



Know! To Define Racial Terms For Teens

Whether our youth are on social media, listening to music, or are streaming their favorite TV show, they are likely hearing highly influential musical artists, athletes, and other celebrities voicing their opinions on racism in America. A lot of terms are being used that we or our children might not be familiar with, which can cause mixed feelings and confusion. As we said in the previous tip, we, as parents and caregivers, must engage our children in ongoing conversations on this topic, and we must be their information filter, as young people may come to harmful conclusions about race and racism when it is not talked about openly and honestly. An important piece in building a foundation for constructive conversations around this subject is to first spend some time defining key terms.

Some basic but necessary terms to get started:

Bias: A preference either for or against an individual or a group of people that affects fair judgement.

Stereotypes: A false idea that all members of a group are the same and think and behave in the same way.

Prejudice: Judging or having an idea about someone or a group of people before you actually know them.

Discrimination: Unfair treatment of one person or a group of people because of the person or group's identity. Discrimination is an action that can come from prejudice.

Racism: Prejudice and/or discrimination against people because of their race.

Defining words to dig deeper:

Implicit/Inherent Bias: The *unconscious* attitudes and stereotypes and *unintentional* actions (positive or negative) toward members of a group simply because of their membership in that group.

White Fragility: The tendency among members of the dominant white cultural group to have a defensive, wounded, angry, or dismissive response to evidence of racism.

Systemic Racism: (as defined by Sociologist Joe Feagin in his book, "Racist America: Roots, Current Realities, and Future Reparations") A complex array of antiblack practices found in each major part of U.S. society - the economy, politics, education, religion, the family.

Microaggressions: These are the everyday slights, indignities, put-downs and insults that people of color may experience in their day-to-day interactions. Microaggressions can appear to be compliments but often contain an unintentional insult to the target group.

On social media, we see people commenting about being "colorblind." They say things like, "I do not see color," or "We are only one race, the human race." While these comments are fully meant to be positive and unifying, they are examples of microaggressions: unintentional snubs to people of color. Though we are unified as human beings, there is pride and honor in a person's race and culture which should be acknowledged and celebrated.

Privilege: The unearned and often unrecognized advantages, benefits, or rights granted to people based on their membership in a dominant group beyond what is commonly experienced by members of a marginalized group.

Examples of privilege include male privilege, heterosexual privilege, people without disabilities privilege, and white privilege. **White privilege** is the term being highlighted currently as public conversations around racism intensify. These are words that can cause discomfort, receive pushback, and derail a conversation entirely among white people if misinterpreted. However, when explained and clearly understood, talking about white privilege can begin to break down the walls of racism.

White privilege doesn't suggest that white people have had everything handed down to them. It doesn't mean they haven't had to work hard to be successful. It does not mean they have not had financial hardships or life struggles. It is not meant to invoke guilt. In simple terms, it addresses the everyday, sometimes subtle, sometimes not subtle advantages that white people have over others.

Subtle example of white privilege: I can walk into a grocery store and simply head to the general hair aisle to find a huge variety of products for my hair type. I do not have to seek out the typically smaller "ethnic hair" section with limited products for my hair type.

Non-subtle example of white privilege: I can take a job or enroll in a college with an affirmative action policy without having my co-workers or peers assume I got it because of my race.

White Privilege, along with additional examples, is best explained by Peggy McIntosh in her essay, "[White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack](#)." It was published in 1988, yet remains relevant today.

The conversations on race and racism we need to have with our children are not necessarily easy, or comfortable, but they are imperative. In the next Know! tip we will provide tips to keep in mind as you share this information and more with your teens.

Sources

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- [Nicki Lisa Cole, Ph.D., Thought Company, Definition of Systemic Racism in Sociology - Beyond Prejudice and Micro-Aggressions. June 11, 2020.](#)
- [Peggy McIntosh, White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack. 1988.](#)

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