

Today, it's impossible for me to write about anything other than the racial and social injustices that our nation and city of Buffalo are currently facing. With the recent tragic murders of three Black individuals and the subsequent protests and riots that are taking place, more than likely, you and your family have been affected in one way or another.

As we continue to deal with social distancing and home-schooling, many children have access to the internet more than they may have had before. Even young children may see or hear about highly publicized incidents like the George Floyd case—perhaps overhearing the TV or the radio—and may ask questions. Or like myself, if parents are upset by the news, your children will most likely notice their parent's distress and ask why mom or dad is upset. In either case, an age-appropriate explanation is better than silence. Initiating an age-appropriate conversation can give children a helpful framework for understanding these difficult realities. It can also help them to process and cope with strong feelings.

One thing to know right off the bat is that it's OK to be scared to have these conversations, it's ok to not know exactly what to say and it's important to remember that you may not have all the answers and that is ok too.

In situations like these, the **FIRST** thing is to take care of yourself as a parent. Think about how on an airplane you're instructed to put your oxygen mask on first before putting your child's on; it's a good reminder that the better we take care of ourselves, the better we will be able to take care of our children. Every parent is different. What do you do to take care of yourself?

**SECOND**, when it comes to having a conversation with your child, the place I always start with is by asking my children what they already know or what they've heard. This is helpful so that you can alter your conversation based on their understanding, thoughts and feelings.

**THIRD**, for younger children, conversations about racism should be limited to basic facts about how people are treated differently due to the color of their skin. It is also important to acknowledge that not everyone treats people differently based on race. For example, many police officers become police officers because they want to help people. And there are times when we would really want a police officer to help us—give some examples— if there's been a car accident, or if someone took something that belonged to us, etc. But sometimes a police officer does something bad. When that happens, we might start to think that all police officers are like that. I would suggest that you don't show your children any of the videos that have surfaced, as it may increase trauma and nightmares.

For older teens, parents can consider exposure to news or social media posts as discussion points about this issue.

**FOURTH**, acknowledge your own feelings as an adult and acknowledge your children's feelings. Parents may have similar feelings. Share your hurt, anger, or disappointment with your child. You may say something like, "I know it's upsetting to hear about and see these things happening all around us. It upsets me too when bad things like this happen. Racism is very unfair."

**FIFTH**, talk with your child about coping mechanisms. What has worked for them before (to calm down) when they've had strong feelings. What are some new things that they can try? Create a list possibly or a space in your home where your child can go when they need to calm down. You may put coloring books, sensory toys, books, etc. in this area for them. Take a look at this infographic with more ways to help your child handle strong emotions.

[https://challengingbehavior.cbcs.usf.edu/docs/Calm-Down\\_Poster\\_EN.pdf](https://challengingbehavior.cbcs.usf.edu/docs/Calm-Down_Poster_EN.pdf)

[https://challengingbehavior.cbcs.usf.edu/docs/Calm-Down\\_Poster\\_SP.pdf](https://challengingbehavior.cbcs.usf.edu/docs/Calm-Down_Poster_SP.pdf)

**SIXTH**, take a few minutes to talk about the fact that there are a lot of people out there that want things to change. Being able to offer specific examples of community change agents would be useful. For example, all the people who came to downtown Buffalo to volunteer after the protest to help clean up our city. Being able to talk about what family members are doing to speak up against injustice is also useful. Actions always speak louder than words. I spoke to my children about my participation in peaceful protests, donating money to local organizations and joining organizations such as SURJ (Standing Up for Racial Justice).

**FINALLY**, take time to hug and love your children. Give them the freedom to express themselves. Ask them if there is anything they would like to do to contribute to anti-racist work and conversations. These times are incredibly difficult for adults. Sometimes children have it even harder because they feel even less control in the situation. Work together as a family unit and support one another.

Check out these links below with more ways to talk to your children about protests and racism, as well as books to support conversations on race/racism/resistance.

As mentioned in the article below, "We need to engage our children in a conversation about racism and use these events as a catalyst. While it is upsetting to watch, we need to sit with that discomfort and teach our families how to channel that energy to work to dismantle the racist structures that exist in our communities." Radesky said.

I am wishing you all my love and support. Please take care of yourself the best you can during these challenging times. We see you, we hear you and we support you.

<https://www.cnn.com/2020/06/01/health/protests-racism-talk-to-children-wellness/index.html>

<https://www.embracerace.org/resources/26-childrens-books-to-support-conversations-on-race-racism-resistance>