



Talking With Kids About Racism

January 14, 2021 – 7:00 pm

Zoom Webinar

Welcome remarks were made by PCW President, Frazier Schulman, followed by an introduction of the evening's panelists from PCW board member Carla Taylor-Pla, followed by an end-of-program Q&A session moderated by PCW board member Suzanna Kang. Biographies of the panelists follow this summary.

Michelle Black, Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion at Stone Ridge School of the Sacred Heart

In general, when discussing the topic of race:

- Check in with yourself first. Know why you want to have this discussion and make sure you are clear on your feelings. What are you hoping to learn and what are you hoping to communicate?
- Conversations about race are not “one and done.” Expect several conversations over time. Identify where long-held beliefs begin.
- Focus on building genuine, sustained relationships with people.
- Prepare for conversations by doing some research. Also, reach out to friends for advice. Come with awareness, not just emotions. You do not have to be an expert, but you need to have some knowledge about history, culture, and context.
- Share stories, articles, and movies that you have seen and discuss content that is challenging. Be okay with being vulnerable and sometimes uncomfortable.
- Allow people to see, think, examine, and change. We are all changing. Our ideas from our younger years may be very different from our thinking as adults.
- Have patience and grace with yourself and others.

Talking With Kids - Lower School Years

- Children absorb their environment. Whether you are aware of it or not, children see, feel, and hear what you value and what you do not. For example, they observe with whom you associate and with whom you do not. They have a cultural awareness of music, art, movies, and clothing.
- If we do not talk about race, we inadvertently teach children to be afraid of difference. Implicit biases may then take root.

- Tell kids that racism is unfair. Ask them what they know. Then listen to them and ask them how they know what they know. Talk about racism as bullying.
- Discuss the media with them and explore examples of stereotypes.
- Find positive messaging in the media about people of color.

Dr. Rodney Glasgow, President, The Glasgow Group and Head of School, Sandy Spring Friends School

Talking With Kids - Middle School Years

- Awareness of difference starts while children are very young. By 5th grade, most have internalized stereotypical messages. While race may not be the first identifier for each person, it is one facet of identity along with gender, class, religion, family structure, age, ability, sexual orientation, etc.
- Racial identity development and understanding one's racial identity in a social context are key in the middle school years. Verbal and non-verbal encoding of values continues in middle schoolers, now more so from peers, the media, and adults outside of the home.
- In brain development, judgment is the last to develop as the pre-frontal cortex matures. Middle schoolers will experiment with many concepts that they do not fully understand because of this stage of brain development.
- Our brains are wired for social interaction and are motivated by status, certainty, autonomy, relatedness, and fairness (Lieberman, 2013).
- When cognitive dissonance occurs in your child or there is psychological discomfort formed by two conflicting thoughts that result in a need to change their own thoughts, feelings, or behavior, parents need to allow for the heightened expression. Acknowledge middle schoolers' feelings of anger or disappointment and do not rush to tamp down their emotions or police their behavior. Think about where and how we can allow children to express cognitive dissonance safely and bravely in our presence, without encountering denial or resolution.
- We are living during one of the most racialized eras in history. Middle schoolers can handle the deep conversations that may arise from recent events.
- Start talking with your kids about race before the middle school years, in order to help them be more comfortable talking about differences and to challenge stereotypes when they are older.
- A child gets to decide whether a challenge to one's thinking is significant. Our role as parents is to notice and validate the emotions of our child.
- Separate what you have experienced, felt, and come to understand about race from what your middle schooler is experiencing, feeling, and understanding about race. This is a time to teach them your values and perspectives, and your expectations and hopes for them around race, but that comes after you engage them to understand how race is forming in their own minds and hearts. Listen more than you speak and know that they are watching and listening when you are not being intentional.

- Identify your child's mirrors at school, in your family, in your neighborhood, and in their peer group. Know who they are going to, outside of you, when they have questions about race, and know how those people are likely to guide your child.
- Prepare children for the racial world we live in, and help them to understand their part in creating the racial world we want to live in. Do not sugar-coat issues. Middle schoolers can handle deep processing and nuance.
- Raise the positive value of racial identity in the world. How can this identity empower them to live a just and purposeful life?

Steven Lee, Director of Equity, Inclusion, and Civic Engagement, Edmund Burke School

Talking With Kids - High School Years

- By the time children are in high school, they have already absorbed societal stereotypes. Depending on how much discussion they have with caring adults and peers, implicit biases may have taken root.
- It is important to study the history of race as a social construct to rank and divide people.
- It is important to discuss the topic of privilege as an unearned access to resources (material, cultural, and structural resources) and to explain that privilege does not make a person bad or not a hard worker.
- There are many forms of privilege (race, class, gender, ability, etc.). Just because people have one form of privilege does not mean that they have other forms of privilege. However, they are intersectional and people navigate their lives using these perceptions of identity.
- Race is a social construct, but its influence is both powerful and real.
- Racism is not only interpersonal, but also institutional and structural.
- Begin by cultivating self-awareness (i.e., awareness of how one's own racial privilege, or lack thereof, shapes one's experience of the world).
- Intentionally incorporate racial diversity into your children's lives beyond their school experience.
- Help your children develop emotional intelligence in order to increase their capacity to engage productively in challenging conversations about race and racism.
- Question yourself: To what extent am I modeling and experiencing a diverse reality with children?
- Have a cup of coffee with people that you do not know and develop long sustained friendships.
- Mostly listen to your children and then sometimes ask them how the shared information is going to help us move through the world justly.

