

Impact of Racism on child development: how to develop resilience in young children and their families in current times and create a change



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Why this talk

- A lot happened this year!! 2020
- Awareness/ News
 - Race, Racism
 - Health Equity, Access to Healthcare
 - COVID affects more non-White
- News resonate differently with each one:
 - Own culture, history, origin, and stories
 - I grew up in a different country (Beirut, Lebanon), speaking a different language, during wartime
 - Parent
 - “Micro-aggressions”: only this summer!
 - Pediatrician working with diverse families
 - Contributed through MA Act Early on previous work on culture and ASD
- I needed to do this talk (I am not a researcher on this topic) but also to start conversations on building resilience and making a change



American University of
Beirut

Beirut
Before and after 8/4/2020



Plan

- Definitions
- How children learn about racial bias
- Current Data: Speaking to children about Race
- How Racism Harms Children
- Racial-Ethnic Identity Development
- How to support positive Racial-Ethnic Identity
- Tips for preventing bias



Definitions

Race

- Any one of the groups that humans are often divided into based on physical traits regarded as common among people of shared ancestry (Merriam-Webster Dictionary)
- Race is a word that is used to describe racial groups such as African Americans, Asian Americans, Native Americans, Latinos and Whites.



Definitions

Culture :

- Customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group
- The characteristic features of everyday existence shared by people in a place or time

Ethnicity:

- Cultural Identity



Definitions

- Race is biological, while ethnicity is cultural
- Ethnicity can be displayed or hidden, while race generally cannot be
- Ethnicity can be adopted, ignored, or broadened
- Ethnicity has subcategories, while races no longer do
- Both have been used to persecute people

RACE VERSUS ETHNICITY

Race is considered
to be a biological
classification

Ethnicity is
considered to be a
cultural identity

Can sometimes be
determined by the
physical
appearance

Can sometimes be
determined by the
manner of
dressing

Member of one
race cannot join
another race

Member of one
ethnicity can join
another ethnicity

Pediaa.com

Definitions

Racism:

- A belief that Race is a fundamental determinant of human traits and capacities and that racial differences produce an inherent superiority of a particular race
- The systemic oppression of a racial group to the social, economic, and political advantage of another
- A political or social system founded on racism



(Merriam Webster Dictionary)

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Racial Cultural Identity



- Skin color plays an early part in young children's developing sense of self and others
- Racial identity is personal development that matures over time and is affected by personal, inter-personal, institutional and cultural environments
- Children's first socializing context: Family Culture
 - Sense of identity and a set of beliefs, values, language and rules of behavior for interacting with the world
 - By 3 years of age, dominant societal culture also influences children's ideas, beliefs and behaviors



Racial-Ethnic Identity

- **What is Ethnic Identity?**
 - Extent to which one identifies with a particular ethnic group(s). Refers to one's sense of belonging to an ethnic group and the part of one's thinking perceptions, feelings, and behavior that is due to ethnic group membership
- Ethnic identity is separate from one's personal identity as an individual, although the two may reciprocally influence each other.
- There are four major components of ethnic identity
 - Ethnic Awareness - understanding of one's own and other groups
 - Ethnic Self-Identification - label used for one's own group
 - Ethnic Attitudes - feelings about own and other groups
 - Ethnic Behaviors - behavior patterns specific to an ethnic group



How Do Children Learn Racial Bias?

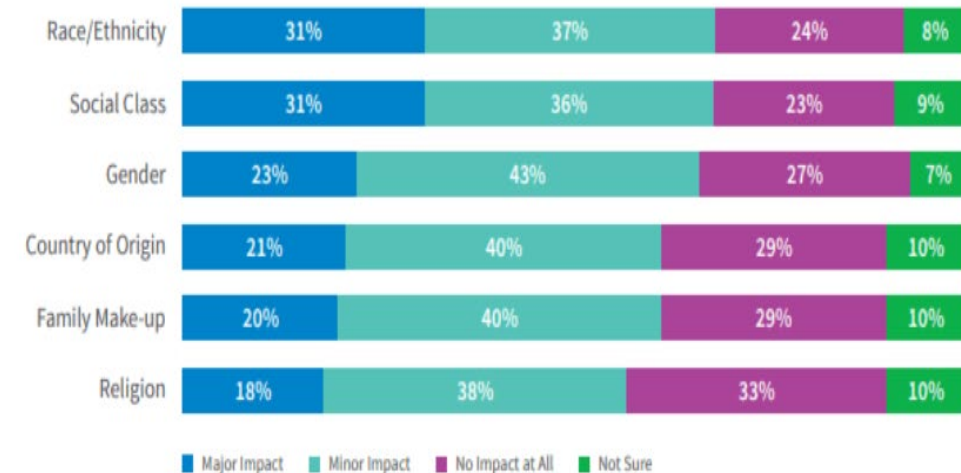
- Children learn about racial differences and racial bias from an early age and learn from their caregivers how to deal with and react to these differences.
- **Process is a lot like learning a new language:**
 - Biology determines a critical early learning period as well as a later window where learning is much harder.
- As early as 6 months, a baby's brain can notice race-based differences.
- By ages 2 to 4, children can internalize racial bias.
- By age 12, many children become set in their beliefs
- Similar to language immersion, children exposed to society will gain fluency in racial bias even if their parents do nothing.



