxiety: Your child may express anxiety through physical complaints such as headaches, stomachaches, or body pains. They might avoid certain people or places, or seem tense and easily startled.
- Concentration: Racial stress can affect a child's ability to focus. You may notice forgetfulness, irritability, or distraction during homework or daily routines. This is not a lack of motivation, it is a sign that emotional energy is being spent on coping.

WHY IT MATTERS

Children with a strong, positive racial identity are significantly more resilient when facing discrimination. Your words and your home are where that identity takes root.

How to Talk With Your Child

There is no single right way to talk about race with children. The most important ingredients are honesty, consistency, and love. Here are some principles to guide you:

- 1. Start Early and Stay Consistent.** Don't wait for an incident. Normalize conversations about race as part of life. Use opportunities at the dinner table, during car rides, while reading books together.
- 2. Use age-appropriate language.** Young children (ages 3–6) can understand basic concepts of fairness and sameness/difference. Older children can handle more complex discussions about systems and history.
- 3. Follow Their Lead.** Ask what they think first when they share an observation. This builds critical thinking and trust. Asking questions first helps your child explore their own observations and teaches them that their ideas matter. It also opens the door for deeper conversations about respect and empathy.
- 4. Name Discrimination.** Affirm you child: "That wasn't fair. That's called discrimination. It is never okay."
- 5. Be honest about your own experiences.** Sharing your own encounters with race and discrimination, at the right level, helps your child feel less alone and teaches them that these experiences are survivable.
- 6. Affirm Consistently.** End every hard conversation: "You are brilliant, loved, and worthy, exactly as you are."

REMEMBER

It is okay to say "I don't know but let's find out together." Curiosity is more powerful than having all the answers.

Every conversation about race is a chance to build trust and belonging. When you listen first, speak honestly, and affirm your child's feelings, you show them that their experiences matter and that they are never alone. These moments teach your child that curiosity and compassion are powerful tools for understanding others and for honoring who they are. Some conversations about race involve language that carries deep historical harm. One of the most important topics to address with your child is the N-Word.

Talking With Your Child About the N-Word

Why this conversation matters

Children hear the N-Word in music, online spaces, and peer conversations, and they may not understand its history or the harm it carries. Talking openly helps your child understand where the word comes from, why it causes pain, and how to make choices that honor themselves and their community. Many school districts are now adopting resolutions that address the N-Word directly because they recognize its impact on student wellbeing and school climate. These efforts reflect a growing commitment to creating learning environments where all children feel safe, respected, and protected from harmful language.

When Black Children Use the N-Word With Each Other

Some Black children use the N-Word casually because they hear it in popular culture or among peers. Families make different choices about this word, and some allow their children to use it at home. Even when this is a family choice, children need to understand that school is a shared environment. Not everyone knows the history of the word, and not everyone uses it with care. Many Black students understand the harm behind the word and find it offensive, even when it is used casually among peers. What feels familiar among Black peers can become confusing or harmful in mixed racial settings.

You can help your child understand that language carries power. Choosing words that uplift strengthens community and self-worth. You might say:

“I know you hear that word in music or from friends. I want you to understand where it comes from and why it has caused so much harm. You deserve language that honors who you are.”

When Other Students Ask for “Permission” to Use the N-Word

Students who do not ethnically identify as Black, sometimes ask Black students if they can use the N-Word. This places Black children in an unfair position. No child is responsible for giving or denying permission for a word rooted in oppression. Your child does not have to explain, justify, or approve anyone’s use of harmful language.

You might say:

“It is not your job to give permission for that word. You can simply say that it is not okay and that you do not want to be part of that conversation.”

This helps your child set boundaries without carrying the emotional weight of managing other people’s choices.

Your guidance helps your child understand the weight of language and the history carried in the N-Word. As more school districts adopt resolutions that address this word directly, families and schools share a growing commitment to creating environments where harmful language is not ignored or minimized. When you talk openly with your child, you strengthen their sense of worth and help them navigate peer culture with clarity and confidence. These conversations remind them that they deserve dignity in every space and that their identity is never defined by the words others choose to use.

What Happens If Your Child Uses the N-Word

This section is written for families whose children may use racial slurs, including the N-Word, regardless of race or ethnicity. Schools are responsible for addressing harmful language because racial slurs can make other students feel unsafe or targeted. A call from the school is not a judgment of your child or your family. It is an opportunity to teach, clarify, and support your child in choosing language that reflects respect and dignity. When educators call home, they are trying to understand what happened, protect all students involved, and partner with families to prevent future harm. You can help your child by staying calm, asking what they understood about the word, and explaining why certain words carry histories that can hurt others.

