



Black History Month: A time to understand the past and create a brighter future

Helping your kids acknowledge and embrace the rich history of Black people can be a powerful step towards broadening their understanding of themselves, their environment, and the people around them.

Black history in our country has no shortage of sensitive topics that can be difficult to talk about with kids including slavery, physical abuse, and death. But addressing that very real past (and the parts of it that still exist today, like racism) is one key to fostering inclusivity and tolerance in your child.

It's likely that your kids and their peers are faced with unfair treatment and negative talk every day. They might hear it on the news, read about it on social media, see it happening around them — or have it directed right at them from other people.

Black History Month is a time to acknowledge the fact that the awesome successes of Black people were achieved only after (and despite) overwhelming oppression, intense struggle, and lots of failures. But, it is also the perfect opportunity to celebrate and elevate the many (many!) stories of people who accomplished incredible things in spite of the obstacles they faced.

It's a testament to the unwavering perseverance and dedication of these historical figures — whether they became an artist, a doctor, an activist, or a psychologist.

If you're trying to start (or add to) teaching lessons to your kids about Black history, racism, and how to treat anyone who is in the midst of a struggle, we've got two areas of focus that might help:

To learn more about how to talk to your kids about Black history, the impact on society, and how to incorporate empathy and understanding into each day, get in touch. Brightline coaches and therapists are always here to help. Visit www.hellobrightline.com

The first is empathy. The second is knowledge.

Empathy: Can I try your shoes on?

Racism has existed for hundreds of years and is rooted in old falsehoods, fear, and a lack of understanding. The inhumane myth that Black people are “less than” others has fed racism over many generations.

There are lots of innocent kids who are victims of outright racism and biased behavior. Your child has probably seen it, heard it, or experienced it themselves.

It may be hard for a child to walk in someone else’s shoes, but they can be taught to be mindful of others’ feelings. They can also learn the importance of standing in solidarity with someone who is being made to feel confused, sad, ashamed, or embarrassed by racism. Every child needs allies who stand up with them, stand up for them, and stand for what’s right.

Parents can teach or nurture empathetic responses from an early age, but it’s never too late to start. Empathy can be a simple act of kindness that brings kids together in the middle of an uncomfortable situation.

How? Here are three easy steps to help you get started:

1. **Watch:** Teach your child to recognize body language. If someone says they’re “fine” but they are crying, hunched over, or shaking, they may be in need of some empathy.
2. **Listen:** Focusing on what someone else is saying takes effort. Discuss what it means to be an active listener when someone is opening up to them.
3. **Walk the talk:** Help your child develop their own inclusive lens and to imagine what it might feel like to be left out on purpose or to experience unprovoked aggression. That can help them gently reflect what they heard or saw happen, even if they can’t personally understand what the person might be feeling. For example, if your child sees someone feeling bad, they might say something like: “I can see you’re sad. We can talk for a while or I can just sit with you if you want some company.”

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Knowledge: Celebrating Black History Month

Understanding the past can help you empower your kids to try and create a better, brighter future.

No doubt, there have been hundreds — if not thousands — of Black people who innovated and inspired over the centuries. Some of them never received public credit for their contributions to their communities and the world — others had their work taken from them and credited to someone else.

We've researched and highlighted just a handful of the brave pioneers who have been recognized for pushing through adversity with tireless hard work and innovation.

Most people are familiar with notable trailblazers like Barack Obama, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Oprah Winfrey. But there are so many others — including the brilliant, devoted scholars whose work has had a positive influence on the mental and physical health of people worldwide.

We encourage you to read about these talented people with your kids. Share your perspectives, spark their young curiosity, and encourage them to learn, ask questions, and develop their own sense of appreciation for Black History — both this month and all year long.

Rebecca Lee Crumpler, MD (1831–1895)

Dr. Crumpler was the first Black American woman to earn a medical degree. Guided by her deep compassion, Dr. Crumpler worked to support the health of newly freed slaves in Virginia, authored *A Book on Medical Discourses*, and established a medical practice in Boston where she focused on the illnesses that primarily affected poor women and children.

Solomon Carter Fuller, MD (1872–1953)

Dr. Fuller became the nation's first Black psychiatrist at the age of 27. He was a research assistant in Germany under Dr. Alzheimer (for whom the brain affliction is named). Dr. Fuller later became a neuropathologist and researcher, and his decades of groundbreaking work changed the way Alzheimer's disease is studied, understood, and treated.

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Inez Beverly Prosser, PhD (1895–1934)

One of 11 children in her Texas family, Dr. Prosser studied the self-esteem of Black students in both segregated and integrated schools, taught at Black colleges, and funded the higher education of many of her students. The first Black American woman to earn a PhD in psychology, her accomplishment landed her on the cover of the NAACP's monthly magazine.

Francis Cecil Sumner, PhD (1895–1954)

Coined the Father of Black Psychology, Dr. Sumner was the first Black American man to earn a PhD in the field. He graduated college magna cum laude with honors (without a high school education!) and was a founder of the psychology department at Harvard. Dr. Sumner's research on psychoanalysis and attitudes towards justice shaped psychology's past and future.

Beverly Daniel Tatum, PhD (1954–)

Dr. Tatum was born just four months after the U.S. Supreme Court outlawed race-based segregation in schools. The recipient of multiple college degrees, she was the President of Spelman College for nine years. Dr. Tatum is a psychologist, educator, and the author of several books, including *Why Are All The Black Kids Sitting Together In The Cafeteria*.

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