When and how to discuss race with children

Sesame Workshop Identity Matters Study: 6070 parents/caregivers of children ages 3-12y and 1046 educators from Pre-K to 5th grade

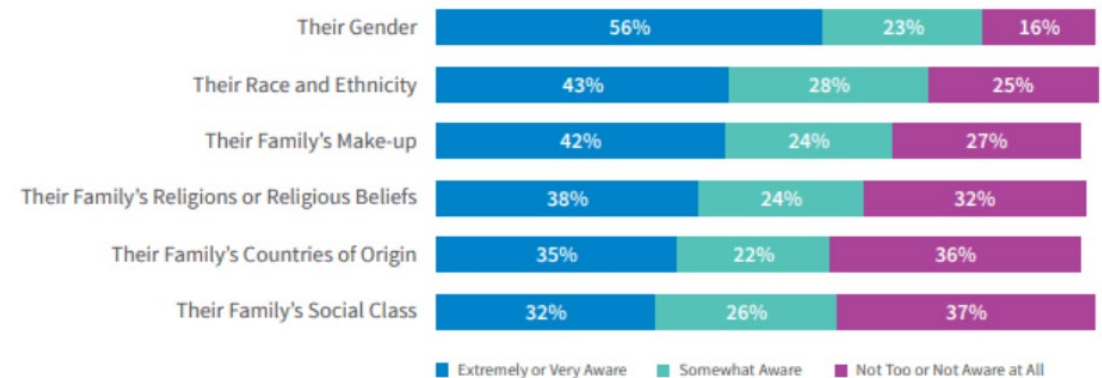
- 60% parents rarely or never discuss race/ethnicity or social class with their children
- 7/10 parents believe that Race/ethnicity and social class have impact on children's future
- But only 30% parents believe impact is major
- Many believe that if they don't talk about social categories like race, religion, or social class, their children won't notice them
- Parents also think that individual characteristics like personalities and abilities have larger impact than social identities



Q: Now, thinking about children in this country generally, do you think each of the following has a major impact, minor impact, or no impact at all on a child's ability to succeed in life?

When and how to discuss race with children

- Parents from minority groups are more likely to recognize social identity's impact on a child's development
 - Black parents (49%) more likely to see race/ethnicity major impact than white parents (29%)
- More parents of minority groups reported their kids having heard at least one negative comment about their religion or race
 - 46% of Muslim parents; 40% of black parents and 32% of Asian parents



Q: How aware is [child's name] that [he/she/they] may differ from others based on each of the following?




When and how to discuss race with children

When to discuss social identity

- Never too early to discuss social identity
- May parents appear to be unaware of exactly how early children identify differences
- Less than half parents say their children aware they are different than others because of their social identity BUT many believe that awareness grew with age, naturally

Why is it important

- Children won't know how to reject negative stereotypes tied to their identities and may internalize those stereotypes
 - Important to provide children all the tools to establish a solid and positive sense of identity. This is Vital for a child's healthy development
- 




How Racism Harms Children-1-

- *Racism hurts children: their health and their chances for a successful life*
- *American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP): Racism is a “Socially Transmitted Disease”*
- How does Racism affect health and well being in children?
 - Chronic stress which leads to actual changes in hormones that leads to inflammation and chronic disease
 - Racial disparities in infant mortality and low birthweight
 - Chronic stress in children of immigrant families: fear of being separated
 - Children raised in African American, Hispanic, American Indian populations: less likely to have good housing, good nutrition, good access to healthcare, and education which will lead to increased risks of health issues and lower quality education





