



early risers

Waking up to racial equity
in early childhood.

Discussion Guide

Season 5, Episode 2: *Being in Community With Children* - released January 24, 2024

Learning Goal: For early childhood educators to learn how to create a consistently safe space to have conversations about race and how to address racialized incidents in the classroom.

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

Many programs that offer innovation in education ask teachers to adopt a new curriculum or implement a new procedure in their classroom. But when it comes to anti-bias work, Veronica Reynoso says there is no new curriculum. Instead, you need to be in community with children and disrupt the biases and stereotypes they pick up from the world. She explains how she does this and how the children respond.

Guest Bio

Veronica Reynoso is an early childhood teacher and mentor teacher at Hilltop Children’s Center in Seattle, Washington. She grew up in Chicago in a Mexican American family. She has been featured in articles, podcasts and a film highlighting her anti-bias practices in the classroom.

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

- Veronica identifies as Mexican American, and her description of her first conversation about race with her father highlights anti-blackness. There is discrimination in many communities against Black or even darker-skinned people. Why do you think that is? Is this something that you see in your classroom or programs?
- Veronica talks about a lot of her anti-bias education is about being present: observing and seeing what children are talking about, observing family dynamics, etc. Do you agree with this? How are you being present in your classroom?
- Veronica talks about power dynamics in the classroom amongst children and how race can factor in. Have you observed power dynamics in your classroom where there is an imbalance between white students and students of color? Discuss a time you witnessed that and how you responded.
- Dianne mentions that Veronica has created an environment in her classroom where children feel safe asking questions about race, etc. What are some things you can do in your classroom to create this environment?
- Veronica talks about the importance of circling back with children when they ask questions about race, especially when you may not have an answer right away. This is your time to do research and take a breath and be prepared to have this conversation. Have you ever had to circle back with children? Discuss that experience.
- Veronica talks about an incident that happened in her classroom where white children told the only Black girl in the classroom that they could not continue to play their game with her because her hands were dirty. Veronica responded to this in several ways. First, she worked to deescalate herself because of her emotions; then she attended to the Black child that had been hurt. She and her co-teacher paused to work out a plan of how to address the situation. Then they held a discussion with the white children's parents about the unconscious biases their children are picking up from the world around them. Discuss the steps you may have taken when experiencing a racialized incident in your classroom or program. What do you feel like you handled correctly? What do you wish you would have done differently?
- What are some ways you can deescalate or help other adults in your classroom deescalate when there is a racist incident in your classroom?
- Veronica talks about listening to her students discuss the different ways boys and girls are depicted in books and Disney movies. Thinking about the books you have in your program, what do you think the children might be observing about how white children and children of color are depicted in these books?
- Dianne talks with Veronica about some pushback she has received from parents as she is creating an anti-bias classroom. Have you experienced similar pushback? Do you anticipate receiving pushback if you begin to implement anti-bias practices? How would you handle the pushback?

- Veronica talks about the importance of having books in the classroom that are not only diverse but show people of color living and enjoying their lives as opposed to always struggling or being bullied. Do you have books in your classroom that represent children and families of color in a joyful way? Why or why not?

Closing the Discussion

As you close your discussion, encourage people to notice where there may be tightness in their body. Take some time to take deep breaths together and end on an upbeat note. Acknowledge key points and lessons learned during the discussion. Finally, share additional resources participants can use to continue learning.

Additional Resources

- More from Veronica Reynoso on [this Embrace Race webinar](#)
- More from Veronica Reynoso in [this Exchange article](#) (paywall)
- Veronica Reynoso and other early childhood teachers are featured in this film "[Reflecting on Anti-bias Education in Action: The Early Years](#)"

Early Risers is a podcast from Little Moments Count, produced by Minnesota Public Radio (MPR). This discussion guide was created by Little Moments Count and MPR, 2024.

