



early risers

Waking up to racial equity
in early childhood.

Discussion Guide

Season 8, Episode 1: *When Children Notice: Talking About Immigration, Racism and Belonging*, released September 9, 2026

Learning Goal: How to discuss ICE and immigration enforcement with young children.

Suggested Conversation Length: 60 minutes



little
moments
count

Early Risers is a podcast focused on how to talk with young children about race. 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

When immigration raids and news headlines dominate conversations, children notice, even when adults think they're too young to understand. In this episode, Host Dianne Haulcy reflects on Minnesota's federal immigration enforcement operation and talks with Season 7 Host Andre Dukes about why families need honest, age-appropriate conversations during uncertain times. You'll hear from play therapist and author Olivia Garcia, who explains how stories can help children make sense of difficult events while reinforcing that they belong, and children's mental health specialist Brandon Jones, who shares practical strategies for limiting harmful media exposure, answering tough questions, and helping young children feel supported. Together, they explore how race, identity and community shape children's experiences and why calm, truthful conversations are one of the most powerful tools adults have to build resilience.

Guest Bio

[Andre Dukes](#) is a widely respected early childhood leader based in Minneapolis and a trusted expert on the topic of identity development. Andre was the featured guest on the inaugural episode of Early Risers in 2021 and served as the podcast's host in 2025. Andre has spent the last decade of his career focused on child development and academic success in North Minneapolis, a community with a deeply rooted history of strategic disinvestment and racial segregation. Andre serves as vice president of family and community impact at Northside Achievement Zone, a Minneapolis-based nonprofit.

Discussion Questions

- Discuss what you think children in Minnesota witnessed during Operation Metro Surge. Discuss what you think children around the country may have heard about Operation Metro Surge and ICE.
- How would you describe racial profiling to a 4-year-old? Where might you go to get some help to have this conversation?
- Andre and Brandon talk about how young children feel racism in their bodies even when they do not have words for what they might be seeing and experiencing. What do you think this looks like in their bodies? What are things you should look for in children if you suspect they might be experiencing racism?
- "Outside our Window" by Olivia Garcia does a good job of helping to put words to what was happening in Operation Metro Surge. Discuss other ways you can use this book with young children and how it can help facilitate conversations about race.
- Brandon talks about how he has sometimes encountered parents who want to avoid conversations with young children about hard topics like racial profiling in order to protect them. Discuss the difference between protecting a child's innocence and preparing them for the real world.
- Andre and Brandon discussed how children of different races experience ICE differently. Discuss how children of different races may have experienced ICE or racial profiling differently.

Closing the Discussion

As you close the discussion, remind everyone they can access the free e-book of “Outside Our Window” by Olivia Garcia. Acknowledge key points and lessons learned during the discussion. Finally, point out additional resources available to them.

Additional Resources

- Olivia Garcia’s [“Outside Our Window”](#) e-book.
- [Meeting the Moment: How to talk with young children about ICE in our communities](#), a conversation with Andre Dukes, Olivia Garcia and Brandon Jones.
- [National Child Traumatic Stress Network](#) — Guides for talking with children after traumatic or frightening events, recognizing stress responses and promoting healing.
- [“Something Happened In Our Town”](#) children’s book — Helps adults discuss racial injustice and community violence with young children in an age-appropriate way.
- [National Immigrant Justice Center – Know Your Rights](#) — Legal rights information and family preparedness resources for immigrant communities.

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. Acknowledge that 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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