



RAISING EMPOWERED CHILDREN

A Parent's Guide to Addressing
Racism and Discrimination

Nkechi Madubuko



Dr. Nkechi Madubuko is a sociologist and cultural journalist. She began her career as an anchor at the German TV station VIVA Zwei and continued her work at stations such as ZDF, Premiere World and DSF. After completing a trainee program at ZDF, she worked as editor for 3sat's "Kulturzeit" show for 15 years. For the past twenty years she has taught seminars and hosted events on immigration, anti-discrimination policies and intercultural exchanges. She completed her PhD in 2010 and wrote her dissertation on coping mechanisms developed by immigrants to address racism and discrimination in their daily lives. She has written many articles on the subject, including the German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees. She has been teaching social work at the University of Kassel since 2017. As a mother, she has raised three children.

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Translated by Garry Zettersten



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Our Children Require Safe Spaces- An Introduction



All parents wish for their children to lead successful and fulfilled lives, with all avenues available to them in their journey through life.

As a Nigerian woman born and raised in Germany, and mother to three Afro-German children, I know how it feels when your children come home disheartened because they have been called names based on the color of their skin. Parents from immigrant communities cannot shield their children from experiencing racism, prejudice and discrimination. But they can help instill a resilient spirit, which will allow them to cope with experiences of racism, prejudice and discrimination. Furthermore, parents can act as advocates for their children and demand equal treatment and respectful conduct by verbally confronting those causing harm.

I realized how important it is to support your children and to strengthen their identity while working on my doctoral thesis *Akkulturationsstress von Migranten*, published in 2010, in which I conducted research on the stresses of acculturation faced by migrants. In my

sociological study, I conducted biographical interviews in order to understand how second-generation immigrants processed racially motivated rejection and which strategies they used to cope with these experiences.

My research showed that a discernable group of men and women were able to keep these experiences at an arm's length and perceive them in a differentiated way, so that neither feelings of stress nor inferiority remained. They all came from families that instilled a sense of self-worth and pride in their heritage, as well as supporting them when transgressions occurred. This inspired me to write this book and to share this knowledge with other parents. I expanded on the empowerment concept I created by further studying intercultural psychology, through experiences in family therapy and child psychology, as well as reports by the Federal Anti-Discrimination Office. Countless discussions with experts specializing in empowerment when working with non-Christian children and children of immigrants helped me create a more well-rounded concept. Their experiences and practices with youth groups will be presented in the second part of the book.

There are numerous words and deeds that are hurtful. This book primarily addresses words that "other" children and teenagers from immigrant (whether second or third generation) and non-Christian families, thereby associating them with (negative) characteristics. The book is intended for all parents whose children could potentially be affected by racism. They play an important role as approachable

conversation partners and supportive confidants. Once you have become aware of these possibilities, you will be able to support your kids by raising them in an empowered environment.

The goal is achieving empowerment by strengthening confidence and agency.

The book provides you with an overview of possible ways of dealing with your children's experiences of racism. First by showing the effect that these experiences have on children's sense of self-worth, and second by illustrating ways of educating your children on different levels, so that they know alternative concepts to prejudices and can deal with such experiences in a differentiated manner. I offer concrete examples for conversations with your child and plans of action in every chapter. A stable sense of self-worth, knowledge on the backgrounds of racism and experiences of acceptance in safe spaces together provide the "tools" and a "protective shell" which "empowers" the child, thereby making them able to defend themselves in a peaceful manner.

Whether or not we have so-called "immigrant backgrounds", we know that casual racism and discrimination affects our children and makes them sad sometimes. The environment within German majority society and its educational institutions, as well as the attitudes of a number of prejudiced people (adults and children), thereby makes the lives of our children more difficult. Every third child is potentially affected by this unequal treatment and degradation in Germany.[\[1\]](#)

Prejudiced thinking patterns and clichés in regard to “immigrant kids” or for example “the Muslims” are commonplace among the majority of German society. They determine their assessments of, expectations and behavior towards these children. The clichés in their heads quickly and unconsciously turn into a disparaging look that the children feel in their daily lives. Children and youth are affected differently depending on their country of origin, religion and the obviousness of their othered attributes. Though there are laws against discrimination-e.g. the General Act on Equal Treatment (*Allgemeines Gleichbehandlungsgesetz*), UN general conventions and children’s rights conventions that Germany has signed-they are not always adhered to or enforced in reality. Parents and families with immigrant backgrounds must support their children and insist upon their equal treatment. The welfare and sense of self-worth of their child is at stake.