How Racism Harms Children-2-

- *Racism hurts children: their health and their chances for a successful life*
 - *American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP): Racism is a “Socially Transmitted Disease”*
 - How does Racism affect health and well being in children?
 - Even when minority live in wealthier areas : treated differently by their teachers; more likely to be punished more harshly for minor issues; less likely to be identified for special education; and teachers may under-estimate their abilities thus child to less believe in themselves
 - In 2015-2016: 88 % white children graduated from High school vs. 76% of African Americans, 72% of American Indians and 79% of Hispanics: less economic opportunity and more health issues (college degree = lower rate of chronic disease)
 - Juvenile justice system: minority youth more likely to be incarcerated. Much increased health and emotional consequences
- 

How Racism Harms children-3-

- Discrimination: not only color of skin leads to discrimination BUT also:
 - Differences in sex, religion, sexual orientation, immigration status, having a disability
- Children are hurt everyday by racism and discrimination and effects can be permanent and continue through generations
- Real urgency to change course on racism and discrimination



Development of Racial identity

- Early development is key
 - Understanding stages critical for INTERVENTION
- Children's brains grow at their fastest rate, and this is when their learning about themselves and the world around them is most formative.
- It is also when attitudes are shaped.
- And, as with any developmental milestone:
 - not all children will experience these in a linear way
 - children may not conform exactly to the age ranges.

<https://www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/question-corner/when-awareness-and-attitudes-about-differences-develop>



Race identity development

Infants

- Gradually become aware of self as a separate being
- Begin to absorb a cultural identity through daily care giving interactions, household smell, sounds, etc.
- Begin to babble a range of sounds and imitating intonation and sounds of the home language
- Begin to notice and respond to skin color cues (around 6 months old)



Race identity development

One and Two years-old

- Continue to develop their awareness of self as separate individual
- Learn to interact with others within the cultural rule system of their families
- **Pay close attention to “their” adults’ feelings and non-verbal messages**
- Curious about physical characteristics of self and others (skin color, hair texture, gender anatomy)



Race identity development

Two and Three years-old

- Sometimes show discomfort around unfamiliar people, including individuals with different skin color
- May not have language to express or ask about aspects of difference that intrigue them
- Begin to vocalize 'words' from her/his home language
- By two identifying self/others with words like "me", "mine", "you"



