4.4 Oh No! My Child Said Something Racist

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SPEAKERS

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You're listening to the First Name Basis podcast, season one, episode four--Oh No! My Child Said Something Racist.

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Teaching our children to be inclusive and anti-racist starts with us within the sacred walls of our home. First Name Basis is designed to empower you with the confidence you need to be a leader in your family and a change maker in your community. Together, we will wrestle with hard questions and use the answers to create the world we want: a world that reflects our values of inclusion, compassion, and courage. I'm your host, Jasmine Bradshaw, and I am so excited to be on this journey with you.

00:51

Hello, First Name Basis, fam. I am so glad you are here. Y'all: why has it taken me so long to make this episode? So many of you have asked me this question a million gajillion times. And I'm so happy that we are talking about it today. Today we are talking about what do you do--Oh, no. What do I do? My child said something racist. Of course, I need to start with a trigger warning for all of my Black, Brown, Indigenous, People of Color out there. We're talking about racism. It's hard.

It's heavy. Take care of yourself.

01:31

Okay, your child made a racist comment or said something that was prejudiced. And now you're not sure where to go what to do what to say, you're in the right place. So in order to guide our conversation, today, I came up with the Five B's. Five B's for what you can do, how you can respond, when your child makes a racist comment or says something that is prejudiced. Now we will go through each one individually, but I just want to give you a quick overview: The first one is Be Proactive. The second one is Be Calm. The third one is Be Curious. The fourth one is Be Clear. And the fifth one is Be Reflective. So let's break down each of the five B's so that you know just what to do next time your child says something that makes you go, "Oh, my goodness, you shouldn't have said that! Oh, no."

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Before we jump into the Five B's, I do want to remind you that we are all swimming in the same water. Which means that it's not only white children who can make comments like this--sometimes children of color make comments that may be prejudiced, even against their own community group that they are a part of. And that all has to do with something called internalized oppression, which is a whole other conversation. But I'm hoping that this first Be, Be Proactive, will help you to build that foundation if you do have a child who is a person of color, so that they will feel secure in themselves and don't feel like they have to play into the lies of white supremacy, that are telling them or telling others around them that they are lesser.

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Okay, the first B: Be Proactive. So our children are being sent these messages by the world around them all the time, telling them who is important and who isn't, who we should value and who we shouldn't. So we have to be proactive in our homes and in our classrooms in our communities about teaching our children who is valuable—everyone, everyone has so much value. But I'm sure you know by now that people who are white or people who hold white privilege are overrepresented in the media or in our books, and movies in terms of the ideal. So in order to counteract that message, we have to make sure that we are preparing an environment for our children, that shows them that people of color, people in marginalized communities, LGBT people, are all valuable, critical, brilliant, amazing contributors to our society. So that first B is Be Proactive, because we are creating this environment where our children can see themselves reflected and see people who are different from them reflected as positive role models, as people to look up to, and people to turn to for strength, right.

The other reason I wanted us to be thinking about how we can be proactive is because white parents often will wait until something happens to begin having conversations with their children about race. So we see something happen on the news, a police officer murders a Black person in the street or something racist happens in your community or at your family dinner, and then you feel like you have to have a conversation. Well, if we are being proactive, if we are helping our children build the foundation, then these conversations will be a lot more fruitfull when it does come to a head, when something bad happens in our community. Because we all know that it is going to happen. It's going to continue to happen. And that's why we're here to build anti-racist families so that we can dismantle the systems that perpetuate these racist events.

05:18

So you don't have to wait until something racist happens to talk about race. And this is where I have to remind you about our Race Talk Roadmap. If you remember from last week, I shared that we created a brand new, free resource just for you so that you can begin these conversations about race with your family. And we created one for younger kiddos and one for older kiddos so that you can choose which one would be more developmentally appropriate for them. Because we're going to want to start in a different spot depending on if we have young ones or if we have older ones. So this Race Talk Roadmap will give you the first three steps that you can take on your anti-racist journey as a family. And I want to remind you, too, that we are having these conversations on an ongoing basis. So just because you've explained melanin to your children once before, or maybe you've explained, "Hey, you know, race is not rooted in biology. Race is socially constructed." Maybe you've had that conversation—we need to be having it again and again and again, so that we can help our children really internalize what we are teaching them.

