

SSND Webinar on Critical Race Theory and Related Issues

Talking Points and Ideas for CRT Discussions by Dr. Sharon Chubbuck



1. Basic Principles:

- Avoid confrontational debate—Don't attack or be defensive.
- Know what the other side is talking about, know your argument/logic.
- Advance positive vision of education that centers race.
- Appeal to shared values (equality, freedom, human dignity, etc.) not negative evaluation of status quo. Explain how these values are derailed by racial bias and systemic racism.
- Move values focus from patriotism, colorblindness, race neutrality, American exceptionalism, "unity," individualism, capitalism, meritocracy to interdependence, collective responsibility, diversity, empathy, belonging, common good.
- Remind people of common belief that all deserve fair opportunity for educational success; explain how systemic failures hurt all Americans
- Don't overstate one side as 100% good, the other as 100% bad.
 - All white people benefit from the privilege of institutionalized racism, but WEALTHY white people enjoy a lot more privilege than poor white people.
 - Age appropriate teaching about race and racism is crucial. In some cases, the presentation has been harmful, not helpful.
- Talk solutions, not just problems. Suggest common action steps.

2. Thinking in Narratives/Big Ideas:

The attacks on critical race theory draw on narratives that breed racial resentment. Understand these narratives including the following:

- Talking about race is inherently "divisive"
- Racism is solely about "hate in one's heart;" systemic racism is not real
- We should be "colorblind" when it comes to solving issues of race
- White people will be "victims" of racial discrimination when we address systemic racism in any meaningful way (i.e. it's a zero-sum game)

Respond to narratives with a different narrative. Here are some suggestions:

- We all deserve an honest education about race in this country. Learning about the history of race and how it informs our present helps us all become wiser, stronger, better citizens—and help America to be a better country.
- Systemic racism is real. Addressing its harmful impact will benefit the entire nation.
- Most students are aware that racism is an issue in America and want to learn about it. Trust students to talk about what's happening in the world around them and to be ready to change things.
- Politicians are using a caricature of critical race theory to rob us of our history and limit our ability to solve our biggest challenges. Fear is being used to support censorship

3. Sample Questions and Reframing Responses:

- **QUESTION: Is Critical Race Theory currently being taught in schools?**

ONE SENTENCE: Critical race theory is a complex legal theory that most people won't encounter until college or graduate school, but schools can and should teach students to be critical of racism in history and today. (Try to avoid saying "critical race theory is not taught in schools.")

MORE DETAILS: In our public schools, our kids deserve age-appropriate and accurate history lessons, helping them become the critical thinkers we need to make this a more just, prosperous and equitable country. While few K-12 educators use the term "critical race theory," discussions of systemic racism have become more common in American schools in recent years. . . and that's a good thing! We can't deny students from having access to information about issues that affect their daily lives. They need to think through questions about racial equity.

- **QUESTION: Are you teaching that all white people are racist or trying to make white students feel guilty?**

ONE SENTENCE: No. We want schools to teach history so students can better understand the present and how to move together into a better future.

MORE DETAILS: We need to remember that although individuals can espouse racist ideas, the most damaging effects of racism come from institutions and structures. Not all white people say or do racist things—but they do live in a society with structures and institutions that grant privileges to them because of their race. By learning the history of how these inequalities were created and opposed, students see that what was built can be taken apart.

- **QUESTION: Isn't teaching about race and politics in schools a form of indoctrination?**

ONE SENTENCE: Demanding that we not talk about race in school and not discuss the fact that there are disparities is indoctrination. It is censorship. This prevents students from having access to information about issues that affect their daily lives.

MORE DETAILS: Unfortunately, it's been all too common for our books and curricula to whitewash the past, hide difficult truths, and even promote misinformation. We can't deny students from having access to information about issues that affect their daily lives.

- **QUESTION: Isn't CRT teaching our children to hate America?**

ONE SENTENCE: When citizens love their country, they see its strengths and critique its failings. They work to improve the country because they value it.

MORE DETAILS: Children deserve an honest education about race and racism in this country. Attempts to squash these conversations are attacks on a multiracial democracy, justice, and community. The U.S. is both founded on ideals of liberty, freedom and equality, and has been built on slavery, exploitation, genocide, and exclusion. If we want our future to be different, we have to deal with the past and present openly and honestly. The age of children shapes how we present information, but not honestly covering all topics is censorship and dangerous.

- **QUESTION: Won't talking about racism/sexism will make students feel uncomfortable, distressed, guilty, etc.? That can't be good.**

ONE SENTENCE: All learning and growth involve moments of discomfort.

MORE DETAILS: If we teach our children to welcome and learn from those uncomfortable moments, not run away from them, they will be better equipped to navigate today's world, and thrive in the life they choose as adults. We cannot allow public officials to dumb down public-school curricula because they are not comfortable with the truth of this country's past and present. That will only hurt our children and our nation.

- **QUESTION: Isn't saying the legal system is racially biased unconstitutional? Martin Luther King himself said he looked forward to a colorblind society.**

ONE SENTENCE: The Constitution demands objectivity in the courts (and other institutions), but that doesn't mean it always happens. In fact, the Constitution would have citizens recognize when bias is present and change things. MLK's vision was for a colorblind society, but getting there requires seeing and changing how systems are treating people differently because of their skin color.