

Children's March Toolkit

This Toolkit will answer the **Who, What, When, Where, Why, and How** we created a **Children's March** for **#blacklivesmatter** in our community. We hope it will be helpful in thinking about how you might create one in **yours**.

Who joins in a Children's March?

That one's easy. Children's Marches are designed for children of all ages. Children's Marches include parents, caregivers, and other community members seeking a kinder, gentler, but nonetheless powerful way to speak out against inequality.



Why a Children's March?

Children's Marches are not a new idea. There have been children's marches almost as long as there have been protests. The current Children's March organization was created as a call for racial justice in response to #blacklivesmatter movement and the movement for equity. Large marches and protests were organized in cities and towns around the country in remembrance of **Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, Eric Garner, Tamir Rice**, and too many other lives lost to systematic violence.

As a family, we found those marches were powerful, but they were not always child-friendly. The crowds, the noise, the speeches, the loud chants and disturbing images often left both children and their parents without a space to join in the movement for racial justice. Since children and families exist at the very heart of #blacklivesmatter, the idea for the Children's March was born. The goal of The Children's March is to create an entry point, with spaces and places for children and families to join the movement.

When did the Children's March begin?

On January 3, 2015, almost 100 children, parents, and community members marched along Germantown Avenue in Philadelphia chanting "Black Lives Matter! Love and Justice!" and the 'Philadelphia Children's March' was born. Planning for the march took place largely on social media, and members in the group soon realized that while planning the march online, they'd created a local community energized around racial justice. They decided to keep the momentum going.

Where is the Children's March now?

Today the Philly Children's March exists both online and in person. The group shares experiences, questions, articles, books, videos and upcoming events on their Facebook page. They also plan actions, playdates, book groups, meet-ups and discussions about topics like how to talk with kids about race, racism, and even police brutality. But our group is not anti-police; we are pro-justice.

How does this Children's March toolkit work?

We hope that sharing ideas from the Philly Children's March experience will be useful to parents, children, and organizers in other towns as they respond to events and work to bring about real change

and real justice. This toolkit is designed so that anyone can host their own Children's March and use that as a springboard to continue community-building around racial justice in their own neighborhoods.

We know every neighborhood is unique, but we hope that sharing some of what we've done and learned along the way might be useful in other communities. The Toolkit is flexible- please take what works, adapt what doesn't, and ignore what doesn't resonate. And please join us on the [Children's March Facebook page](#) to report back to share ideas with us and let us know how your Children's March group evolves!

The **Children's March Toolkit** is organized into the following sections. *Organizing, Planning, Marching, After the March, and Resources*. We found that kicking things off with a march helped to quickly build and energize a community around this issue. We were able to refine, refocus, explore and expand from there.

Organizing the March

How We Did It:

We created a Facebook group and got the word out via Facebook (mostly) and Twitter that any families interested in marching in a family-friendly action for #blacklivesmatter should join our newly created Facebook group. We kept the group a 'closed' group so that we could fend off internet trolls.

In a closed Facebook group, one of the administrators of the group has to approve all new users and offensive posters can easily be removed. This meant a lot of clicking 'approve' in the early days, but other than that, it's not any more work than having an open group. Three people who emerged early on as thoughtful responders were asked to be co-moderators for the group. Each of us tried to field

comments and questions in a manner that continued the conversation, allowed members to express a variety of opinions, but remained respectful in both content and language.

Steps for Creating a Facebook Group

1. Create a Facebook group with the name of your location/area and children's march (ie. Baltimore Children's March). Here are the [directions to creating a group](#).
2. Consider changing the settings to [Closed Group](#).
3. Create a description for your group.
4. Post a welcome message and relevant photo on the page.
5. Post any event details for the march that have been decided.
6. Invite people to join through your personal pages and any relevant networks (churches, parenting groups, schools, etc.)

Once the Facebook group was established, we selected a page photo from a previous march and created a group description/mission statement and welcome message. The current **Mission Statement** for the Philly Children's March reads:

The Children's March for Love & Justice was originally conceived as a local, family-friendly event in response to the tragic events and lack of justice in Ferguson, Cleveland, New York, and around the country. The original march was held in Philadelphia on January 3, 2015. It was a child-friendly response to Ferguson, aimed at affirming the belief that #blacklivesmatter.

