

HER IMPACT INITIATIVE

Resource Guides for Women & Allies

Guides to inform, empower, and activate.

Inspired by a conversation with entrepreneur, activist, and princess Lerato Motea

Raising Activist Children — A Guide for Parents and Caregivers

Children who grow up with language for injustice, permission to ask questions, and adults who take their moral instincts seriously become the next generation of advocates. Here's how to nurture that.

“I wanted them to know that they have someone who will fight for their rights. They can't be finding out about something through their friends and then have a misunderstanding altogether.”

Start With Age-Appropriate Honesty

Many parents protect children from knowledge of difficult realities. But children often encounter these realities anyway — through peers, media, or their own experience — without the context or language to understand them. Proactive, age-appropriate conversation builds trust and critical thinking.

- **Young children (5-8):** Focus on fairness, kindness, and the concept that some people don't have the same access as others. Books and stories are powerful tools.
- **Older children (9-12):** Can handle more direct conversations about inequality, discrimination, and why the world isn't always fair.
- **Teenagers:** Can engage with systemic analysis, policy, history, and their own role as emerging citizens and advocates.

The goal: Not to alarm or overwhelm, but to ensure that when children encounter injustice, they have a trusted adult to process it with — and language to name what they're seeing.

Follow Their Lead

“What really always baffles me is how beautiful their understanding of self is. They've come into this world being very clear about who they are and their discomfort. I recognized that instead of being like an adult that ignored it.”

Children often notice injustice before they have words for it. When they name discomfort — about something a teacher said, something they witnessed, something that doesn't feel right — take it seriously. This teaches them that their moral instincts are valid.

- Ask: "What made you uncomfortable about that?"
- Resist the urge to immediately explain it away or minimize
- Sit with the discomfort alongside them before moving to reassurance
- Validate: "That doesn't seem right to me either. Here's what I think is happening."

Nurture, Don't Impose

There is a difference between raising a child with values and raising a child with your specific agenda. The goal is to develop their capacity for ethical reasoning, not to replicate your own conclusions.

- Share your values and explain why you hold them
- Expose them to service, community work, and people with different experiences
- When they form their own positions — even different from yours — engage with curiosity
- Model the behavior you want to see: speaking up, asking questions, admitting uncertainty

Let Them Participate

"Leia said, 'Mommy, can I please stay at home? I would like to go to the march.' Had I not let her go, that would have been a different dynamic altogether. She felt something. I didn't put that in there and all I needed to do was nurture it."

When children express a desire to participate in advocacy — a march, a petition, a community project — let them. Even if they change their minds, the act of being invited to participate builds investment in the work.

Build Resilience Alongside Awareness

Teaching children about injustice without also building their resilience and sense of agency can leave them feeling hopeless. Pair awareness with action:

- For every problem you discuss, explore what people are doing about it
- Help them identify their own sphere of influence — what can they affect in their school, family, neighborhood?
- Celebrate small acts of courage and speaking up

Resources

- "Raising White Kids" by Jennifer Harvey — raising children to understand race and racism
- "How to Talk to Kids About Race" — by American Psychological Association (searchable online)
- Teaching Tolerance — [tolerance.org](https://www.tolerance.org/) — classroom and home resources for equity education
- Girls Inc. — [girlsinc.org](https://www.girlsinc.org/) — programs inspiring girls to be strong, smart, and bold

This resource guide was developed by the Her Impact Initiative. For more information or to share your story, contact us.