Race identity development

Three and Four years-old

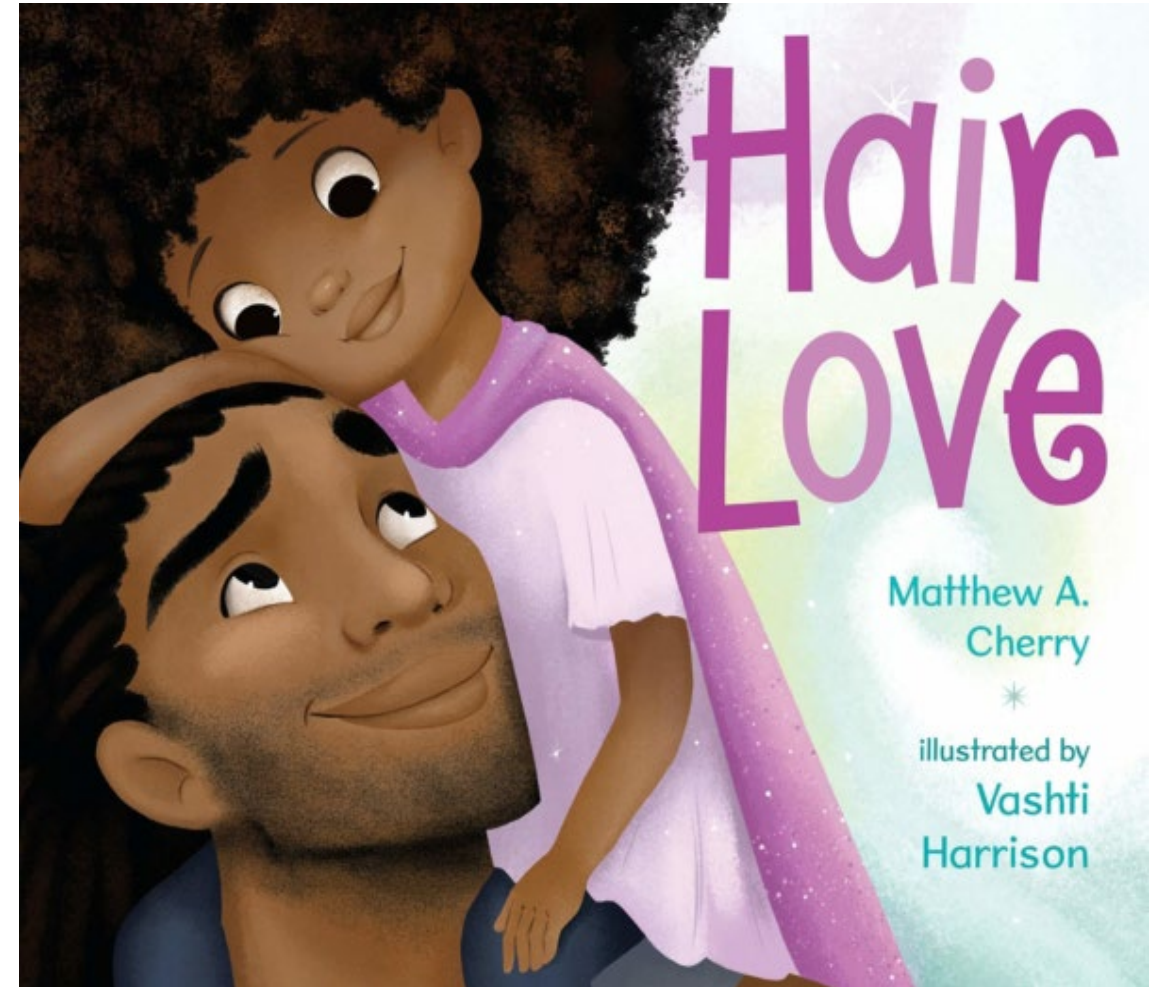


- Speak and continue to develop their home language
- Become grounded in their family/extended family's cultural ways of being: language, rules about behavior, how emotions are expressed, gender norms
- Identify and match people according to “racial” physical characteristics and groups, but still confused about complexities of group categories (e.g., “” *How can two children with dark brown skin be in different groups, e.g., African American and Mexican American*)

Race identity development

Three and Four Years old

- Can learn that skin serves the same purpose for everyone, regardless of skin color.
- Absorb societal stereotypes from people and from media about other groups and *may tease or refuse to play with others because of skin color, language differences, and physical disabilities*
- Have a strong sense of empathy and interest in fairness and can begin to **develop critical thinking about hurtful images, comments and behaviors**
- Begin to show how they feel about their self and /or group identity, *i.e., evidence of beginnings of internalized superiority (IS) or internalized oppression (IO)*



Race identity development


Four- and Five-year-olds



- Often face a "bi-cultural" crisis upon entering school.
- May select to play only with children close to their gender and racial/cultural identities, but may also reject members of their own racial/cultural group
- May use prejudicial insults and name-calling to show anger or aggression, knowing that these terms hurt.
- Develop gender and racial constancy



Race identity development

- ***By 6 years of age:***
 - Children can describe worth, happiness and wealth in concrete terms
 - They see themselves as a member of a racial group
 - ***Children 6,7, and 8 years old:***
 - Continue to gain information (correct and incorrect)
 - Continue to gain feelings about human differences
 - Begin to acknowledge many aspects of their identity (gender, ethnicity, class)
 - Capable of making judgments about equity/unfairness/privilege
 - They begin to voice the “truths”, stereotypes and biases they have been taught
- ***By 9 and 10 years of age:***
 - Attitudes have solidified
- 



Race identity development

Opportunities to shape positive experience and teach tolerance

Are your kids too young to talk about race?

Nope. Silence about race can reinforce racism by letting children draw their own conclusions.

0-1 year

At birth, babies look equally at faces of all races. At 3 months, babies look more at faces that match the race of their caregivers.

[Kelly et al, 2005](#)

2 years

Children as young as 2 use race to reason about people's behaviors.

[Hirschfeld, 2008](#)

2.5 years

By 30 months, most children use race to choose playmates.

[Katz & Kofkin, 1997](#)

4-5 years

Expressions of racial prejudice often peak at ages 4 and 5.

