

SOCIAL

HOW TO RAISE COMPASSIONATE,

JUSTICE

ANTI-RACIST, JUSTICE-MINDED KIDS

PARENTING

IN AN UNJUST WORLD

Dr. Traci Baxley



HARPER WAVE

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CHAPTER 1

WHAT IS SOCIAL JUSTICE PARENTING?

THE ROCKS OF SOCIAL JUSTICE PARENTING

JOURNAL WRITING

Consider your fears as a parent. Write them down, and then reflect on each fear. Where did it come from? Is it a rational fear? Remember, you have to name your fears before you can overcome them. Now is your chance.

CHAPTER 2

THE NEED TO BELONG

WHAT'S YOUR WHY?

JOURNAL WRITING

Take a few minutes to write your core values for your family. I would even suggest that you do this with your children. This will allow them to have a chance to build these values and have a voice in something important to your family. Come up with three to five centering beliefs that are vital to who you want your children to become.

JOURNAL WRITING

Create your Why statement grounded in your family's core values.

CHAPTER 3

RAISING ANTI-RACIST CHILDREN

UNPACKING AND ACKNOWLEDGING PRIVILEGE

"P" OR "M"	IDENTITIES	PRIVILEGED*	MARGINALIZED*
	Gender	Men	Women, transperson/gender
	Race	White	People of color
	Class	Middle and upper class	Poor and working class
	Nation	United States or "First World"	"Second, Third Worlds"
	Ethnicity	European	All others

	Sexual orientation or gender identity	Heterosexual or cisgender	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender
	Religion	Christian	All other religions
	Physical ability	Able-bodied	Persons with disabilities
	Age	Youth	Elderly persons
	Language	English	All other languages
	Brain differences	Neurotypical	Neurodivergent

*The identities are labeled as privileged or marginalized based on the current power structure in the United States.

CHAPTER 4

REFLECTION

WHAT IS SELF-REFLECTION?

JOURNAL WRITING:

1. List three (3) things you do well in your daily parenting that bring you and your child(ren) joy.

My example: (1) Open dialogue and family discussions; (2) bedtime reading to younger kids (I want this to last forever—I will even volunteer to read one of my older kids' textbooks with them just to snuggle and read together); and (3) family dinner time.

2. List two (2) things that you do as a parent that you want to change.

My example: (1) Yell from room to room to get the kids' attention instead of getting up and asking them face-to-face; and (2) Not listening as closely to my children as I would like to when they need my attention while I'm working.

3. Pick one (1) of these items (the most pressing at this time) from your "I want to change" list that you want to address first.

My example: I notice when I'm working and my children come to talk to me, I can get impatient or I tell them I'm too busy to talk right now. I often forget to circle back around to ask them what they wanted to talk about. I am afraid this is not reinforcing my ideas of belonging. I don't want the children to feel like what they say is not important. If I'm not listening to the small stories, why would they come to me when they have big issues and situations?

4. First be aware of what is happening. Then think about what triggers this reaction or action.

If I tune in and pay attention to my behavior in the moment, I find myself half listening while they are telling me something, or I get impatient if they take too long to tell a story and I tell them to hurry and finish their thoughts for them. It happens most often when I'm working—deadlines are particularly triggering. If I'm in the middle of a thought, I worry that I will lose the flow of being creative or productive. Or (and this is where I get vulnerable and honest with you) sometimes it's just that I think my kid's story is going to be about a subject that I have no interest in or knowledge of.

5. Create an action plan for how you will work on this.

I go back to my base: radical love and my family's core values. I ask myself: Am I practicing the Platinum Rule? Am I treating my son the way he wants to be treated? Are my actions rooted in radical love? I created a "Need to Talk" whiteboard close to my desk. When my kids want to talk while I'm working, they'll write what they want to talk about on the board. This system allows me to focus on my work and allows them to know that what they have to say is important and worth documenting for me. When I'm done working, I follow up with each of them.

6. In this situation, what does “reacting” look like? What would “responding” look like, instead?

Reacting looks like sounding exasperated or putting my finger up to tell them to wait. It also looks like my children acting impatient or frustrated when I can’t talk right away. Responding would look like my giving them the thumbs-up or a smile when they are writing on the board. Responding also looks like quality time with my kiddos, going through our whiteboard list during a time when we all feel relaxed and attentive.

