



Before you start ...

There are some important things to know before continuing.

Voices of lived experience

This fact sheet is part of a series we created with families who've experienced racism and tough times to give you new ideas for how to get through as a family – and spark some hope.

We hope these resources have something to offer all families, but recognise they are simply a snapshot reflecting the lived experiences of the families who helped us create them – other families will have different experiences and stories.

We also intentionally create resources that reflect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of *knowing, being and doing* with guidance from our National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Consultancy Group and partners.

For more information please see emergingminds.com.au/working-with-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-peoples

Language notes: 'Parents'

Emerging Minds acknowledges that families come in many forms. In our resources, the term 'parent' encompasses biological, adoptive, foster and kinship carers as well as individuals who have chosen to take up primary or shared responsibility in raising children. Our resources aim to support families and the children in their care. We acknowledge that every child is unique and has different strengths, vulnerabilities and experiences that shape their health and development.

Although racism can have a profound impact on our daily lives, we are always responding. This doesn't always mean saying something or doing something in reaction to racist words or behaviours. Sometimes our responses are small, quiet or easily missed. Sometimes it doesn't feel safe to respond. Sometimes surviving or caring for our loved ones is our response.

Next, we share stories of ways we respond to racism and our hopes for how others can join us in challenging and dismantling racism.

For those reading this who don't experience racism, we invite you to listen, learn and act using our reflection fact sheet [Striving to be an ally to families experiencing racism](#).

Experiences of racism

Everyone experiences racism differently. One of the difficult things about racism is that it can be hard to name and see its effects clearly. This can have a big impact on children, parents and families.

Take a moment to think about...



- How do you recognise when your family or children are experiencing racism?
- What is the effect of racism on you as a parent or carer?
- What is the effect of racism on your children or your family relationships?

Talking to our children about racism

It's important that every family talks to each other about racism. But for families of the global majority, there is often no choice but to talk about racism, as it's a daily reality. Parents use their skills and knowledges to figure out when and how to have these conversations with children. And we're not always going to feel like we got it right. But the mothers we spoke to share some of their ideas in the following section.

Content warning

Our stories include references to racism, abuse and domestic violence. If reading about these things brings up any difficult feelings for you, please seek help from your networks, or one of these [crisis or support services](#).

Celebrating diversity, honouring our heritage

'My son comes and says: "I don't like my colour." I tell him that it makes us really interesting. If we eat one food all the time, you get really bored of it. Variety is very important and everyone has their own beauty. I also explain that we come from places that are hot and we need a bit of sun resilience. That's why we are brown.'

Modelling pride in our culture

'I feel happy they don't think it's shameful to speak Chinese. As a parent, it's very important to model I'm proud of our cultural background, our language. And if some people try to put it down, whenever I feel safe, I would stand up, speak up for it. But again, we have to assess if the environment is safe enough.'

Choosing when to respond – in the moment or at a later time

'Whenever they raise it, ask me a question, I think it's a good time to debrief it. If we can't talk about it at the time, it's always good at bedtime because it's quiet and we can talk.'

Making sure they treat others with respect

'They have to treat other people the way they want to be treated too. It's not OK for other people to do these things to them, but also it's not OK for them to do any of this to other people.'

Finding the best ways to not hurt them more

'I've got an ongoing challenge. My child came back [from staying with his father every week] and said, "You're stupid," repeating very nasty or racist words. I say: "When you say this, you're hurting my feelings. Don't repeat what other people say, use your own brain. Use your own judgement." I try to talk to my child directly, not giving comment about other people's behaviour. He gets poisoned. They use him as a weapon against me. I have to find the best way not to hurt my child more.'

Telling our children ‘It’s not OK’

‘My son, he got trauma with his dad, he’s really withdrawing. He doesn’t want to talk because he doesn’t feel safe. Sometimes I have to dig really deep about what actually has been happening. One time he was in tears, but he refused to tell me what happened. We have to take a couple of days. He was set up by some older white kids, they lure him into the trap and they actually hit him. It’s too late, I can’t go confront those people, so I said: “The way you have been treated is totally unacceptable. And if that ever happened again you have to tell me straight away.” I have to reinforce with my children, it’s never acceptable. I feel as a parent it’s really good or important to show them I’m very firm on my values. And if people cross the line, we have to tell them it’s not OK.’

Letting children know they have a right to defend themselves

‘If my children get bullied at school, firstly I need to tell my children, “You have to make sure you’re safe, walk away for whatever reason. But you can defend yourself if people are getting too much.” I found that’s a dramatic difference because all my white friends, they never mentioned you can defend yourself. But my point is, you can tolerate people’s behaviour. But to a point, you have your right to defend yourself – but make sure you’re safe.’