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So you can get your hands on your very own Race Talk Roadmap, at firstnamebasis.org/racetalk. That's firstnamebasis.org/R-A-C-E-T-A-L-K. And you can download it completely for free. All you have to do is enter your name and your email and it will be sent right to your inbox.

06:47

So we're being proactive, we are downloading the Race Talk Roadmap. And there is an amazing quote that I want to share with you from a fantastic book that I read. The book is called "Anti-bias Education for Young Children and Ourselves." It's by Louise Derman-Sparks and Julie Olsen Edwards. And they talk about this idea of how powerful it is for us to be proactive in our homes and in our classrooms. It says quote, "if we want children to thrive in a diverse world, and to

choose to stand up for themselves and others to create a more just place for all, then we must be proactive in helping children to construct a healthy, positive racial identity and respectful attitudes towards people of differing racial identities." End quote.

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So that leads me to two of the best things that we can do, as parents and as caregivers, for our children to build a strong foundation of anti-racism within them. And I have to mention that both of these strategies come from the book that I just quoted from. So the first thing that we need to do is we need to teach our children about who they are, and where they come from. This will give our kiddos a strong sense of identity of purpose, and an idea that there is something going on that is bigger than themselves, right? Something really amazing that they can tap into to get a better idea of their sense of self. Now, this practice is important for all children, because children of color are being sent messages from the world around them, that they're not enough or that they're lesser. And so we have to be proactive in building them up and helping them see the amazing potential that they have in this world. And of course, too, we need them to know that there is so much strength in their ancestors, that they have the opportunity to draw from. Now, when it comes to white children and children who hold white privilege, they need to understand that their worth and their brilliance and their brightness comes from who they are, and not from their whiteness. Their brilliance does not come from being white. Whiteness is not a heritage. White children have a rich cultural histories, but they often don't really have very much idea of what they are or where they come from, because our society has taught them that whiteness is what makes them good, instead of helping them see that the goodness is inside of them. So I actually have a whole episode about this topic. It's season one, episode four. So throwing it way back to the beginning of the podcast. It's called "Using Your Culture to Build Your Child's Sense of Self," and I'll be sure to link that in the show notes.

09:36

Of course, you know that I spend a lot of time reading and learning from different anti-racist educators and researchers, and two of my favorites are Britt Hawthorne and Tiffany Jewell. And they really taught me that children of color need to be given more opportunities to take up space, while children who hold white privilege need to understand what it looks like to step aside and create space. So as we are teaching our kiddos, who they are, where they come from, helping them embrace their identity, helping them build their sense of self, that's something that we should be keeping in the front of our minds: are we showing them how to either take up space, or how to create space based on the privileges that they hold? So that's the first thing that we're doing— we're building their identity, building their sense of self.

The second thing that we are doing is teaching our children that differences are a normal and exciting part of life. Our kiddos, they need to be comfortable with diversity, because this comfort that they have with diversity will be a very key element when it comes to developing their anti-racist practice in their life. When talking about these two proactive strategies, Louise Durbin-Sparks and Julie Olsen Edwards said, quote, "by providing language and information, we help prevent racism from harming children's evolving self concept or influencing them to reject or fear others." End quote. So what they're saying here is when we give them the language, when we give them the understanding, we are either helping them build the shield around themselves to prevent harm from racism, or we're helping to teach them how to make sure that they're including and being accepting of others instead of rejecting and fearing them.

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Okay, so we've been talking about this for a little while, and you're sitting there thinking, "Okay, yeah, that's wonderful, be proactive, but my child does something racist and I don't know what to do". So the rest of the Bs, that was the first B of our Five Bs, Be Proactive. The rest of them are in response to something racist, or prejudiced, that your child has said. So let's break that down, because chances are, even if you build a strong foundation for your child, they will probably say something prejudiced at some point in their life, and you're going to have to know what to do and how you can respond.

12:02

I want to remind you that children begin to develop these prejudices before they're even in preschool. And then we really start to see them play out when they're in spaces with other children, where they're figuring out the world. So we see them on the playground, we see them at school, maybe when they're doing centers and moving around the classroom and playing in the little play kitchen at preschool. We are seeing it come out in those spaces. There was actually a year long study that was done at a racially diverse preschool. And they studied the children as they were playing and interacting. And what they realized is that the children, quote, "learned racial terminology, used racial language to describe themselves and others, and used racial terms as negatives when teasing or excluding children from play. End quote. So these little ones are not too young to be talking about race, skin tone, identity, fairness, all of those different things, because we are seeing it come out in their play. So they need an opportunity to talk to someone who can guide them about that. And that is where you come in.

