

Framing Brave Conversations about Race and Ethnicity

How to Use this Resource:

Issues of race, culture, and identity are deeply personal and oftentimes emotional. As we engage with students, families, and other stakeholders around the concepts of race and ethnicity, it is important to frame conversations in a way that creates a safe, affirming space for all. Use this list of tips as a guide for engaging in brave discussions about race and ethnicity as an educator.

Respect Preferences & Honor Experiences

In conversations about race and ethnicity, the most vital principle to acknowledge is that the ultimate authority on a person's identity and experiences belongs to that individual. Thus, if a student tells you that they identify as a particular ethnicity, respect that identity. If a parent says that they experienced racism, believe them. Above all, **commit to respecting the other person's preferences and honoring their lived experiences.**

Acknowledge Bias & Privilege

Be intentionally aware of your privilege and your implicit biases. Acknowledge how your appearance, social class, upbringing, or affiliations might place you in a privileged position. If you have not done any work of identifying and unpacking your biases, I would suggest taking the **Implicit Association Test** before choosing to embark on brave conversations about race.

Own Your Learning

As you discuss complex notions about race and ethnicity, be open to learning something new - especially from your students! Be careful, however, not to rely on the other person to teach you everything about their race or culture. Engage people on their terms, and do not expect them to accept the burden of automatically educating you about unfamiliar topics.

Communicate Positive Intentions

Always lead with positive intentions. Explicitly communicate your respect for the other person and your commitment to treating them with care. **Never expect students or families to presume that you have positive intent, just because of your role as an educator.** This is especially important if you do not yet have a strong relationship with the person.



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Avoid Assumptions

Avoid making assumptions or inferences about a particular racial or ethnic group based on limited or biased samples. While it is excellent to research different cultures and backgrounds, be careful to ensure that your sources of information are credible.

Reject Color Blindness

To build relationships, it can be powerful to connect with students and families over similarities. However, **do not neglect to celebrate your differences! Refuse to be color blind.** Take time to appreciate the uniqueness and individuality of each individual you encounter.

Consider Context

Be mindful of the social and historical context in which you operate. Approach the conversation acknowledging your position as a member of the majority or the minority. Keep in mind that there may be a history of certain groups being underrepresented or mistreated in your particular educational or geographic context.

Be Open to Being Wrong

Be willing to acknowledge that you might be wrong! Understand that we all have implicit biases that can misinform how we perceive the world. **Approach the conversation with the goal of learning and understanding, not persuading or convincing.**

Get Comfortable with Discomfort

Because concepts of race, culture, and identity are complex and deeply personal, they often bring feelings of discomfort. Many of us enjoy talking to our students about the latest movies we saw over the weekend, music, activities, and events in our communities. Yet, racial issues such as police brutality and xenophobia are avoided at all costs. Whether we address them in class or not, our students are thinking and talking about these issues. We cannot avoid these conversations because they make us uncomfortable. **Get comfortable with your discomfort, and do not use it as an excuse to avoid engaging with people who are different from you.**

