

Approaching Conversations on the Intersection of Race and LGBTQ Identity

By: Kendra Gaunt (she/they), Data + AI Product Owner, The Trevor Project



As communities around the world join together in the movement to address systemic racism, white supremacy, and end the unjust killings of Black people in the United States of America, The Trevor Project hears from LGBTQ youth who experience a range of intense emotions and feelings. LGBTQ young people, including those who feel heartfelt solidarity at protests or sadness from seeing how racism and police brutality impacts Black people, are starting conversations about race and their LGBTQ identities all over the country. Many Black LGBTQ young people have been faced with difficult conversations at the intersection of race with non-Black family, friends, colleagues, and peers. As people who hold multiple marginalized identities, there are layers to these conversations that can sometimes feel overwhelming to explore with others — especially those whose lived experiences are different.

The process of having difficult conversations does not begin or end with the discussion itself. It is essential to consider your well-being and safety at each step in the journey. To engage in healthy dialogue, consider how the following approaches can assist you in protecting your mental and emotional health while navigating these conversations.

Before: Prepare yourself for the conversation.

While you cannot control how someone may respond to you, preparing for the conversation can improve your communication skills and increase your confidence. Going into a discussion with some understanding of what you think, how you feel, and what you hope will come from it can help you manage your expectations. After thinking it through, you may decide that you no longer want to have the conversation, and that's more than okay, too.

To anchor yourself going into these discussions, try thinking about the following prior:

- What is your degree of comfort with talking about race, police brutality, and white supremacy?
- What aspect(s) of the topic(s) do you find challenging?
- What research might help you in communicating your viewpoint?
- What is your motivation for having the conversation?
- What benefits do you think will come from having the conversation?
- What are your assumptions about the other person's/people's understanding?
- What environment and time do you think will be the safest to ask someone to engage in a conversation with you?
- What are the ground rules for the conversation?
- What is your plan if the conversation reaches a point where you need to take a break or no longer feel safe? (This can include, but is not limited to, alternative arrangements for housing, food, or transportation.)
- If this is your first time discussing your sexual orientation or gender identity with them, you may want to reference The Trevor Project's [Coming Out: A Handbook for LGBTQ Young People](#) and our [Guide to Being an Ally to Transgender and Nonbinary Youth](#).

If there are a lot of thoughts floating around and you need help organizing them, try reaching out to someone you trust and ask them to practice. You can also have a conversation with yourself out loud or by writing it down. Any of these approaches can be helpful exercises in

refining what you want to convey. Additionally, if you would find it helpful to have moral support throughout the conversation, invite someone you both know to be present during the discussion.

During: Remember your boundaries.

You are the expert about your experience. The response you are met with is in no way a reflection of the validity of your experience. Upon entering the conversation, consider communicating any ground rules that might help to create a safe space for you to express yourself. If these ground rules are not respected, or the discussion has reached a point where it is no longer conducive or safe for your well-being, consider engaging the relevant aspects of your plan as defined during the preparation phase.

After: Reflect on the experience.

Leaving these conversations — even if they have gone well — may have you feeling emotionally and mentally exhausted. Try to create space to decompress after the chat by practicing self-care in a way that resonates with where you are in the moment.

The following can be used as prompts to reflect on the discussion:

- How do you feel after having the conversation?
- How did the actual conversation compare to the goals you set beforehand?
- What did you learn? How can you incorporate this knowledge going forward?
- What do you wish you would have talked about that you didn't?
- How do you think you can best follow up to explore the conversation further?

If you are interested in engaging in conversations about the intersection of race and LGBTQ identities as a non-Black person, the following can be helpful guideposts to ensure that you are acting in line with authentic allyship:

- **Do the work.** It is not the job of Black people to educate you on the racial injustices they face. Proactively seek out resources that allow you to engage in meaningful dialogue with Black people on their lived experiences, so that you can fill in the gaps of your understanding. There will be moments when you are wrong or feel uncomfortable, and it's okay to acknowledge these moments and learn from them. This is sometimes required as you learn how to be a real ally, and unlearn some of the assumptions you've had about race.
- **Hold yourself accountable.** Examine how your (un)conscious bias — and we all have it — creates or reinforces harmful conditions for Black people. With this knowledge, consider the role that you or anyone from your community plays in shaping the lived experience of Black people.
- **Listen.** Open yourself up to understanding without the desire to be heard. It is an incredibly personal and vulnerable decision for someone to approach you with a

conversation regarding race and how that intersects with their other identities. Respect their experience even if there are elements that do not align with your own.

- **Action.** Think about the ways you can use your privilege to support the liberation of all Black people. Use your voice to uplift the voices of Black people, educate others, support Black businesses, creators, organizers, and vote!

If you need support at any point in your journey, The Trevor Project is here for you, 24/7, and for free. Visit [TheTrevorProject.org/Help](https://www.thetrevorproject.org/help) anytime to connect to a trained crisis counselor via phone, chat, or text.

For additional ways to care for yourself as a Black LGBTQ young person or to learn how you can support Black LGBTQ youth, please read our recent post, [Supporting Black LGBTQ Youth Mental Health](#).