‘Sometimes we need to help our kids think about safety, and that it won’t always be safe for them to respond to racism in the moment.’

Take a moment to think about...



- Do any of these ideas stand out to you?
- How do you talk to your children about racism?

Communicating with children during tough times

In addition to the advice in this fact sheet, you might like to check out the following age-appropriate guides for planning and having conversations with children.

- [Communicating with your baby during tough times](#)
- [Communicating with your toddler during tough times](#)
- [Communicating with your primary school-age child during tough times](#)
- [Communicating with your teenager during tough times](#)

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I would like to make a more engaged community where people are celebrating their backgrounds, cultures and abilities more without embarrassment or feeling like people are judging them.

YOUNG PERSON, TASMANIA, IN LISTENING TO CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE¹

Surviving and responding to racism

As well as finding ways to lovingly walk alongside our children, we are responding to racism in many other moments. Some things make responding easier, like having the knowledge to clearly see and name racism or having others responding with us. And some things make it harder, like financial stress if we’re worried about losing our job, or experiencing violence. Which can mean we have to stay silent to stay safe.

Racism increases the chances that families will experience poverty and financial hardship. If you find yourself in this situation you might wish to read [Struggling with money and experiencing racism at the same time](#).

‘I have a lot to say but my language doesn’t allow me to make sure other people understand accurately. That restricts people to be able to respond powerfully. You need confidence, ability. It took a learning curve, I didn’t come like this, I was quite timid. If we are in the situation where financially it is a big stress, there’s no capacity for us to do anything like that. With living here over 10 years, my language ability has been improving, and my knowledge about the system, I feel a lot of readiness. Plus, I have a very strong belief: racism is simply not OK. And I know how to respond to those people. If they try to be terrible, I can use their way to deal with them. For example, if they say very mean things, I would just tell them, “Look, what you did is completely not acceptable and you have to stop saying mean things to me.”’

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It takes time and probably need some company. If only me versus a hundred, that’s really imbalanced. But if me with a bunch of friends, I would feel more confident. Or if I have white friends with me, I have all different cross-border supporters.

WEI, CHINESE-AUSTRALIAN MOTHER,
LIVING ON KAURNA COUNTRY

Surviving while responding to racism and money difficulties

Connecting with our children and our culture

‘We can do activities together that don’t cost money or are cheaper. For example, there are lots of YouTube videos with cultural practices or traditions from our home countries. These kinds of things can help us to connect with our kids, connect with culture, and foster a sense of pride and identity without much cost or leaving the home!’

‘My son likes it when I make traditional Afghan food. He says: “Mummy, your Afghan food is really good.”’

‘Food has a big part in our culture. We eat specific foods at certain times, and there is a reason behind this. Food can help us connect with each other and connect with culture.’

‘Language, dance, clothing, food and history can all connect us to a culture. And simple things can help kids to connect – like a video chat or phone call to extended family back in our home country.’

Family routines and traditions

Some families have family routines and traditions that are spiritual or faith based. These kinds of things can be great for children’s wellbeing, while expressing identity and celebrating uniqueness.

‘We practise our languages and cultural traditions, even if we can’t always do it exactly like we would at home. For example, Eid is a festival from my country, and if I celebrate it, then my son will know this is part of our culture and uniqueness.’

‘In our New Year, we set a Haft-Sin table with seven symbols on it, they are all symbols of positive things, like health, wealth, wellness, prosperity. It helps my son with his identity as Iranian-Australian. He is building his own identity from both cultures.’



RYAN, 7 YEARS OLD

Surrounding ourselves with supportive people

‘Surround yourself with people who are supportive and caring. Family gathering, regular time with friends and family who really enjoy the interaction. That’s what helps me coping with things.’

‘Some people dropped a very racist letter into my letterbox. I talked to my psychologist – a white woman. Her instant response was so touching. She was actually in tears, and said: “That’s wrong, not OK.” Initially, I was just angry. But seeing her reaction, I can feel the deep connection as humans without labels of difference. Reaching out to safe people, safe community, can be really helpful.’

Raising things if it’s safe and the community is open to criticism

‘You can also respond to it by talking if the community is more open and when your safety is not at risk. It’s less possible when the community is not more open to criticism and when you’re in a minority group, you usually tend to silence yourself. It’s very up to individuals, communities, if this community is open-minded, inclusive, has trauma-informed practice, if you feel safe to raise questions, to put on the table ... talk about it.’

