



# early risers

Waking up to racial equity  
in early childhood.

## Discussion Guide

Season 1, Episode 1: *Bad Things Happen: Helping Young Children Process Racism and Violence*, released April 21, 2021

**Learning Goal:** To discuss the impact racism and violence have on young children, especially when it comes from those who are meant to serve and protect, and what we can do to prepare our children and help them process the consequences of these types of issues.

**Suggested Conversation Length:** 60 minutes



Early Risers is a podcast focused on how to talk with young children about race. Hosted by Dianne Haulcy, the podcast invites early childhood experts into conversations about how parents, caregivers and early childhood educators can tackle this big topic with the little ones in their lives.

## Background

This episode focuses on the impact the killing of yet another African American man at the hands of a white police officer has had on our communities. In this conversation, we are focused on our children: How do we prepare our children for these events? How do we answer their questions? And how can we build up our BIPOC children so they are stronger than the racism they face? It's a job for all of us.

## Guest Bio

Andre Dukes has spent the last decade focused on child development and academic success within the North Minneapolis community in Minnesota. He has partnered with the University of Minnesota Center for Early Education and Development and Urban Research and Outreach-Engagement Center to develop a series of parent education classes that support child development at each stage of the education continuum. Andre also developed "Proud Papa," a curriculum designed to celebrate and use the natural skills of fathers to enhance child development. He is currently vice president of Family and Community Impact for the Northside Achievement Zone in Minneapolis.

## Questions for Discussion

- What are your hopes and fears about participating in this conversation?
- What are your hopes and fears for your young children or the children in your care? What do you hope they will learn?
- Why is it important to talk with children about what happened to George Floyd and other incidents of police brutality or racism in the news? How can parents start these conversations and how does that change depending on their race and the race of their children? Is it more, less, or equally important for white children and children of color to be able to have these conversations? What should an adult say if a child says something racist during one of these conversations?
- How can educators and other caregivers address children's questions or concerns? Do you think that these events can also impact the way a child of color sees their white teacher/caregiver or vice versa? How?
- Andre talks about the importance of helping BIPOC children develop a positive racial identity. How important is the role of a parent, educator, and/or other caregiver in helping a child achieve this? Is one more important than the other? What might this look like in each setting?
- Andre also shared a very painful personal experience that deeply affected his life. How can parents talk to children about law enforcement in a way that is honest, but also doesn't discourage BIPOC children from asking for help from law enforcement when needed? If a child says they are afraid or angry, what do you say? If a child is afraid for their safety or for one of their friends or family members, what do you say?
- Many of these deaths and their aftermath garner attention because recorded footage goes viral and there is a good chance children of various ages will see them. What should we say if a child asks to see it? How can parents explain the instances of social unrest in a way that doesn't condone violence but also doesn't minimize the sense of injustice fueling them?

## Closing the Discussion

As you are closing your discussion, encourage people to continue learning about the history of police brutality in our country and its effect on BIPOC communities. Acknowledge key points and lessons learned during the discussion. Finally, point to additional resources that are available.

## Additional Resources

- [Raising Race Conscious Children](#)
- [Embrace Race: Supporting Kids through Racialized Violence](#)
- [PBS Parent Guide](#)
- [Children's Community School Printable Infographic](#)

## General Facilitator Tips

- Read through all the questions first.
- Reiterate that the purpose of the discussion is to learn from each other.
- Create an agreement with everyone in the discussion group that helps create a safe, nonjudgmental atmosphere—talking about race can be difficult.
- Be sensitive as to how people identify.
- Be prepared for a response to any remarks that might be offensive. The person saying it may not be aware that it is offensive, so be gentle in pointing it out.

## Group Agreements

Ground rules and group agreements are a way to respect safety. Ask members to brainstorm and collectively determine group agreements. Here is some information you can reference:

- [Group agreement information from Seeds for Change](#)
- [Community Agreements tool from Just Lead Washington](#)
- [Sample group agreement from GSAFE](#)

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