You might say:

“I know you may have heard that word in music or from friends. I want you to understand where it comes from and why it can hurt people. You are learning and growing, and we can talk about better ways to express yourself.”

Responding with honesty and care helps your child learn accountability without shame. It also strengthens trust between families and schools, making it easier to work together when difficult moments arise.

What educators are required to do when slurs are used

Educators are responsible for keeping all students safe. When a racial slur is used, staff must respond in ways that protect student wellbeing and prevent future harm. This includes addressing the incident, checking in with students who were affected, and communicating with families when needed. Schools are also required to follow district policies that prohibit discrimination and harmful language. These steps help create a learning environment where every child feels respected and supported.

What families should expect during a school follow-up

When a racial slur is used at school, educators should follow up with students to understand what happened and to support all students involved. Families should expect a calm conversation focused on safety, clarity, and learning. Staff may ask what your child understood about the word, where they heard it, and how they felt during the incident. They may also share how other students were affected and what steps the school is taking to address the situation.

The goal is not to blame your child. The goal is to help them learn, repair harm, and choose language that reflects respect. Families can expect open communication, opportunities to ask questions, and a shared commitment to helping children grow in ways that strengthen the school community.

When Your Child Reports an Incident at School

If your child tells you about a racial incident at school, the first few minutes are a powerful opportunity to offer safety, care, and clarity. Your calm presence helps them feel believed and protected. Once they feel secure, you can take clear steps to ensure accountability and support.

- 1. Listen fully.** Let your child tell the full story in their own words. Do not minimize or rush to solutions.
- 2. Affirm clearly.** Say, “I believe you. What happened was wrong.” Avoid explaining or excusing the behavior.
- 3. Document carefully.** Record dates, times, and names to protect your child’s story and ensure accountability.
- 4. Contact the school formally.** Request a meeting in writing and reference district policy.
- 5. Know your rights.** California law protects students from racial harassment and ensures prompt corrective action. *California’s Safe Place to Learn Act* requires schools to prevent and address racial harassment. If your district does not act promptly, you can file a Uniform Complaint Procedure (UCP) with the district or escalate to the California Department of Education.

GETA TIP

When you meet with school staff, bring a written summary of what your child shared and what you hope will happen next. Clear documentation helps everyone stay focused on solutions and accountability.

When your child shares a painful experience, your calm presence becomes the foundation for action. Listening with care and documenting what happened turns empathy into advocacy. Each time you speak up with clarity and compassion, you show your child that fairness is not optional and that their voice has power. Together, you are shaping a school community where every child deserves respect.

PARENT REFLECTION

What messages about language did you grow up with, and how do they shape the guidance you want to give your child today?

Culturally Responsive Guidance for Black Families

Black families have long navigated the delicate balance of instilling Black Joy while also preparing children for the realities of living in a society that does not always see their full humanity. This dual awareness, often called double consciousness, helps children thrive within their own culture while navigating how their world perceives them. The following practices help your child build pride, connection, and resilience by grounding them in identity, community, and joy.

Affirm Identity and Heritage. Actively celebrate Black history, art, language, and achievement year round. Fill your home with books, music, and images that reflect your child's full humanity and history.

The Talk and Why It Still Matters. Age appropriate conversations about how to navigate encounters with authority, including law enforcement, are a protective factor, not a burden. Frame these conversations with love, not fear.

Bring in Community and Faith. Extended family, church communities, and Black-centered programs offer spaces where your child sees themselves reflected and celebrated.

Honor Joy Alongside Struggle. Do not let conversations about discrimination overshadow Black joy, beauty, creativity, and love. Both are true and both matter.

GET A TIP

Invite your child to share something they love about being part of their culture. Write their words on a card and place it somewhere visible at home. Seeing their own affirmation each day reminds them that cultural confidence and belonging begin within.

“Know whence you came. If you know whence you came, there is really no limit to where you can go.”

James Baldwin

Raising a Black child means nurturing a sense of wholeness and self worth that cannot be shaken by the world. Each conversation, each moment of honesty, and each act of love teaches your child that they are seen, valued, and held. You are helping them grow into their full brilliance with confidence and belonging.

Preparing Children for Racist Comments & Bias

No parent wants to imagine their child being treated unfairly because of race. Preparing children for these moments is an act of care. When children understand that bias exists and that it is never their fault, they are better able to respond with calm and self respect. When children are prepared for unfair moments, they are more likely to respond with confidence and to trust their own worth.

