



# early risers

Waking up to racial equity  
in early childhood.

## Discussion Guide

Season 3, Episode 3: *Helping Children to Love the Skin They're In* released June 29, 2022

**Learning Goal:** To discuss how parents and caregivers can encourage young children to love their skin, hair texture and body type.

**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

As parents and caregivers, we need to be intentional about helping children—especially children of color—develop a strong foundation of positive self-esteem and ego strength. This protects them from internalizing racist messages and helps them to build a positive racial identity. Research studies show that having a positive racial and ethnic identity is associated with higher resilience and problem-solving skills. But where should parents and caregivers begin? Dr. Aisha White directs a program called Positive Racial Identity Development in Early Education, based at the University of Pittsburgh, that supports the positive racial identity development of Black children. This includes feeling good about their skin color and hair texture, as well as having positive associations about belonging to a larger Black community and diaspora. It's a way of countering the anti-Black racism in this country, with roots reaching far back to the transatlantic slave trade, the Jim Crow era that followed, and whose presence continues to impact us today.

## Guest Bio

Dr. Aisha White directs the [Positive Racial Identity Development in Early Education \(P.R.I.D.E.\)](#) program at the University of Pittsburgh School of Education. She has served as an advisor and contributor to PBS Kids, including the children's television program *Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood* and the award-winning special, "PBS KIDS Talk About: Race & Racism," which models how parents can engage with young children in conversations about race.

## 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

- Helping young children develop a positive racial identity can feel challenging for parents who have not developed their own positive racial identity. When was the first time you recall talking about race with a parent or caregiver? How did these early conversations contribute to the development of your racial identity?
- Discuss how you have introduced the conversation about race with the young children in your life. If this is something you have not done yet, discuss steps you can take to start.
- Discuss Dr. White’s definition of positive racial identity and the importance of observing these traits in young Black children.

*Positive racial identity is found in individuals and communities who understand the racial group they belong to, feel good about the fact they belong to a particular race, and understand why they have these positive feelings about being a part of a particular race. In addition to this, individuals have positive feelings about their physical traits and features as well.*

- Dr. White describes how a conversation with her grandson revealed negative feelings towards his own race, known as colorism. Discuss her approach to addressing his response. Was there anything that surprised you? If so, why?
- Educating parents is an important part of helping young children develop positive racial identities. Discuss the benefits of learning in a community like the Parent Village.
- Dr. White shares an audio clip of a Black parent offering affirmation to her child. Discuss the language the mother uses to reinforce her child’s positive racial identity. What do you notice?
- Discuss the important role early childhood educators play in helping young Black children develop positive racial identities.

## Closing the Discussion

As you close your discussion, remind participants to recognize the importance and value of supporting positive racial identity development in young children. Have them reflect on Dr. White’s statement that, “children are thinking about these things even if they don’t say anything about it.” Acknowledge key points and lessons learned during the discussion. Finally, share additional resources participants can use to continue learning.

## Additional Resources

- Dr. White served as an advisor on the Emmy Award-winning [PBS Kids Talk About Race and Racism](#) special that models how parents can engage with young children in conversations about race.
- Dr. White wrote a [personal essay](#) about an encounter she had with her grandson about colorism and how she responded when he told her that a book character’s skin was “too dark.”

- [“How to Talk Honestly with Children About Racism”](#): In this article for PBS Kids, Dr. White offers resource suggestions and concrete actions parents and caregivers can take, including specific activities and picture books that can open up conversations about race and racism.
- [In this interview](#), Dr. White discusses her work in children’s media, including how she advises script writers to represent Black characters authentically.
- Dr. White mentioned the work of Louise Derman-Sparks, a longtime leader in anti-bias education in early childhood. Early Risers host Dianne Haulcy interviewed Louise Derman-Sparks in 2021. You can listen to that episode [here](#).

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.