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One thing that you might notice, or one thing that I want to make you aware of, I guess I should say, is that when you start talking to your children about race, you might notice that they make a racist comment. And you're probably like, "Wait a minute! Where did I go wrong? I thought talking about race was supposed to help this, but I feel like I'm making it worse." I heard that from a mom recently. And I want to assure you that it's actually beneficial that your children are expressing these things because it's already in their heads. So they have these thoughts. And now they're finally saying them out loud, because you have created a space in which it's okay for them to express these ideas, so that you can figure out "okay, what do you have in there? What do we need to unpack. What is true, what is untrue, what aligns with our values as a family and what doesn't."

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So I'm just here to tell you that it is very common for children to start expressing those ideas when you begin talking about race, because now that they feel comfortable talking to you about it, they're sharing the beliefs that they've begun to internalize. And in the book "Anti-bias Education for Young Children and Ourselves," it says, quote, "As children first begin to talk about identity and fairness, they may make more rather than fewer biased comments than before. But such comments are a natural part of the anti-bias process. It takes many attempts before they learn a new way of thinking about differences. So children need to be free to ask questions and share their ideas. End quote.

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Now, just because I'm saying that it's common doesn't mean that these comments that they make are not harmful. So that is where we as adults come in. We have a responsibility to help them repair the harm when they say something prejudiced bias racist, we are going to move on to our second be in just a moment. But before I tell you what to do, I want to tell you one thing that you absolutely need to avoid. And that is ignoring it. So if your child says something racist, biased, or prejudiced, please do not ignore this behavior. I was in the Google machine typing in "what do I do if my child says something racist?" just to see what was out there, to see "okay, is this already covered? Does this need to be a podcast episode?" Obviously, it does need to be an episode because I read an entire article where a very concerned mom wrote in and said, "My child is saying these racist things blah, blah, blah," and whoever—I don't know what their credentials were, the advice giver was saying, "Oh, just ignore it. Your child is doing this for attention." Yikes. Oh, my gosh, giant, super huge giant, the biggest yikes, ever in the whole wide world. Even if your child is doing this for attention, this behavior should not be ignored. Because when we ignore the behavior, we say that this harm is not something that I am willing to deal with. This harm is not something that is big enough for me to respond to. And the pre-prejudice that is forming in their minds is cemented when we ignore the racist comments. So don't please don't ignore it. Don't

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take the Google's advice, do not ignore the racism.

16:30

So what do we do if our children make racist comments? Now, I'm going to use the same example throughout so that I can take you from start to finish using this same story. And this is a real, this is a true real life true story. And I heard this when I was at a book club. So when I first moved into the home that we're living in now, there was a little neighborhood book club, and I went, and I can't even remember how we got on the topic, but one of the moms was saying that she was at the park with her daughter, and her daughter's white, and she was playing with a girl who's Black. and her white daughter said to the Black girl that she was playing with, "I don't like your brown skin." Now, of course, the mom of the Black girl was very upset about this and was talking to her saying, "Are you going to say something? Are you going to do something?" And this mom responded by saying, "Oh, well, it's not like she was trying to be mean. She was saying it just like she would say anything else. She was saying it like, I don't like your earrings". Now, first of all, saying "I don't like your earrings" is also rude. So you should probably talk to your children about that. But the effect of saying "I don't like your brown skin," and "I don't like your earrings are completely different."