They are my hell yeah, every time. Big picture: They are learning patience and I am able to get work complete and enjoy more quality time with each of them.

REFLECTING ON CHILDHOOD

JOURNAL WRITING

Write down two memories from your childhood, one positive and one negative. Then reflect on how these experiences have shaped the kind of parent you are today.

THE POWER OF SELF-REFLECTION

JOURNAL WRITING

Consider reflecting on the following questions and write your responses in your journal:

- What is the impact that I want to make in the world? The legacy that I want to leave for my children?
-
-

- What are my family's passions and how do we tap into them to serve others?
-
-

- What are my limiting beliefs—about myself, my partner, my parenting, my children, the world—and how do I work to overcome them?
-
-

- How are the people closest to me (family, extended family, friends, etc.) or the people I spend the most time with (could also include

colleagues, team members, coworkers, etc.) impacting my life?

- What have I learned about myself over the last year that can help me to continue to grow into the person, mother, activist, human being that I want to become?

CHAPTER 8

**SOCIAL JUSTICE
ENGAGEMENT**

GETTING STARTED

EXAMPLE FAMILY MEMBER— WHAT ARE MY PASSIONS?	FAMILY MEMBER #1 WHAT ARE MY PASSIONS?	FAMILY MEMBER #2 WHAT ARE MY PASSIONS?	FAMILY MEMBER #3 WHAT ARE MY PASSIONS?	FAMILY MEMBER #4 WHAT ARE MY PASSIONS?
I want to help homeless people.				

I want to help manatees because they are endangered.				
I want to close the educational gap for people of color.				

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES AND SUPPORT

While I hope this book has offered a useful road map for your Social Justice Parenting journey, remember to lean on your village—both local and global—for support and help along the way. If you're a member of a mom group, or if you simply have a few friends with kids around the same age and you share the same values, consider forming a support system so that you always have someone you can turn to when you're not sure what to do or when you need help brainstorming how to handle a certain situation—or even just someone to pick you up when you're feeling discouraged.

There are also a lot of helpful resources available in books and online. (You should absolutely join me and my Mosaic of Moms @socialjusticeparenting on Instagram. The SJP Village provides a space where you belong and are supported!) But I'm going to put my educator hat on and make sure you and your kids aren't just diving into some internet black hole of misinformation that will actually do more harm than good. It's important that your family has the capacity to be critical consumers of media.

That can be a little harder to achieve than it seems. We grew up learning that literacy is the ability to read, write, and think. While this is still true, there's so much more to it these days. Literacy is not just about being able to understand words on a page and writing complete and grammatical sentences—we also must have the ability

to understand the different types of media (children's literature, text messages, social media, movies, memes, and more) that our children are exposed to and be aware of the subconscious messages they are sending on a daily basis.

For example, marketers often create commercials that draw your younger children to the television screen. When a commercial comes on, ask your children questions that will help them better understand the intent behind it. Ask your children questions about what they are seeing. What is the commercial about? What is the commercial trying to tell you to do? How does the commercial make you feel? Discuss why famous people and characters are used to sell things that they like. Talk about the way commercials "sell" to them as consumers. When my children were younger, they would see toys or gadgets on television and ask me to buy them. I would ask if they thought the toy would work the same way when they got it home. We would talk about why the people produced a commercial that made everything look like it was hours of fun.

This is just one of the many ways the media manipulates us, and it's a fairly obvious one—but bringing awareness to it will help you and your kids remember to remain aware of the other, subtler manipulations and help to build critical media literacy—which will help our children better analyze what they read and see, and help them understand themselves and the world around them. Being critical consumers of media can also help us and our children challenge many of the -isms (racism, sexism, colorism, etc.) in our society.

Once your kids reach their tweens, you can go much deeper. When my oldest two were tweens, I allowed them to watch some of the tween television shows on the two big children's networks. After watching with them, we began to engage in our own research study and discussed the pattern that we always saw in all of the shows. The main tween character was sneaking, lying, or hiding something,

and the parents were always clueless and ill-informed. We discussed these dynamics and talked about how this could possibly cause issues in real life if my kids took those messages as truth and lost their faith in us as parents—and if we, therefore, lost our faith in them as trustworthy people who showed good judgment. It's also a great opportunity to discuss ethical dilemmas and what they would do if they were in the shoes of the main character. Discuss how their decisions align or contrast with your family's core values.

