

WebSource

Video Short

Pre-Emptying Racism

By CWK Network Producer

"Be friends with someone who's got a completely different background and past in life than you, and you can learn so much from your friends."

-Chris, 16 years old

How do you raise a child who doesn't judge others by their color, or religion, or their last name? Developmental psychologists say parents have the greatest power to fight racism, especially if their children get to know other kids different from them during a certain window in childhood.

Sixteen-year-old Chris says he has an open mind and a global perspective" in part because he was exposed to diversity at a critical time. When he was eleven, he began attending an International School. "I love it. Once I came to this school, it was a completely different community," he says. "It makes me feel like I have a better understanding of the world as a whole, and certain people in my society."

"This is when children take their own experiences, which tend to be unblemished, untainted, unbiased, very much couched in optimism and they transfer it into long term memory," says Dr. Peter Ross, a child development psychologist.

Experts say there is a very good time to expose children to friends who are different- from age six through age 10. That's when kids have an open mind.

Early encounters with friends of diverse backgrounds can be carried throughout life, Ross says. "This experience of enjoyment, and knowing these other people, and having valuable playtime with them, will create a memory for you, into your future about what other people are like."

After five years at the International School, Chris has learned to enjoy friends who are different from him, and to value how he is different from them.

"When he can accept them for the differences that they bring to the table," says Chris's mom, Susan Lipson, "he then can accept the differences that he has. And consequently his confidence soars, and he can become the person that he wants to become."

How Children View Race

By CWK Network, Inc.

At what age do children begin to notice and understand race? Psychologist Stephen Quintana, Ph.D., has developed and evaluated a model of children's understanding of ethnicity, race, gender, social status, nationality and social class. Quintana's research, through interviews conducted with hundreds of children of various ethnic backgrounds, led to a model described in *Monitor on Psychology*, a journal of the American Psychological Association. The model divides children's developmental understanding of race and ethnicity into four levels:

- **Physical: Ages 3 to 6.** Children in this age group view race purely in physical terms and may think racial characteristics can be changed by surgery, that skin color could be the result of staying in the sun too long.
- **Literal: Ages 6 to 10.** Children understand that ethnic background is a function of ancestry that influences not only how people look, but also the food they eat, the language they speak, and the activities they enjoy. It is a very literal understanding of ethnicity.
- **Social: Ages 10 to 14.** Children realize that ethnicity can be linked to social class. Often, among children in this age group, interracial and inter-ethnic friendships that began in elementary school come to an end, as social groups become more racially segregated.
- **Group: Adolescence.** Many teenagers express pride in their heritage and a sense of belonging to a group. Their view of ethnicity and race matures.

When to Intervene?

The best time to address race and ethnicity, according to Quintana, is in middle childhood and early adolescence, when children are at an age when they are able to go beyond the literal meaning of the words and make their own observations about race and ethnicity.

Middle childhood (ages 6 to 10) is a good time to expose children to different cultures, because their conceptions of race and ethnicity tend to be colored less by societal biases. When dealing with older children (ages 6 to 10), parents and teachers should be honest about the existence of racial and ethnic prejudice. And among adolescents, teachers and parents should help teenagers express their ethnicity in positive ways, instead of pressuring them to assimilate into the majority culture.

Resources

- [American Psychological Association](#)
- [Julian Samora Research Institute](#)
- [School of Education University of Wisconsin-Madison](#)

Websource Video Link: Websource/Video_Shots/2015_updated_video_shorts