

SAFE SPACE RADIO



TALKING TO WHITE KIDS ABOUT RACE & RACISM

AUDIO DISCUSSION GUIDE

www.safespaceaudio.com

Using this Guide

The purpose of this discussion guide is to help facilitate discussion and reflection after listening to Safe Space Radio's *Talking to White Kids About Race & Racism* episode, part of Season One of our miniseries, *Can We Talk*. This guide is divided into sections corresponding to the five stories in the episode. We hope this discussion guide will prove useful to people directly impacted by the issues addressed in *Talking to White Kids*, as well as friends, family members, caregivers, teachers, and healthcare providers for whom these conversations are part of daily life.

If you use Safe Space Radio in your home, classroom, group, or community, please let us know! We would love to hear from you at info@safespaceaudio.com.

About Safe Space Radio

The mission of Safe Space Radio is to inspire courageous conversations, break down the barriers that divide us, and create compassionate communities.

Founded in 2008, Safe Space Radio has broadcast more than 300 episodes and received numerous awards. The first season of our four-part miniseries, *Can We Talk?*, broadcast in May 2019 for Mental Health Awareness Month. Two long-form specials, "[Out-Takes](#)," on suicide prevention among LGBTQ teens, and "[Still Here](#)," on caregiving and dementia, both broadcast nationally in 2016. Our podcast is used in training programs for healthcare professionals, therapists, and teachers as they learn to address the needs of underserved populations.

About Can We Talk?

Can We Talk is our miniseries for Mental Health Awareness in May. The first season broadcast in May 2019. Each episode explores a subject that is difficult to talk about through a combination of storytelling and expert guidance, offering listeners practical tools for navigating challenging conversations. This series is distributed in partnership with WBUR Boston.

The first season of *Can We Talk* includes four hour-long episodes:

- [Apologies](#)
- [Asking for Help](#)
- [Loneliness](#)
- [Talking to White Kids About Race & Racism](#).

GENERAL QUESTIONS ABOUT TALKING TO WHITE KIDS ABOUT RACE & RACISM

Why do you think white people have a hard time talking about race? Is it important to talk about race and racism? What happens when we don't talk about it?

Why do you think this episode is focused on talking to white kids specifically? Why do you think the episode features so many white folks? Why is it important for white people to talk to each other about race and racism?

What is racial justice? What does racial justice mean to you?

Describe a time you had a conversation with a young person about race. How did it go? What did you learn? How did your own racial identity influence the conversation?

How did your own parents talk to you about race and racism when you were growing up? Did they? What other messages did you get about race and racism as a young person? Do you remember where you got those messages, for example from your teachers, your peers, the media, etc.?

If you are a parent, have you talked with your kids about race and racism? What influences this choice? What conversations would you like to have that you haven't yet?

If you are a white person, what influences your own ability to talk about race and racism? What skills would you like to improve?

If you are a white person, describe an experience when you felt challenged by racial conflict or a conversation about race and felt a defensive reaction. How did you express your defensiveness? How do you feel when you tell the story? How might you handle the situation differently? Why do you think white people often feel defensive or vulnerable in conversations about race and racism?

If you are a person of color, how would you describe talking about race and racism with white people? How do you think your conversations with your own kids differ from those of white parents? What do you wish that white parents said to their kids?

Professor and scholar J. Kēhaulani Kauanui writes that "Racism is a structure, not an event." What do you think she means by this? Did you see this statement reflected in this episode?

What are some implications—both local and national—of racism being a foundational structure and ideology in US history, culture, economic system, and civic life? How do you witness or experience structural racism in your own life?

Describe a scene, conversation, or story from this episode that you found particularly moving, vivid, or disturbing. What about that scene was compelling to you?

If you could ask anyone in this episode a single question, what would you ask them?

What did you take away from this episode that you wish everyone knew? What might change in our community if everyone knew it?

SHAY STEWART-BOULEY AND DEBBY IRVING SEGMENT

Content Reflection

Shay and Debby both describe some of their early conversations with their kids about race and racism. What differences do you see in their stories?

Debby and Shay both talk about “the need to be comfortable” and “moving beyond discomfort.” What does comfort have to do with talking about race? How does the need to be comfortable seem connected with the expectations of white people? Where does this expectation come from?

SIERRA BLACK SEGMENT

Content Reflection

What does Sierra mean when she talks about her own “invisible-to-me-as-like-a-nice-person racism”?

Personal Reflection

Many parents have experienced a moment when their child said something in public that made them feel embarrassed or ashamed. Did Sierra’s story remind you of any experience from your own life? How did you navigate the situation?

What does Sierra mean when she says that “silence is its own message?” Can you relate this statement to your own life, either in conversations about race and racism or some other topic?

JENNIFER HARVEY SEGMENT

Content Reflection

The messages of white supremacy are like a smog that we all breathe in, unrelated to our intention, awareness, or agreement. How can we use this awareness to change our thinking about racism? How might this awareness impact white defensiveness or fragility?

Jennifer describes using her family's vacation to Colorado as an entry to talking about this country's history of colonization, genocide, and land theft against Native people. If you are a parent, how might you talk with your own kids about this country's history?