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So what do you do if your child is the one making a comment like this at the park? This leads us into our second B. So our first B was Be Proactive. Our second B is in response to the racist comment and that is to Be Calm. Talking about race is a big topic that most people have big feelings about, right? You have big feelings, your little ones can sense your big feelings and they have big feelings. So we need to remain calm. When something like this happens. Our little ones are looking to us for guidance about like, "Should I freak out right now? Is this the time to freak out?" It's like when you're on a plane. Just a couple weeks ago, I was on a plane flying home from Utah to Arizona, and there was a big bump. We were not expecting it. Everybody on the plane screamed. And the first thing we did was look to the flight attendants to see if they were freaking out because you know, right, everybody knows if a flight attendant is freaking out, it is just about time to freak out. So we all look to the flight attendants. The flight attendants looked calm, cool, collected. Cool as a cucumber. And we all actually started laughing because we realized, "okay, there's nothing to worry about." So when this happens, our kiddos are looking to us, and we need to be remaining calm. Now we need to try not to overreact. But we also need to try not to under react. In her book, "Start Here, Start Now," Liz Kleinrock, an educator and anti-racist educator says, quote, "Sweeping comments under the rug or hardly reprimanding students who don't understand the gravity of their words, contribute to an environment of mistrust." End quote. So under-reacting like this mom did where she said, "Oh, it's okay. She would have said that about her earrings," that is an underreaction, and that is contributing to an environment of mistrust. For

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example, I bet the woman at the park probably didn't want her daughter to be playing with this woman's white child anymore, knowing that she might be hearing racist things and that her mom wasn't going to do anything about it. And let me tell you: I definitely didn't go back to that book club. And I have never sent my children over to her house, nor will I ever send them over to her house, because I do not trust that she is going to react appropriately if something racist or biased happens when my children are in her care.

20:07

So when this happens, you might feel embarrassed or frustrated. But I really want to challenge you to reframe this as a teaching opportunity. This is a great opportunity for you to teach your family values to your child. When we reframe it as a teaching opportunity, it will really help us avoid shaming the child. Because shame and guilt are really not very productive. When it comes to doing anti-racist work. Liz Kleinrock also said in her book, quote, "Shaming kids for their ignorance is unproductive. All it does is teach them to fear being wrong, or asking questions. Shaming encourages them to disengage." End quote. And you've heard me say over and over again, "your kiddos questions don't go away, they just stop asking them." So depending on how you react to the questions that they bring to you, or to the comments that they say, is going to determine whether or not they continue to come to you in these situations where they need guidance.

21:13

All right, so we've got our first B: Be Productive. Our second B, Be Calm. And our third B is Be Curious. This is the stage when you are going to begin opening up the conversation with your child. Now depending on the situation, I would ask the other parents involved if it's okay if you have this conversation right there, or if they would like you to talk to your child individually. Now, as many of you know, I used to be a second grade teacher. And I want to tell you that if you're a teacher, you should have this conversation with all of the students that are involved, so that they can learn together. And so that the student who was harmed knows that you're going to support them, and you're going to do what's best to keep them safe. But when you're at the park, or when you're at someone's house, that's kind of different, because parents will have different comfort levels for these types of conversations. And you want to be respectful of that. So when it's someone else's child, you need to make sure you're asking them, "is it okay that I talk to her about this comment and unpack what it means and help her understand the harm that was done? Do you want me to do this right here with your child present and involved in the conversation? Or do you want me to pull her off to the side?" So before you jump into teaching mode, and helping them understand why what they said wasn't okay, you really want to approach the situation with curiosity, have them explain in their own words, what happened, say, can you tell me what's going on? Or can you explain what happened to me? And then once they tell you, "she said this...I said

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that...this was my response..." You can see, where did this comment stem from? Did it stem from a bias that is forming within them? Did it stem from, maybe this other child has a toy that they wanted to play with and instead of giving it to them right away, they got frustrated, and so that's why she said, "Well, I don't like your brown skin." If that's the case, she needs to understand that there are many different ways to handle that situation, and rejecting someone because of their skin color is not an appropriate response.

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This will also show, you what is the underlying belief that your child is holding? Have they heard someone in your home, in your family, in their community, speak negatively about people with brown skin? Maybe they see parallels. I have heard people say all the time, "Oh, my husband was up for this job but he didn't get the job because they had to give it to a brown person." Your child is internalizing these conversations, and they're saying, "Okay, my mom's friend, who I really love and trust and respect, says that these brown people are taking things away from us. And now I'm at the park, and this brown person is taking something away from me. So that's when I have to say, I don't like your brown skin. I'm not only standing up for myself, and the thing that you've taken away from me, I'm standing up for my community and my family." Right? So we have to do some introspection into, where is this coming from? Where is my child getting these ideas? So once you ask them to explain the situation, in their own words, you can follow that up with, "Why did you say that to your friend?" That way they can try to draw out of themselves what they're feeling, what they were thinking when they made the comment. Now I need you to be careful because this isn't saying. "Why would you say such a thing?!" That is very shame-y and that is something that we're trying to avoid. This is a question that we are using to gain more information about the root of the prejudice.

