

A woman with long dreadlocks is sitting on a bed, reading a book to a young child. The child is smiling and looking at the book. The scene is set against a light blue background. The woman is wearing a white shirt, and the child is wearing a white dress. The book is titled "BE A MOM MOM 10" and features a lightbulb icon. The overall mood is warm and educational.

ProKids

ADVOCATING FOR EQUITY
IN THE CHILD PROTECTION
SYSTEM

A safe, permanent and nurturing home for

every disabled child

every queer child

every black child

every transgender child

every brown child

every child.

What does it mean to center minority communities in our advocacy?

Minority communities are overrepresented in the child protection system. Once in the system, these communities also are susceptible to poorer care and overall outcomes.

When we center minority communities, it means solving problems from their perspective, and considering them first in every potential solution. We need to move beyond asking whether a strategy will serve everyone to focusing first on whether it will effectively address the needs of those most likely to be in need.

This curriculum is part of a series at ProKids, working to equip community members with information necessary to effectively advocate for minority communities and individuals.

WELCOME

What if home is not just a physical space, but also a philosophical one?

The way we approach our work as advocates changes. In our effort to advocate for a safe, permanent, and nurturing home for every child we must also address the community level issues that affect a child's safety - even those issues that don't necessarily bring a child into child protection system.

Oppression in all forms present safety issues for children part of minority populations in our community. It is our obligation as advocates, as community members to address and be part of the remedy to those issues.

Advocating for Equity

This curriculum is designed to help you begin centering youth from minority populations in your work as an advocate. You'll complete the curriculum material within a cohort over six weeks. Each week, you'll have a series of materials to read or watch on your own and a homework assignment. This work on your own should take about an hour to complete. After completing work on your own, you'll join a one-hour session with your cohort where you'll be able to debrief about the materials as well as listen to facilitated materials by a member of the ProKids team.

Completing the materials on your own prior to joining the session with your cohort is essential. The materials provide the foundational learning necessary to participate fully in the debrief session and advanced learning. For each week, follow the links provided to access materials. Please be sure to record any thoughts, notes, or questions in the space provided so that you may bring those to each week's debrief session.

When you signed up for this cohort, you received all of the debrief session dates and times through Eventbrite. Please make it a priority to attend each session. Learning from and contributing to your cohort is an important part of this curriculum.

As a result of completing this class, we expect you'll:

- have a thorough understanding of the concepts of privilege, oppression and bias.
- understand and have empathy for common issues minority youth and families experience as well as be able to recognize the resilience of minority people,
- understand how systems of oppression have been created at the societal and institutional level to purposefully disenfranchise minority people,
- have actionable strategies to advocate for minority people both individually and within systems.

As mentioned previously, this curriculum is designed to help you begin your journey centering minority youth in your work as an advocate. We hope that by completing this curriculum, you become inspired to explore more about the topics discussed and continuously learn how you can better show up for the minority populations in your life.

If you ever have any questions or need assistance while completing this class, please contact the Professional Development team at profdev@prokids.org. We are excited that you'll be joining us on this journey.

I can ride in the car with my dad
I can plan a party
I can ask the cops a question
I can cash a check
I can take out my wallet
I can hold a hair brush
I can party on New Years
I can walk home
I can play loud music
I can ask for help
I can sleep
I can breathe
I can shop at Walmart
I can walk from the store
I can play cops and robbers
I can run
I can live
I can get a ticket

Claude Reese, 14yo RIP
Randy Evans, 15yo RIP
Yvonne Smallwood, 28yo RIP
Amadou Diallo, 23yo RIP
Sean Bell, 23yo RIP
Oscar Grant, 22yo RIP
Trayvon Martin, 17yo RIP
Jordan Davis, 17yo RIP
Jonathan Ferrell, 24yo RIP
Aiyana Jones, 7yo RIP
Eric Garner, 43yo RIP
John Crawford, 22yo RIP
Mike Brown, 18yo RIP
Tamir Rice, 12yo RIP
Walter Scott, 50yo RIP
Freddie Gray, 25yo RIP
Sandra Bland, 28yo RIP

[Son,]

Perhaps you remember that time we went to see *Howl's Moving Castle* on the Upper West Side. You were almost 5 years old. The theater was crowded, and when we came out we rode a set of escalators down to the ground floor. As we came off, you were moving at the dawdling speed of a small child. A white woman pushed you and said, "Come on!" Many things now happened at once. There was the reaction of any parent when a stranger puts a hand on the body of their child. And there was my own insecurity in my ability to protect your black body. And more: There was my sense that this woman was pulling rank. I knew, for instance, that she would not have pushed a black child out on my part of Flatbush, because she would be afraid there and would sense, if not know, that there would be a penalty for such an action. But I was not out on my part of Flatbush. And I was not in West Baltimore. I forgot all of that. I was only aware that someone had invoked their right over the body of my son. I turned and spoke to this woman, and my words were hot with all of the moment and all of my history. She shrank back, shocked. A white man standing nearby spoke up in her defense. I experienced this as his attempt to rescue the damsel from the beast. He had made no such attempt on behalf of my son. And he was now supported by other white people in the assembling crowd. The man came closer. He grew louder. I pushed him away. He said, "I could have you arrested!" I did not care. I told him this, and the desire to do much more was hot in my throat. This desire was only controllable because I remembered someone standing off to the side there, bearing witness to more fury than he had ever seen from me—you.

