



## KEY INSIGHTS FROM THE RESEARCH ON REDUCING PREJUDICE AND BIAS IN CHILDREN – SUMMARY

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### When does stereotyping and prejudice start?

- Babies notice race as early as 3 – 6 months.<sup>1</sup>
- Children start to apply stereotypes between the ages of 3 – 5.<sup>2</sup>
- Even preschoolers use racist language intentionally.<sup>3</sup>
- Elementary school students understand that stereotypes lead to discrimination.<sup>4</sup>
- Everyone is susceptible to implicit biases.<sup>5,6</sup>
- Adolescents, when looking at African American faces, show higher levels of activity in the amygdala – the area of the brain known for its fight-flight reactions.<sup>7</sup>

### Why is it important to discuss prejudice, bias and race in school?

- Increase academic achievement and well being by valuing diversity.<sup>8</sup>
- If bias is not interrupted, students believe it is accepted.<sup>9</sup>
- Harmless objects may be mistaken for weapons.<sup>10</sup>

### Research proven ways to reduce prejudice and bias:

- Real conversations about race with students make a difference.<sup>11</sup>
- Emphasize similarities across race and differences within race.<sup>12</sup>
- Show interracial interactions with books.<sup>13</sup>
- Showing images of people that run counter to stereotypes.<sup>14</sup>
- It's important for students to see others being an ally and to experience for themselves.<sup>15</sup>
- By age 8 – 9, children can help peers reduce prejudice.<sup>16</sup>
- Intergroup contact generally reduces intergroup prejudice.<sup>17</sup>
- Develop positive self-worth to reduce biases and to help handle discrimination.<sup>18,19,20</sup>
- Key developmental skills for reducing prejudice:<sup>21</sup>
  - Seeing beyond external differences. Realizing that although things may appear different they can be similar.
  - Have the ability to see that someone could be a member of many different groups at the same time.
  - Understanding that other people can have different and equally valid perspectives. Develop empathy.

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## KEY INSIGHTS FROM THE RESEARCH ON REDUCING PREJUDICE AND BIAS IN CHILDREN (WITH DETAIL)

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### When does stereotyping and prejudice start?

**Babies notice race as early as 3 – 6 months:** Infants living in a homogeneous neighborhood show preferences to faces from their own racial group while infants in heterogeneous environments do not.<sup>22</sup>

**Children start to apply stereotypes at a very young age:** Between the ages of 3 and 5, children begin to categorize people by race and express bias based on race.<sup>23</sup>

**Even preschoolers use racist language intentionally:** Children as young as preschool are able to use racist language to create social hierarchies, evoke emotional reactions by victims, and produce harmful results.<sup>24</sup>

**Elementary school students understand that stereotypes lead to discrimination:** By age 7, about 30% of children understand that stereotypes can lead to discrimination. By age 10, this figure rises to 90%.<sup>25</sup>

**Everyone is susceptible to implicit biases:** Most Americans, regardless of race, display an implicit (or unconscious) pro-White/anti-Black bias.<sup>26</sup> By 6 years, children demonstrate implicit biases about race.<sup>27</sup>

**Adolescents, when looking at African American faces, show higher levels of activity in the area of the brain known for its fight-flight reactions:** By age 14 both African American (AA) and European American (EA) children show heightened amygdala activity (a subconscious emotional response) when viewing AA faces relative to EA faces. This difference is not present in earlier childhood. And responses to EA faces remained stable across the ages studied (ages 4 – 16 years.)<sup>28</sup>

### Why is it important to discuss prejudice, bias and race in school?

**Increase academic achievement and well being by valuing diversity:** The perception of the value and emphasis on cultural diversity in the school setting, multiculturalism, is associated with more positive outcomes such as better academic achievement and psychosocial well being.<sup>29</sup>

**If bias is not interrupted, students believe it is accepted:** If name-calling or other discrimination happens at school and goes either unnoticed or is not discussed by adults, students infer that the behavior is widely accepted.<sup>30</sup>

**Harmless objects may be mistaken for weapons:** Based on a number of studies, people are more likely to mistake harmless objects for weapons when held by or in the presence of Black people relative to White people and in the presence of men relative to women.<sup>31</sup>

### Research proven ways to reduce prejudice and bias:

**Real conversations with students make a difference:** Age-appropriate conversation about race, racial differences, and even racial inequity and racism are associated with lower levels of bias in young children.<sup>32</sup>

**Emphasize similarities across race and differences within race:** When discussing race, it is important to emphasize the similarities across race and the differences within a race, as these are harder for children to see who tend to focus on more noticeable differences.<sup>33</sup>

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**Show interracial interactions with books:** Books that portray interaction between children who are similar to the audience and children of different races or cultures have more impact on attitudinal changes than books that only portray people of other races and cultures.<sup>34</sup>

**Showing images of people that run counter to stereotypes:** Exposing students to counter stereotypic individuals builds new associations in people's minds – for example male nurses, black inventors, or gay heroes.<sup>35</sup>

**It's important to see others and to experience being an ally:** Providing examples of allies working to end bias based on race shows models of effective action and can alleviate feelings of guilt.<sup>36</sup>

**By age 8-9 children can help peers reduce prejudice:** Caucasian third and fourth graders with lower levels of prejudice who discussed their racial attitudes with peers who had higher levels of prejudice peer were able to lower their peer's prejudice.<sup>37</sup>

**Intergroup contact generally reduces intergroup prejudice:** Children from racially mixed schools are less likely to develop race-related favorable in-group biases and negative out-group biases.<sup>38</sup> Some key conditions are important for positive effects of intergroup contact, including individuals sharing equal status and common goals, a cooperative rather than competitive environment, and the presence of support from authority figures.<sup>39</sup>

**Develop Positive Self-Worth:**

- When someone's own self-worth is affirmed, they are less likely to judge others negatively based on race or ethnicity.<sup>40</sup>
- Middle-school students with a stronger racial identity report less stress related to racial daily hassles.<sup>41</sup>
- A positive ethnic identity helps promote educational success in the face of perceived discrimination.<sup>42</sup>

**Key Developmental Skills for Reducing Prejudice:**<sup>43</sup>

- **Seeing beyond external differences / Realizing that although things may appear different they can be similar.** For example understanding that a tall, thin glass of water could have the same amount of water as a short, wide glass.
- **Have the ability to see that someone could be a member of many different groups at the same time.** For example, a child could be a girl, a Latina, a student, and an athlete.
- **Understanding that other people can have different and equally valid perspectives.** For example, some kids like recess because they can run around while others like recess because they can hangout and talk with friends.
- **Develop Empathy:** Learning to perceive and share the emotions of another person.

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