

Impact of Race, Ethnicity, Culture, Class, and Diversity on Children and Families



RACE, ETHNICITY, & DIVERSITY MATTER

Assessing a youth's experiences related to discrimination is key. Whether it is related to race, adoption, or another status, ongoing discrimination is a type of trauma that impacts a youth's mental health.

Bias has many facets – beliefs or stereotypes; a range of feelings, i.e. like, dislike, comfort or unfamiliarity; and behaviors, such as avoidance or discrimination. Even if people never learn stereotypes from family, they are likely to have learned them from movies, TV or other sources. It is only through self-awareness of our own beliefs and biases that we can respect differences and prevent negative impacts in practice.



Discuss with a colleague or friend your own socialization experiences related to race, ethnicity, and other categories, such as gender, sexual orientation or religion. What stereotypical messages did you receive from your parents, friends, and community? Are there types of individuals or families for whom you need to expand your understanding, comfort, or acceptance? Consider how your own biases might impact your practice and discuss with a supervisor or colleague strategies for addressing this.

Transracial & Transcultural Adoption

The U.S. Census reveals that about 1/3 of all adopted children are of a different race or ethnicity than their parents. For intercountry adoptions, about 85% are transracial, and all are transcultural.

Racial socialization and identity are important to address in adoptive families where children are of a different race/ethnicity than their parents. Class differences also can make children feel they do not fit in with their family or peers.

In cases where parents are White and not familiar with experiencing racial bias, they often do not understand a child of color's experiences or know how to support the youth.


"I know I'm supposed to fit in with the other kids, we look the same, and, at first, they assume that we have had similar experiences and interests ... but we don't, and they quickly realize it. I want to fit in, I want to understand who I am, what being Black means to me ... but no one has ever really helped me with this question..."





Practice Considerations in Transracial and Transcultural Adoptions

When a child moves to a new family, it is a culture shock, which is magnified when the parents and environment are very different. It is important for parents to **honor the child’s race, ethnicity, and culture and support their child in developing a positive identity and learning survival strategies** for coping with bias. Race matters, and color blindness is not helpful.


 Review the Executive Summary of the resource, **Beyond Culture Camp**.

Some important findings of this research include:

- Racial/ethnic identity increased in importance to transracial adoptees into young adulthood when 81% reported race was central in identity.
- Coping with discrimination is an important aspect of coming to terms with racial/ethnic identity for adoptees of color.
- Most children of color adopted by white families considered them-selves White or wanted to be White as children.
- Positive racial/ethnic identity development is most effectively facilitated by “lived” experiences such as travel to native country, attending racially diverse schools, and having role models of their own race/ethnicity.


“Embrace diversity and celebrate all cultures in your home. Practice traditions from your child’s ethnic heritage. This is imperative to becoming a bicultural home.”

Excerpt from IPAFA Handbook, Transracial Parenting in Foster Care and Adoption, Iowa Foster & Adoptive Parents Assoc.


 Review the resource, **Seven Tasks for Parents, Developing Positive Racial Identity**. Consider sharing these with the parents when working with a transracial adoptive family.

Meeting the Needs of LGBTQ Youth

LGBTQ youth are overrepresented in foster care. They experience more placement instability, harassment, rejection and violence than other foster youth. Experiencing high levels of family rejection increases youth’s vulnerability to suicide attempts, depression, drug abuse, and high-risk sexual behaviors.

 During assessment, it is important to **focus on the whole youth**, assessing all presenting problems and distinguishing issues of sexual orientation from those related to gender identity. It is critical for clinicians to seek training, consultation, or supervision when needed to address implicit or explicit biases.

In addition to developing an open, trusting relationship with the youth and family, **Module 6** offers **9 Practice Guidelines**. Strengthening parental understanding of the youth’s needs and learning how to support them is a key goal.

 Explore the referral resources at the end of **Lesson 5**, and review the **practice guide**.

 **National Adoption Competency Mental Health Training Initiative**



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