I came home shook. It was a mix of shame for having gone back to the law of the streets, and rage—"I could have you arrested!" Which is to say: "I could take your body."

I have told this story many times, not out of bravado, but out of a need for absolution. But more than any shame I felt, my greatest regret was that in seeking to defend you I was, in fact, endangering you.

"I could have you arrested," he said. Which is to say: "One of your son's earliest memories will be watching the men who sodomized Abner Louima and choked Anthony Baez cuff, club, tase, and break you." I had forgotten the rules, an error as dangerous on the Upper West Side of Manhattan as on the West Side of Baltimore. One must be without error out here. Walk in single file. Work quietly. Pack an extra No. 2 pencil. Make no mistakes.

But you are human and you will make mistakes. You will misjudge. You will yell. You will drink too much. You will hang out with people whom you shouldn't. Not all of us can always be Jackie Robinson—not even Jackie Robinson was always Jackie Robinson. But the price of error is higher for you than it is for your countrymen, and so that America might justify itself, the story of a black body's destruction must always begin with his or her error, real or imagined—with Eric Garner's anger, with Trayvon Martin's mythical words ("You are gonna die tonight"), with Sean Bell's mistake of running with the wrong crowd, with me standing too close to the small-eyed boy pulling out [a gun].

You are called to struggle, not because it assures you victory but because it assures you an honorable and sane life. I am ashamed of how I acted that day, ashamed of endangering your body. I am ashamed that I made an error, knowing that our errors always cost us more.

I am sorry that I cannot make it okay. I am sorry that I cannot save you—but not that sorry. Part of me thinks that your very vulnerability brings you closer to the meaning of life, just as for others, the quest to believe oneself white divides them from it. The fact is that despite their dreams, their lives are also not inviolable. When their own vulnerability becomes real—when the police decide that tactics intended for the ghetto should enjoy wider usage, when their armed society shoots down their children, when nature sends hurricanes against their cities—they are shocked by the rages of logic and the natural world in a way that those of us who were born and bred to understand cause and effect can never be. And I would not have you live like them. You have been cast into a race in which the wind is always at your face and the hounds are always at your heels. And to varying degrees this is true of all life. The difference is that you do not have the privilege of living in ignorance of this essential fact.

I am speaking to you as I always have—treating you as the sober and serious man I have always wanted you to be, who does not apologize for his human feelings, who does not make excuses for his height, his long arms, his beautiful smile. You are growing into consciousness, and my wish for you is that you feel no need to constrict yourself to make other people comfortable. None of that can change the math anyway. I never wanted you to be twice as good as them, so much as I have always wanted you to attack every day of your brief bright life determined to struggle. The people who must believe they are white can never be your measuring stick. I would not have you descend into your own dream. I would have you be a conscious citizen of this terrible and beautiful world.

Excerpt from "Letter to My Son" By Ta-Nehisi Coates, appearing in The Atlantic on July 4, 2015

WEEK ONE

Equity, Racism, Oppression, and Privilege

We are starting here with a closer look at four hard hitting words so that we can begin on the same page and grow in our understanding together over the next six weeks about how these concepts turn up in the lives of ProKids kids and young adults.

Take a deep breath. Notice how you are feeling right now just reading the words “equity”, “racism”, “oppression” and “privilege”. These words can make us feel all the feelings. And that’s okay.

There is so much talk about these concepts happening in our culture, but we can’t afford to make the mistake of assuming that we all define and understand these terms in the same way. We will start below, by looking at information that highlights circumstances of equity, racism, oppression, and privilege, and then we will look more at the terms themselves in our first hour together.

Please complete the following material prior to attending the Week One Debrief Session:

Think – Build your knowledge.

1. Check out [this infographic](#) about the way that racism impacts early childhood development.
2. Look at [this report](#) from the ACLU on marijuana arrests and race (feel free to explore the interactive data visualizer, too!). You are welcome to read all of it, but are only responsible for pages 10-14, 28-33, and the State Profile for Ohio (state profiles begin on pg. 48).

Feel – Connect with the concept.

1. Watch this [video](#) as Clint Smith talks about growing up as a black son in America.
2. Listen as these moms talk about what they have learned about [being in interracial families](#).