Personal Reflection

How diverse is your neighborhood? Your school system? How do you think this challenges or benefits your kids?

If you live in a racially diverse environment, how did it become racially diverse? Is it becoming more or less diverse over time?

If you are a parent, what messages do you think your kids get about the desirability of a racially diverse environment? How are they getting those messages? How can parents help kids in a segregated community develop the skills they need for multiracial contexts?

Did you grow up in a racially diverse or a racially segregated environment? What messages did you get as a child about the desirability of a racially diverse or racially segregated environment? Were those messages overt or coded?

If you grew up in a racially segregated environment, did anyone ever tell you that you were missing something of value, or that there was value in living in a racially diverse environment?

Have you engaged in conversations that assumed a racially segregated environment was desirable? How did you feel about the conversation?

Growing up, did you attend a racially segregated school or a racially diverse school? How do you think your school environment influenced your thinking about race and racism? Were you taught about race and racism in school?

If you are a parent, how do you think your choices about where to live affect your kids' outlook?

How did you feel about Jennifer's suggestions for talking about race even with very young white kids (ages 2-3)? What are the benefits of talking with very young children about race? What are the specific challenges?

Describe a time when you challenged another adult's assumptions or bigotry. How did it feel? What made it challenging or difficult?

If you're a parent, what are some everyday situations that you might use as an entry point for starting a conversation about race and racism?

MELISSA UNTERECKER SEGMENT

Personal Reflection

What are the benefits and challenges of talking about current events with kids?

If you are a parent, how much do you think your kids pay attention to what is going on in the world?

Melissa describes how immigration is part of the daily conversation in her community, and therefore her in her home. How do you think this changes her conversation with her kids? How might you talk with your kids about immigration if you live in a more or less segregated community?

JOHN BIEWEN SEGMENT

Content Reflection

John talks about his feeling of being “one of the good white people” when he was younger. What does this statement mean? What behaviors or thoughts is he talking about? Why might this identity be problematic?

Does John’s description of history align with how you were taught to think about racism? How does it change your way of thinking about the history of race as a concept? What are some ways that race has been used to rationalize injustice and inequality?

Personal Reflection

Human beings have a strong desire to be seen as good. How can this desire sometimes get in the way of white people talking about race and racism? Can the desire to be seen as good be an obstacle in other conversations?

Do you strongly want to be thought of as a good person? How do you think this influences your actions or behaviors?

Is it possible to be a good person and a person who sometimes thinks, speaks, or acts in racist ways? Is it possible to fight against racism and still have racist thoughts? What do your answers tell you about fighting racism?

KARINA MOLTZ SEGMENT

Content Reflection

What are the big choices that Karina makes in this story? Why do you think she acts as she does? How do her actions affect Jackson?

Karina describes how the Border Crossers training taught her that *not* talking about race with her kids was “a privilege I hadn’t realized I was exercising.” What do you think she means by this?

Personal Reflection

How did you feel while listening to Karina’s story? Did she say anything that surprised you?

What is “privilege?” What does the word privilege mean to you? What is a privilege that you personally hold? Name one way you experience that privilege.

Most parents feel a strong urge to shelter or protect their child from violent or disturbing things. What are the benefits and challenges of that urge? How do you think protectiveness influences parents talking about race and racism? How might protectiveness manifest differently for parents of different racial identities?

If you are a parent, when do you experience the instinct to protect or shelter your child? Have you ever acted against that urge? Why?

If you are a white parent, what are the biggest obstacles for you in talking to your kids about race and racism? What are your fears? What are your hopes?

TIM WISE SEGMENT

Content Reflection

How would you describe Tim's approach to talking with his daughter about race? How did you feel about the story? What were some other ways he might have approached the situation?

Personal Reflection

If you are a parent, how do you talk with your kids when they make a statement you disagree with? Has your child ever said anything you found offensive? How did you handle it?

MARGARET HAGERMAN SEGMENT

Content Reflection

What do you think Margaret means when she calls race a "social construct?" What does that phrase mean to you?

Who do you think benefits from a biological view of race, or the idea that there are biologically-based differences between racial groups?

Personal Reflection

How would you define "race." What does the word race mean to you?

Where do your ideas about race come from? What are the sources of your information?

Besides race, what are some reasons why some people are more susceptible to certain diseases or health issues? How is ancestry different from race?

For many people, race is an important part of their identity. How do you think your life would be different if you were categorized as a different race?

For Clinical Providers

Should health professionals take race into account when diagnosing and treating illness? Why? Can you think of a situation where thinking about race as biological might be misleading or have a negative effect?

MARIA POLANCO AND MYLES NELSON SEGMENT

Content Reflection

In Maria's story, all of the white students in her classroom "fall back" in a conversation about race. How does she understand their silence? How does Myles?

Jennifer Harvey says that her students of color have "learned calculus and white students have been unable to learn basic addition." What does she mean by this statement? What can we do about it?

Personal Reflection

Do you think race and racism has ever affected your own friendships?

Myles asks Maria what a white person needs to know to be a good friend. How would you answer this question based on your own experience?

In the episode, Myles describes witnessing how cops treat him differently than his friend of color. If you're a white person, have you ever seen someone close to you experience racism? Did you talk about it? How did that go?