The decisions that children make in their teenage years, specifically on their phones and with social media, can impact the rest of their lives. Set parameters with your children and have an ongoing dialogue about the difference between social media life and real life. There are so many teenagers who feel pressure to look or behave certain ways because of the filters, camera lighting, and fantasy worlds of social media, and these pressures have been proven to have a direct connection to depression, anxiety, and suicide. The reward center of the brain responds to “likes,” which leads to the addictive behavior that children display when on their electronic devices.

Because most of our tweens and teens have cell phones, they are constantly bombarded with information. It's important to support them in discerning the difference between real and fake news. Have them ask themselves critical questions such as *Who made this video? What was the purpose of making it? Who does it include and who does it leave out? What point of view is this, or who are they marketing to and why?*

USING CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

Children's books are a great way to begin the practice of critical literacy, and they can be used to support conversations and interactions with your children, which lead to the practice of your values in the

world. Books can be used as mirrors, reflecting the lives of the reader. All children need to see themselves reflected in books. Representation matters! Literature adds to their understanding of how they view themselves and how others view and value them. Your children can see evidence of themselves, their families, and communities mirrored in the books they read. This supports their need to be validated and gives them a sense of belonging.

Books can also serve as windows into the lives of others. Literature expands the way your children experience other people's experiences. This is how you can begin to expose your children to differences in culture, skin color, religion, and lifestyle. Children can develop their sense of compassion and care for others while exploring their curiosities about others through the pages of a book.

Finally, books can be used as doors, allowing children to find ways to step into the world of others. If, by peering in through the window of a book about someone whose life is different from theirs, your child is then inspired to befriend someone who is also different, then that book served as a door. Using books as doors can also be symbolic for teaching your children to stand up for others or inspire them to enter other people's worlds through activism, allyship, or volunteering. Children's literature has the capacity to broaden your family's passions and deepen your knowledge of how to use your resources to step into someone's life and to serve others.

However, as much as I believe in the power of children's literature, all books are not created equal. As a Social Justice Parent, it is important for you to analyze the books your children read and the books that you read to them. Begin analyzing the books that you read with your children early in their lives. This will set the foundation for them to do this independently as they get older. I am not asking you not to read books that are controversial or that have been banned for various reasons—in fact, oftentimes those are the ones you and

your kids *should* read, together. And regardless of whether you choose to read them, have a conversation around why those books may be problematic for you or for some groups of people. One of our family's favorite "banned" books is *And Tango Makes Three* by Peter Parnell and Justin Richardson. It's a sweet, true story about a male chinstrap penguin couple in the New York Central Park Zoo who raised a baby penguin as their own. This book was banned from various school districts because it was "unsuitable for young children" and has "homosexual overtones."

I want you to explore the books that can be controversial or hotly discussed, but do your homework first so that you are prepared to unpack them with your children. Don't read a book that may have problematic issues and then not engage in the needed conversations around those issues. The Council on Interracial Books for Children suggests ways to analyze children's books for issues like racism and sexism. Some of their recommendations include: look at the illustrations for stereotypes and tokenism, look at the story line for forms of bias, note who the heroes are and who possess the power in the story, and pay attention to any "loaded words" that are used (lazy, docile, savage, etc.).

To help you get started, or to expand your existing library of literature, I've gathered books to represent four age levels: newborn to preschool; kindergarten to second grade; third to fifth grade; and sixth to eighth grade. It is my hope that these books will facilitate important conversations with your children and will support your efforts in raising children who feel like they belong in the world. The following list is categorized by the key themes of this book (belonging, anti-racism, reflection, open dialogue, compassion, kindness, social justice engagement, and self-advocacy). Within each topic, I've categorized by age/reading level. I encourage you to visit your local library or bookstore and bring home some of these books!

CHILDREN'S BOOKS ON SOCIAL JUSTICE

BELONGING

NEWBORN TO PRESCHOOL (NEWBORN TO AGE 4)

***It's Okay to Be Different* by Todd Parr**

This book teaches young readers to love who they are and to accept and appreciate the differences in others.

***The Belonging Tree* by Maryann Cocca-Leffler**

When the blue jays and chipmunks moved into the squirrel family's tree, a lesson in inclusion and kindness is needed.

***All Are Welcome* by Alexandra Penfold**

Imagine a school where—no matter what—you belong.