Things to Say in Advance:

- "Sometimes people say hurtful things about race. That is never okay. It is never your fault."
- "If someone says something mean about your skin color or your family, you have permission to say, *“That is not okay”*, then walk away and tell an adult.”
- "Your identity is something to honor and celebrate. No one should try to diminish your worth."

PREPARATION TIPS:

Name It Before It Happens. Talking openly about race helps children understand the world around them. When you name unfair behavior clearly, you help your child recognize it without blaming themselves.

Practice Responses Together. Try simple role play. You might say, “Let us practice what you can do if someone says something unfair.” Then model calm responses such as, “That is not okay,” or “I know who I am.” Practicing ahead of time helps children feel prepared and confident.

Debrief After Incidents. Invite your child to talk about what happened and what they did well. This helps them see their own strength and keeps the experience from settling into self doubt.

GETA TIP

Always reassure your child: **"You did nothing wrong. What happened was unfair, and we will handle it together."**

Preparation helps children respond with confidence. When an incident does occur, your calm presence becomes their anchor. Every conversation about race is an act of care. Listening, affirming, and showing up remind your child that they are never alone.

Affirming Conversation Starters by Age

START SMALL

Choose one question at a time. Let your child lead the pace. These conversations grow naturally when they feel safe and unhurried.

AGES 3–5 · Simple & Affirming

- I love our brown skin. What do you love about the way you look?
- Why do people have different skin colors?
- Let's read a book about someone who looks like you!
- Every family looks a little different, and that's beautiful.
- Have you ever noticed that some kids look different from you? What do you think about that?

AGES 6–9 · Curious & Exploratory

- Why do you think some places have more people who look like us?
- What would you do if someone said something unkind about how you look?
- Who is your favorite Black hero, real or in a story, and why?
- What makes you feel honored to be Black?
- How can we help someone who feels left out because of how they look?

AGES 10–13 · Critical & Empowering

- What have you noticed about how Black people are shown in movies or TV?
- What do you think racism looks like today? Is it different from the past?
- Have you ever seen or experienced something that felt unfair because of your skin tone?
- What does being Black mean to you? What do you want others to know about your culture?
- How do you think schools can make sure every student feels respected and included?

AGES 14-17 · Bold & Action-Oriented

- What does racial justice mean to you, and what is one thing you could do in your school or community to help?
- Have you ever had a conversation with someone about race? What was it like?
- How do you protect your mental health and joy while staying informed about racism and injustice?
- What does allyship look like to you? How would you like to be supported?
- How can you use your voice to make change while keeping compassion at the center?

Conversation Starters About Harmful Language

START SMALL

Choose one question at a time. Let your child lead the pace. These conversations grow naturally when they feel safe and unhurried.

AGES 3–5 · Simple & Affirming

- Some words can hurt people. What are kind words we can use instead?
- Tell me one nice you can say to someone when you love them?
- If we hear a word that feels mean, what can we do?
- Why is it important to use words that make people feel good?
- Let’s practice saying words that help people feel safe.

AGES 6–9 · Curious & Exploratory

- Have you ever heard someone say a word that felt wrong or unkind?
- How do words make people feel angry or sad?
- What should you do if a friend uses a word that hurts someone?
- What does it mean when people say a word has history?
- How can we help friends understand when a word is not okay to use?

AGES 10–13 · Critical & Empowering

- What have you heard about the N-Word or other harmful words? Where do people use them?
- Why do some people say certain words are okay in music but not okay at school?
- How do you feel when you hear a word that has been used to hurt people?
- What can you do if someone asks you for permission to use a harmful word?
- How can words hurt someone, even if you didn’t mean to hurt them?

AGES 14-17 · Bold & Action-Oriented

- What does reclaiming language mean to you? Do you think all reclaimed words feel safe for everyone?
- How can you talk about the N-Word or other slurs without shame or fear?
- What does respect look like when people disagree about certain words?
- How can you challenge harmful language while keeping compassion at the center?
- How do you protect your mental health when conversations about language get heavy?

What Families Can Do Together

It takes a community to raise a race-conscious and resilient child. Help your child identify trusted people who affirm their identity and advocate for their safety. Home is the first classroom, and community is where those lessons are practiced. Together, these spaces reinforce your family’s values and strengthen your child’s confidence.

At Home

- Build a home library with books centering Black children and families
- Display art, photos, and symbols that celebrate your heritage
- Watch films and shows featuring authentic Black stories
- Celebrate Juneteenth, Black History Month, and ongoing family traditions

In the Community

- Attend cultural festivals, museums, and events centering Black history
- Connect with Black-led nonprofits and cultural organizations
- Seek schools and programs with diverse, affirming curricula

Ongoing Practices

- Hold weekly check-in conversations about identity and school
- Share stories of navigating race with age-appropriate honesty
- Model how to speak up respectfully when you witness injustice

Identify Allies.

