

This is a very sensitive but important topic for parents. We hope to assist parents in understanding how their children may view ethnic and racial differences in today's world, **The goal here is to try to help parents know what the level of understanding is in each age group, so as to clarify things for children, rather than confuse them.** Some basic principles of ethnicity, racial differences, and prejudice can be discussed without interjecting a bias. During our children's development, they can benefit from our support and knowledge.

It is important to understand the average child's ability to comprehend information, at different ages. We stress this 'age appropriate advice' at each of our well-child-office-visits, and at our behavioral health visits. **It is rarely the case that a child under the age of 4 years-old will have questions or concerns about race.** They may gravitate to people of the same color, just as they might gravitate to people of the same size, or to people who they are familiar with.

At approximately **four-and-one-half-years-old**, children naturally start to get pre-occupied with gender differences and start to understand permanence & competition. Also, 'socialization' begins to be an important part of their learning (the original purpose of Kindergarten). The topics of race and ethnicity may come up; and the answers that they receive begin to formulate their relationships with diverse ethnic groups, as well as with those of the same ethnicity. **Therefore, from 4.5 to 7-years-old, the teaching about relationships, without any prejudice toward race or ethnicity, allows for good social development.** Much of the teaching that our children receive at these ages is done through television. For the most part, these presentations are done well, when it comes to educating our children about these social skills & relationships. There are times when some experts feel that children can interpret messages to be prejudiced or biased, based on some extreme presentations.

Sometime between 7 & 9 years-old, all children become pre-occupied with their appearance; they try to understand how others perceive their appearance. Some of the common topics that are brought up by children of this age are: hair styles, earrings, clothing, skin blemishes, height & weight, or any physical traits/deformity that might be evident. It seems that every child has some things that they like about their appearance, and some things that they would like to change. Obviously, this is a critical age to ask children how they feel about their appearance, and then to stress that we are all unique individuals, but we all share the same human organs and abilities and emotions. **Children can be made to feel good or bad about their appearance, based on what others tell them.** It is often very difficult for parents to answer difficult questions. **We advise parents to emphasize the common human elements that we all share, and then to emphasize that we all have the ability to learn and be together, regardless of our height or weight or blemishes or clothes or language or skin color.** Unfortunately, many adults have developed biases (prejudices) that get transferred to our children of this age, with regards to the physical features listed here. The biases could teach children that anyone who does not have the same appearance or language as they do, does not fit with them. **The term racism, as per the dictionary, is reserved for when there is a clear inference to a racial superiority or inferiority. It is important to explain that the term "racism" is clearly more extreme than a prejudice or a bias.**

As children enter Puberty (ages 9-11), they develop many questions about many things. Interestingly, they do not always ask the questions that are on their minds, thus leaving the window to the mind open for whatever they see and hear. Ethnicity and cultural diversity are just one topic of incredible interest that develops, in their minds, at this age. Morals, values, sexuality, violence, alcohol, smoking, and drugs all begin to become part of what they are exposed to, in one form or another. This is a very good age for children to begin to hear non-biased reviews about the history of race relations in our country. **It may be important for children of this age to hear about times that people have been mistreated in our country, based on race & ethnicity.** It is also likely beneficial to hear how things have improved quite a bit in this regard, but that there remains work to do. Unfortunately, **it seems that there is a need for a more coordinated effort by many of our social leaders, the extremes of all races to speak 'together', about plans for positive change that we can all work toward, without the degree of controversy that we currently see and hear.**

As puberty reaches its peak, (age 12-15 yrs), voice change, rapid growth spurt, sexual interest. The common theme is 'Peer Relationships'. These relationships seem to dominate over family teaching, or that of formal educational teaching. **Many people will influence teens at this stage of development.** In order to make this complex topic somewhat easier, it again seems clear that it would be best to hear messages and teachings that come from multiple ethnic leaders delivering a common message 'together'. This could then be embraced by all, without anger and with hope. We suggest that parents seek out these scenarios! **We suggest that parents monitor the social media reports, which are often opinions without support from those leaders who truly want positive change. All teens need to be reminded that `social media posts` are largely unchecked opinions;** so, they should look for the united statements from culturally diverse leaders.

In the late stages of Puberty (ages 16-18yrs,) , the adolescent begins to have the ability for more clear rational thought, and therefore does much more 'thinking ahead to future outcomes'. This is a change from the immediate gratification, the simplicity, and the experimentation that had been taking place after the learning from family, teachers, coaches, and peers. **Prejudice can still interfere with the development of how a `late adolescent` views the world.** Clear thought processes are a more likely outcome if late adolescents hear leaders of all races and ethnic backgrounds present logical ways of thinking 'together'. **It becomes difficult for this age group to formulate logical or rational thoughts and arguments, if they are hearing the differences of opinion often, and the commonality of opinion less often.**

There is obviously great interest and frustration around the topics of prejudice and race. The goal here is to help parents know what their children are thinking, and what they are capable of thinking. Hopefully, they will hear and think about how we might unite to make things better than ever before.