Growing Up Different: Understanding our Families
Foster Care and Adoption and Its Impact on Learning, Identity, and Self-Image in Multiracial Families

Important Terms to Know Regarding Race

- **Race**: refers to physical differences that groups and cultures consider socially significant
- **Ethnicity**: refers to shared culture, such as language, ancestry, practices, and beliefs.
- **Culture**: is the ‘way of life’ of groups of people, meaning the way they do things.
- **Heritage**: the background from which one comes

Racial Identity

**Definition**: can be referred to as a sense of group or collective *identity* based on one’s perception that he or she shares a common heritage with a particular *racial* group.

- Lifelong, continuously changing process
- Influenced by those in a particular individual’s ethnic group as well as those outside it

Racial Identity Constructs

- Genetic Racial Identity
- Imposed Racial Identity
- Cognitive Racial Identity
- Feeling Racial Identity
- Visual Racial Identity

Influences on Racial Identity Development

- Age of child
- Cognitive development
- Racial environment
- Racial socialization experiences

Development of racial and cultural identity

- 3 years—Aware of race and skin color differences
- 4–6—can identify own group and may put positive or negative value; information from environment and parents
- 7–11—have idea of own and other racial and ethnic groups; explore meaning of being member of different groups; calculates social mathematics of belonging to particular group
- 12–18—assess importance of race and ethnicity
Elementary School

- School age children want to be like everyone else—they may start to pull away from heritage activities—Child won’t say “I wish I were White, but might say, let’s skip culture day—I’d rather play soccer.”
- Emerging Awareness: Children who attend racially diverse schools or reside in racially diverse communities are much more likely to become aware of race at an early age than those in more homogeneous settings.

Preteens

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Development</th>
<th>Identity Development</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preteens hate to feel different</td>
<td>Explore the question of identity, “Who Am I?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role models are key to forming identity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentor of their own race can be very influential</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Issues for parents and children

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Intervention</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Absence of an adult of color in the family</td>
<td>Shared parenting with adults of color</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need for race conscious parents</td>
<td>Education, attention, be an ally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness of adoption issues of rejection and abandonment</td>
<td>Validation not denial, anticipate and hold feelings for child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact of visibility</td>
<td>Awareness, preparation, practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hair and Skin care</td>
<td>Ask, partner, learn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Systemic racism/assumptions</td>
<td>Speak out, advocate, “arm” child</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Hair

- Hair is a huge part of identity. Learning how to take care of Children’s hair and community resources is essential to healthy identity

White Privilege

- Color Blindness:
  - “I don’t see color” “We are all part of the human race. We are all the same race.” “I don’t see you as a person of color”
- Transcendence
  - “What matters is what is on the inside, not on the outside”

1. A right, advantage, or immunity granted to or enjoyed by white persons beyond the common advantage of all others; an exemption in many particular cases from certain burdens or liabilities.
2. A privileged position; the possession of an advantage white persons enjoy over non–white persons.
3. To sum up, (1) white privilege should be defined carefully because it is contested; (2) that contestation is itself racialized, (3) which is what we should expect, since (4) socially invisible structures of oppression are more effective and enduring than socially visible ones.
**Educational Inequalities**

- 2005: 48% of 4th grade black students attended high-poverty schools, compared with 5% of 4th grade white students.
- The percentage of 16- to 24-year-olds who were high school dropouts was higher among black students (10%) than among whites (6%) and Asians/Pacific Islanders (3%).
- 2005 National Assessment of Educational Progress reading assessment, higher percentages of Asian/Pacific Islander and white students in grades 4th, 8th, and 12th scored at or above proficient than black students at the same grade level.
- In 2006, 18.5% of blacks aged 25 years and older earned a bachelor’s degree or higher, compared with 31% of whites.