24:44

So in our five B's we have, Be Broactive, Be Calm, Be Curious. And our fourth is Be Clear. You want to make sure that in your response, you are very clear and helping your kiddo understand, what is the harm that was done? And how can they help repair that harm? So during this stage of our Five Bs when we are being clear, we want to help our kiddos understand the impact of their statement. Now, if you remember, I always say that we have to understand that our impact is greater than our intent. So even if you didn't intend to hurt someone's feelings, even if you didn't intend to say something racist, if the impact is that it was racist, then we need to repair the harm. So we can help our children understand this as well. So here is how I would respond. If my child who holds white privilege was at the park. And they said to a Black child, I don't like your brown skin—now, I do need to tell you that in the book, "Start Here, Start Now," Liz Kleinrock has a whole section where she gives examples of racist or prejudiced things that children could say, and responses to them—so I was reading through her words, and I pieced together a few things that she had, and

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the things that I've learned in the past to craft this response. Here's what I would say: I would get down to her level I with her, and I would say, "Do you know why her skin is more brown than yours? Her skin is more brown because she has more melanin. Melanin is something that's in everyone's skin. Some people have more of it. And some people have less of it. Melanin protects our skin from the sun. But here's the thing for a very long time, people with a lot of melanin, people with brown skin, have been treated badly. Not because there's anything wrong with them or with their skin, but because some people think they deserve to have more money and land than others. So they made up lies about dark skin being bad." Then I would ask, "do you think it's fair for people with dark skin to be treated badly?" I want to draw your attention to one of the things that I said in that response. And that is this idea that we are not telling our kids, that the reason why people are treated badly is because of the color of their skin. I wish I could remember who I learned this from, but I saw it on Instagram recently where someone said, "Please stop telling children that Martin Luther King was treated badly because he was Black. Explained to them that Martin Luther King was treated badly because of racism and because of the hate that fuels racism. Not because of Blackness. Blackness is not the problem. White supremacy is the problem." So you probably heard that I said, "not because there's anything wrong with them or their skin. But because some people think they deserve to have more money and land than others. So they made up lies about dark skin being bad." So from there, we of course asked this question, "do you think it's fair for people with dark skin to be treated badly?" Now I'm sure your little one is going to say "No, no one should be treated badly." And that's when you respond: "Exactly. So when you say that you don't like her brown skin. It's not just that it's unkind. It's also that other people will think that you believe it's okay to treat people badly or unfairly."

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Now, this is her time to shine. When you ask her, "What do you think you should do to help your friend feel better?" This is your kiddo's opportunity to figure out "how am I going to fix this? How am I going to repair the harm that was done?" And of course, hopefully, they'll say, "Apologize. I need to apologize. I need to say I'm sorry." Help your child say I'm sorry. And help them say what they're sorry for. Do you see the power in guiding your child through a conversation like this?

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Something that you might have noticed is that this takes time. This takes a real investment of time and energy. And let me tell you: it's 100% worth it. It is so worth it when our children start to internalize the values that we hold as a family and the values that we should hold as a community. And it's such good practice. It's such good practice for them and for us, because as long as there's racism in the world, people are going to be saying racist, prejudiced, and biased things. And we need to know how to respond whether it's us saying it, or our children saying it.

We have covered four out of the Five Bs. The first was Be Proactive. The second was Be Calm. The third was Be Curious. The fourth was Be Clear. And our last B is Be Reflective. This is when you get to do some internal work as a parent, as a caregiver, as a teacher. When you are being reflective, I want you to talk about what happened with another adult that you trust; share how you think it went. What would you do differently next time? Ask for their advice. And then I want you to ask yourself, "Is there something in my environment that might be contributing to this prejudice? Or to this bias?" Is there someone in your family, someone in your church community, someone around you who is making these harmful comments, especially in this political climate? I mean, y'all this past couple of years has been absolutely atrocious when it comes to people saying blatantly awful, racist things. And I'm not saying they weren't there before, because believe me: I've been Black my whole life. I've been hearing this for a very long time, but it has been especially hard with some people who are really, really close to us. So what's going on in your family? What's going on in your church community? And what do you need to do as the adult here to start being in solidarity with Black and Brown people, being in solidarity with liberation, and being anti-racist? Take some time to audit your life and figure out what are the racist things that my child is hearing, whether it be in the home or outside of the home?