KINDERGARTEN TO SECOND GRADE (AGES 5–7)

***One Green Apple* by Eve Bunting**

A young Muslim immigrant starts school in America and immediately feels that she doesn't fit in. A field trip to an apple orchard helps her see the value in being different.

***The Big Umbrella* by Amy June Bates and Juniper Bates**

With a theme of inclusion and friendship, this special umbrella likes bringing different people together.

***A Kids Book About Belonging* by Kevin Carroll**

This book introduces children to the concept of belonging, discussing how it feels to belong to a group as well as how it feels when you don't belong, and what to do.

THIRD TO FIFTH GRADE (AGES 8–10)

The Junkyard Wonders by Patricia Polacco

Trisha was always placed in the class that was called “special” and thought this meant she wasn’t smart. When her family moved to a new town, her teacher, Mrs. Peterson, showed Trisha and her classmates just how special and talented they really are, and how in fact they are marvelous Wonders.

Amina’s Voice by Hena Khan

This book tells the story of a Pakistani American girl who is stuck between two worlds. In her journey to balance assimilating in America and remaining true to her Pakistani culture, she finds her voice in a way that brings her community together.

The Arabic Quilt by Aya Khalil

Kanzi’s family has moved from Egypt to America, and she wants very much to fit in. When her classmates see her mother dressed in her hijab, they begin teasing her about being different. Kanzi’s grandmother’s quilt, which gives her comfort after school, becomes the very thing that teaches the children about inclusion and kindness.

SIXTH TO EIGHTH GRADE (AGES 11–13)

I Can Make This Promise by Christine Day

Edie has always felt that she doesn’t belong; her mom was adopted by a white couple and no one ever talked about her Native American heritage. One day she uncovers a box hidden in the attic that holds the answers to so many of her questions.

The Unteachables by Gordon Korman

The Unteachables, the group of students that nobody wanted, was given to Mr. Kermit, the teacher that didn't want to teach. When a new teacher shakes things up a bit, Mr. Kermit and the Unteachables discover amazing things about themselves and each other.

Listen, Slowly by Thanhha Lai

For the summer, twelve-year-old Mia, a first-generation Vietnamese American girl, was sent to Vietnam by her parents to accompany her grandmother in search of her grandfather. While the trip was meant for her grandmother to connect to her past, Mia finds herself and learns to appreciate her Vietnamese culture.

ANTI-RACISM

NEWBORN TO PRESCHOOL (NEWBORN TO AGE 4)

Skin Like Mine by LaTashia M. Perry

This book celebrates the diversity in skin color among young children.

Antiracist Baby by Ibram X. Kendi

Kendi shows us that even the youngest kids can combat racism. It's up to us, as parents, to teach them how.

A Is for Activist by Innosanto Nagara

This book exposes children (and their parents) to a rich vocabulary associated with activism. It includes terms such as environmental justice, civil rights, and LGBTQ+ rights.

KINDERGARTEN TO SECOND GRADE (AGES 5–7)

The Skin You Live In by Michael Tyler

This beautiful story teaches children about what skin is and what it is not. Everybody's skin is both different and the same.

Something Happened in Our Town by Marianne Celano

The book follows two families—one white, one Black—as they discuss a police shooting of a Black man in their community. It tackles difficult conversations about racial injustice.

Say Something! by Peter H. Reynolds

This empowering picture book explores the importance of using your voice to make a difference. Each of us, each and every day, has the opportunity to use our words and take actions to make a difference.

THIRD TO FIFTH GRADE (AGES 8–10)

Not My Idea: A Book About Whiteness by Anastasia Higginbotham

In this call to action, a young white child recognizes the power and privilege that come along with being white. The child's parents continue to attempt to protect or deny the systemic racism that is happening all around. After a trip to the library, the child uses what has been learned to communicate feelings of frustration to the parents.

Can I Touch Your Hair?: Poems of Race, Mistakes, and Friendship by Irene Latham and Charles Waters

Two poets, one a white woman and one a Black man, explore race and childhood from their own perspectives and lived experiences.

Momma, Did You Hear the News? by Sanya Whittaker Gragg

A Black father sits his sons down to share “The Talk” that his mother had with him as a young boy about safe ways to interact with law enforcement.

