

Frequently Asked Questions: Caregivers Raising Asian American Children

Have questions about race, racism, and your Asian American child? You're not alone! Take a look at these FAQs from parents and caregivers like you.



1 How can I help my child understand the differences between race, ethnicity, and nationality?

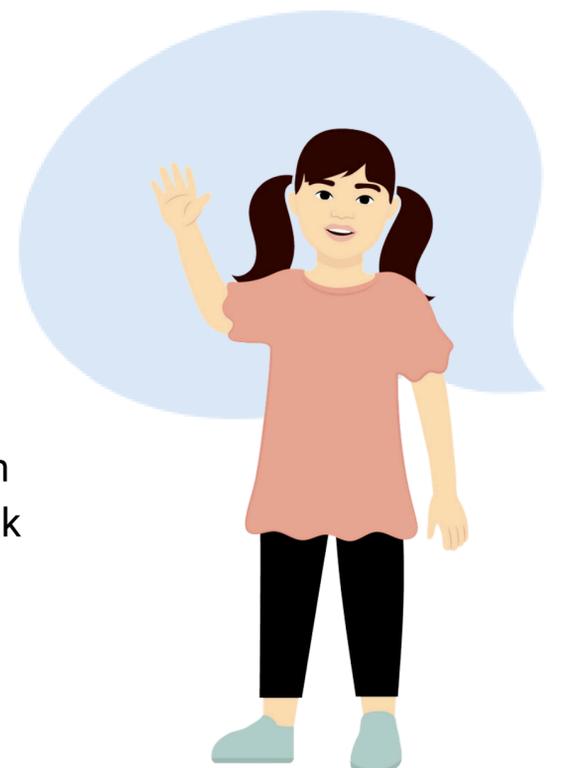
Race, ethnicity, and nationality are related, but they are not exactly the same.

Racial categories tend to be very broad, while ethnicities are more specific. For example, in the United States, we group many different Asian ethnicities under the "Asian American" racial category. This category is incredibly diverse, and include East Asian ethnicities like Chinese, Japanese, and Korean, Southeast Asian ethnicities like Filipino, Vietnamese, and Indonesian, and South Asian ethnicities like Indian, Pakistani, and Sri Lankan. Many countries in Asia are made up of multiple ethnic groups, too. For example, in India, there are many different ethnic groups like Punjabis, Bengalis, Tamils, Gujaratis, and Sindhis. [Watch this video](#) with your child to learn more together about who is Asian American!

Nationality is related to where you were born and where you live, and some people choose to combine their ethnicity and/or race with their nationality. For example, people with Asian ethnicities in the United States might identify as "Asian American," "Cambodian American" or "Indian American," to include both their racial and/or ethnic groups with their nationality.

Most people have multiple ethnicities, and some people have multiple races. It's natural for children (and adults!) to explore different identity terms to figure out how they want to describe themselves. And, people often decide to change how they identify, too. But, figuring out how to identify is not always straightforward, so it's helpful for caregivers to help provide children with the language to start.

When talking about race, ethnicity, and nationality with your child, it can be helpful to talk about your family's history and origins together! Check out the [My Family's Rivers activity](#) as a tool to talk about your family's racial, ethnic, and national backgrounds.



2 How much should I tell my child about my own experiences with racism?

Figuring out if, and how much, you should share with your child about your personal experiences with racism can depend on many factors and looks different from family to family. And, it's always important to check in with yourself, reflect on your own emotions and reactions, and consider how you want to talk about these experiences with your child before starting the conversation. Storytelling, including sharing family stories about racism, can be a powerful learning tool for children because it can provide concrete examples of racism that happened to people the child knows. These stories can expose children to experiences and ways to respond, and can serve to validate their feelings should they experience something similar. If you feel ready to share your experiences with your child, below are some things to consider.

Staying attuned to your child's personality and emotional reactions can help you decide if, when, and how much to share. If your child tends to be overly anxious, fearful, or sensitive, you may decide to hold back until you're confident they can cope with these emotions. Or you may decide to omit certain details and share when your child is feeling less stressed. As a parent, you know best, so trust your intuition!

Sometimes, sharing your own experiences with racism can be uncomfortable and may bring up negative emotions. Parents may also be worried about burdening or transferring their racial trauma to their children. Just like on a plane when the flight attendants instruct you to first put on your own oxygen mask before helping others, you may need to prioritize yourself and heal from your experiences with racism before you feel ready to share them with your children, and that's okay!



Although adults often underestimate how much children notice and understand race, parents may feel hesitant to share because of their child's young age or difficulty in figuring out age-appropriate ways to share. You can decide how to share with your child based on your comfort level.

Some tips to remember when sharing your experiences with your children include reflecting on your personal biases and practicing the conversation beforehand. Check out [this resource that includes quotes and reflections from Asian American parents](#) to learn more.