[Aboud, 2008](#)

5 years

Black and latinx children in research settings show no preference toward their own groups, as compared to white children at this age, who are more likely to be strongly biased in favor of whiteness.

[Dunham et al, 2008](#)

5 years

By kindergarten, children show many of the same racial attitudes held by adults in our culture. They have already learned to associate some groups with higher status than others.

[Kinzler, 2016](#)

5-7 years


Explicit conversations with 5-7 year olds about interracial friendship can dramatically improve their racial attitudes in as little as a single week.

[Bronson & Merryman, 2009](#)

Adapted from work by the Children's Community School.

More info at childrenscommunityschool.org/social-justice-resources/

Design provided by prettygooddesign.org




Support positive racial development

- Develop programs that continue incorporating home cultures and introduce diversity through activities, books, posters, puzzles that are age appropriate
- Quality care/education programs provide cultural continuity with each infant's home culture and some caregivers from infants' racial/cultural group



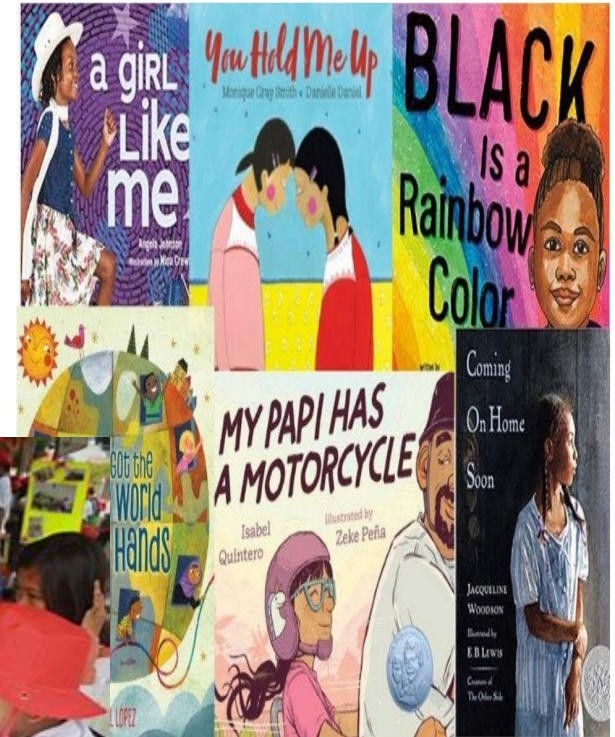
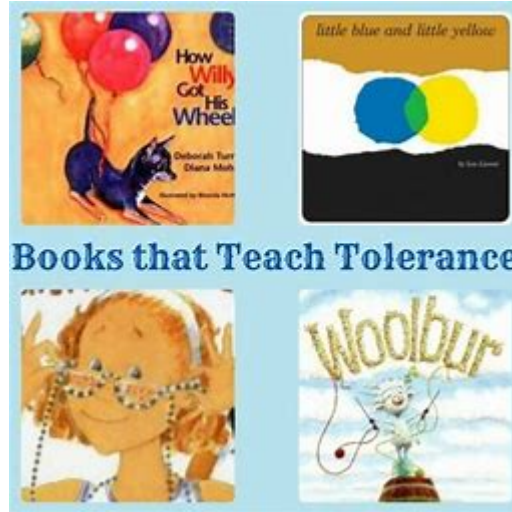


Support positive racial development

- Quality Early Childhood programs need to support and foster:
 - Children's self and group identities.
 - Integrate home cultures and support home language to extent possible.
 - Promote learning about each other's home cultures and each other's similarities and differences
 - Introduce critical thinking (true/not true, fair/not fair) about pervasive stereotypes.
 - Teach skills for dealing with hurtful behavior among themselves.
 - Develop empathy, compassion, and a sense of justice at an early age helps kids grow into adults who want to help make the world a better place.
- 

Support positive racial development

- Update libraries: books, videos, movies, games..
- Introduce diversity to activities:
 - Visits to museums and libraries.
- Be open and alert to situations: talking about race is not a one-time event
- Don't pretend to have all the answers.
- Involve parents: cultural activities day
 - Food, traditions



