



# early risers

Waking up to racial equity  
in early childhood.

## Discussion Guide

Season 3, Episode 5: *A Pediatrician Gets Real with His Patients in Talking About Race*  
released July 27, 2022

**Learning Goal:** The goal of this discussion is to explore the role that pediatricians can play in helping parents and caregivers address issues of race and racism.

**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

When it comes to a child's healthy development, the role of a family pediatrician can't be underestimated. In recent years, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and other health officials have identified racism as a serious public health threat. So how can pediatricians help parents and caregivers address issues of race and racism? Dr. Nathan Chomilo is a practicing general pediatrician as well as a leading voice around health equity, both in Minnesota and on the national level. He describes the conversations he has with his patients about race and how parents can work with their pediatrician as an ally when a child encounters racial bias.

## Guest Bio

Dr. Nathan Chomilo is a general pediatrician at Park Nicollet Health Services/HealthPartners and Executive Committee Member, American Academy of Pediatrics Section on Minority Health Equity & Inclusion.

## 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 are some agreements tools to use as a reference:

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

## Questions for Discussion

- Incorporating discussions about race in well-child checks is not required but can be a safe place for families to gain skills in supporting children’s racial identity development. Discuss your initial thoughts about hearing how Dr. Chomilo and other doctors are incorporating conversations about race into patient visits.
- Ages 3-4 is a critical period for children when it comes to forming an understanding of differences in race as they begin internalizing hidden messages they receive. Dr. Chomilo described how locking one’s car doors when driving through certain neighborhoods can influence a child’s perception of the people who live in that neighborhood. Discuss other hidden messages children may pick up on when observing the behavior of the adults in their lives. What are children internalizing when they see these behaviors?
- Host Dianne Haulcy explains how pediatricians are one of the highest regarded external partners, outside of family members. Discuss other trusted partners that families rely on to help their children understand the world around them. How can these partners influence a child’s racial identity development?
- Dr. Chomilo references two studies showing the relationship between racism/racial bias and medical outcomes for Black children. In both studies, Black children were less likely to receive proper pain medication, or any pain medication at all, when experiencing the same injuries or illnesses as white children. Discuss your reactions to these findings.
- Studies show that children begin to recognize differences as young as infancy. Dr. Chomilo explains that by age 5, children begin to internalize race as a determining factor in who their friends are going to be when they enter school. By age 12, if they have internalized bias and racist ideas, it becomes more challenging to address these mindsets. Think back to when you were those ages. How did racial socialization play a part in relationship building? As a preteen, what were the messages you internalized regarding your own race and the race of others that influenced your choice in friends? How does this make you feel now?

## Closing the Discussion

As you are closing your discussion, encourage people to continue learning about the history of structural racism within the field of medicine. Ask participants to reflect on Dr. Chomilo’s final comments: “Children will grow up to create policies that either address or feed into biases. The next generation could come back and reinstitute things. We are doing this for everyone.” Acknowledge key points and lessons learned during the discussion. Finally, share additional resources participants can use to continue learning.

## Additional Resources

- [Raising Race Conscious Children](#): A blog and resource for parents and educators engaged in actively challenging racism.
- [EmbraceRace](#): A parent-led website, online community and podcast for parents who want “to raise kids who are thoughtful, informed, and brave about race.”
- CDC: [Race and Health](#)

Early Risers is a podcast from Little Moments Count, produced by Minnesota Public Radio (MPR). This discussion guide was created in partnership with Think Small Institute and was prepared and presented by Little Moments Count and MPR, 2022.