Q&A Highlights

- Talk about recent events and ideas about white privilege with your children.
- Practice a culture of grace and forgiveness (with self and others), when discussing race. There may be many awkward, uncomfortable, and vulnerable moments when

talking about race. In general, we have not had very much practice talking about this issue.

- Do not take offense when called out. Humility is needed in this work. We all are learning.
- Understand that some people may have experienced an accumulation of the impact of so much micro aggression. Give that person a break. Continue the conversation over time and do not disengage. Learn together.
- Role play with your children when they are needing support with confronting challenging interactions about race. Help them practice the words to communicate their feelings.
- Know that there will be plenty of experimentation with language and ideas about race when children are young. Listen to them, affirm their feelings and, using open-ended questions, explore their understanding about race.
- Question where they are getting their information about race, e.g., gaming, technology, internet, chat rooms, etc. Remember to monitor conversations with people that they do not know personally and only have met online.
- Be curious and engage in dialogue with people and develop friendships.
- Watch movies together. Wait and process issues before talking about racialized stereotypes and bias. The conversation does not have to happen immediately.
- Use humor as an entry to serious subjects.

Resources

Books:

- Alexander, K. and Nelson, K. *The Undefeated*. New York: Versify, 2019. Illustrated Version.
- Brackett, Mark. *Permission to Feel: Unlocking the Power of Emotions to Help Our Kids, Ourselves, and Our Society Thrive*. New York: Celadon Books, 2019.
- Coates, Ta-Nahasi. *Between the World and Me*. New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2015.
- Craft, Jerry. *New Kid*. New York: Quill Tree Books, 2019.
- Tatum, Beverly D. *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?: And Other Conversations About Race*. New York: Basic Books, 2017 Rev. Ed.

Websites:

- National Museum of African American History and Culture - <https://nmaahc.si.edu/explore/nmaahc-digital-resources-guide>
- Netflix Search: Black Lives Matter

Panelist Biographies

Michelle Black began her career in New York City, working in public relations for Elizabeth Arden. During this time, Michelle knew her purpose was not with magazine beauty editors or writing press releases. She followed her heart and calling to become a teacher. Upon completing her graduate degree in education, Michelle embarked on her true and joyful career in schools. She's been an

educator in public, independent, boarding, and faith-based schools on the East and West Coast. In each community, Michelle created spaces for students, colleagues, and staff to honestly and bravely address difficult topics. In July 2018, she moved to Maryland and joined Stone Ridge School of the Sacred Heart as the Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. After more than ten years working in DEI related positions in schools, Michelle remains committed to helping communities build more inclusive, equitable, and joy-filled spaces.

Michelle graduated from New York University with a B.A. in English Literature and Journalism; Columbia University's Teachers College, MA in Teaching of English; and an MS.Ed. from the University of Pennsylvania in School Leadership.

Dr. Rodney Glasgow is an educational leader, published author, keynote speaker, diversity practitioner, and current Head of School at Sandy Spring Friends School. Rodney joined SSFS in July 2020 after nearly 20 years of experience in progressive and independent school settings as an educator and senior administrator. Rodney is a graduate of Gilman School in his hometown of Baltimore, MD, received a bachelor's degree in Psychology and African American Studies from Harvard University, a Master's degree in Organizational Leadership from Columbia University's Klingenstein Center, and a Doctorate of Education degree from The George Washington University. Rodney has held classroom, boardroom, and administrative leadership positions at several independent schools and is a diversity advocate and facilitator. He is a founder and Chair of the National Diversity Practitioners Institute for educators and administrators, as well as the NAIS Student Diversity Leadership Conference.

Rodney is President and Principal Consultant of the Glasgow Group, LLC, which works with schools, individuals, and organizations to create and promote equitable and just practices that harness the power of diversity and inclusivity. Rodney is the recipient of the People of Courage Award from the City of Worcester and a featured writer in "One Teacher in Ten in the New Millennium: LGBT Educators Speak Out About What's Gotten Better ... and What Hasn't." Rodney is passionate about encouraging students to find and express the fullness of their identities, and providing transformative educational environments that allow students and teachers to lead and learn together.

Steven Lee is the Director of Equity, Inclusion, and Civic Engagement and the former Chairperson of the Health, Values, and Ethics Department at Edmund Burke School in Washington DC. Prior to assuming these roles at Burke, he taught high school English and Humanities for 10 years at two independent schools in the San Francisco Bay Area. He holds a BA in English from UCLA and an MA in Comparative Ethnic Studies from UC Berkeley.