Acknowledging our value and sharing our stories

‘Each family or each person has got their value, but they need to value that. They need to keep that alive. Believe in yourself. Don’t take negative comments seriously. Also sharing your story like we’re doing right now. Some people can relate, you know, some people might read this and say, “Oh, I’m not the only person.” Maybe that gives them a little bit of hope. Speak up, even if you feel like it’s not gonna help. Maybe it’s like making me feel better saying that “This is what happened to me and I’m not happy about that.” But now I think that that’s like a weapon, you know? That’s something that we can do.’

Going where you feel safe

‘If anything happen, I go home where I feel safe first. People deal with things differently. I’m an introvert – if there’s nobody at home, perfect. I find a safe space and kind of regulate. And analyse what actually happened and how I can respond or who can I reach out to.’

Being active to get the bad energy out

‘My strategy, I’m an active person, running, walking, cleaning the house, sometimes when I can’t handle, scrubbing the toilet. My body needs to move to get that bad energy out. I just laugh and tell my friends that like, “If you see my house messy, that means I’m feeling good. If you see my house really clean, means I’m not OK.” I just need to run or just do something to get that out of me and then try to think clear. And then use the best strategy for me and my child and for my loved one.’

Some other things that help us survive racism as a family

- Prayer
- Sports
- Uplifting activities
- Having visual reminders on our fridge – ‘You have a right to be treated well.’
- Meditation
- Music

‘My dad was a refugee and it was instilled in us as we were growing up that “Not everyone has the life that you do or the opportunities that you do.” And “You need to welcome everyone into your community because it’s not about where they have come from but it’s about what they can do.” The house next door to our house was a rental with people coming and going every six months or so. I got to meet a lot of cool people. People who had just migrated into the country. We should all meet and share experiences and cultures.’

High school student, South East Queensland, in *This place I call home*²

Take a moment to think about...



- What did you take note of when reading these stories?
- What are your family's stories about surviving and responding to racism?
- Who or what supports you and your children to survive or respond to racism?
- How might you share your stories or join together with others in solidarity against racist words and behaviour?

Thanks for taking the time to read these stories. Perhaps you were reminded about things you, your children or your communities do to survive and respond to racism. It's important to find ways to share different stories so we can all continue to grow our understanding of racism and be reminded as often as possible that we are not alone.

Dive deeper into podcasts

- Hear from migrant and refugee women who are quietly building new lives in regional Australia, making friends, and finding community on [SBS podcast New Home](#).
- What is it really like to start calling Australia home? The [My First Year on Aussie Soil podcast](#) is a series sharing stories from people who have found their feet in Australia, sharing their first impressions, the highs and lows of life in a new country, and the perils of the Aussie accent.
- Young multicultural leaders from the Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network address pressing issues in Australia on the [MY Voice podcast](#).

Resources and information on responding to racism

- Read the stories of inspiring young Muslim women who are responding to racism by [trying not to take people's hate into their hearts](#).
- Visit Democracy in Colour, an [organisation working to change the institutions and systems that cause racial and economic injustice](#).
- CopWatch shares tools and information to help you [stay safe when coming into contact with police](#).

More Money, housing and health resources

Have a look at the following options and choose what feels right for you and your family.

- [Struggling with money and racism at the same time](#)
- [Striving to be an ally for families experiencing racism](#)

AVAILABLE HERE

View all Money, housing and health resources



Are you a practitioner wanting to share this resource with a person or family?

First, check out our practitioner guide: emergingminds.com.au/resources/practitioner-guide-money-housing-and-health-resources

If you are a professional working with families from the global majority, you might also be interested in our online course, [Understanding children's mental health in culturally diverse communities](#).

Emerging Minds Families

For more resources to support the mental health and wellbeing of your family visit emergingminds.com.au/families

Or you can follow us on social media or our podcast channel:

 [instagram.com/emergingmindsau](https://www.instagram.com/emergingmindsau)

 [facebook.com/EMFamilies](https://www.facebook.com/EMFamilies)

 emergingminds.com.au/families/podcasts

References

1. Commissioner for Children and Young People Tasmania. (2020). [*Listening to children and young people in Tasmania, 2019*](#). CCYPT.
2. Queensland Family and Child Commission. (2018). [*This place I call home: The views of children and young people on growing up in Queensland*](#). Queensland Government.
3. Commissioner for Children and Young People Western Australia. (2021). [*My place in WA: Children and young people speak out about their living environment*](#). CCYP WA.