

Resources for Parents

We've compiled a host of resources for parents and families who would like to help their children understand, confront, discuss and engage in the issues raised in the wake of the unrest in our city and the questions of racial equity and equality. One of the messages of the *Painting for Peace* book is that of empowerment. Even when the challenges seems overwhelming we all have tools we can use to make a difference ... even if it is as simple as a paint brush. Perhaps you've heard this quote from author [Max Lucado](#): "No one can do everything, but everyone can do something."

The information below includes ways your family and children may be able to help, either financially or through volunteer work; ways to talk about issues of civil unrest, tolerance and race; and even simple ways that can help us to be different in our day-to-day lives.

Talking to Kids: Answering the Difficult Questions That Arise



Psychologists who deal with children and schools agree on the one most important thing parents must do during difficult times: Reassure children that they are safe and cared for. The [National Association of School Psychologists counsels](#) parents to "explain that all feelings are OK when something upsetting happens. Let children talk about their feelings, help put them into perspective, and assist them in expressing these feelings appropriately."

Here's a few more key pieces of advice, drawn from the [NASP here](#), as well as [from Bruce Reyes-Chow](#), author, blogger and leadership coach, whose work has been recommended by school districts in the St. Louis area.

- Make the time for kids to talk. Look for signs that they're interested in asking questions.
- Make your explanations age-appropriate. Look for [guidelines on this NASP page](#).
- Limit the time you spend watching troubling events on television.
- Several school districts in the region have advised parents not to assume your "child's worries and questions are the same as your own."
- Do not shy away from discussions about race. As [Reyes-Chow notes](#), "These are hard conversations, they are awkward and we may instinctively want to avoid having them. But if you also believe that most Black families in the United States have talked about Ferguson, what does it say about the rest of us if we have not?"
- School officials say it's OK to acknowledge that opinions may vary around the specific facts involving the Michael Brown case. Parents, when asked, should share messages with their children such as:
 - "We need to work for peace in our community."
 - "I want you to be safe. "
 - "What can we do in the community to make sure we all get along?"
 - "We need to make sure everyone is treated with dignity and respect."

How to Talk to Your Kids About Civil Unrest

Again, be sure to reassure children that they are safe, and that schools are a safe place for them to be. In fact, your school has probably shared information about its emergency procedures. Talking about those with your child can assure them that their school is prepared and is a safe place. Beyond that, there are key messages you can share, in an age-appropriate way, with children who have seen images of, and now the results of, looting, arson and vandalism.

- Acknowledge that it is [hard to understand why the violence](#) has occurred and that people sometimes do bad things that hurt other people.
- Counsel that violence is never the right answer to getting positive change in a community.



- Note to your children that the actions of a few people should not reflect on everyone. Legitimate protesters do not loot businesses or set them on fire. The vast majority of police officers want to serve their community and protect its residents.

The Ferguson-Florissant School District compiled an additional list of [resources for parents on this page](#), which links to resources for a variety of community service agencies.

What Can You Do In Your Own Neighborhood to Make a Difference?

"We want our children to have faith in the bedrock institutions of our country. But, they also must learn that like the humans that comprise them, institutions and systems are imperfect." From a column in [the St. Louis Post-Dispatch on Nov. 26, 2014](#), by parenting writer Aisha Sultan.

PBS Parents suggests that [families can go further than seeking out volunteer opportunities](#) to help their community. They can actively work to expose children to issues involving their communities: Social justice, homelessness, the environment and more.

The site references [Dr. Amy D'Unger](#), a sociologist and board chair for [CompassionateKids.com](#). The article says D'Unger "recommends taking your child on a field trip to expose them to an important social issue. She says these experiences 'can set the foundation in knowledge and enthusiasm for future volunteer activities.'"

CompassionateKids.com has other ideas about how children can get involved in their community from the perspective of social activism.

[From its website:](#)

- Write letters to targeted decision makers.
- Enter compassionate messages in art and essay contests.
- Set up information tables.
- Make displays for library bulletin boards or store windows.



- Put on compassion-themed shows.
- Give speeches or make presentations.

How to Talk To Your Kids About Tolerance

The National Association of School Psychologists has an online resource guide with ideas about how to address issues of tolerance and social justice with children. A few of their tips (with the [full menu available online here](#)) include:

- Remind children not to characterize an entire group or class of people by how a few of them behave.
- Note that one of America's core strengths is its diversity.
- Reinforce this core principle: Treat people with fairness, respect and dignity.



The NASP counsels parents to “model tolerance and compassion. Children take their emotional cues from the significant adults in their lives. Avoid making negative statements about any racial, ethnic, or religious group. Reach out to your neighbors and colleagues who might feel at risk because of their ethnicity, religion or other traits.”

A variety of excellent online videos offer tools for talking about issues such as race, prejudice, stereotyping and white privilege.

