

How to Deal With Racism

Since the first cases of coronavirus (COVID-19) were identified in China, both children and adults of Chinese and Asian descent have been experiencing “coronavirus racism,” including scapegoating for the spread of COVID-19 and xenophobic reactions including fear, exclusion, microaggressions, verbal harassment, exclusion and other racist behaviors.

COVID-19 does not recognize race, nationality or ethnicity. Individuals of Chinese ancestry, or of any other Asian nationality, are not more vulnerable to this illness than anyone else. Accurate information is essential to allaying anxiety about COVID-19 and ensuring that Asian communities are not unfairly targeted or stigmatized.

Racism and bias have no place in our school or community under any circumstance and are not a solution to our fears. The goal, when faced with a potential health emergency like COVID-19, is to focus the steps we can take to reduce spread of the virus, not to cause further, unfounded harm. Lashing out at innocent people around us or hating them because of their origins, appearance, ethnicity or choice of dress will not help reduce risk from the virus and will only cause unnecessary harm.

All people deserve to be treated with fairness, respect and dignity. America is strong because of its diversity. Differences in culture, religion, ideas, ethnicity and other forms of identity have contributed to the strength and richness of our communities.

We are in this together. People of all ethnicities are affected when an emergency event impacts a community. We need to support each other, comfort each other and work together during difficult times.

Tips for Teachers, Staff, Parents and Caregivers

1. **Stop stigma by sharing accurate information and countering misinformation.** Being of Asian descent does not increase the chance of getting or spreading COVID-19. Children should be provided with factual, age appropriate information about how to avoid infections and the spread of disease. Teaching children positive preventive measures, talking with them about their fears and giving them a sense of some control over their risk of infection can help reduce anxiety.
2. **Avoid stereotyping people or countries.** Children can easily generalize negative statements to students in their classes and community. Appearing suspicious of individuals of Asian descent and making inappropriate comments and innuendo about Asian communities can create a stressful and unsafe learning environment for innocent

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groups of people. Be clear about your statements and biases, and help children understand their own prejudices.

3. **Understand that your students of Asian descent may likely be experiencing increased anxiety** due to awareness of xenophobia and racism, or from being the direct targets of racism during the COVID-19 outbreak. Let students and adults know your expectations of respect for all with zero tolerance for racism.
4. **Speak up if you hear, see or read discriminatory comments made by students or staff.** Adults must interrupt bias by speaking up against every biased remark every time it happens. Inconsistent responding sends the message that coronavirus stigma and racism are acceptable in some circumstances. Additionally, adults should explain why the behavior or statement was offensive and how it may be interpreted by others.
5. **Counter microaggressions with micro-affirmations.** Micro-affirmations are subtle acknowledgements to help individuals feel valued and included. These include acknowledging that a microaggression may have occurred, supporting individuals when they tell you they have been targeted because of their Chinese or Asian heritage and visibly confronting inequitable, hostile or biased behavior.
6. **Model compassion and acceptance of differences.** Children take their emotional cues from the significant adults in their lives. Avoid making negative statements about any racial, ethnic or religious group. Reach out to your neighbors and colleagues who might feel at risk because of their race, ethnicity, religion or other traits.
7. **Provide useful information.** Accurate information about people, events, reactions and feelings is empowering. Use language that is developmentally appropriate for children. Make sure all information is factually true. This is especially important when news reports have negative statements about any specific group.
8. **Stop any type of harassment or bullying immediately.** Make it clear that such behavior, in any form (in person, online, social media) is unacceptable. Talk to the children and adults involved about the reasons for their behavior. Offer alternative methods of expressing their anger, confusion or insecurity.
9. **Empower students/children to seek help.** Adults should encourage students/children (victim and bystanders) to tell a trusted adult or speak out against bullying, harassment or microaggressions (if they feel safe doing so).
10. **Ensure that staff, parents, caregivers and community members are respected and protected as well.** Students may not be the only individuals at risk of experiencing overt bias or microaggressions from peers or students. Make sure staff and adults know their rights, what an appropriate response may be in the face of such behavior and how to communicate a concern to school leaders.
11. **Explore children's fears.** Even children who can describe what happened may not be able to express fears, form questions or describe assumptions or conclusions they may

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have made. Use activities, role-playing, and discussions to explore their fears about the events and their feelings about various groups from diverse cultures or lifestyles.

12. **Emphasize positive, familiar images of diverse groups.** Identify people of diverse ethnicities, religions and/or lifestyles that children know and who have a positive place in their lives. These could be neighbors, friends, school personnel, healthcare professionals, members of their faith community or local merchants. Discuss the many characteristics, values and experiences the children have in common with these people.
13. **Read books with your children or students that address prejudice, tolerance and hate.** There are many, many stories appropriate for varying age groups that can help children think about and define their feelings regarding these issues. The school or local librarian can make recommendations.

Resources for teaching about racism

- [Teaching Tolerance](#)
- [Tool kit for responding to microaggressions](#)
- [Massachusetts General Hospital Center for Cross-Cultural Student Emotional Wellness](#)
- New York Times (Video): [Coronavirus Racism Infected My High School](#)
- [Asian Pacific Policy and Planning Council incident report form](#)