

Let's Talk Race provides proactive, practical, simple steps for group race discussions by walking you through everything from how to invite others to your group to how to handle conflict. The discussion guide has ice breakers, readings, discussion questions and homework.

Let's Talk about Race: A workbook for safe, honest and productive group discussions

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Let's Talk About Race:

A workbook for safe, honest and productive
group discussions

Let's Talk about Race

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Table of Contents

Introduction: Meet the Dions	1
Part I: How to Have a Let's Talk Group	5
Chapter 1: Defining a Let's Talk Discussion Group.....	7
Chapter 2: Inviting Others (For group leaders).....	13
Chapter 3: Setting Group Rules	23
Chapter 4: Handling Conflicts	33
Chapter 5: Assessing Progress	41
Part II: Discussion Guide	45
Chapter 6: Setting Some Goals	47
Chapter 7: Move Me	53
Chapter 8: Curtis' Comments	59
Chapter 9: Some Statistics	65
Chapter 10: We Have to be Better	71
Chapter 11: Confessions of a Kool-aid Mom	75
Chapter 12: June 13, 1967.....	81
Chapter 13: The Day Race Didn't Matter	87
Chapter 14: The Last Session: Evaluating & Celebrating	93
Recommended Resources for Further Discussion	95
Glossary of Terms	105

Chapter 1

Defining a Let's Talk Discussion Group

An Ideal Let's Talk group should meet ten standards. This chapter will explain the first six. The remaining chapters of Part I cover the other four.

1. An ideal Let's Talk group has four to twelve members. This is an optimum size because it is small enough to allow everyone an opportunity to share comfortably and get to know each other easily.
2. An ideal Let's Talk group is a closed group, meaning it doesn't allow new members to join once the group has started. It may seem obvious why a closed-ended group is best. As people get to know each other over the weeks, they lower their guards over time. Your group will begin to relate to each other in a more familiar way. Adding a new member will set the group back and thwart the growth that the initial members worked to establish. Even in our group we noted that members who didn't attend regularly found it more difficult to reenter the discussion after an absence. Invite people who will commit to attending consistently so they can most benefit from the group atmosphere and not feel left out.
3. An ideal Let's Talk group meets in a location that is comfortable for everyone. Finding an appropriate location can be tricky. For example, if one member of the group is particularly vocal and the group meets at her house, others may feel uncomfortable disagreeing on her turf. By the same token, meeting in a public place is probably not the best approach. Race discussions are private and confidential. An audience of strangers at a restaurant or even a library may inhibit honest discussions. If someone has unpopular or "politically incorrect" views, they'll be less likely to air them in a public arena. Our group met in our living room, a place familiar and comfortable to every member of our group. You can meet in an office, conference room, lunch room, church

or anywhere else that is convenient and secure for every group member.

4. An ideal Let's Talk group meets weekly for at least ten weeks. This allows one week for establishing group rules, eight weeks for the readings and discussions and one week for celebrating and evaluation. I also recommend at least one break/time-out somewhere in the middle of the ten weeks. During the break you may want to do a fun activity such as a potluck dinner, a movie or bowling.
5. An ideal Let's Talk group meets for two hours each session. Two hours is not so long that members will grow weary with the topic yet long enough for everyone to have an opportunity to speak, listen and absorb.
6. An ideal Let's Talk group follows a particular format to avoid tangents and sidetracks to make the most productive use of group time. Following this outline might be helpful.

Before the group

Read through the discussion guide chapter and work through the discussion questions. Have in mind which questions you want to discuss with the group. As you go through the chapter, jot down any additional questions you come up with. Also, make sure you have done the homework from the week before.

The group process

15 minutes – Welcome and ice breaker. Everyone arrives. You can decide as a group whether you want food or drinks available. This is a great time to do a fun ice breaker. If some members arrive late they will only miss the ice breaker instead of the meat of the conversation. The ice breaker also warms up the discussion. Each of the discussion guide chapters offers suggestions for ice breakers.

25 minutes – Discuss homework. Each week participants should complete a homework assignment that will further illuminate their

Let's Talk About Race

experience with race. We found in our group that sometimes the homework discussion took longer than twenty five minutes. For example, after watching the movie *Crash* we talked for the entire two hours about the movie. It is okay if this happens. Be willing to remain flexible with group time. As long as the conversation is moving along and everyone seems interested in talking about it feel free to spend more than the times suggested here.

60 minutes – Reading and discussion questions. This is the bulk of group time. Start by having someone read the reading aloud. Although everyone should have read it and looked at the questions before group, it's a good idea to refresh memories. And we know some never get around to the reading before group.

Next, go through some of the discussion questions. I usually had a few picked out that I wanted to discuss. I always ask the group which question struck them as most interesting. Sometimes you probably won't get through all of the questions. Some weeks you won't get to any of them. Again, that's perfectly fine.

Remember, the purpose is not to fill in all of the blanks in your workbook. The purpose is to have safe and honest discussions about topics that are relevant to the group. Keep that goal in mind. Then the number of questions you answer becomes less important than the development of productive relationships.

15 minutes – Evaluation and follow-up. Give everyone a chance to think about and respond to how they think the discussion went. What were their feelings about the discussion? What was important and significant for them? This might also be a good time for people to talk about what they may do differently as a result of the discussion.

5 minutes – Assign homework and close. Each discussion chapter concludes with a homework assignment. When coming up with these projects, I wanted to provide a way for people to experience race relationships outside of the group setting. If the homework assignment is something the group wants to do together, agree to a time and place. For example, we watched the movie "Crash" together as a group during our regular discussion time.