Diversity advocate Vernā Myers

[Her TED Talk in November 2014](#) addresses Ferguson and beyond, focusing on the three things she thinks we should be doing:

Get out of denial. “Stop trying to be good people. We need real people.” Don’t try to be “color blind.”

Acknowledge and confront biases.

- Move toward young black men instead of away from them. “Walk toward your discomfort. Don’t take crazy risks, but expand your professional and social circles.”
- When we see something, have the courage to say something. Call out prejudice and racism. “We’ve got to be able to say, ‘Grandma, we don’t call people that anymore.’”

Performance artist Hetain Patel

[His TED Talk challenges viewers](#) to consider their assumptions about race, background and ethnicity in an entertaining and sometimes humorous examination of how people look and speak.

Ideas about “how to talk about race”

Eric Deggans, TV/Media Critic for the Tampa Bay Times and chair of the Media Monitoring Committee for the National Association of Black Journalists, says “the conversation about race in America is just beginning — but it’s vital that we not shy away from it.” [Another solid TED Talk](#).

Stereotyping vs. celebrating differences

Sarah Jones, a comedian and character actor, speaks about the line between stereotyping and celebrating cultural differences in this interview on [National Public Radio’s TED Radio hour](#).

How You Can Help

Each of us has a way that we can help. That’s important to remember when the work seems overwhelming.

Many businesses and residents have been hurt by the unrest caused in the wake of the Michael Brown case. People often disagree over issues surrounding race, law enforcement and community relations. Get involved. Find what moves you and focus there. Your contribution will be appreciated. You can’t do everything; you can do something.

Giving of Your Time and Talent

Are you looking for a volunteer opportunity? A way to use your skills to support your community? If volunteer work is something your children seek, the

best place to start is by setting a good example for your children.

[PBS Parents suggests](#) that being a volunteering role model is where to begin.

Create an opportunity

Students at a St. Louis-area girls' high school invited a Ferguson restaurant to provide their lunch one school day. The restaurant sustained damage during the unrest. The restaurant owners provided four menu items to the students, delivered the food, and [students raised more than \\$3,000](#) to help the business by buying lunches from the restaurant that day. Consider how you might rally your own student organization, club, team or program around a specific fundraiser for a Ferguson business. [PBS Parents acknowledges](#) that finding ways for children to volunteer can be challenging; one strategy is to create your own opportunity: a walkathon, a friendly fundraising competition, a canned food drive, etc.

Visit the Ferguson city website

The city of Ferguson [promotes volunteer opportunities in the community](#). Most are not directly related to the issues raised by the Michael Brown shooting. But supporting the community as a volunteer is one way to show your concern and do something to help. You might also contact the [Northwest Chamber of Commerce](#), which includes businesses in the Ferguson area, to ask about volunteer opportunities.

Check online resources

Sites such as [VolunteerMatch.org](#) and [Idealist.org](#) provide a catalogue of volunteer opportunities that you can filter for the kid- or family-friendly ones. The United Way of Greater St. Louis also can connect you with volunteer opportunities.

Reach out to local organizations

Is there a particular cause or agency that does work you'd like to support? Directly contact organizations that serve causes you care about. Ask them for ideas about how you can help. [CompassionateKids.com has other suggestions](#) about volunteering with children, as well.

Make simple blankets

Kids can help make simple "security blankets" that emergency responders offer to youngsters suffering from trauma. Look for details at the [Project Linus website](#) for chapter serving St. Louis and St. Charles counties.

Giving of Your Treasure



Perhaps it's not time you have, but you can donate money or participate in a fundraiser. Here's a few ideas for how to get involved with your wallet.

Visit Ferguson and spend money

Residents and business owners want the wider community to know Ferguson is open for business. Consider making the effort to visit the city and spend shopping dollars there. Have lunch or dinner at a Ferguson restaurant. Consider more than just lunch ... there are optical shops, tire and auto repair shops, pharmacies, frame shops, etc. Businesses will know you support them because they'll see you there, patronizing their shops, stores, boutiques and restaurants. Find opportunities to shop in Ferguson on the city's [Ferguson CityWalk website](#), where you can find a list of all the community's businesses. Can't visit the city yourself? Some businesses have online stores. Look for opportunities to buy online.

Donate money directly

Businesses, faith-communities and other organizations have launched online campaigns to raise money to help restore businesses in the Ferguson community. Consider focusing your attention on one specific need and offer your resources there. The [ONE Ferguson website offers a listing of specific community fundraisers](#) that have launched online.

Wear the cause

Organizations such as [I Love Ferguson are selling merchandise](#) such as T-shirts, coats, hoodies and fleeces adorned with messages of support for the Ferguson community. Buying a bit of merchandise provides funds and shows the wider community that you are interested and concerned.

Donate food

Some of the area's food banks have suffered troubling shortfalls for their communities, particularly in the Ferguson area. Donations to any area food bank are particularly helpful. The [United Way gave an update in December about food pantries](#), including a link to [specific food pantries that serve the Ferguson area](#).