SIXTH TO EIGHTH GRADE (AGES 11–13)

Ghost Boys by Jewell Parker Rhodes

Jerome Rogers, a Black twelve-year-old, is shot and killed by a white policeman while outside playing with a toy gun. As a ghost, he is able to look down on earth and see the impact his death has had on the community. Ironically, the only person who can still see Jerome is the daughter of the white policeman.

New Kid by Jerry Craft

Jordan, the main character of this graphic novel, is an African American seventh-grader whose parents enroll him in a private, predominantly white middle school in another part of town. Jordan struggles to find his place between the two worlds of his neighborhood and his new school.

Stamped: Racism, Antiracism, and You by

Jason Reynolds and Ibram X. Kendi

This book unpacks the history of racism and can be used as a tool for young adults to begin their antiracist journey.

REFLECTION

NEWBORN TO PRESCHOOL (NEWBORN TO AGE 4)

Skin Again by bell hooks

bell hooks invites readers to go beyond the color of people’s skin and learn their stories and experiences. That’s how you really get to know someone.

***Fry Bread: A Native American Family Story* by
Kevin Noble Maillard**

This book highlights Native American culture and the importance of passing down the traditions of their ancestors.

***The Wonderful Things You Will Be* by Emily Winfield Martin**

This book represents all the dreams and unconditional love that parents have for their children.

KINDERGARTEN TO SECOND GRADE (AGES 5–7)

***The Day You Begin* by Jacqueline Woodson**

This book reminds us that there's power in storytelling. When we have the courage to tell our story, we build the capacity for reflection and belonging.

***The Three Questions* by Jon J. Muth**

This is a spiritually-based book that teaches the importance of asking the right questions, living in the present moment, and acting on behalf of others.

***Be You* by Peter H. Reynolds**

This book takes the reader through a sweet journey of finding joy in being unique, in being yourself.

THIRD TO FIFTH GRADE (AGES 8–10)

***The Memory Coat* by Elvira Woodruff**

This is a story of the journey of a ragged coat and a Jewish family's migration to America. The coat represents the value of keeping family history and memories as part of a collective story passed through generations.

*Just Feel: How to Be Stronger, Happier, Healthier,
and More* by Mallika Chopra

A guide that supports children in identifying, reflecting on, and dealing with various feelings. The reader is given actionable activities that lead to more awareness and mindfulness regarding their emotions.

The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind by William Kamkwamba

After being forced to drop out of school because his family could no longer afford the fees, fourteen-year-old Kamkwamba found a way to educate himself and save his village. Through trial and error and persistence, Kamkwamba was able to turn scraps into a working wind-mill for his village.

SIXTH TO EIGHTH GRADE (AGES 11–13)

Blended by Sharon M. Draper

Isabella is biracial girl who is always questioned about her racial identity. In addition, her parents are going through a divorce and she must split her time between their homes. Ultimately, in being forced to reflect on both of her identities, Isabella learns who she really is.

Counting by 7s by Holly Goldberg Sloan

Willow Chance is a quiet, eccentric twelve-year-old genius, whose world is turned upside down when she finds out that her parents have died in car crash. In this story we follow her on a journey to find belonging and love with an unconventional family who help her embrace the wonders of being different.

Same Sun Here by Silas House and Neela Vaswani

Through letter writing, two tweens with very different circumstances learn about each other's lives. Through their exchange, Meena,

an Indian immigrant girl living in New York City, and River, the son of a Kentucky coal miner, discover much about each other and themselves.

OPEN DIALOGUE

NEWBORN TO PRESCHOOL (NEWBORN TO AGE 4)

***C Is for Consent* by Eleanor Morrison**

The book teaches children to be in control of their of bodies by learning to say no and creating boundaries for themselves and for others.

***We're Different, We're the Same* by Bobbi Kates**

The Sesame Street friends help teach little ones that we all share common traits and experiences, but it's the differences that we should all celebrate.

***Brown Sugar Babe* by Charlotte Watson Sherman**

When a little girl doesn't like her brown skin color, her mother reminds her of all the beauty there is in being brown.

KINDERGARTEN TO SECOND GRADE (AGES 5–7)

***The Other Side* by Jacqueline Woodson**

Clover, an African American girl, and Anna, a white girl, live in a segregated town. Clover's mom always reminds her to never climb over the fence that separates their backyards. Clover and Anna find a way to become friends in this segregated town while still following the grown-ups' rules.