**Issues for parents and children**

- Absence of an adult of color in the family
- Need for race conscious parents
- Awareness of adoption issues of rejection and abandonment
- Impact of visibility
- Hair and Skin care
- Child learns racially based survival skills
- Acknowledge differences and similarities within your family

**Things White Parents can do to be better informed**

- Understand and check personal bias
- Understand white privilege and how privilege can be used to be an ally and advocate for children
- Understand cultural humility and be aware
- Be open, celebrate culture and be open to trying and embracing new cultural traditions

**Understanding Personal Bias**

- Bias: Attitudes, opinions, and judgments we hold about a person or group of people before the presence of evidence that either confirms or contradicts. Bias can be positive or negative.

**Competence vs. Humility**

- Cultural Competence Vs. Cultural Humility
  - Competence implies an endpoint
  - Humility implies ongoing learning

  “To be culturally humble means that I am willing to learn,”
  - Joe Gallagher

**Don’t Be Afraid To Talk about Race**

- Differences are not intended to segregate, exclude or segregate. We are different precisely in order to make a world of our own. - Donna Tartt
What White Parents Should Know About Adopting Black Children

- The desire to love a black child must be matched by the willingness to learn and accept the unique needs of blackness and black childhood.
- “Going in with the mindset that this black child is no different from any other child is a naiveté the adoptive parent cannot afford...”
- [Link to Huffington Post article](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/la-sha/what-white-parents-adopting-black-children_b_8951402.html)

Comments from Transracial Adoptive Parents about Challenges faced due to racial differences

- Teased and asked questions by peers—upsets child
- She would like me to be brown also
- Kids make fun of her
- Hair and skin care
- People asking if AP is the real mom
- KKK pamphlet dropped on friend’s door
- Remarks at school—“can’t play here—only for White kids”

Intent Vs. Impact

WARNING DANGER: Microaggressions-behavioral, and environmental communications, whether intentional or unintentional, that transmit hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to a target person because they belong to a stigmatized group.

Real Examples:
- “So where are you from?..... No, like where are you really from?”
- “Your Hair is so fluffy its like dogs”
- “So where are your real parents?”
- “What was the orphanage like?”

Having “The Talk”: Racism and Racialized Violence

Help your children to stay safe! Have the “talk”

LISTEN

- If your child is sharing that something makes them uncomfortable; listen!
- **Golden Rule:** Do unto others as you would have them do unto you
- **Platinum Rule:** Do unto others as they would have you do unto them

Being an Ally

- “You aren’t an ally just because you love a member of the community—you are an ally because you actively fight against racial injustice.” — Jaeran Kim, PhD

Ally is not a noun. It’s a verb.
Imperatives…

▪ Have books, periodicals, toys, games, artwork that reflect your child’s heritage.
▪ Participate in cultural activities in your community.
▪ Be clear with yourself and your child as to her/his racial identity.
▪ Be intolerant of racism.

Adult Responsibilities

▪ Have friends, adults as well as children, that reflect your child’s heritage.
▪ Realize that in matters of race and culture you will learn the most about parenting your child from other cultural guides.
▪ Attend integrated schools.
▪ Live in an integrated community.
▪ Use services in your child’s cultural community.
▪ Learn how to take good care of your child’s skin and hair, dietary preferences.

Imperatives…

▪ Ask for help, and keep learning!
▪ Accept and understand that not all of her/his activities will--or ought to--include you.
▪ Always know whose side you’re on.
▪ Learn how to choose your battles. You can’t do everything.
▪ Embrace and celebrate diversity across the board.

Your Family Needs No Explanation

Model to your children they are not required to explain why their family looks different to everyone they meet. Each persons story is their story to tell when and to whom they decide to share it with.

Parenting Doesn’t Stop at 18

▪ Most young people experience a great mix of struggle for independence and fear if the unknown, Transracial adoptees have an added layer of trying to figure out where they fit in culturally independent of their families.
Contact Information

Mercedes Zahler,  
Youth Engagement Coordinator  
651-644-3036, ext. 112  
mercedeszahler@nacac.org

Kim Stevens,  
Program Manager  
508-254-2200  
kimstevens@nacac.org