

# Supporting Your Practice: Talking About Race and Racism with Children



*As an organization, self-regulatory body and a participant in the early learning and child care sector, the College of Early Childhood Educators (the College) is committed to embedding anti-racism principles, policies and practices in all aspects of its work.*

In this resource, RECEs will find important definitions and explanations about racism and anti-racism, and practical guidance on talking with children about race and racism. For those seeking further learning on this topic area, there are links to a Scenarios for Reflection resource, relevant College resources and a glossary of terms at the end.

To support RECEs' professional learning, this resource references or relates to multiple sections of the [Code and Standards](#), including:

- Standard I: C
- Standard II: A, C
- Standard III: A
- Standard IV: C

## What is racism?

**“Racism is an ideology that either directly or indirectly asserts that one group is inherently superior to others.** It can be openly displayed in racial jokes and slurs or hate crimes but it can be more deeply rooted in attitudes, values and stereotypical beliefs. In some cases, these are unconsciously held and have become deeply embedded in systems and institutions that have evolved over time. Despite the fact that Canada has made much progress, unfortunately racism and racial discrimination remain a persistent reality in Canadian society. This fact must be acknowledged as a starting point to effectively address racism and racial discrimination.” (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2024)

Consider reading more [from the Ontario Human Rights Commission](#).

## Why must we talk about race and racism with children?

By engaging in supportive and respectful interactions with children, RECEs can ensure that all children in their practice setting feel a sense of security and belonging ([Standard I: C.2](#)).

Historically, dominant child development theories have assumed that children do not see race or are too disturbed by conversations about it. **However, current [research in early childhood education](#) has shown that this assumption is false; children do see race, and interactions with adults, as well as their peers, can influence how they interpret the world around them.**

Having conversations about race and acknowledging the harms that racism causes in society ties closely to developing and maintaining responsive, caring relationships. It supports helping children to interact positively with others ([Standard I: C.4](#)) and recognizes children's rights to experience an authentic sense of belonging in their learning environment. It also supports RECEs to advocate in the interest of all children, families, early childhood educators and the early years sector in their practice ([Standard IV: C.5](#)).

To ensure all children feel a true sense of belonging and safety, RECEs should pay attention to what is happening in their practice environment and constructively question and address any actions that have the potential to harm any member of the community, including actions tied to race and racism.

## What does it mean to talk about race and racism with children?

RECEs play a valuable role in advocating for children's rights and the construction of welcoming, inclusive spaces that foster an authentic sense of belonging for the community. RECEs can not only ensure that all children are represented in the learning environment by including materials that are representative of different racial backgrounds, but also actively engage in important discussions about race and racism with children, families and colleagues.

RECEs draw from their professional knowledge of child development, learning theories and pedagogical and curriculum approaches to plan, implement, document and assess child-centred, inquiry and play-based learning experiences for children ([Standard II: A](#)). In doing this work, they can incorporate an anti-racist approach.

## What is anti-racism?

Anti-racism is a process, a systematic method of analysis, and a proactive course of action rooted in the recognition of the existence of racism, including systemic racism. **Anti-racism seeks to identify, remove, prevent and mitigate racially inequitable outcomes and power imbalances between groups, and change the structures that sustain inequities.** ([Ontario Government Glossary](#))

## What does an anti-racist approach look like in your practice?

1. Understanding that talking about race and racism is both important and developmentally appropriate.
2. Thoughtfully responding to children's actions, questions or conversations about race and racism during their play.
3. Constructively and compassionately responding to actions that have the potential to harm a person in the learning community.
4. Engaging in active dialogue with the community to create productive and tangible solutions to issues that arise related to race and racism.
5. Working collaboratively with colleagues to promote friendships among the children.
6. Supporting children in interacting positively with others ([Standard I: C.4](#))
7. Reflecting on your own beliefs and biases to ensure communication with children, families and colleagues is consistently equitable, inclusive and respectful of diversity. The College's [Practice Note](#) and [Reflection Guide](#) on Beliefs and Biases can support this reflection.

There is no expectation that an RECE must have all the right answers about race, racism and human differences. It is important however, to generate conversations that cultivate insights and reflections. It's better to respond and say something than nothing at all. It's better to step in and show a child who may have been hurt that the RECE cares, just through their actions of noticing and being able to talk about it. That child in turn, is more likely to feel seen and know that they are important.

Please watch this short video, which provides an example of how an educator failed to support an Indigenous student and what they could have done differently. [Susan Dion – How teachers can support Aboriginal students.](#)

## To more deeply understand your practice decisions and actions, take a moment to consider:

- What conversations or questions make you feel uncomfortable?
  - What would help you feel more comfortable in these instances?
  - What resources would you need?
- Which, and whose, ideas do you address and which ones do you avoid, and why?
- Do you respond to some children’s ideas and not others? Why?
- Do you interact with some children and focus more on “behavioural issues” with other children? Why?
- How you feel when children ask questions or make comments about race and skin colour?

## For practice scenarios that can promote awareness and insight into your pedagogical actions take a moment to review the following resource:

- [Scenarios for Reflection: Talking About Race and Racism with Children](#)

## Glossary of terms

- [Canadian Race Relation Foundations](#)

## Other College Resources

- [Practice Guideline: Child Development \(2022\)](#)
- [Practice Guideline: Diversity and Culture \(2020\)](#)
- [Practice Guideline: Pedagogical Practice \(2020\)](#)
- [Practice Note: Beliefs and Biases \(2022\)](#)
- [Reflection Guide: Beliefs and Biases \(2022\)](#)

## References

- Escayg, K.A., & Daniel B.J. (2019). [Special Issue: Young Children, Race, and Racism: Global Perspectives](#)