***Let's Talk About Race* by Julius Lester**

This book explores the concept of race for young readers. We are all individuals and we all have a story. Sometimes stories are true, and

sometimes we believe stories about others that are not true. When you peel back the layers of our stories, you will find the truth.

The Color of Us by Karen Katz

Seven-year-old Lena is going to paint a picture of herself using her brown paint. But as she takes a walk with her mother in the neighborhood, she realizes that brown comes in many beautiful shades.

THIRD TO FIFTH GRADE (AGES 8–10)

A Shelter in Our Car by Monica Gunning

Zettie and her mother come to the United States looking for a better life when Zettie's father dies. They temporarily live in their car while Mama struggles to find a job. The book reminds us to remain hopeful in the midst of hard times.

I Dissent: Ruth Bader Ginsburg Makes Her Mark by Debbie Levy

Supreme Court justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg spent a lifetime standing up for and challenging gender norms. This picture book highlights her life's work through the lens of her famous dissents.

The Proudest Blue: A Story of Hijab and Family by Ibtihaj Muhammad

Faizah recalls the day at school when her older sister, Asiya, wore her hijab for the first time. What started out as a day of joy, pride, and celebration ended in a day of hurt and sadness. This story highlights the importance of family and culture.

SIXTH TO EIGHTH GRADE (AGES 11–13)

Amal Unbound by Aisha Saeed

After her mother suffers from postpartum depression, Amal must stop going to school to take care of her younger siblings. Through a

series of unfortunate events, Amal finds herself working for the Pakistani village's landlord as an indentured servant.

***Long Way Down* by Jason Reynolds**

After Will witnesses his older brother, Shawn, murdered, he wants revenge. He grabs Shawn's gun and hops on the elevator. The elevator stops on each floor on the way down. Each floor reveals layers of Will's life that led to the moment of Shawn's death.

***Other Words for Home* by Jasmine Warga**

Jude is forced to leave her father, older brother, and her country, Syria, behind during civil unrest. She is sent to live with her uncle in Ohio and she quickly realizes what it means to be a "Middle Easterner" in the United States.

COMPASSION

NEWBORN TO PRESCHOOL (NEWBORN TO AGE 4)

***The Rabbit Listened* by Cori Doerrfeld**

When Taylor's block tower is knocked down, Rabbit is just what Taylor needs. Taylor is able to process the array of feelings inside because Rabbit was willing to listen.

***It's Okay to Make Mistakes* by Todd Parr**

Making mistakes can lead to learning about ourselves. This book teaches children to make lemonade out of lemons and to give themselves a little grace along the way.

***The World Needs More Purple People* by
Kristen Bell and Benjamin Hart**

Purple people are people who help others and love who they are. This book teaches children to stand up for what is fair.

KINDERGARTEN TO SECOND GRADE (AGES 5–7)

Listening with My Heart by Gabi Garcia

Esperanza's heart-shaped rock reminds her to show compassion to others. She learns that sometimes she has to use her special rock to practice self-compassion.

I Am Human by Susan Verde

This book affirms the power of giving and receiving empathy and compassion.

Compassionate Ninja by Mary Nhin

Compassionate Ninja teaches young readers the importance of self-compassion and positive self-talk.

THIRD TO FIFTH GRADE (AGES 8–10)

The Lemonade Club by Patricia Polacco

When Marilyn, Traci's best friend, is diagnosed with leukemia in Miss Wichelman's fifth-grade class, they count Miss Wichelman's famous saying "making lemonade out of life's sour lemons" to help them get through it. When Marilyn returns to school after going through chemotherapy, the entire class shows their compassion for their classmate with a sweet surprise.

Fly Away Home by Eve Bunting

The preschool-aged narrator and his father live in the airport while the father looks for more work and an apartment for them to live in. He relies on another homeless family to take care of his son while he is working. This book is an excellent story to support your conversation about homelessness with young children.

***Finding Perfect* by Elly Swartz**

This book is about a twelve-year-old girl, Molly, who has OCD. The coping skills and strategies that were effective in the past are no longer working as her life and the people in it become harder to control. Throughout the story, with the help and compassion from those around her, Molly slowly understands that perfection is not attainable for anyone.

SIXTH TO EIGHTH GRADE (AGES 11–13)

***Wonder* by R. J. Palacio**

Auggie, a ten-year-old who was born with facial defects, is leaving the safety of homeschooling and is going to public school for the first time. This heartwarming story teaches values of compassion, friendship, and standing up for others.

