



# early risers

Waking up to racial equity  
in early childhood.

## Discussion Guide

Season 2, Episode 1: [The Danger of Being “Color Silent:” Talking about Race with Young Children](#), released October 20, 2021

**Learning Goal:** Discuss how racist messages embedded in our culture affect the development of our children’s racial identities and how we can best support them to ensure they have the information they need in order to mitigate negative effects they may encounter as a result of breathing in “the smog.”

**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

In this conversation, we are focused on the messaging our children receive on a daily basis. We know children begin to notice differences at a very young age and begin to communicate these observations as soon as their language develops. Without proper support and guidance, children will draw their own conclusions about these observations in an attempt to make sense of the information—and these conclusions are often incorrect and can cause harm in the long run.

## Guest Bio

Dr. Beverly Daniel Tatum is a psychologist, speaker and author of the bestselling book “Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria? And Other Conversations About Race,” among other works. A leader in the field of higher education and an expert in race relations, Tatum was the recipient of the Carnegie Academic Leadership Award in 2013 and the 2014 recipient of the American Psychological Association Award for Outstanding Lifetime Contributions to Psychology. Throughout her career, she has served as faculty member at the University of California, Santa Barbara; Westfield State University; and Mount Holyoke. She is currently President Emerita of Spelman College.

## Discussion Questions

- 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?
- Haulcy shares that children naturally begin to categorize people based on skin color at a very young age. They develop ideas and values about people based on their own observations and begin to communicate these observations as soon as language development occurs in an attempt to make sense of these observed differences. Reflecting on Tatum’s story about her son Jonathan and his friend Tommy, what are some ways and opportunities in which you can talk to your children—or any children in your life—about the observable differences in race and culture? Looking back, have you missed opportunities to talk about things that make us different? How about the things that make us the same, even though we may look different?
- Tatum talks about “the smog we are all breathing,” explaining that stereotypes, misinformation and prejudices can be found in TV programs, consumer products and other media. This information creates an environment of prejudice that becomes unavoidable, like smog in the air, which makes us all smog breathers. What are some ways in which you might be contributing to this smog? Why is lack of action—remaining silent or staying removed—a problem? What are some ways in which you could help reduce the smog we’re all breathing?
- Haulcy shares a personal story about when she was young and believed she wanted to be white, just like her friends. Tatum clarifies that although this isn’t necessarily self-rejection, children do have a yearning to fit in. She discusses how popular culture’s messages indicate to Black children and children of color that white children have access to things they don’t, such as books and movies where the star looks like them. Why is it important for children of color to “see” themselves in books and television in a positive light? How might lack of diversity in television and books affect a

young child's self-esteem and sense of belonging? In your opinion, is lack of representation and misrepresentation an issue? Why or why not?

- The term "colorism" is mentioned and described as a form of internalized racism. This is a serious problem and one that is often painful, even among family members. Tatum recommends taking everyday opportunities to help combat colorism in children, such as affirmation during bath time. What are other ways in which you can help combat colorism in young children? How does colorism affect a child's identity? What are some instances in which you have encountered colorism? Were you on the receiving end, dealing end or sidelines? Did you realize it was happening in the moment?
- This episode addresses how difficult it can be to discuss racial issues. White people, who are unlikely to experience disadvantages due to their race, often use the term "colorblind" in an attempt to make themselves feel better about their privileged social standing. What message does this send to people of color? How does the term "colorblind" affect both children of color and white children? Why is "shushing" a child noticing or wanting to talk about skin color a bigger problem than it seems? What are some reasons parents neglect to talk to their children about the value of all races?
- Haulcy and Tatum introduce the term "color-silent" as a more accurate term than colorblind, which often leads to denial of negative racial experiences for people of color. It also tends to lead to rejection of differing cultural heritages and unique cultural perspectives. How is being color-silent a form of racism? How has this term contributed to race becoming a taboo topic? How does it lead to adults not being able to have important conversations about race and racism? What would you say to a parent who says their child is "colorblind"?

### Closing the Discussion

As you close the discussion, encourage people to continue learning about the importance of talking about race and racial identity to young children. Acknowledge key points and lessons learned during the discussion. Finally, point to additional resources available to them.

### Additional Resources

- [Raising Race Conscious Children](#)
- [Psychology Today: Colorblind Ideology is a Form of Racism](#)
- [PBS Parent Guide: Talking to Young Children About Race and Racism](#)
- [Michigan Health: Raising Race-Conscious Children: How to Talk to Kids About Race and Racism](#)

## General Facilitator Tips

- Read through all the questions first.
- Reiterate 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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