

Dear Educators,

Today students will return from the weekend looking for our guidance, and you may not know exactly what to do or say. That's okay, as we cannot comfortably go back to our lives after seeing the police murder yet another black man, George Floyd, with such callousness and disregard for a human life. We also know that a collective desire for comfort is a primary adversary to racial justice. Today, as educators, we are called to ask and answer some fundamental questions: *What will we/our school DO differently to root out racism? How will we engage with students and each other? How can we learn about topics such as police brutality; demonstrating, protesting and rioting; police militarization; and their roles in upholding or dismantling systemic racism?*

It might be easier to simply opt out of such discussions with your students. You may feel unprepared. You might feel your students are not developmentally ready to engage. You might fear retribution from families, administrators, other teachers, and even your students for engaging in tough conversations. You might feel overwhelmed with all the information you are consuming. These are all understandable. However, consider that all MPS students are impacted by the murder of George Floyd, and they deserve a space to process, grieve, share, reflect, and learn. We will never achieve racial justice by being silent. We invite you to engage your students in dialogues about the relationship between white supremacy, white privilege, racism and police violence in a developmentally and socially responsive way and hope this document will serve as a guide.

We say this knowing many of you are also personally dealing with challenging circumstances and emotions. Please take time to take care of yourself before you talk to your students, and rely on each other's collective power to work through this. If you accept our invitation, we hope this document can provide some practical ideas about engaging in discussions that are timely, student-centered, and learning-focused.

Key Things to Remember:

- It's important to say something even if you don't know what to say. *"You might begin by admitting to students that—like them—you are scared, frustrated, angry, confused, hurt or uncomfortable. Students at any age understand these feelings and will appreciate your humility, compassion and vulnerability, especially Black and Brown students. This is how you lay the foundation. Next, you might begin to explain why you are feeling this way, although many students will already know why. And then, after you begin the conversation, step back, sit down and be quiet. Let your students lead. Let them speak and ask questions. Allow them, the opportunity to be "in front" of what they are feeling rather than reacting to it.* " (From [Teaching Tolerance, "Don't Say Nothing"](#))
- Say his name! George Floyd. Acknowledge his humanity. Create space to talk about not only how he died but who he was - a father, a son, a brother, a friend.
- Consider your own positionality. It is okay to acknowledge that you may not know what your students are going through because you don't live in Minneapolis, are white, share their

identities etc. Learn more about what students in your school have experienced recently and be aware of potential triggers.

- Consider offering Grounding Guidelines for any [healing space/ discussion](#) such as...
 - Listen and respect truth.
 - If you pass, you'll have a chance to share at the end.
 - Honor voice..
 - It's ok to not be ok
 - Mute your microphone when you're not speaking.
 - You do not have to have your camera on.
 - *After discussing guidelines, ask to everyone to say or type in the chat "I'm in" if they're willing to honoring the offered agreements.*
- Learn and focus on the facts and what we do know:
 - Initial police contact was for a potentially fraudulent twenty dollar bill, a nonviolent offense.
 - An illegal hold was used (the hold is not authorized by MPD).
 - George Floyd had no weapons on him.
 - George Floyd repeatedly said "*I can't breathe*".
 - George Floyd repeatedly asked for help.
 - Three other police officers stood by without intervening.
 - All four officers were fired.
 - The BCA and FBI are investigating.
 - Mayor Frey asked for the arrest of and charges brought against one officer.
 - New video footage challenges the "resisting arrest" narrative.
 - George Floyd died on the street.
 - At around 12:26pm on Friday, Derek Chauvin was arrested. Charged with 3rd degree murder and manslaughter.
 - The other three officers have not yet been arrested or charged.
 - The majority of protests have been peaceful.
 - Some protests have turned destructive.
 - Some police have hurt protesters with tear gas and rubber bullets.
 - Between Wednesday and Friday, over 200 businesses and properties were vandalized or looted across Minneapolis and Saint Paul. These varied from being tagged with graffiti to being burned down.
 - Some of these acts appear unconnected to protests and committed by people with ulterior motives (who were not supporting the protests).
 - The governor called in the National Guard to support the police and put a curfew in place Friday- Sunday night.
- Create space for students to share their feelings. This may be easier for some students to do in writing or chatting in a virtual space.
 - What is one word that you are feeling right now?
 - What's coming up for you right now?
 - Where are you feeling it in your body?
 - What do you need? How are you caring for yourself right now?

Additional Ideas

- Help students make connections between these events and other things that have happened in their lives or historically in Minneapolis and across the world. Some ideas could include the [summer of 1967](#), the murder of Jamar Clark in 2015 and Philando Castille in 2016.
- Help students investigate and learn more. Compile their questions and help them look through different sources of information. The internet and social media is full of misinformation right now. Help students sort through how to know [whether a source is credible](#).
- Make space for students to process difficult emotions AND hopes for the future. Consider questions like:
 - What is one hope you have that may come from these events?
 - What are some positive outcomes that could come out of these events we don't expect?
- Students may want to do something to get involved. Discuss the multiple ways people can support this movement against police brutality in addition to protesting.
 - Signing petitions
 - Letter writing
 - Making art
 - Cleaning up communities that have been targeted
 - Learning more about racism, white supremacy and social justice
 - *Be mindful of what students may be experiencing. Many of our families are not in a position to donate to others right now. Consider asking students that have taken actions this weekend to support others to share.*
- Communicate with families
 - Check in with families to see how they are doing and what they need right now.
 - Consider sharing with families how you plan to discuss these topics with students.

Resources on Discussing Racism and Police Violence in the Classroom

- [Don't Say Nothing | Teaching Tolerance](#)
- [Teaching About Race, Racism and Police Violence | Teaching ...](#)
- [Preparing to Discuss Race and Police Violence in the ... - dcps](#)
- [How to Address Race and Police Violence: Advice for ... - Blogs](#)
- [Teaching about Racism, Violence, Inequity and the Criminal ...](#)
- Facing History and Ourselves: [Bearing Witness: The Death of George Floyd](#)

Self Care Resources -- A gentle reminder for us all: Paraphrasing many great Equity & SEL Leaders, caring for ourselves is also an act of caring for our community. When we care for ourselves we help to ensure our own resiliency so we may have the stamina to stay in the work. And when we keep this intention, we live out loud our own strategies for self-care and also model ways we can show grace when we fix our mistakes or become exhausted and need to ask for help.

- [Self-Care Tips for Black People Who Are Struggling With This Very Painful Week](#), Vice
- [MPS Caring Corner](#)
- [Liberate Meditation App for Black Indigenous and People of Color](#)
- Educator SEL & Self-care from Greater Good: [My Well-Being](#)
- [3 Misconceptions About Educator Self-Care](#)

In solidarity,

The Equity, Social Emotional Learning and Positive School Wide Engagement Teams