

# What Can Educators with Families Do to Fight Institutional Racism and Civil Rights Injustices?

## What Can Educators with Families Do to Fight Institutional Black Racism and Civil Rights Injustices?

As an educator for over 30 years, I am committed to supporting the healthy development and academic successes of students and their families. As a white-women raised in Oakland in the 1960s, I am a social justice advocate and educator. I initially volunteered for nonprofit agencies who helped immigrant families access social services. As a parent education teacher, I created parenting classes that taught parents how to partner with schools. And then I worked at United Way and taught nonprofits how to partner with schools to leverage significant educational resources. As a doctoral student, I partnered with culturally diverse community partners to create community-empowered schools. Some of these schools became part of a VISTA project and later best practices were featured at a National Title I Conference and at a National

Association of Bilingual Education Conference. We continue to write our program strategies in [www.GenParenting.com](http://www.GenParenting.com) blogs and through teacher and parent education publications.

## Racially Sensitive Community Building

Community building is my passion. I am not effective without the guidance of my sisterhood of culturally diverse educators and colleagues that represent many different cultural and economic backgrounds. I am continually reminded that as a person of privilege, I may accidentally misspeak or be racially insensitive due to my white entitlement blindness. Most folks trust my sincerity, forgive my misdeeds, and encourage me to continue the journey of social action change.

## 10 Tenets for Civil Rights and Social Action Change



Our culturally and economically diverse colleagues have inspired our team to collaborate and deliver educational services to families by using the following 10 tenets:

We must speak with our hearts. We are sincere, honest, spiritually supportive, and most importantly understand that we are not the experts and that the

communities that we are representing are the experts for civil rights and social action change.

Stakeholders must act with integrity with timely follow-through. They must provide their best services, resources, and provide collaborative partners as needed.

Partners understand that we do not have all of the answers. Some may fail forward to support civil rights and social action changes.

We must collaboratively assure community members that we can only write a grant or create program documentation that is competitive. The service providers must own the program to ensure success. Education is the answer to overcome black racism, civil rights injustices, and inspire social action change. It is imperative that we educate ourselves with the key stakeholders who will provide and receive program services. We must read research from culturally and economically diverse partners. All must participate in culturally and economically diverse stakeholder conferences. And we must socialize and become friends with our diverse colleagues and acquaintances.

Many will not trust our intentions or motivations. And that is ok.

Not everyone will want our help.

When community members become open to change, there may be disfunction and chaos before the community is ready to sit down, talk, collaborate, problem solve and make essential societal changes.

Pain, grief, and despair are essential for change because it is difficult and hard work. Folks do not want to change just because it is a good idea. They

may experience fear and pain to make essential changes. Status quo is not acceptable. Communities must equalize the playing field for all.

Finally, we must ensure that our children and youth understand what has gone wrong in our society for generations. How we teach them, how we treat them, and how we care for them will make a difference in each child's life. Many times, educators and community volunteers are the lifeline for many children who come from overwhelmed families. We are the future for our students and children in our community.

## Case Study

When I review these tenets, I remember a time that I spent weeks working on a community building grant for a school community. The nonprofit agency partners desperately wanted the services, but they did not want the local school district to serve as the grant's fiscal agent. The grant proposal and program design were competitive and probably would have received significant funding, but the community partners did not trust the partnership with the school district and the grant program would not have been successful. In the end, we did not submit the grant to the funder. Walking away from this multi-million-dollar grant was painful, but it was the right thing to do at that time.

## How to Develop Trust

As our communities get ready for social action change to eliminate black racism and develop civil rights

services, we must consider the institutional lack of trust from critical community partners. Reflect on the tenets listed above and acknowledge which conditions exist in our communities and partnerships. Create an action plan and share it with others so you can be held accountable for your commitments. Then we must honestly walk our talk, act with heart, and be spiritually supportive each day of our lives.

Black lives matter and civil rights for all!

Mary Ann with Yvette