Do – Apply your knowledge.

The following questions are intended to stimulate your thoughts on the topic of race, and how you may have experienced inequities, racism, privilege, and/or oppression throughout your life. Write about whichever question(s) brings you to address these issues most directly.

When did you first feel that one part of your identity limited your ability to live life the way you wanted to? How have your physical appearance (race, height, facial characteristics), and presentation (how you speak, walk, interact, move, mental health, physical health, gender expression), affected your ability to live your life? Have you ever received something because of your appearance or presentation? Have you ever been denied (or given) something because of your appearance or presentation?

WEEK TWO

Equity in Education

Last week, we defined equity as recognizing that each person has different circumstances and needs, and therefore different groups of people need different resources and opportunities allocated to them in order to thrive. Equity, in its simplest terms as it relates to racial and social justice, means meeting communities where they are and allocating resources and opportunities as needed to create equal outcomes for all community members.

Education is one of the systems that all children in our country are lawfully expected to experience throughout their childhood. It is also a system that is full of inequity, where racism and oppression and privilege are experienced by the youngest ones in our community—and our ProKids children are no exception.

It is important that we use these words without watering them down, and that we take this opportunity to learn about ways children experience inequity, racism, oppression and privilege with humility. The reality is: this is both about you and not about you at the same time. You did not create this society that we live in, but you do live in it. And your actions will directly impact the systems of oppression in our society. You and your actions will either maintain these systems or dismantle them.

Please complete the following material prior to attending the Week Two Debrief Session:

Think – Build your knowledge.

1. Look at the information on [this page](#) and be sure to look at the information under the heading “Race/Ethnicity of IDEA Students Receiving Disciplinary Actions”, and note the racial differences in the “School IDEA Enrollment”, “Out of School Suspensions”, “Expulsions”, and “Referrals to Law Enforcement”. (IDEA students are those students on an Individual Education Plan or 504 Plan.)
2. Read about a recent study about racism in preschool [here](#). (You are only responsible for reading the following sections: “Abstract”, page 2; “The Potential Role of Implicit Biases”, pages 3-5; and “Conclusions and Implications” on pages 15-16. You are certainly welcome to read more!)

Feel – Connect with the concept.

1. Listen to what [these young men](#) have to say about their educational experiences.
2. Watch [this video](#) about some amazing work being done in Pittsburgh.

Do – Apply your knowledge.

When did you first have a teacher that identified with the same race and gender identities as yourself? What about the first time you had a teacher that identified as a different race or gender than yourself? Did you notice any differences in the messages you received from teachers that were similar to you and those that were less similar? How did those messages impact your view of yourself? When did you first learn about a culture or people group other than your own in school?

WEEK THREE

Equity in Child Protective Services

We are all here at ProKids because we care about the children for whom we advocate. We care about more than just the fact they are foster children, we care that they are infants, young adults, neurodivergent, gay, Black, Latinx, white, physically unhealthy, mentally healthy, and the list continues. However, we see a difference between children in our larger community and the children who come into contact with Hamilton County child protection system.

Children of color, neurodivergent, and LGBTQ children are hugely overrepresented in the child protection system throughout our nation. In Hamilton County, there are around 200,000 young people. Approximately two-thirds of those young people are white, with only one third belonging to a racial or ethnic minority. From national data we can estimate 7-10% of the youth population identifies or will identify as part of the LGBTQ community and approximately 17% of these young people are born neurodivergent.

In the child protection system locally, 3,000-4,000 children per year are served. In contrast to our community's general population, racial and ethnic demographics flip with nearly two-thirds of youth belonging a minority community while only one third identifying as white. While data on sexual orientation, gender identity, and neurodivergence is not uniformly collected locally, we know from national data youth who belong to the LGBTQ community can be overrepresented at two to four times the rate of the general population and we see a large overlap of neurodivergent youth who both are in foster care and receive other government assistance.

Please complete the following material prior to attending the Week Three Debrief Session:

Think – Build your knowledge.

1. Explore [this dashboard](#) from the National Center for Juvenile Justice. Be sure to change the data display (blue button toward the right of the page) to each of the four options, and explore not just Ohio, but any other states you like.
2. Learn about the history of child protection through module 2, lesson 1 from the Kirwan Institute [here](#).

Feel – Connect with the concept.

1. Hear about what it was like for Native American children removed from home [here](#) and [here](#). How is this similar or different from how ProKids kids might feel in 2022 when they are separated from their families?

Do – Apply your knowledge.

Write about a time when you or your family were being judged. What did it feel like? Did you ever want to talk with strangers about the experience? Did you feel that you were seen differently because of the structure of your family or the physical appearance of your family?

WEEK FOUR

Examining Our Own Biases

First, let's acknowledge that bias is pervasive in our society, and no one is exempt. No matter how hard we or our parents try to keep us free of biases, we all will have to reckon with the implicit biases that we carry.