Despite the approaches offered here, dealing with stressful experiences will remain different in each individual case and cannot be addressed with sweeping solutions. Children are simply too different in their resources and personalities. The suggestions in this book are meant as thought-provoking impulses for your consideration.

I hope you enjoy reading this book and find the impulses that you have been looking for. Have the courage to “feel touchy” in regard to any form of exclusion, discrimination or racist insult, in order to preserve the healthy personal development of your children.

Chapter Overview

The first chapter, Wounded Souls, addresses the definition, mechanism and hurtful potential of everyday racism in regard to children's self-confidence. As an introduction to the topic, I describe the findings of child psychology on what constitutes children's sense of self-worth and how it can be negatively and positively influenced. As there are often uncertainties among parents if they should fight against discrimination, I provide an overview on the binding legal framework and the laws that forbid discrimination in Germany. I then move on to partially discriminatory practices in schools, lacking cultural sensibilities in daycare centers and problems that children and students with immigrant backgrounds encounter. The chapter ends with an overview of alternative approaches by introducing Anti-Bias-Approaches based in prejudice-conscious education and offering recommendations on how to best deal with daycare centers and schools.

The second chapter focuses on the term "empowerment" and its different elements: questions regarding searching for identity (being able to mirror oneself), the importance of appreciative spaces, as well as knowledge on the backgrounds of prejudice and racism. Together they offer tools for processing experiences.

The third chapter is dedicated to the question of what parents need to bring to the table in order to strengthen the resilience of their children. For example, this includes

recognizing the individuality of the child, strengthening their personality and establishing a trusting relationship with the child in general.

Chapter four addresses how to deal with racist experiences. I begin by introducing findings from the field of family therapy and illustrating what makes children strong and enables them to deal with burdens (like racism). I then provide three concrete strategies for dealing with racism as examples, which should be adjusted according to the situation, as well the age and personality of the child. The chapter closes with a reflection task for parents. This is meant to help you to be able to question your own attitudes towards prejudiced Germans without an immigrant background, in order to see what world view you are passing on to your children in this regard.

In the fifth chapter on interior safe spaces and the sixth chapter on exterior safe spaces, I outline the components “home” and “social environment”, which constitute the entirety that can provide children with a “protective shell” composed of experiences of acceptance, love, appreciation, and social exchanges. In the process, I also address questions on relations to home countries or religion, as well as the supportive effect of intercultural and prejudice-conscious books for children and young people. They are valuable resources for identification, learning through stories, as well as actively addressing problems and solving them.

I also introduce the work of empowering youth groups with young Afro-Germans, Sinti and Romani, Jewish and

Muslim youth. Both the group directors and the young people themselves describe the problems faced searching for identity, the discrimination they face and how they find safe spaces in the youth groups, in which they can experience what makes them special, discuss their questions on identity and find answers for themselves.

The seventh chapter deals with problematic behavioral patterns towards racism: making it a taboo subject, downplaying it, having to bear it and placing racism at the center. This chapter is meant to illustrate the problematic consequences hidden within such educational messaging.

Finally, I summarize my empowerment concept within the “motto for empowering parents” at the end of the book.

Chapter 1:

Wounded Souls



A story from a pre-school: after winning a game, every child is allowed to take pieces of candy from a bag of candy. As soon as a five-year-old Afro-German boy wants to take a piece of candy, the other children begin to voice their protest. They are afraid that they could catch an African disease. The pre-school teacher says nothing and the boy does not receive any candy.

In elementary school: an Afro-German girl is isolated in her class. Her classmates do not like her because of the color of her skin. They only play with her, if she has candy. Otherwise, she is alone. Her teachers know that she is isolated, but do not address this situation with her classmates, who are excluding her.

Recognizing Racism in Daily Life

Recurring experiences of denigration based on prejudice and racist thought patterns can have a terrible effect on children and youth. It is important for parents to know which forms of behavior in everyday life are racist, and therefore harmful for their children, so that these negative effects can be avoided. Everyone remembers words from