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# Flair

Amy Redford overshadows  
her dad at Sundance

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A lesson for children

# Countering racism



BRAD KEMP/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Olivia Mason McGowan (left) and her friend Kameron Prejean, both 6, enjoy playing together at Butterflies Day Care in Lafayette, La.

## Parents must address issue calmly, experts say, with an eye toward education

From Staffand Wire Reports

**W**hen a relative recently made a disparaging remark about blacks to Arica Prejean in the presence of her children, Prejean immediately repudiated it.

"There was no hesitation," said the 28-year-old, who is white and lives in Lafayette, La. She considers speaking out against racism part of her job as a parent.

"I own a staffing agency. Every race comes through our door," she said.

"It's the ignorance that's being passed down from generation to generation that's not making things any better."

Many parents struggle with what to do when someone makes a racial slur in front of their children. Should they set an example by speaking out and showing that such comments aren't acceptable? Or would a confrontation be too uncomfortable and magnify the insult? When the offending person is a friend or loved one, things get even more complicated.



Prejean

"It definitely needs to be addressed," said psychologist Lawrence Cohen, who writes parenting articles for NickJr.com, the Web site for the children's television network. But it's

important to do so in a way that doesn't upset the child.

"Don't start hurling nasty names or the child will be very confused," Cohen said. "If we're hostile and angry, they're not going to learn very well."

If you're able to calmly ask the person to refrain from speaking that way in front of your child, do so. If not, wait until you've cooled off, Cohen recommended.

There are four different ways to confront those making racist remarks, which are outlined in her book, "Whites Confront Racism," said Eileen O'Brien, assistant professor of sociology at the University of Richmond.

Being angry and direct, usually with

people you will see only once, is one option. Being indirect or waiting to discuss the issue after calmness has prevailed is another. Countering the negative statement with a positive one can be another type.



O'Brien

"One black woman I know who worked in an office where a white man continually brought the 'crime' column of the newspaper into work and asked her if she knew each black person who had committed a crime devised a clever

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## Racism

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strategy," O'Brien said.

She began cutting out newspaper articles that featured prominent African-Americans. And each time her co-worker brought in the crime articles, she would respond, "No, I don't know that person, but do you know this black person?"

The fourth type of confrontation is also indirect and does not challenge the offender. Instead you befriend him or her with the intention of exposing them to a workshop or other intervention that they would not probably be willing to do if you suggested it right after the comment, since people tend to be defensive about race.

"It is particularly important for us to respond to such incidents, even if, and I would argue, especially if it's a family member. We do not have to see these incidents as censoring or challenging the authority of a family member or elder. There are ways this can be done that are loving and not accusatory or rude," O'Brien said.

"Indeed, if more such incidents were handled that way, instead of publicly censoring everyone who makes the slightest racial comment, then much more true learning and education would take place."

When you do broach the issue, use "I" statements to make your point, recommended Beverly Daniel Tatum, president of Spelman College in Atlanta and author of "Can We Talk About Race."

For example, she suggests saying, "I felt that way or I used to think that way." Then say what changed your mind and add, "Now I feel it's impor-



BRAD KEMP/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Kameron Prejean (left) with friend Olivia Mason McGowan asked his parents why a friend at school was getting teased about having black skin.

tant for me to say something."

This approach works because it does not accuse the speaker, she said.

If comments persist, let your relationship with the person determine how you respond, said Carmen Van Kerckhove, a diversity trainer who runs the blog [rent.com.](http://www.antiracistpa-</a></p>
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If the speaker is an acquaintance, you might be able to stop associating with him or her. If it's a relative, you might have to threaten to limit contact with the children.

"Parents need to make decisions about how important it is for the child

to have that person in their life," Van Kerckhove said.

Prejean said she has told family members: "If you can't keep that to yourself when my kids are around, we're not going to bring them around."

Exposing children to people of all backgrounds is critical in creating open

minds, experts say.

"Real experiences, real knowledge of people is the only thing that breaks down those stereotypes," Cohen said.

Liz Dwyer of Los Angeles, who is black, said she likes her city's diversity; her two boys, Olinga and Toussaint Bolden, play with Hispanic, white, Chinese and Iranian kids. But Dwyer has had to chastise relatives for insensitive remarks about Hispanics. She said she tells them, "That's what they used to say about black people."

Parents also need to tell children that racism exists and explain what it is, Van Kerckhove added.

"The most important thing is for parents to start talking about race early on," she said. "Parents underestimate the likelihood of kids hearing racial slurs."

Prejean was disheartened when 6-year-old Kameron came home from school and asked why one of his friends was getting teased about having black skin. She and her husband, Ian, explained that skin comes in all different shades, like hair.

"We did tell him if somebody says that in front of you, it's OK to say something because maybe their mom or dad hasn't told them it's the same thing as different color of hair," she said. "I think if it happened again, now that he understands, he'd speak up."

Most of all, be honest with your children, recommended Keith Morton, who blogs about being a black dad at [Fatherdad.com](http://Fatherdad.com).

"You can't be afraid of the topic," said Morton, of New York. "Fear of the topic creates ignorance, and that's no way to live."

• Times-Dispatch staffwriter Robin Farmer and Melissa Kossler Dutton of The Associated Press contributed to this report.