

# RACE, RELATIONSHIPS, & RESOURCES

## CONVERSATION TIPS FOR BIGS



**At Big Brothers Big Sisters of Metro Milwaukee, we recognize that systemic racism and violence affect our community and we believe that having conversations about race and social justice topics is important. This document is meant to provide support and resources for Bigs as they support their Littles in seeking to understand and think critically about racism and social justice in America. As always, Bigs and Families are encouraged to reach out to their Match Support Specialist for additional support.**

### **Create Space**

- Send a message that this is a space your Little can talk about race or social justice.
- The main purpose of bringing up the conversation about is to convey to your Little is that you have an awareness about racism, violence, and social justice issues, that you care about them, and are here to listen anytime.

### **Find Your "Window"**

- When you know you want to have a difficult conversation, sometimes it helps to find an appropriate time. For example, there may be a current event or a comment made by your Little that could prompt a deeper conversation.

### **Read Your Audience**

- Follow your Little's cues to give you feedback as to how interested/comfortable they are in talking about this and where they're at in terms of how this is impacting them and the level of their understanding.
- Always consider your Little's age and maturity level
  - **All ages:** Thank them for sharing their perspective and let them know you're there to support them. Ask open-ended questions to elicit more than a one word response.
  - **Younger Littles:** Discuss basic information about how people are sometimes treated differently due to their skin color.
  - **Older Littles:** Consider talking points based on current news. Ask for your Little's perspective and how they're feeling about current events.

### **You Don't Have to be an Expert**

- We are all on a journey to learn more. You don't have to put pressure on yourself to be an expert or know the perfect thing to say.

- It's okay to say you don't have all the answers—this is a complex issue and we are all learning and growing.
- Have self-awareness of your own assumptions and biases.

### **Be Humble**

- If you make a mistake, say something that is incorrect, or hurts your Little, apologize.
- Framework for apologizing for impact:
  - Listen, believe, take responsibility for impact.
  - When apologizing, focus on impact, rather than explaining intent.
  - Ex: "I'm sorry my words impacted you that way."

### **Get a Little More Comfortable Being Uncomfortable**

- An age appropriate response is better than ignoring the question or having no response.

### **Plan for a Marathon, not a Sprint**

- Keep the conversation going
- It's okay to say, "I'm not sure" or "Let's come back to that later, okay?" But then do come back to it. Make conversations like this routine. Race is a topic you could revisit again and again in many different ways over time.

### **Be Curious**

- Learn together.
- Study and talk about the histories and experiences of people from different backgrounds (*ex: explore cultural festivals, diverse museums, art exhibits, or learn about cultural traditions*).
- Consider age appropriate books or movies.

### **Lead with Empathy**

- Approach conversations with a perspective of empathy
- Validate their truth and lived experiences
- Validate their feelings-- it's okay for children to express feeling scared, confused, angry, etc. about what is happening in the world around them.

### **Listen**

- Seek to Fully Understand
- Don't assume you are the only one to bring wisdom to the conversation. Adults can learn from youth, too. The better you understand what your Little already knows

and what their concerns are, the better you'll be able to support them and help them understand you are a person they can talk to.

- Practice active listening and reflect back what you're hearing your Little say to ensure you understand.
- Ask open ended questions
  - *"Tell me more about that experience"*
  - *"What do you want me to know about that?"*
  - *"What do you want me to know about what it was like watching that video"*

### **Get Support and Work Together**

- Bigs are encouraged to reach out to your Match Support Specialist for additional support.
- Communicate and partner with your Little's Parent/Caregiver to determine how you can best support your Little.