After the group

Group leaders can spend time evaluating what went well and what didn't. Ask questions like:

Did anyone (including me) monopolize the conversation?

Did anyone not participate in the discussion?

Do I need to follow up with someone before the next group?

Was the discussion beneficial, not just for me, but for the other members of the group?

Was there any body language I noticed?

What can I do to improve next week's session?

This is not a time for group leaders to beat themselves up. Hindsight can bring self-condemnation if we're not careful. This group evaluation is to alert you to patterns, problems and progress.

Now you have a basic understanding of the ideal format of a Let's Talk Group. You know an ideal group size, that the group should be closed and the location should be comfortable for all members. You also know about the recommended duration (number of sessions) and time to allow for each session. You know how to spend those two hours of group time as well.

Group leaders will benefit from looking at the remaining chapters in Part 1. Participants can expect a discussion of chapters 3 and 4 during one of your initial Let's Talk group sessions.

Here are the last four characteristics of an ideal Let's Talk group. They also serve as an outline for the rest of Part 1.

7. An ideal Let's Talk Group has a diverse compilation of group of members. Chapter 2 explains how to invite others and create a diverse group.

8. An ideal Let's Talk group has a set of group rules and values that all participants agree to follow. Chapter 3 offers suggestions for both group leaders and participants.

Let's Talk About Race

9. An ideal Let's Talk group has a plan for handling conflicts. Chapter 4 addresses potential conflict and how to handle disagreements in group.

10. An ideal Let's Talk group has a plan for assessing progress. Chapter 5 gives guidelines for how and why group evaluation can occur.

Chapter 11

Confessions of a Kool-aid Mom

Ice Breaker Questions

1. How are you most like your mother? Your father?
2. What is the most important thing you want your kids (or potential kids) to know?
3. What event(s) do you remember as child that most frightened your parents?

Review Homework

What did you discover from the homework last time? Were there generational differences?

Reading #6: Confessions of a Kool-aid Mom

When my family moved to a suburban Maryland neighborhood five years ago, we appreciated that it was a transient population. Many commute every day to jobs in Washington, D.C. and Virginia. Several are looking forward to “movin’ on up” to the newest planned community in another section of town. Some are waiting for the next military assignment. As a result of this transitory environment, I would be justified in not getting to know my neighbors.

Instead, I created an environment I affectionately called the “Kool-Aid house,” the house where all of the neighborhood children came and felt welcomed. We entertained children of various shapes, sizes, ages, and yes,

Angela Dion

colors. My son is biracial. Yet, we never emphasized a difference between any of these children and our own son. We welcomed everyone and have raised our son to embrace all people. That almost changed forever.

Several years ago someone distributed a series of racist hate mail throughout my community. The letters contained the “N” word, death threats, and anti-everyone non-White language. They left messages all over *my* neighborhood. Perhaps by *my* neighbors. When I first heard about the letters, I thought seriously of moving. Fear told me at the very least I should grab my son and lock him in the house. I screamed. I cried. I changed.

I used to welcome everyone with open arms, without question. I liked the fact that the kids were at my house. I figured, “I’d rather they be here where I can keep an eye on them.” But after the letters, I found myself more cautious. I peeked out my window a little more often to check on the whereabouts of my son playing in the neighborhood. I questioned strangers and even acquaintances just a little more defensively. I’m ashamed to say the letters terrified me. The Kool-Aid house, once a haven for the neighborhood’s children, now housed the overprotective, paranoid Black lady.

It’s been several years since the letters. I have lightened up a lot since then. But I can never again *completely* let my guard down. I can never again assume the best of everyone. I look for hidden clues and meanings. I continue to question defensively. I apologize to my good neighbors, as most of them are, for allowing a few racists to scare me out of being the neighbor I wish to be: displaying the love of God, following the Golden Rule, and turning the other cheek. But I have a son to raise, a son whom, no matter how much we say it doesn’t matter, is different and who will be discriminated against.

Let's Talk About Race

I know many non-minorities (White people) who read that last sentence and can't believe that my son will experience discrimination and racism. He already has – like when a classmate said he was only accepted into the technology high school because he was black. That hurt me more than it hurt my son. I know he earned his way into that school. Why did someone have to say that to him? Why did someone have to remind me of those racist letters so many years prior?

The letters took me out of my Kool-Aid glass house and opened my eyes to reality. Racism and prejudice exist--in this country, in Maryland, and in my neighborhood. How could I forget that? How could I let my guard down, even for a second? I should have known better. Yeah, the letters changed me. I will never be the same.

Discussion Questions

1. Do you believe racism exists in your neighborhood?
2. Has an act of racism changed the way you do business with the world? Explain.
3. Are racial tensions evident in your life? Are they improving?

Angela Dion

4. What are your thoughts on the “N” word? Should anyone use it?

5. Has an incident from you past (or recent past) changed your thoughts about race relations?

6. What would your response have been if you received racist mail?

7. Whose responsibility is it to educate our kids about race: parents, the education/school system and/or the government?

8. What is your concern (if any) about this piece?

Homework

This is an out-of-the-box homework assignment. Do one of these in the next week.

- Visit a racially diverse church.
- Visit a park in another area of town.
- Invite someone of a different race to dinner.
- Set up a play date with a mom who is a different race.
- Be creative in seeking ways to expose your kids (and yourself) to a variety of people.

Let's Talk About Race

Follow-up

Intentionally the homework assignments are getting more proactive and personal, how does that sit with you? Are you completing the homework? Why or why not? Is this something the group should discuss? Did you feel you could have done something differently during this discussion session?

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