



Appendix C: Kids at Social Justice Rallies and Protests

ACT for Social Justice [blog post](#), Oct. 24, 2016, by Angela Berkfield



"Mom, why are we going to the rally?"

"Black people are being killed by police in a way that is not fair, not just. Many people in our town are going to the rally to say this must stop."

A quiet descends on the car. I know I'll have more questions later, but for now my 4- and 7-year-old kids are digesting my answer.

As parents in these tumultuous times, there are some big decisions to make about how we will show up for social justice. Rallies and protests are powerful tools, and there are some big questions parents are asking about bringing their kids. Are we putting our kids in harm's way? Are we brainwashing our kids by bringing them to rallies on issues that we feel passionate about but they haven't made their own decisions about? Are our kids ready to hear the devastating realities of our world?



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This summer in our rural New England town there were a couple rallies with nearly 400 people, a big deal in our town of 12,000. Two were Black Lives Matter rallies, shining the spotlight on the injustice of black men who continue to be killed by law enforcement (see [The Guardian's counter](#) for numbers). And two rallies were in solidarity with [Standing Rock](#), a Sioux tribe in North Dakota, where since April hundreds and sometimes thousands have gathered from over 100 tribes to stop the oil pipeline that crosses two rivers and through sacred land. This is the frontline of climate justice.

At the rallies it was beautiful to see many families with kids. At the Black Lives Matter rally there was a group of high school students leading the chants!

Here are a few stories from parents about why they brought their kids to these rallies, or why they chose not to, and also how they talked with their kids about the rallies. One white mother, who has kids (also white) who are 2, 7, and 11, after the rally asked her 7-year-old if he understood what the chanting was about, and he replied, "I understand black lives matter, and no justice means no peace." Later they were able to talk about how people of color have a different experience with the police because of the color of their skin and how they are having a hard time with the justice system right now. This mother's 11-year-old internalizes injustice and works through her anxiety about it over a longer period of time. Mom is looking at the [Zinn Education Project](#) to find age-appropriate teaching resources and will start reading *A Young People's History* out loud with her daughter.

Another white mother had never brought her (white) kids ages 5 and 7 to a social justice rally and didn't feel ready to have a conversation with them about police violence against black folks. She came to the rally by herself and did some work to think about having that conversation with her kids. She is now ready and will most likely bring her kids to the next rally.

One mother of color brought her 9- and 11-year-old kids to both of the rallies. They were really nervous and scared on the way to the Black Lives Matter rally. As the kids began to interact with the people around them, they began to relax and be able to fully show up. Said the mother, "The energy at a BLM rally is definitely different from a



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climate protest. The intensity is powerful on a deeper level when you are fighting for your culture, your dignity, your people to be treated like people.”



People have a lot to say on the topic of bringing kids to protests--you can google it and find a wide variety of opinions. Among resources I like is a [blog post](#) by Jennifer Harvey, who writes about her thinking behind taking kids to politically charged events and blows the question of brainwashing out of the water. You can also read our [blog post](#) about families showing up for racial justice, and another about why we support [Black Lives Matter](#).

When it comes down to it, I choose to take my kids to social justice rallies because injustice is real and we have to do something about it. Inaction only contributes to injustice. Are my kids super excited about going? No, but they aren't excited about going to the dentist or going to school every day either. Showing up at rallies feels like



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a necessary part of creating a society that is good for all citizens and for the planet, just as going to the dentist is really good for our overall personal health.

Rallies, marches, protests, and sit-ins are important tools in the struggle for justice. Many things I do to fight for justice aren't as visible to my kids: donating to BLM, advocating against racism in my community, signing petitions, having conversations and leading trainings about racism... Rallies are something my kids can actually participate in, and a chance for them to see that many people care about injustice. Unfortunately this is not something they are learning about in school or from mainstream media, so I have chosen to be intentional about making sure they have access to the information that's shared at these events.

My hope is that my kids will be motivated to fight the injustice they come up against in



their lives: a kid being treated unfairly at school, curriculum that is disrespectful to Indigenous people, an unjust policy on their sports team. When it comes down to it, my kids will make their own choices in life; I can't (and don't want to) control their thinking and action. What I can do is teach them about what is happening in the world and give them tools for making positive change. My kids don't go around the house chanting "no justice, no

peace--no racist police!" yet; they aren't so easily indoctrinated. But they are listening. They are watching. I trust them to make their own decisions about how they will show up for justice.

Will you be taking your kids to rallies and protests in the future, or not? Why do you show up for rallies with your kids? Or why don't you?