Talking to children and young people about anti-racism protests: Guidance for schools

Why is this relevant to my school?

Schools routinely discuss societal issues such as human rights, domestic violence, sexual abuse, gender identity and sexuality, and terrorist incidences - even when they may not directly affect all pupils. These whole school addresses aim to: raise pupil's awareness of social issues, promote empathy, equip pupils to recognise and act on concerns and are in line with promoting British Values which include mutual respect and tolerance.

These actions are in line with duties that apply to all public bodies (including schools) under Section 149 of the Equality Act (2010) which require schools to have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate discrimination and other conduct that is prohibited by the Act
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it
- Foster good relations across all characteristics - between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it

It is therefore within the scope of schools' responsibility to provide a proactive response to current race - related protests and support pupils to make sense of these issues in order to foster good relations amongst pupils.

Whilst not all pupils, families and staff in your school may engage with the news on anti-racist protests following the death of George Floyd in America, some children will be directly impacted.

In particular, Black children may experience a grief or traumatic response to exposure of these events on television and on social media (where children and young people have circulated video compilations of people being killed by police) See Appendix 1.

All schools have a duty to safeguard pupils, and this extends to their emotional and mental wellbeing.

Providing an initial response

Acknowledge the following:

- That recent events, including the death of George Floyd and ensuing protests across the world, and in the UK have directly affected pupils, in particular those who are racialised as Black and those who have African and Caribbean heritage
  - They may experience traumatic responses to these events (Heard-Garris et al. 2018)
- Recent events have stirred many to reflect on issues of race, racism and injustice in the UK
  - Pupils and their families may be reflecting on experiences of racism perpetrated against them which may exacerbate distress
  - Pupils, parents and staff, having different racial identities, experiences and perspectives will likely experience challenge and distress when discussing these issues perhaps having feelings of confusion, guilt, shame, anger and helplessness
  - However, silence around the distress of others, exacerbates distress (Kinouani 2020)

Provide a response which promotes:

- **Emotional safety**
  - It will be important for schools to facilitate opportunities for staff to discuss these events amongst themselves and consider a whole school response to this issue, prior to speaking to pupils
  - Staff and pupils should feel safe to discuss concerns, thoughts and feelings related to issues of race
  - Create safe spaces for both staff and pupils to express feelings without judgement
  - Offer the opportunities for discussion but do not pressure pupils or staff into participating
  - Show empathy, name and validate staff and pupils' emotional responses
  - Be wary of minimising, negating and, or avoiding emotional responses of others
  - Recognise that based on their age and stage of emotional and cognitive development pupils may re-enact violence in play (Ogawa, 2004), make jokes or draw simplistic conclusions (e.g. "Black people are bad, they got in trouble with the police")
  - Recognise that grief and traumatic responses may lead to confusion, avoidance of the subject, expressions of anger, helplessness, affect sleep (induce nightmares), affect mood, and ability to attend to learning (Comas-Díaz, Hall, and Neville 2019)
- **Belonging**
  - It will be helpful for schools to re-emphasise connectedness and the shared school identity

- **Identity and self-esteem**
  - It will be helpful for schools to support pupils to feel positive about their own and others' racial and ethnic groups

Suggestions for discussing issues of race when pupils return to school
In group contexts
- Students may continue to have difficulty in making sense of issues of race and racism upon the return to school in what will be a difficult transition context
- Staff ought to ensure they feel emotionally regulated before beginning conversations on the topic and make a plan to debrief with a colleague afterward
- Highlight the discussion maybe emotionally overwhelming and allow pupils the option to leave the room if they find the discussion difficult
  - Provide physical spaces within the school for pupils to withdraw to and access to adults who might support them
  - Arrange opportunities for pupils to debrief with a trusted adult or friend if they have to leave the room during a discussion
- Consider who might be particularly distressed (for example those who already have recognised SEMH needs) and perhaps provide opportunities for small group discussion with a trusted adult instead of the whole class or whole school assembly
- Ensure differentiation and adaptations for pupils with additional needs

Staff in direct work or with individual pupils
- Listen without interrupting
- Provide gentle challenges to misconceptions, for example "How do you know, Why might they feel that, How would you respond?"
- Support pupils to explore the evidence for misconceptions and misattributions; encourage them to reflect on different sources of information and be critical thinkers (See fact checking websites and guidance against fake news Fullfact 2020; Share Checklist, 2020)
- Be honest and authentic about your own responses and if you are not sure how to proceed or become emotionally overwhelmed, return to the topic of conversation later

Actions
- Schools to make their own response plans in consultation with staff, parents, and governors
- Reflect and review your curriculum planning around understandings of race and racism throughout the school year
  - The more often pupils can revisit the topic the less daunting it will feel to both staff and students
- Explore further practical actions your school might take to foster good relations in school and in the community
- Ensure young people know who they could speak to and what they might do if they become distressed (for example speaking to an adult, friend, reading, exercising etc.)
- Activities such as arts and crafts, journaling, poetry and making music can help young people express themselves

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References

Comas-Díaz, Lillian, Gordon Nagayama Hall, and Helen A. Neville. 2019. "Racial Trauma: Theory, Research, and Healing: Introduction to the Special Issue." *The American Psychologist* 74 (1): 1–5.

