

Talking to Kids About Police Violence



1. Start 'em young.

Kids are able to understand complex concepts at far younger ages than we assume!

Silence perpetuates biases and invites children to make uninformed judgements. Children as young as six months of age show preferences towards people with skin color that matches their own.

One-year-olds are able to identify what they want to “be” when they grow up, often naming police officers. The earlier we introduce challenging topics, the easier it will be to revisit them in painful moments.

2. Learn what they know.

Ask questions, and find out what your children think and know about police. If you have police officers or police cars in your home, observe how your child interacts with them. Notice how they respond to sirens driving by your home or police officers you walk by on the street. Is getting arrested part of their repertoire? Are they afraid of police officers? Learn what they know, and pay attention as that changes in time.

3. Remember that children understand fairness.

Lots of research shows that children have an innate understanding of fairness from a young age. They are drawn to share their treats and toys, concerned about friends and neighbors, and know when someone gets hurt. As you share information about incidents of police violence, remember that children will identify when something was not fair and want to discuss why that happened.

4. Make space for discomfort.

Let your child/ren know it's okay to be uncomfortable with these conversations, and remind yourself that the same is true for you. People should experience discomfort when they learn about others' suffering; we'd worry if they didn't! Make space for that by offering reassurance, and letting them explore the questions they may have.

5. Ask - and answer - questions.

After engaging in a difficult conversation, observing something complex, or noticing big emotions, check in with your children. Ask how they're feeling, help them find words to identify what they've seen or heard, and check for understanding. This is the best way to know what your kids are experiencing and fill in the gaps when you need to. Kids are curious, and we want to encourage that as parents. Seeing and talking about homelessness can be challenging for anyone to process, particularly children. When your kids ask questions, take time to answer them honestly and fully.

6. Teach children that sometimes good people do bad things.

Children are skilled at being comfortable when things are not completely one thing or another, but it can be confusing to learn that good people can do bad things. In particular, it can be confusing to understand that authority figures intentionally hurt others. Invite children to reflect on times that they did harmful things to others, and remind them that they are still “good,” even when they've done bad things. While it may be difficult depending on the situation, encourage your children to understand issues as actions rather than representations of an individual's whole being.

7. Consider ages and stages.

Being direct is very important, but be aware of what your child is able to understand at this point in time. If hearing certain information will be scary and can be avoided, it may not be the time to share that. Use children's literature and videos when it is helpful, and seek out help from experts when you need to.

8. Remember: actions speak louder than words.

Remember that actions speak louder than words. Give money, write letters, make phone calls, join protests, and serve your community. The communities most impacted by police violence are the same ones most impacted by hunger, homelessness, and poverty.

Keep up the Learning



- [Impact of Jail on Families](#) *This is a comprehensive resource from Vera Institute for Justice explaining the impact of jail on kids and families, through both narrative and statistics.*
- [Sesame Street's Toolkit on Incarceration for Little Ones](#) *Sesame Street's resources in this toolkit are designed specifically for families who have a loved one that is incarcerated. The content includes videos, a children's e-book, and reading for adults. It can be very helpful for families ready to talk to their children about incarceration, no matter their experience.*
- [Black Lives Matter at School](#) *This website is full of resources for teaching children of all ages about Black Lives Matter. Designed by classroom educators, the content includes various modalities and is updated annually.*
- [Police Violence as a Public Health Issue](#) *This article explains how police violence functions as a public health issue for children; written by a pediatrician.*
- [Racism and Violence: How to Help Kids Handle the News](#) *Child Mind Institute offer practical tips for supporting children emotionally while still sharing important and troubling news.*
- [Something Happened in Our Town](#) *by Marriane Celano, Marietta Collins & Ann Hazard This children's book is about a shooting of a Black man by police in a small town. Extensive resources for families are included.*