

## Childhood Experiences and Intergroup Biases Among Children

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From early childhood children show signs of intergroup biases. Here we review the types of childhood experiences that have been associated with the development and change of intergroup bias and discuss the social and policy implications of this work. Our review indicated that just one type of childhood experience reliably *creates or increases intergroup bias*—explicit messages communicating intergroup conflict, negativity, or threat from other groups. We identified three specific childhood experiences that reliably *reduce intergroup bias*: (a) structured intergroup contact, (b) explicit education about prejudice, and (c) imagined contact with members of other groups.

Based on the current review of the childhood experiences associated with intergroup bias, we offer the following observations and recommendations for those seeking to combat intergroup biases in childhood:

First, exposing children to conflict and antagonism between groups tends to promote intergroup biases among children. Also, if children are provided positive messages about their ingroup only, and no information about other groups, they may put that information together to infer that their group is better than others—promoting intergroup bias.

Third, providing children with opportunities for intergroup contact that are scaffolded by adults to promote cooperation and the pursuit of common goals is effective in reducing intergroup biases among children. For children with few opportunities for intergroup contact,

providing them with stories and guided imagination activities that lead them to think about members of other groups and positive intergroup interactions reduces intergroup biases.

Fourth, children are carefully observing and learning from our behavior. Adults' nonverbal behaviors can communicate biases to children whether we mean to or not. Children develop biases against people and social groups that they observe receiving more cold nonverbal signals (relative to others) from adults, and this begins in early childhood. However, our explicit verbal messages can make a difference too. Talking to children about prejudice, inequality, and discrimination has been shown to reduce intergroup biases among children in the 8-year-old to 12-year-old range.

Intervention Considerations
<p>How old are the children?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interventions tailored toward younger children should center around concrete experiences and representations of groups/intergroup relations that do not require an abstract or conceptual understanding of group membership.</li> <li>• In middle childhood, interventions should involve more sophisticated messages about groups: promoting empathy and perspective-taking, explicitly positive messages about other groups, and/or information about the broader cultural context that shapes intergroup attitudes/relations.</li> </ul>
<p>Things to promote:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explicitly positive messages about other groups and norms of social inclusion.</li> <li>• Positive cooperative intergroup contact experiences that encourage interdependence.</li> <li>• Discussion about prejudice, inequality, and discrimination.</li> <li>• Books, stories, and activities that promote individuation, perspective-taking, and empathy for members of other groups.</li> <li>• Modeling positive intergroup relations and friendships.</li> </ul>
<p>Things to avoid:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explicit or implied negative messages about other groups.</li> <li>• Hostile, negative, or highly competitive intergroup contact experiences.</li> <li>• Exposing children to negative nonverbal signals directed toward members of other groups.</li> </ul>

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