



CASD CHAT E-Newsletter

Talking to Youth on the Autism Spectrum about Racism

Dear CASD Families,

The last few months have brought immense changes for all of us, as our nation grapples with both the COVID-19 pandemic, and what the American Psychological Association has termed "the pandemic of racism." Our hearts go out to families in our community and around the nation who are hurting right now, and those who have been hurting for a long time. [Here at Children's National, we recognize the toll that systemic racism has on children's health and well-being.](#) We continually strive to make CASD a place that is welcoming and affirming for all families and that helps families advocate for and support their children.

During these tumultuous times, many families are wondering how to talk to their children about issues related to race and racism. These are challenging conversations for any family, which can be even more difficult to navigate with youth with ASD. Psychologists here at Children's National have provided a very [useful guide](#) for talking to children about these topics, and an additional [guide](#) and [booklist](#) are available from PBS.

When approaching these conversations with a child with ASD, consider the following:

- **Use Visual Supports:** Books, videos, and pictures can all help children with ASD understand the conversation better. For example, a Social Story™ about the death of George Floyd and the protests is available [here](#).
- **Don't Try to Do Too Much at Once:** Children with ASD often struggle to process long conversations. Consider ways that you can expose your child to cultural diversity through books, movies, and other media. Some children may benefit from pausing and discussing examples of racism or injustice in media or in daily life; others may find it overwhelming. It's okay if your child is not ready for this yet.
- **Be Concrete:** Use clear, simple language to talk about race, and state expectations and rules clearly and simply. Connecting abstract concepts to real people or events in your child's life can help them understand.

- **Practice Scripts:** It can be helpful to practice a simple script for what your child can say or do if they are being treated unjustly, or if it happening to someone else.

Racism is a challenge that goes beyond any single person or organization, but each of us can make a difference, however small, by modeling values of empathy and justice. At CASD, we remain committed to working with our community and to advocating for the rights of all children to be included, respected, and celebrated.

The CASD Faculty