***Rules* by Cynthia Lord**

Twelve-year-old Catherine just wants to be a normal girl and have a normal family. Catherine's brother has autism, and she is often embarrassed by his behavior. This is a helpful book for families with neurodiverse siblings.

***Out of My Mind* by Sharon M. Draper**

Eleven-year-old Melody has cerebral palsy. Everyone sees her broken body but no one knows that she also has a photographic memory. How does she get her teachers, doctors, and classmates to see her for what she really is? This story teaches children not to judge a person by physical appearance or able-bodiedness.

KINDNESS

NEWBORN TO PRESCHOOL (NEWBORN TO AGE 4)

The Kindness Book by Todd Parr

Being kind is a choice! Parents can use this book to emphasize the importance of choosing to be kind to everyone.

Kindness Makes Us Strong by Sophie Beer

Kindness can come in so many forms. Read this book with little ones to explore different ways to show kindness.

Kindness Counts 123 by R. A. Strong

This is a simple yet thoughtful book that shares ways to engage in random acts of kindness and to build habits of kindness with your family.

KINDERGARTEN TO SECOND GRADE (AGES 5–7)

Maddi's Fridge by Lois Brandt

Sofia learns that her best friend, Maddi, and her family don't have enough money for food. Sofia is torn between keeping her best friend's secret and confiding in her mother so that they can find a way to help Sofia's family.

Enemy Pie by Derek Munson

Jeremy Ross moved into the neighborhood and he's not nice. At least that's what the narrator thinks. When the narrator's dad agrees to bake enemy pie for Jeremy, the boy invites Jeremy over for the day to feed him a slice of that special pie.

*Chocolate Milk, Por Favor: Celebrating Diversity
with Empathy* by Maria Dismondy

It's Gabe's first day of school in America, and he doesn't speak English. Johnny doesn't like the way Gabe talks and decided he doesn't want to be friends with him! This book teaches kids about the values of empathy and compassion.

THIRD TO FIFTH GRADE (AGES 8–10)

Last Stop on Market Street by Matt de la Peña

CJ and his grandmother take a bus ride across town on Sundays. CJ sees all the things that are wrong or negative in his community and his grandmother's kind spirit helps CJ see all the beauty in what's around him and to be grateful for what he has.

I Walk with Vanessa by Kerascoët

This powerful picture book tells the story of one girl who decided to be an upstander when a classmate was being bullied. This one act of kindness sparks an entire community to do the same.

The Invisible Boy by Trudy Ludwig

No one in the class notices Brian and his creative talents until he uses that talent to make the new student feel like he belongs. This act of kindness changes the way his classmates see Brian.

SIXTH TO EIGHTH GRADE (AGES 11–13)

Freak the Mighty by Rodman Philbrick

Max and Kevin were always outcasts but found belonging with each other. Their differences create an unbreakable bond as they navigate through life-changing situations.

The Science of Breakable Things by Tae Keller

Natalie's mom is suffering with depression and Natalie is desperate to help her. Her last chance is to win the prize money from the science project at school to take her mom to see the cobalt-blue orchids that her mom loves. This is a powerful book to facilitate discussions about mental health.

Pay It Forward by Catherine Ryan Hyde

Trevor McKinney's middle school social studies teacher challenged the class to come up with an idea that could change the world. Trevor comes up with a simple plan that transforms his entire community.

SOCIAL JUSTICE ENGAGEMENT

NEWBORN TO PRESCHOOL (NEWBORN TO AGE 4)

Get Up, Stand Up by Bob Marley and Cedella Marley

This is a wonderful primer to teach your children to stand up for themselves and for others.

No!: My First Book of Protest by Julie Merberg

A toddler using the word "no" can sometimes feel overwhelming for parents. This book introduces little ones to historical activists who used the word "no" to make social changes.

Woke Baby by Mahogany L. Browne

This book is a beautiful celebration of toddlerhood and the potential of raising a child who is capable of making changes in the world.

KINDERGARTEN TO SECOND GRADE (AGES 5–7)

Giant Steps to Change the World by
Spike Lee and Tonya Lewis Lee

Children can begin engaging in activism even in the earliest years. Using examples of historical activists, this story presents icons as regular people who stood up for what they believed in and helped change the world, one step at a time.

