
Recognizing and Describing Children's Emotions About Race

INSTRUCTIONS

This handout was designed for use with the TEDxStanford talk entitled “Is My Skin Brown Because I Drank Chocolate Milk?” by Dr. Beverly Daniel Tatum. The questions and activities in this handout could be used in a work session (e.g., professional learning community, professional development session), for individual coaching, or for self-reflection.

Goals

- ◆ Understand how strong emotions connected with race-related experiences influence our sense of the world from a very young age.
- ◆ Explore ways to support young children as they recognize and describe their own emotions about race and other forms of human diversity.

Activity

- ◆ Listen to the TED talk or read the transcript. This talk is given by Dr. Beverly Daniel Tatum, expert in racial identity development and author of the best-selling book, *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria? And Other Conversations about Race*.
- ◆ After listening to the presentation, use the questions below to guide your reflection on how adults can help children understand their emotions about race and race-related events.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- ◆ What caught your attention from the talk? What made that fact, excerpt, or example meaningful to you?

- ◆ At the beginning of the talk, Dr. Tatum asks the audience to reflect on the emotions that are attached to their earliest race-related memory. Take some time to reflect on your own memories by responding to the following questions:
 1. What is your earliest race-related memory? What emotions are attached to that memory?
 2. Did you talk about that experience when it occurred with a caring, trusted adult, like a family member or teacher? If you shared with an adult, how did they respond to your emotions in that moment? If you didn't share, why not?
 3. Reflect: How did the experience of sharing (or not sharing) your emotions about a race-related memory with an adult influence your sense of the world?

- ◆ Although Dr. Tatum shares stories about her conversations with preschoolers and older children, research shows that children as young as three months begin to show racial awareness and preferences. As they develop, toddlers notice differences among people and may experience fear or discomfort towards people who look or sound different from them.
 - Why do you think teachers and families shy away from discussing topics of diversity around and with very young children?
 - What kinds of emotions have you noticed children experience when they encounter people who are different from them?
 - How can we help children feel safe and supported to express their feelings, make observations, and ask questions about human diversity?

- ◆ Young children need support to recognize and describe their emotions about race-related issues and while they're forming their own ideas about their racial identity. Dr. Tatum recommends that adults listen and respond to children's observations and questions about race rather than ignoring or dismissing them. When we help children recognize and describe their emotions about race, as well as other topics of human diversity (i.e., gender, language, culture etc.), they are better able to understand their feelings and make sense of the world. Use the form on the next page to plan how to support young children's emotions about race and human diversity.

Supporting Children’s Emotions While Talking about Race

Steps and Guiding Questions	Your Plan
<p>Closely observe children’s interactions and conversations. Notice their language, tones, and body language. Get a sense of how they feel while experiencing or talking about human diversity.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ When are children noticing race/human diversity? How do you know? ◆ How will you note their emotions, questions, and observations about race/human diversity? ◆ When will you reflect on your observations? With whom? 	
<p>Respond to children’s emotions in the moment by modeling how to label emotions and supporting them to label their own emotions. Describe their emotions and help them understand why they feel a certain way.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ How will you respond to the emotions of <i>every child</i> involved in the conversations/interactions? ◆ How can older toddlers practice talking about their feelings prior to experiencing strong or complex emotions when talking about race? ◆ What additional supports can you provide to help children recognize and describe their emotions during these interactions and throughout the day? 	
<p>Answer children’s questions with simple and direct language. Notice if and how their emotions change during and after your conversations and interactions. Continue to respond by helping them recognize and describe their changing emotions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ What resources do you need to gather? Where will you find them? ◆ What vocabulary will you use and how will you describe more complex concepts in child-friendly ways? ◆ How will you respond to children’s emotions during your conversations and interactions? How will you check in with their emotions after? 	
<p>Connect with families to share their children’s feelings and questions about race and human diversity. Plan to continue checking in with families as you support children’s emotions while exploring these topics together.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ When and how will you communicate with families about children’s emotions about race? How will you elicit their feelings, experiences, and perspectives about race and other topics of human diversity? ◆ How will you maintain family connections and continue conversations about race and human diversity? 	

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Learn more about supporting children’s emotions while exploring race:

- ◆ **Source:** National Center for Pyramid Model Innovations
 - ◆ **Article:** “Talking to Very Young Children about Race: It’s Necessary Now, More than Ever” by Rosemarie Allen, Amy Hunter, Eric Barton, and Ben Riepe.
 - ◆ **Link:** <https://challengingbehavior.cbcs.usf.edu/docs/Talking-to-children-race.pdf>
 - ◆ **Description:** This article makes a case for normalizing conversations about race with all children to support children’s emotional development. It describes key developmental understandings of race and differences and provides strategies for talking about race at each life stage (birth to 5). Consider how these strategies and open conversations can help children feel safe and confident to share their emotions.
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- ◆ **Source:** EmbraceRace
 - ◆ **List:** “20 Picture Books for 2020: Readings to Embrace Race, Provide Solace and Do Good”
 - ◆ **Link:** <https://www.embracerace.org/resources/20-picture-books-for-2020>
 - ◆ **Description:** Reading books is a great way to start conversations with children about race and to help them explore their emotions. This book list features many children’s books featuring characters and written by authors from marginalized or under-represented groups.
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- ◆ **Source:** Psychology Today
 - ◆ **Article:** “Emotion Perception Across Cultures” by Marianna Pogosyan, Ph.D.
 - ◆ **Link:** <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/between-cultures/201610/emotion-perception-across-cultures>
 - ◆ **Description:** This article explains how culture influences emotion perception in many ways. It contains links to more research that help readers develop a better awareness of cultural differences in emotional expression and provide insight into how to recognize and interpret the emotions of people whose culture differs from their own more accurately.