Allies are people who listen, act, and stand beside your child. Help them recognize who those people are at school and in the community.

Allies at School May Include:

- A teacher, aid, counselor, or principal who openly acknowledges and celebrates your child's culture
- A campus supervisor or wellness aid who has been trained in culturally responsive practices
- A staff member who responds promptly and equitably to reports of bias
- A classmate who stands up for others and treats everyone with respect
- A friend who listens and helps you find an adult when something unfair happens

Allies in Your Community May Include:

- Faith leaders and Community Based Organizations who speak openly about justice
- Coaches, peer mentors, or youth program leaders who reflect your child's identity
- A therapist or counselor who understands racial stress and healing
- A school board member who supports fair policies and responds to concerns about student safety and inclusion.
- Other parents and family networks who share your values

Appendix: How Schools Can Use This Guide

This guide supports families in understanding their rights, reducing racial stress, and navigating school systems with clarity. Families who know how to advocate help schools create safer and more equitable environments for all children. The guidance does not require schools to disclose private student information or violate FERPA, HIPAA, Ed Code, or IEP protections.

It explains what families can document, what they can request, and what California law requires districts to do when racial incidents are reported. Districts must investigate concerns, take prompt corrective action, communicate with families, and maintain policies that protect students from discrimination.

Schools can use this guide to strengthen trust, improve communication, and ensure that children feel safe, respected, and supported. Clear expectations help families and schools work together to protect student wellbeing.

For Educators Navigating Peer Use of the N-Word

In many schools, educators hear Black students using the N-Word casually with each other. These moments can be confusing for staff who want to respond appropriately but also respect cultural context. For some Black students, the word feels familiar because they hear it in music, social media, or peer conversations. They may use it as a form of bonding, humor, or shared identity. For others, it feels uncomfortable or painful. Both experiences are valid, and schools must approach these situations with understanding, not punishment.

When Black students use the N-Word with each other, it is not automatically a disciplinary issue. It is a teaching moment. Educators can use restorative conversations to help students explore the history of the word, its emotional impact, and the power of language to heal or harm. These conversations build trust and help students understand that their voices matter. Their dignity is always the goal.

Educators should remember that the N-Word carries a long history of violence and dehumanization. Even when used between Black students, it can still cause harm, especially in mixed settings where others may not understand its meaning or boundaries. The goal is not to shame students but to help them reflect on how language shapes identity, belonging, and respect.

When addressing these moments, educators can:

- Speak privately and calmly with the students involved.
- Ask what the word means to them and how they think others might feel hearing it.
- Affirm their right to cultural expression while helping them understand that school is a shared environment.
- Explain that using the word publicly can invite misunderstanding or harm, even among peers.
- Encourage language that uplifts and honors their identity.

You might say: “I know you may hear that word in music or among friends, but it has a painful history. I want you to think about how it affects others and how you can use words that show honor and respect for yourself and your community.”

This approach helps students feel seen and respected while learning accountability. It also models how schools can respond to complex cultural language with empathy and clarity.

WE HOPE YOU FIND THIS PARENT GUIDE HELPFUL

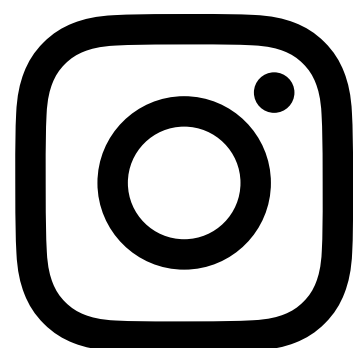
At GETA, we know these conversations do not end here. There is so much more to explore, learn, and build together. We are committed to continuing this work with you and will keep creating tools and solutions that support families and schools, strengthen safety, and develop empathy.

We invite you to stay connected by visiting our website to join our mailing list and follow us on social media. Additionally, be on the lookout for additional resources, trainings, and guidance. Your voice, your questions, and your experiences help shape what we create next.

You are not alone on this journey. You are part of a community that believes in justice, belonging, and the brilliance of Black children. Keep showing up. Keep listening. Keep affirming. Keep preparing. Your presence is powerful, and your love is a foundation your child will carry for life.

Stay Connected

@imagineglobalempathy



GETA uses a holistic approach to all areas of our work to build a culture of belonging. Justice and equity are at the core of our mission, and all of our work is designed to help restore well-being in a traumatic era of civil unrest.

For more information, visit our website at

www.globalempathytraining.com



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