Since then, members of the Philly Children's March group have conducted other children's marches, marched as a family contingent in larger marches, met in person and online, and attended and created events to build community around racial justice. Our group is evolving as a community for exploring and addressing issues of race and racial justice across both race and

generations. We look forward to learning from one another about how to listen, to speak out, to call for racial justice, and to begin working for the systemic change needed for a more equitable and just society.

Planning the March

The purpose for our march was very clear from the start: to create a child-friendly response in support of #Black Lives Matter. As a result, planning for the march was quick and took less than a week. The decision not to indict in the Eric Garner case had just been announced, and in speaking to other local parents, we found a shared desire to respond to that injustice with a family-friendly action. Almost all of the planning was done online via our Facebook group. Here are the steps we took and offer as a guide:

1. **Identify seasoned activists and partners from within the black community to help you plan.** If we'd done more of this at the onset, planning would have been more streamlined... once we had a seasoned activist in our group, we at least knew what questions we needed to start asking ourselves.
2. **Brainstorm a child-friendly and safe route.** Some marches incorporate relevant points of interest (political or historical sites or the site of the tragedy), but we elected to create our route in a place where families could meet and children could run around safely at both the starting and ending points. We gathered in a large field before the march, and we ended at a playground/recreation center. This allowed time and space for parents to talk with one another while the children played. We also had older teens and adults ready to guide marchers along the route.
3. **Check to see if you need a march/protest permit.** In our case, we decided to stick to sidewalks to keep everyone safe and not have to worry about permit approval, but another family-friendly group marched in our city on the same day, and they secured permission to march in the street in their neighborhood. Different cities and towns have different regulations about who, how, and when a

permit is needed for marching or protesting. Since we weren't marching in the street, our march did not require a permit.

4. **Practice walking the route with at least one child.** Doing that on foot helped us figure out where to station our guides, which side of the road we wanted to stick to, and where potential tricky spots could be, especially with young children. It also allowed us to inform businesses along the route about our event.
5. **Contact Police.** Not every protest or action in our city notifies police ahead of time, however for safety reasons, we felt it important to do it. We notified the local precinct that covered the march route and the Civic Affairs Division as well. They asked general questions about the planned route, the purpose of the march, and what we had planned. On the day of the march, we were provided with a police escort who stopped traffic at crossing points, allowing us to all march as one big group.
6. **Partner with Organizations.** We were scheduling our march over the winter holidays, so reaching out was a challenge, but we did connect with some leaders from different faith groups and one local school. We have since grown our list of partners who support our group, and these ongoing relationships have provided us with materials and space when needed, as well as crucial input and support. One of the faith leaders who joined our group early on was a seasoned activist who provided invaluable advice on everything from thoughtful group processes to weather contingencies.
7. **Plan the program.** We printed out a program, but found that wasn't really necessary. But planning the beginning and end of the event was important, especially in working to connect the kids to why they were marching. Since the program became unwieldy to plan online with so many opinions and members on the page, we met in person for that piece. The planning meeting was open to anyone interested, and we had six members attend. We talked about songs that might fit with the movement, thought of ways for children to participate, debated wording and guidelines (which slogans and chants we would use, ones we might want to avoid), discussed visuals, sign-making and more. Planning both online and in-person was an eye-opening process, with some genuine differences of opinions that resulted in rich conversations and input.

8. **Find your People.** Who will speak? Who will lead the group in song? Who will lead chants? Who is the point person? Who will lead the march? Who will be liaison with police? Who will remind people of the route? Who will remind people of safety guidelines? Who will take video and photographs to share and use for a press release after the march?
9. **Create an Outreach Plan.** Even with the relative ease of social media, we needed to strategize about getting the word out. Since it was our first march, several of us were hesitant to promote too widely. We used Facebook, Twitter, emails to leaders of schools and faith groups, word of mouth, and some posters to promote. Even with wintry weather that day, this brought nearly 100 marchers, but kept the event size manageable for so many first timers.
10. **Create a Media Plan:** Crowdfund to see who will volunteer to create an online poster, and see if you have people who will also print out paper copies from home to distribute. Have other volunteers find contacts for the local newspaper, tv station, bloggers, and relevant online communities. Release a press announcement before the march to attract attention the day of, and have someone ready to quickly send one after the march to share how it went. (This is an area in which our group needs to improve.)
11. **Gather Materials.** Depending on your plan for pre-and post-march activities, you might consider the following:
 - Poster-making materials (posterboard, markers, etc.)
 - Balloons or signs for locating the starting point
 - Easily identifiable clothing (safety vests come in handy) for march leaders
 - A sign-up sheet for marchers interested in continuing with the group after the march
 - A portable loudspeaker
 - Tables for making signs, displaying materials, etc.
12. **Plan for Weather Contingencies:** Will there be a rain/snow date? Is there an indoor option available as backup? This was one thing we did not fully think through ahead of time, so in the hours leading up to our first march, we ended up scrambling for what to do about the wintry mix we were suddenly in the path of!