*The Youngest Marcher: The Story of Audrey Faye Hendricks,
a Young Civil Rights Activist* by Cynthia Levinson

Learn about Audrey Faye Hendricks, the youngest activist at a civil rights protest in Birmingham, Alabama.

If You're Going to a March by Martha Freeman

This story helps young activists prepare and participate in peaceful protests.

THIRD TO FIFTH GRADE (AGES 8–10)

*Sit-In: How Four Friends Stood Up by Sitting
Down* by Andrea Davis Pinkney

This book tells the story of how four Black male college students decided to take a stand by sitting down.

Voice of Freedom: Fannie Lou Hamer
by Carole Boston Weatherford

This is an account of Fannie Lou Hamer's life, from her childhood as a daughter of sharecroppers to the last years of her life fighting for civil rights and equity.

Intersection Allies: We Make Room for All by Chelsea
Johnson, LaToya Council, and Carolyn Choi

The intersectionality of the nine characters in this story is highlighted and celebrated. This book is a fantastic example of how we can use our privileged identities to support others.

SIXTH TO EIGHTH GRADE (AGES 11–13)

A Good Kind of Trouble by Lisa Moore Ramée

Shayla is a rule follower. She feels comfortable with boundaries. But when her sister, Hana, is active in the Black Lives Matter protests, Shayla realizes that sometimes it's important to break the rules.

One Crazy Summer by Rita Williams-Garcia

Eleven-year-old Delphine and her two younger sisters find themselves spending the summer in California with a mother that chose a life with the Black Panthers instead of being a mother to the girls in Brooklyn. What will they learn about the mother that abandoned them for the last seven years?

Count Me In by Barsha Bajaj

Neighbors Karina and Chris, along with Karina's grandfather, were attacked in a race-based hate crime. Karina and her grandfather, an Indian American, were called Muslim terrorists during the attack. Karina decides to take action in her community.

SELF-ADVOCACY

NEWBORN TO PRESCHOOL (NEWBORN TO AGE 4)

Hair Love by Matthew A. Cherry

A Black daddy learns to style his Black daughter's gorgeous curly hair, teaching self-confidence and self-love.

***Be Who You Are* by Todd Parr**

This book shows young children that it's awesome to be the person you were meant to be.

***Ella Sarah Gets Dressed* by Margaret Chodos-Irvine**

Ella loves to express herself by wearing bright colors and patterns and fancy style. Before she leaves the house, all her family members comment on Ella's outfit. Will she listen to them and change her clothes?

KINDERGARTEN TO SECOND GRADE (AGES 5–7)

***I Am Enough* by Grace Byers**

We all want to raise children who are self-confident and who know that they are worthy. This is a great book to begin the journey of self-acceptance and self-love.

***Red* by Michael Hall**

This book teaches kids not to be afraid to be themselves, even when others want them to change.

***Amazing Grace* by Mary Hoffman**

Grace's family tells her she can be anything. So, when a boy at school tells her she can't be Peter Pan because she's Black, Grace's grandmother has something to say about that.

THIRD TO FIFTH GRADE (AGES 8–10)

***What Should Danny Do?* by Adir Levy**

Every choice that you make has consequences. This book allows the reader to help Danny make choices during his day.

*Weird!: A Story About Dealing with Bullying
in Schools* by Erin Frankel

In this book, young Luisa is called “weird” by her classmate Sam when she is just being herself. We watch what happens as Luisa is supported by her peers to stand up to Sam.

The Thing Lou Couldn't Do by Ashley Spires

In this story, a young girl named Lou learns to change her mindset, stop procrastinating, and face the things she's afraid of.

SIXTH TO EIGHTH GRADE (AGES 11–13)

Brown Girl Dreaming by Jacqueline Woodson

In powerfully moving autobiographic prose, Woodson describes her childhood and growing up Black in America, offering young readers the opportunity to see what it means to fight for justice and equality.

Trout and Me by Susan Shreve

Ben has ADHD and dyslexia. As much as he tries to focus, he often finds himself getting in trouble. Trout learns how he can help Ben be appreciated for who he is instead of being judged by his behaviors.

Bluefish by Pat Schmatz

Travis, an eighth-grader living with his alcoholic grandfather, finds himself at a new school and befriending Velveeta, a popular girl. They both struggle with the weight of family secrets but find comfort and support in their special friendship.