Support positive racial development

Background Worcester population

MOST COMMON ORIGIN

1. Ghana
2. Dominican Republic
3. Vietnam

MOST COMMON LANGUAGE SPOKEN

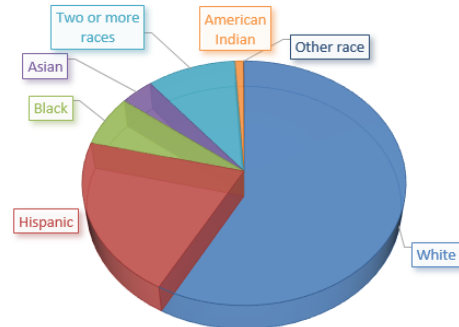
1. Spanish
2. Portuguese
3. West African Languages

ETHNICITY:

1. White
2. Hispanic
3. Black



Population by Race (2017)



- It is important to teach about people in their and each others' communities who work to end prejudice and discrimination
- All aspects of curriculum should make visible the contributions of all racial/cultural groups
- **Become familiar with your community**
- Staff mirrors diversity in community
- Explore different cultures present



Strategies to Help Children Deal with Racial Bias

1


Discuss and acknowledge that racial differences and bias do exist

2

Confront your own bias and model how you want your children/children in your care to respond to others who may be different than them

3

Encourage children to challenge racial stereotypes and racial bias by being kind and compassionate when interacting with people of all racial, ethnic, and cultural groups



How to confront one's own racial bias and improve inclusion

Caregivers, Parents



- Be a role model
 - Identify and correct your own racially biased thoughts, feelings, and actions
 - Everyday comments and actions
- Have a wide, culturally diverse social network
 - Encourage children to have diverse circles of friends, as well
 - Leads to engagement in multicultural activities and experiences
- Expose children to other communities and cultures
 - Activities :arts and crafts; cooking; show and tell
 - Celebrate different holidays and discuss
- Encourage parents to get involved in their child's program
 - Parents who are involved in this way are better able to advocate for fair treatment of racially marginalized groups and raise awareness of race issues in other groups.

Tips for Talking About Racial Differences & Racism

- Talking about race is not racist. It's OK—and important. **But it's important to keep the child's developmental readiness in mind**
- For preschoolers:
 - They may begin to notice and point out differences in other children and people around them
 - If the child asks about someone's skin tone, you might say, "Isn't it wonderful that we are all so different!" You can even hold your arm against theirs to show the differences in skin tones
- These conversations begin to lay the groundwork for young children to accept and respect everyone's differences and similarities.





Further advocacy

(American Academy of Pediatrics)

01

Engage community leaders to create safe playgrounds and healthy food markets to reduce disparities in obesity and undernutrition in neighborhoods affected by poverty

02

Advocate for improvements in the quality of education

03

Support local educational systems by connecting with and supporting school staff

04

Advocate for curricula that are multicultural, multilingual, and reflective of the communities in which children in their practices attend school

05

Advocate for federal and local policies that support implicit-bias training in schools and robust training of educators in culturally competent classroom management to improve disparities in academic outcomes





Some Resources: Share with us any you create or find that are helpful!

Teaching Children Cultural and Racial Pride

- <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/family-life/family-dynamics/Pages/Teaching-Children-Cultural-and-Racial-Pride.aspx>

Help Your Kids Find Books with Diverse Characters (Common Sense Media)

- <https://www.commonsensemedia.org/blog/help-your-kids-find-books-with-diverse-characters>

Apps and Games with Diverse Characters (Common Sense Media)

- <https://www.commonsensemedia.org/lists/apps-and-games-with-diverse-characters>

Beyond the Golden Rule. A Parent's Guide to Preventing and Responding to Prejudice (Tolerance.org)

- http://www.tolerance.org/sites/default/files/general/beyond_golden_rule.pdf

A Conversation on Race (New York Times)

- <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/projects/your-stories/conversations-on-race>

Racism and Its Impact on Child and Adolescent Health (AAP Policy Statement)

- <https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/144/2/e20191765>
- Sesame Street Workshop
- <https://www.sesameworkshop.org/>
- Anti-defamation League: <https://www.adl.org/>
- Louise Derman-Sparks: stages in Children's Development of Racial/Cultural Identity
- www.maactearly.org: Culture in Autism Screening; Project 1,2,3 GROW



Thank You

**Please complete the post survey so you can
receive your certificate of attendance**

**We will upload the slides and the talks to the
MA Act Early Website and will send you links**

www.maactearly.org

**Let us know if you have any ideas,
suggestions, activities or other**

