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Excerpt from [Today's Parent](#) article with Rachel Berman, graduate program director of the School of Early Childhood Studies at Ryerson University and [Today.com](#) article with Dr. Jacqueline Dougé, a Maryland pediatrician: Are you wanting to talk to your athletes about Race and Racism? Here is a guide to helping facilitate this conversation with your athletes age-by-age.

You can start by taking a look at this video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QNEKbVq_ou4

Middle School-Aged Athletes (ages 11 – 14)

Middle school is a time where your athletes circles of exposure broaden, meaning they need to start having guided talks about race and racism. By now, your athletes are receiving unspoken, subtle messages from media on who has power and who has value, so easing into frank conversations is the best way to go. They have to learn to be critical thinkers when it comes to this topic as they continue to consume different forms of media.

You can start by asking questions such as “Are there certain groups who never get to be the hero in comic books and movies?”

Conversations should become more advanced the older your athlete is, but as a coach you should work to keep an open mind. You should also encourage your athletes to ask questions they might have about the topic or things that relate to it, while also making sure the conversation stay appropriate for their age.

“See what they're feeling, then gauge your conversation based on that. They need to know they have a voice about it, they know they're being heard, they know they have a safe area to process these uncomfortable conversations.” - Annette Nunez, Psychotherapist

Understanding that your comfort level as a coach varies, it is important to approach the subject head-on if you really want to see change in the world.

You can use this time to teach your athletes different ways to combat racism and prejudice. The key here is introducing to them the reality that people do experience varying treatment based on their skin color, gender, culture, religion, ability, and so much more. The details of how people are treated different should be kept age appropriate.

Asking your athletes about how they are feeling with current events is also important, however, it is important for you to know a fair amount of facts in the event your athletes have questions. You can ask athletes if they are interested in knowing about what is happening and why.

High School-Aged Athletes (ages 15 – 18)

At this age, your athletes are ready for in-depth conversations around racism and prejudice. They are also ready to talk about what role they play in society when it comes to this issue. Bringing up key



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words/phrases such as “Black Lives Matter” and racial profiling are also good to use for this age group. They probably have spent a lot of time online or watching some sort of news, meaning they may be absorbing incorrect information and forming opinions based on them. Really encourage your athletes to think critically about sources, reports, and other information they are reading.

Understand that your athletes in this age group are probably familiar with the topic already, because it is everywhere right now. It is important to ask questions to understand exactly what your athletes know and fill in blanks of information that they don't know.

“It's really important to hear their voice, but then also use books to show them images of historic protests. Really start showing the history of race and racism and protesting because it's not something that's new. It's something that has existed and it's a part of our history.” - Annette Nunez, Psychotherapist

While having these conversations, ask your athletes things like:

- “Oh, that's interesting. Where did you get that information?” or,
- What did you think and how did you feel when you read that information?

Know that your athletes are becoming more and more independent and, as a coach, you can help them in developing those skills. You can be an integral part in helping your athletes become free thinkers as they enter adulthood.

Conclusion

Let your athletes know there are many ways to show solidarity and support, should they express their interest. Some suggestions are below:

- Show your support and solidarity through liking, sharing, and posting information from a trustworthy source as it comes your way – you never know who might benefit from seeing it! Again, encourage the athletes to think critically about sources, reports, and other information they are reading before they share.
- Support Black artists and creators and give them credit where it's due – especially if you're sharing their work as a means to get across a message that probably means a lot to them.
- Protest – safely – if you're able to with a guardian's approval and with a group of people that you know and trust.
- If you don't feel informed enough to take a stance on racial issues then you can educate yourself – [these books](#) are a great place to start.