



Forming a Healthy Racial Identity

Identity is how we define ourselves, and how we understand the way in which we fit into the world.

- **Identity formation is a lifelong process with many stages**
- **To support your child, explore the ways your race influenced your identity**

● Identity formation is a lifelong process with many stages

Understanding who we are is a lifelong process that has many stages from early childhood, adolescence, leaving home, and starting a new family of our own. There is no precise timeline or specific age-range for each stage, but it is important to consider:

- When very young children interact primarily within the close family circle, it is common for them to identify more with their parents. They may even identify themselves as being of the same race as their parents, even when they are not.
- As socialization outside of the home begins, other children may question them about their race and the way their family looks. Children will be prepared to respond appropriately if parents have talked openly about skin color, race, racism and adoption.
- Children will develop a broad vocabulary about race and adoption when their parents talk with them about race, ethnicity and other differences. This will make it easier for them to respond more confidently as they get older.
- Through the adolescent and teen years, children begin an advanced exploration of what groups they do or don't fit into and how they feel about who they are. They may have resentment or other emotional reactions, and go through phases of both seeking out and rejecting their own race. They may resent or feel embarrassed by their parents and this may include a rejection of their parents' race.
- The process of forming a racial identity is an ongoing process that can influence who a person marries, where they live, how they parent, their course of study and choice of occupation.

● To support your child, explore the ways your race influenced your identity

Your child will need your support with identity formation through many stages of their life. In order to provide this support, you must explore the ways that your race has influenced your own identity.

- How does your race affect the way you see the world and the way the world sees you?
- When adopting a child of a different race, you must become racially aware. Explore media such as books, documentaries, movies, magazines and journals to learn more. If possible, speak with people of different races and ethnicities about their life experiences.



RACE: Turning to Learning

Learning about race and racism is a process, and responding to racism is a skill that must be learned. Parents in a transracial family might start out thinking that they can protect their child inside the family bubble, and that it doesn't matter how the rest of the world thinks about race, but racism is a fact of life and a part of human history. It is embedded in our culture. When you take on the role of a parent in a transracial family, it is important to become more racially aware. Understanding racism in its many forms makes you a better advocate for your child, and makes you a better parent.

- **Learn about racism**
- **Interrupt racism and respond effectively**

● Learn about racism

- **Become familiar with the topic**

Explore media that focus on racial issues such as books, documentaries, magazines and journals to help you develop an understanding of race and racism—both historically and currently. This knowledge is the foundation of your ability to recognize racism.

- **Recognize that not all racism is overt**

Not all racism is overt, much of it is subtle. It is common for us to think of racism as violent and extreme as we think of the past. While the history of racism is something that we must learn from and never forget, the reality in the United States today is that people of color are more likely to face racism that is subtle or “covert,” not violent or outwardly hostile. Yet it still has a malevolent effect on people's lives and our society as a whole. Covert racism is perpetrated by individuals and by institutions. It can be hard to recognize by both the victims and the perpetrators.

Examples of covert racism:

Being ignored

Being ridiculed

Being treated differently

- **Discuss race issues**

Talk with your children; make discussions about race and racism part of your family life. This will help you and your children become comfortable talking about the topic and processing it.

- **Seek experts and allies**

Seek out experts and knowledgeable allies to help you learn more. Join anti-racist networks of diverse families, multicultural communities, and organizations.



Race: Turning to Learning

● Interrupt racism and respond effectively

Interrupting and responding to racism means that you recognize it and take action to oppose it. All of these reactions model appropriate responses that will help you keep a level head, whether your child is present or not. Interrupting racism doesn't make it go away. Talk to your child and talk to others, and don't be afraid to ask questions and admit that you are still learning too.

- **Educating (at the moment)**

When someone says something that is unintentionally offensive, this is a great time to educate.

- **Advocacy (continual)**

Sometimes after educating a person, you may want to invite them to get involved. This way they can learn more and perhaps make an impact.

- **Walking away**

In some cases you may feel that the comment is intended to draw you into a confrontation in front of your child or may lead to a dangerous situation. In these cases it is best to walk away or to avoid the interaction in a respectful way.





Creating Connections: Cultures and Races

Connecting your child to his or her culture and racial identity is important when he or she is from a different race and culture than your own.

- **Honor the birth culture**
- **Involve your child in your family's culture**
- **Connect your child to same-race peers and role models**

● Honor the birth culture

- Participate with your child and show your interest and respect for his or her birth culture. To respect the birth culture is to respect the whole child.
- Learn and teach about your child's country of origin. The heritage, ancestry, and modern-day culture of the country of origin is a part of what makes your child who they are. Introduce your child to the "museum culture" and modern culture as well. Who are some famous citizens or leaders in the country? What languages are spoken? What sports and music are popular? What are some of the country's current events and achievements? Visiting the country of origin is one of the best ways to explore the culture.
- If your child was adopted domestically, learn and teach about the diversity of culture within our own country because his or her birth culture may be different from yours. Seek out and explore your child's culture through community events and media. Consider visiting your child's place of birth.

● Involve your child in your family's culture

- It is also important to connect your child to your family's culture and traditions. Teach by example the importance of culture in your own life. Sharing stories about your cultural background helps a child understand the importance of cultural identity.
- Don't feel that you must abandon one culture for the sake of the other. Consider your child's sense of belonging in your family as well as their sense of belonging to their birth culture.

● Connect your child to same-race peers and role models

- Having same-race peers and role models in your child's life is also very important. Same-race role models and peers understand what it is like to be a racial minority and can provide emotional support to your family. These relationships can help your child form a healthy cultural and racial identity and develop solutions to challenges they will face. You lead the way.
- Put yourself in settings where authentic relationships can develop naturally.
- Provide your child with same-race role models through biographies, media, internet resources and travel.
- Get involved as a family in causes and organizations that promote diversity. Through community involvement, you can make a difference and form life-long connections as a family.