early risers

Waking up to racial equity in early childhood.

Discussion Guide

Season 8, Episode 6: *Protecting Childhood Joy: Dr. Ibram X. Kendi on Raising Children with Love and Equity*, released November 18, 2026

Learning Goal: To understand how young children develop beliefs about race and explore how adults can help them reject harmful racial messages, embrace differences, and maintain their sense of joy and belonging.

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

Children aren't born with racist beliefs, but they begin absorbing messages about race, fear and belonging long before adults may realize it. In this episode, host Dianne Haulcy talks with Dr. Ibram X. Kendi, award-winning author, historian and leading scholar of racism and antiracism at Howard University, about how young children learn racial attitudes through the words, actions and even silence of the adults around them. Drawing on his experiences as a father and his work as the author of "How to Raise an Antiracist" and "Chain of Ideas," Dr. Kendi explains why avoiding conversations about racism doesn't protect children and how parents can address difficult realities without instilling fear. He explores how common messages about stranger danger can reinforce racial stereotypes, how children internalize harmful ideas about themselves and others, and why these beliefs can limit opportunities for friendship and connection. Together, they discuss how parents and educators can help children question bias, embrace differences and hold on to the love, curiosity and joy that racism too often takes away.

Guest Bio

Dr. Ibram X. Kendi is a historian, author and one of the country's most prominent scholars of racism and antiracism. He is the Carter G. Woodson Endowed Chair in History at Howard University and the inaugural director of Howard's Institute for Advanced Study. He is the author of 18 books for adults and children, including the National Book Award-winning "Stamped from the Beginning," the international bestseller "How to Be an Antiracist," "How to Raise an Antiracist," "Antiracist Baby," "Goodnight Racism," "Stamped for Kids" and "How to Be a (Young) Antiracist." His work for children and families has focused on helping adults understand that children notice race from an early age and that conversations about racism can help children develop healthier understandings of themselves and others. His newest book for young readers, "Malcolm Lives!," was published in 2025, and his latest book for adults, "Chain of Ideas: The Origins of Our Authoritarian Age," was published in March 2026.

Discussion Questions

- Dr. Kendi talks about his experience when he was in second grade, asking the Black teacher at his new school, "Why are you the only Black teacher in this school". What could this indicate how young children (about six or seven) process information about race?
- Dr. Kendi talks about the research that indicates children are assigning value to people of different skin colors starting around three years old. What does this tell you about what children have been learning in their environment for those first three years of their life?
- Dr. Kendi talks about how children seven years and under are learning a lot from the nonverbal behavior of their parents and adults around them. What do you think young children are learning about your nonverbal behavior. What do you think you learned from adults in your life about their nonverbal behavior?
- How do we help children recognize and reject the negative messages they receive about their race, rather than internalizing those messages as truths about who they are?
- Dianne and Dr. Kendi talk about how difficult it can be to talk to adults about racism because it is uncomfortable for adults. Have you ever seen pushback in your family or at work about having

these conversations because of a fear of being uncomfortable? Do you agree with Dr. Kendi's assessment that healing is uncomfortable?

- Although there are very real safety reasons to teach children about "stranger danger," how do the underlying messages reinforce ideals found in the "great replacement theory?" (***The Great Replacement theory is a debunked white nationalist conspiracy claiming that white populations are being deliberately replaced by nonwhite people and immigrants.)***
- Dr. Kendi talks about how much we miss out on when racism is in play, including relationships, opportunities and friendships. Do you think this is true? Do you think racism has ever stolen your joy?
- Do you agree with Dr. Kendi's explanation of why children are more joyful than adults? How do we as adults encourage young people to retain their joy.

Closing the Discussion

As you close the discussion, ask everyone to take a couple deep breaths and to share in one word what brings them joy. Acknowledge key points and lessons learned. Finally, point out additional resources available to participants.

Additional Resources

"How to Raise an Antiracist" by Dr. Ibram X. Kendi – A guide for parents, caregivers and educators on helping children understand race and racism from their earliest years. Drawing on research and personal experiences as a father, Dr. Kendi explores how children develop racial attitudes and offers age-appropriate approaches to nurturing antiracist values, healthy racial identities and respect for others.

Rethinking Stranger Danger — National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (KidSmartz) – A practical resource for parents and caregivers on teaching children personal safety without encouraging fear of people they don't know. It explains why traditional "stranger danger" messages can be misleading and offers age-appropriate strategies for helping children recognize unsafe behaviors, identify trusted adults and respond to potentially dangerous situations.

The Power of We: A Watch & Play Together Guide — PBS KIDS and Sesame Street – A free printable guide with activities that help children celebrate their racial and cultural identities, recognize unfair treatment and practice standing up for others. Families can watch "Sesame Street" characters explore differences and use the activities to start conversations about racism, friendship and belonging.

EmbraceRace – A collection of articles, webinars, conversation guides and activities to help parents and caregivers raise children who are thoughtful and brave about race. Resources explore how children learn racial attitudes, how adults can respond to bias and discrimination, and how families can nurture positive racial identities, meaningful relationships across differences and a strong sense of belonging.

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 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

Early Risers is produced and distributed by Minnesota Public Radio. This discussion guide was prepared and presented by Little Moments Count and Minnesota Public Radio, 2026.