13. Create an Agenda: We planned for songs and speakers before and after the march and printed that info. into a program (not necessary to print, but can be helpful to people unfamiliar with songs). Our program before and after the march included the following (full program is available in the resource section):

- A few **speakers** who shared their stories and explained why their family was marching
- **Songs** with original or adapted lyrics that connect with the Black Lives Matter movement
- A **"sing-in"**... at the first march, ours was planned for 4 and 1/2 minutes to honor Michael Brown's death, but another group held a **"noise-in"** where families made noise with instruments and voices for that same length of time.
- **Appreciations:** We thanked people for marching, sang a few songs, and had refreshments at the end of the march. For our winter march, a local restaurant donated hot chocolate, and for our summer march, the same restaurant donated water ice.

14. Be flexible. Be gracious. Be open to new ideas.

At the March

We printed a banner and some balloons with our logo at the entrance to our gathering spot so that families could easily find us.

We provided lots of posterboard and markers so that families could **create their own signs** (we also had a sign-making party with anyone interested the night before so that there were posters ready to go).

Poster-making was tricky at our first march because of the weather, but we offered it for one hour before our second march, and we found that it provided a really valuable opportunity for families to meet each other and talk with children about the purpose of the day. It also gave the children something to share when they came up to the mic to talk about why they were marching.

Due to weather, we weren't able to follow the outdoor program as planned for our first march, so we adapted and did some of it along the way and some of it inside at the end. At our second Children's March, we talked, sang, shared and chanted together for about 20 minutes before marching.

Chants at both marches were call-and-response and included the following statements:

Black Lives Matter... **Love and Justice!**

For Eric... **Love and Justice!**

For Michael... **Love and Justice!**

For Tamir... **Love and Justice!**

From Ferguson... **to Philly! BLACK LIVES MATTER!**

From Cleveland... **to Philly! BLACK LIVES MATTER!**

From New York... **to Philly! BLACK LIVES MATTER!**

From Baltimore... **to Philly! BLACK LIVES MATTER!**

What do we want? **JUSTICE!**

When do we want it? **NOW!**

Along the route, we had children pull the wagon with the mic and speaker in both marches. A 16 year old led the chants for the second march, sharing the mic with children along the way.

For the second march, we had a few more materials printed up. We had t-shirts, coloring books, information cards and balloons with our logo.

After the March

Debrief- we debriefed a bit online and a bit in person about how the march went, what kids thought of it, what we would have done differently, etc.

- **Lesson Learned:** We have since had another march and handed more control during the march over to the children. In our solidarity march with Baltimore, we had children sharing the mic for the songs, explaining their posters to the crowd and leading chants throughout the march. We are working on finding more ways to give the children more ownership of the group, including involving older children in planning future events and actions.

Next Event- One of the members in our group offered to host a “House Meeting” potluck for parents to get to know one another. She capped the group at 15 and graciously hosted us at her house. That event gave us a nice opportunity to talk about why we were committed to this work and what next steps might be.

Posting Content- we had two articles about our march published online. Another children’s march that was held on the same day was on the local news. The more outreach you do before the march, the more press you will receive. It’s a very attractive thing for media to cover, and the more media exposure, the more the message is heard.

Connecting to Events- we promoted the next event, which was taking our children to attend a city-wide march. But we planned to join with other families and walk together in a “family contingent” to create a safe bubble for children within the big march. We also worked on planning our own group events. We talked about hosting a minimum of one family-friendly event for racial justice per month. Most months, we’ve done much more than that.

Group Events

House Meetings- A house meeting is when someone in the group offers their house as a meeting spot for sharing some food, building community and discussion. We've had planning house meetings, potluck house meetings, and house meetings both with and without children. Our format is typically to gather, eat together, and then sit in a circle and discuss, plan, etc. One group member typically leads the discussion. We have also discussed having guest speakers at future house meetings.

Larger Marches- Members of our group have met up at larger marches and walked together, creating a child-friendly "family contingent."