"Full Fact - Full Fact Is the UK's Independent Fact Checking Organisation." n.d. Full Fact accessed from https://fullfact.org/

Heard-Garris, N. J., M. Cale, L. Camaj, M. C. Hamati, and T. P. Dominguez. 2018. "Transmitting Trauma: A Systematic Review of Vicarious Racism and Child Health." *Social Science & Medicine* 199 (February): 230–40.

Kinouani, Guilaine. 2020. "Silencing, Power and Racial Trauma in Groups." *Group Analysis* 53 (2): 145–61.
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National Child Traumatic Stress Network, Justice Consortium, Schools Committee, and Culture   Consortium. (2017). Addressing Race and Trauma in the Classroom: A Resource for Educators. Los Angeles, CA, and Durham, NC: National Center for Child Traumatic Stress.

Ogawa, Yumiko. 2004. "Childhood Trauma and Play Therapy Intervention for Traumatized Children." *Journal of Professional Counseling: Practice, Theory & Research* 32 (1): 19–29

"Home - SHARE Checklist." n.d. SHARE Checklist accessed from https://sharechecklist.gov.uk/

Links to More Information and Resources

School Staff and Teachers: Words you could use
https://www.ahaparenting.com/ask-the-doctor-1/talking-with-children-about-racism-police-brutality-and-protests

https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/parenting/wp/2015/07/06/how-silence-can-breed-prejudice-a-child-development-professor-explains-how-and-why-to-talk-to-kids-about-race/

For Primary School Practitioners
https://rowman.com/isbn/9780847688623/the-first-r-how-children-learn-race-and-racism

For Secondary School and College Practitioners

Runnymede Perspectives: Race and Racism in English Secondary Schools (2020)

https://www.runnymedetrust.org/uploads/publications/pdfs/Runnymede%20Secondary%20Schools%20report%20FINAL.pdf

From "The Runnymede School Report: Race, Education and Equality in Contemporary Britain" (2015)

- Black and Minority Ethnic Students on the Margins: Self-segregation or Enforced Exclusion? By Gill Crozier
- 'Racism, It's Part of My Everyday Life': Black and Minority Ethnic Pupils' Experiences in a Predominantly White School by Vini Landa
- 'Hard Time Pressure inna Babylon': Why Black History in Schools is Failing to Meet the Needs of BME Students, at Key Stage 3 by Nadena Doherty

https://www.runnymedetrust.org/uploads/The%20School%20Report.pdf

Research on racism and anti-racism in Cheshire, Halton and Warrington Secondary Schools

http://chawrec.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/Practitioner-Report-A4.pdf

Resources to use with Primary Age Pupils (Blue Peter and Newsround)

Blue Peter Statement

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9LLBDsVREaI

"Watch our special programme about racism"

https://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/52978346

"George Floyd, Why are there huge protests about his death"

 https://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/52813673

"Stormzy donates £10m to help tackle racism in the UK"
https://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/53014453

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<u>Appendix 1. "What Are the Effects of Racial Trauma by Age Group?"</u>
Reproduced from an infographic by the National Child Trauma Stress Network (2017)

Infants and Toddlers (0-36 months)	Although young children lack the cognitive abilities to identify and understand discrimination and racism they are not spared from their effects (Brown, 2015). These adverse conditions affect young children's development directly and by the deleterious environmental conditions that are created. Infants and toddlers experience developmentally appropriate fears and anxieties (separation, loss of parents, loss of body parts) (Van Horn & Lieberman, 2008). They are aware of sounds and sights in their environments and of their caregivers' emotional states. For young children, their perception of safety is closely linked to the perceived safety of their caregivers (Scheeringa and Zeanah, 1995). Being exposed to racially-motivated traumatic events toward them or their loved ones can be perceived as threats by young children who might respond with physiological or emotional difficulties. In addition, caregivers' own stressors, including the effects of racial trauma, can impact their emotional availability for their children and ability to protect them from danger and stress (Brown 2015, Van Horn & Lieberman, 2008).
Preschoolers (Ages 3-5)	Children in this age range may exhibit behaviors in response to trauma that can include re-creating the traumatic event or having difficulties with sleeping, appetite, or reaction to loud sounds or sudden movements. In addition, if they are exposed to media reports of racial trauma (such as a police shooting), they tend to focus on sights and sounds and interpret words and images literally. They may not fully grasp the concept of an image being repeatedly replayed on television and may think each time that the event is happening over and over again.
School Age Children (Ages 6-11)	Children in this age range often exhibit a variety of reactions to trauma and to racial trauma in particular. Much will depend on whether they have directly experienced an event or have a personal connection with those involved. School-age children tend to view media coverage in personal terms, worrying that a similar event could happen to them. This can lead to preoccupations with their own safety or that of their friends, which in turn can lead to distractibility and problems in school.
Older Students (Ages 12-17)	Youth in this age range typically have a better understanding of events and the implications of issues such as racial trauma. They are also often still forming their identities and their views of the world and their place in it. High school-aged students may become fixated on events as a way of trying to cope or deal with the anxiety that they are feeling as a result. Older students may be exposed to a wide range of images and information via social media as well. They may benefit from discussing ways that they can promote positive changes in their communities.