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The other thing that I want you to do when you're thinking about being reflective is to follow up with your child. Did you know that most people have to hear something seven times before they feel like they like really have their arms around it and understand what it is? That is a lot of times! Seven is a lot. So I want you to be snuggling up with your kiddo to talk about what happened. Have them explain the situation to you again, have them explain how they felt. You tell them how you felt. And then find ways to build these conversations into your everyday life over the next little while. So is there a book you could read about the topic? Is there a movie you could watch, or even an educator or someone that you trust to guide you through these conversations?

32:23

And that leads me to a super-duper exciting announcement. I'm so excited. I need like a confetti cannon; I need fireworks; I need all the things because this is so exciting. Here at First Name Basis, we have been working on a course just for families like yours. This course is called Ally Elementary. Just saying the name out loud, like, gives me butterflies in my belly. It's called Ally Elementary, because it is an opportunity for you to sit down with your babies, snuggle up on the couch, press play, and have conversations about race, racism, skin tone, privilege—all of these things to set the foundation for anti-racism in your home. We're going to be doing it together.

So here's how it works. There will be video lessons where I am teaching the foundational principles of anti-racism. So you will press play, and I'll be able to explain to you and your kiddo, what even is race? Where did this thing called race come from? What is privilege? What do we do with this privilege? And these lessons are aimed for elementary-aged kiddos. So Ally Elementary is really the perfect opportunity for you to continue having these conversations if you've started them already or if you are just beginning. All you have to do is press play. I'll have discussion questions, I'll have activities. Oh my gosh, it's gonna be so amazing. I have goosebumps. D'you have goosebumps.

34:03

So Ally Elementary will be launching at the end of October. And I know that sounds like it's a little ways away but I'm just too excited. I can't keep it to myself anymore. So if you would like to get on the waitlist for Ally Elementary, that will give you access to early bird pricing. And you will know exactly when the doors open, when you can enroll. Just go to firstnamebasis.org/waitlist and we will make sure that you are the first to know about Ally Elementary. You're the first to get your hands on it, and you're the first to get that early bird price. So Ally Elementary is coming. Y'all, it is coming. I'm so excited. I cannot wait to see the transformation in your family, in your home, in your classroom. If you're a teacher, it is going to be such a powerful experience for all of us. The conversations that we are going to have with our children are going to be life-changing, and you know I don't use that word lightly. So get on the waitlist, go to firstnamebasis.org/waitlist to sign up for updates about Ally Elementary and so that you will know exactly when it goes on sale and you will get access to early bird pricing.

35:16

All right, so how do you feel? How do you feel about having that conversation about the Five Bs? I hope that you feel more confident. I hope you feel more prepared to have these conversations and ready to jump in when something like this happens. because let me tell you, it will. So just a reminder as we wrap up, those Five Bs are: number one, Be Proactive. Number two, Be Calm. Number three, Be Curious. Number four, Be Clear. And number five, Be Reflective.

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If you are not already, please follow us on Instagram @firstname.basis. And if you are able to think of a situation in which you could have used the Five Bs, or you're like, "Oh my gosh, I cannot wait to put this into practice," reach out to me. Send me a DM, comment on one of the photos because I want to hear all about it. Okay, my friends, I love you so much. Please get on the waitlist for Ally Elementary because this is gonna be so fantastic. I hope you have the best week ever.

36:22

My friends, thank you for being here. I hope you can feel how much I believe in you, and how deeply I know that when we work together, we can make a real change in our community. Any of the books or podcasts or articles that I reference will be linked in the show notes. If you are looking for more detailed notes, be sure to head over to our Patreon community. On our Patreon site. I provide all of the outlines that I use to make the episodes. Everything is linked there so you don't have to take furious notes while you are listening. And don't forget to join us over on Instagram at firstname.basis. If you're interested in partnering with First Name Basis or doing some kind of collaboration, please email us at hello@firstnamebasis.orgblack. All right, have a great week my friends and I will talk to you again soon.

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