Witness- Some group members have met up at agreed upon times and locations and held protest signs so that people and cars passing by could witness their assertion that Black Lives Matter. This has been a very positive experience for both adults and children since there is often a lot of positive feedback. It's also easy to organize and powerful.

One-to-ones— Some members of the group who previously hadn't met have arranged to meet 1:1 to grab a coffee, discuss issues, plan, shared ideas, and have conversations... often, but not always, across race.

Playgroups- one member of our group created a playgroup that meets twice/month for parents of toddlers and preschoolers. This is a multi-racial group where families can share questions, ideas, and play!

Book Talks- many of us have met up at relevant book talks, as several community bookstores have offered relevant topics that appeal to our work (some in connection with our group, others not). There was a book browse/talk for using children's books to talk about race, a story time for young children with a march protest book, a book talk for older children about...., as well as a book talk and book signing about a biography of Bayard Rustin (Martin Luther King's right-hand man) written by his life partner.

Community Events- some of us met up at a "My Son Matters" photo exhibition and others attended a community play about the civil rights movement as well. We try to highlight upcoming events on our group Facebook page.

Community/School Booths- we have secured tables to share our group at some community and school events. For these, we typically print up information cards and a sign-up sheet, offer an activity, and bring balloons and coloring books to distribute.

Activity Ideas

We have used some activities to help to get to know one another and/or encourage people to engage in the purpose of our group:

Step to the Middle- Form two parallel lines. One person is the "caller" and says things like, "Anyone who step to the middle." What gets "called" can be light (anyone who likes ice cream, step to the middle)

or more topical (anyone who has been to a march, step to the middle), or heavier (anyone who heard about the church in Charleston, step to the middle).

Group Pantomime- Great for getting to know each other's names. People stand in a circle and think of their favorite activity. One by one, they say their name and pantomime their favorite activity. The members of the group then greet the person by name, pantomime the activity, and then guess what it was. This can also be done with march-related choices "Pantomime your favorite way to show that Black Lives Matter." (Participants can pantomime marching, holding a sign, reading, singing, chanting, etc.)

6 Word Stories- This is a real favorite that both children and adults can do. Using a prompt, each person writes (or dictates) a "6 word story" to answer the prompt. We did this at a community event when we had a booth, and we used the prompt, "Black Lives Matter means..." and had people plan their answer on one side (it helped both children and adults to see the prompt with six blanks) and write them more clearly on the other side of the card. We also took photos of everyone who did it to put on their card, but that's not necessary. (Link to cards we used is available in resource section)

Book/Song/Video + Activity- Easy and great with children of all ages. Read a book aloud and offer a related activity. For example, at one house meeting, one of the teenagers helping with the smaller children read *The Colors of Us* by Karen Katz and then offered multicultural markers for children to draw their families. This can also be done with poetry or can be very powerful with older children listening to, reading, and then examining song lyrics. We plan to use the lyrics to *Glory* by John Legend for an activity with older children. There are also many powerful videos for children of all ages that can spark great discussions.

Poster Making- So far, poster-making has generated the most conversation and allowed children and adults to explore their personal connection and commitment to racial justice. Deciding what to "say" on

your sign for a march or a “witness” can be a very powerful way for people of all ages to reflect on just why you’re doing it. Children typically add artwork and lots of illustrations to their posters, and we always encourage them to do the writing themselves if they’re able.

Activism/Organizing- This is definitely where we want to head in the future... finding ways to get families involved in activism related to racial justice. We did promote a voting campaign for publicly funded preschool as one of our “action items” at the second march, and relevant info gets shared in the Facebook group, but finding ways to connect kids and families with working for change is a priority as we head into the second six months of our first year together. We’ve identified issues such as education, wages, and police.... as some core

Resources for the Group

Personalized Logo & Items- we created a simple, logo for the group. This allows us to have a symbol that is easily recognizable and also easy to include on printed material. The logo is customizable, so any children’s march group can contact us at phillychildrensmarch@gmail.com to have their own logo sent to them, free of charge. (ex. If you create a group or a march in Baltimore, we can create a logo that has the name of your city on it... Baltimore Children’s March. It also says Black Lives Matter.) We’re also printing up lawn signs, and those can easily be customized and ordered for different locations (the cost for those is \$5 each, including stands) We’ve done Tshirts and balloons and book bags for our group too.

Children’s March Coloring Book- using several online resources, we created a coloring book that is easy to print and useful for coloring pages or stapled together as a book. These also offer children and parents a way to begin conversations at events and at home.