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How can I talk about race and racism with my child without instilling fear or making them feel less-than?

Discussing race and racism can feel difficult, especially with young children. To make sure your child isn't fearful or excessively worried about racism, you can try to balance conversations about racism with positive messages. For instance, you can remind your child that, "Even though racism and other bad things happen, there are ways to make things better by standing up against racism together with other people." It can also be helpful to use resources in conversations about racism — check out [this tool](#) that showcases examples of Asian American resistance to racism through activism and solidarity.

Another way to deal with children's potential fear or worry surrounding racism is to help them cope. You can validate your child's feelings and experiences by saying, "I would feel scared and sad too if that happened to me." You can also empower your children to stand up for themselves and others by discussing different options or actions they can take in the face of racism. Check out the [role-play resource](#) for an example of how such a conversation might go.

Children might feel inferior after learning about or experiencing racism. To avoid this, remind your child that it's not their fault and teach them to be proud of their culture and heritage through books, cultural celebrations, positive role models, and countering stereotypes. Remind your child that their culture and community are important by saying things like, "You are amazing! And our family is special for so many reasons. What are some things that make us unique?"

Want to learn more? Read [10 tips for teaching and talking to kids about race](#).



4 I tend to ignore or brush off anything negative that happens to me and tell my child to do the same. But, are there other safe responses that I can teach my child?

It's natural to want to protect your child from negativity by encouraging them to brush off negative experiences, but it's important to recognize that acknowledging and addressing these moments can be incredibly empowering!

Research shows that caregivers are important sources of support for children when they experience something negative, like racial discrimination. You can encourage your child to share their experiences by asking, "Can you tell me what happened? How did that make you feel?" You can then also help your child cope by listening to their experiences and validating their feelings, by saying things like, "That must have been really hard." Be sure to uplift your child and remind them that it's not their fault because without direct conversations with an adult, children may feel inferior or think they are to blame. After soothing their feelings, you can also teach your child how to evaluate their surroundings to see if it might be safe to stand up for themselves. You can talk about potential responses for the future by asking your child, "What can you say to this person if it happens again?" "Who can you go talk to for help?"

Remember: bottling up emotions isn't healthy for anyone. By creating a safe space for your child to express themselves and equipping them with coping mechanisms, you're helping them navigate challenges and build resilience.

5 My child asked me if Asians Americans are considered minorities or People of Color. How should I respond?

Before responding, it can be helpful to learn about what spurred your child's question by asking something like, "That's an interesting question, what do you think?" You can mention some of the following points, but feel free to add to or change this explanation depending on your child's thought process:



Asian Americans are considered racial minorities or People of Color because they experience racism and they don't have the same advantages or rewards that White people have in the United States. Even though there are examples of Asian Americans who have achieved success in different ways, they still are treated differently based on their skin color, where they come from, or how they look.

Some people might believe that Asian Americans are not racial minorities because of something called the "model minority myth." This includes beliefs that all Asian Americans have achieved success because they hardly experience racism, or by overcoming racism through working hard, following the rules, and being 'perfect' minorities. But these beliefs are false because many Asian Americans are struggling and Asian Americans do experience racism, no matter how successful they are.

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I tend to focus on racism that other groups experience but rarely talk about racism against Asian Americans. What are some ways that I can talk about racism that Asian Americans experience with my child?

It's great to have already taken the initiative to talk about racism with your children. A lot of adults find it hard to talk about racism with their children in general, so you're already on the right track! For many Asian American families, talking about anti-Asian racism can feel difficult. It might trigger stress responses in you as you recall your own experiences with racism and it can feel closer to home because it is racism that directly affects your family and loved ones.

Read books. For all families, including those that are not Asian American but want to talk more about racism that Asian Americans experience, children's books are a helpful place to start the conversation. Check out the books, *Laxmi's Mooch* and *Eyes that Weave the World's Wonders* as windows into the experiences of different Asian American children. If you're looking for more books, take a look at these [picture book](#) and [chapter book lists](#) that feature books about Asian and Asian American families' experiences.

Watch these videos. You can watch [this video](#) with your child that explains racism that Asian American experience in a child-friendly way, and [this video](#) explains some common Asian American stereotypes. After watching the videos together, discuss your reactions, reflections, and wonderings by using the accompanying discussion prompts.

Learn about Asian American activists. Beyond just talking about racism that Asian Americans experience, it's also important to highlight the important work of activists that have long resisted racism. [Check out this resource](#) that showcases historical and contemporary Asian American activists and leaders, like Filipino American activist Larry Itliong and Taiwanese American activist Aijen Poo, who have fought for social and racial justice.

Foster open communication. Research also shows that these conversations are often sparked by questions and comments from children. Fostering an open communication style between you and your child, by encouraging them to share their experiences and letting them know that they can ask or tell you anything, can help open the door to more conversations, including after your child has an experience with racism.