The work we do with ProKids is difficult, not only because we are working with children and families who have experienced abuse and neglect, but because we are working with them through our own implicit biases.

Processing your own biases may automatically feel uncomfortable, and that's okay. We often grow most when we work through our discomfort to arrive at a larger perspective and ability to understand the experiences of those around us.

There are also some things that we may need to unlearn, and this is an opportunity to begin or continue on that path.

We are in this together.

Please complete the following material prior to attending the Week Three Debrief Session:

Think – Build your knowledge.

1. Watch this short video on implicit bias [here](#).
2. Check out module 1, lesson 1 from the Kirwan Institute [here](#).
3. Read PDF pages 9 (“Two Stories”), 11-17 (“Executive Summary”), and 36-44 (“Part IV”) from [this UCLA study](#). You are certainly welcome to read more than just these pages.

Feel – Connect with the concept.

1. Watch [module 2, lesson 2](#) about implicit bias in the child protection system from the Kirwan Institute.
2. Watch [this CNN story](#).

Do – Apply your knowledge.

Think of a time when you encountered someone who had a bias (positive, neutral, or negative) toward you. What was that experience like? Where/when/how do you think that person developed that bias?

Think of a time when you have realized one of the biases you hold against someone else, or a group of “someone elses”. Can you pinpoint where that bias originated in your life?

WEEK FIVE

Equity, Racism, Privilege, Oppression, and YOU

We won't ever know everything about the children and families we serve—especially not when we are new on the case. All we can do is bring our curiosity and a willingness to learn no matter where our questions might lead us.

It's okay to ask hard questions. It's okay to question the systems that exist in our society, and it is absolutely okay to wonder if, maybe, a case would have turned out differently if the family looked different, lived in a different zip code, had reacted differently when JFS first responded to their home...we should ask and question and wonder all of these things.

There will be times that we need to speak up if we are serious about addressing equity, racism, oppression, and privilege.

And there will also be times when we realize that we need to educate ourselves...and then we need to do that.

Please complete the following material prior to attending the Week Five Debrief Session:

Think – Build your knowledge.

1. Be inspired to become "[color brave](#)".
2. Take a look at history from a different perspective by reading [this article](#) from the National Museum of African American History and Culture.

Feel – Connect with the concept.

1. Listen to [this Ted talk](#) about the problem of silence.
2. Get [comfortable being uncomfortable](#).

Do – Apply your knowledge.

What do you know that you need to learn more about? (The history of race in America? Oppression and privilege in present day America? Your own biases? What inequity looks like in your circles?) What has piqued your curiosity over the last few weeks? Dig into an issue of equity, racism, oppression, or privilege, and be ready to share with us what you learn for our next meeting.

If you feel stuck and aren't sure what to dig into, think of what Luvie Ajayi Jones said she checks herself on when she speaks a hard truth: Did I mean it? Can I defend it? Did I say it with love? (What things do you say, and do you mean them? Can you defend them? Can you say them with love?)

WEEK SIX

Applying Equitable Principles as We Work

The work we do with ProKids can often feel isolating and overwhelming, especially in the face of issues like systemic racism, oppression, privilege, equity, and implicit bias that we know we all struggle with.

We serve children who are seen and labeled as broken, dangerous, messed up, mentally challenged. We must see them as resilient, incredible, strong, able.

We have the privilege of working, not only on our cases, but also in our lives, for justice for the children that we serve.

We often receive (and ask for!) a lot of information as CASAs. Thousands of pages of medical records, hours of conversations with caregivers, and plenty of information from society, family, and friends about the worth of the children for whom we are assigned to advocate.

It is part of our task to filter through the vast amounts of information we receive and separate it into the parts on which we can act. We also need to make sure that we understand ourselves well enough to know when we may be falling prey to implicit (or sometimes explicit) bias, and when our ProKids kids are experiencing an unintended outcome based on racist, inequitable, or oppressive systems or policies.

We need to be willing to change our habits, the ways we make decisions, and the ways we confront issues of equity, racism, oppression, and privilege in the places we find ourselves.

Please complete the following material prior to attending the Week Six Debrief Session:

Think – Build your knowledge.

1. Watch [this video](#) about our habits.
2. Read [this article](#) about ways to combat systemic racism.

Feel – Connect with the concept.

1. Imagine how it would feel to benefit from a new system in child protection as [Jessica Pryce](#) shares one way to address systemic racial inequities.
2. Read [Prevent Protect and Provide](#).

Do – Apply your knowledge.

Thinking about your ProKids cases, or about the child protection system in general, think of a decision where you think the outcome was not as equitable as it could have been. What could have been done differently? How might ProKids (or another person on the case) have intervened to disrupt the systems that were in play?