



## Honoring Your Child's Racial and Cultural Identity

When adopting a child transracially or transculturally, certain changes within your family may seem obvious in the beginning. However, adopting a child of a different race or culture will require a shift in thinking above and beyond what you may initially think because your child's experience will differ greatly from your own.

We hope the following information may help your family adapt to becoming a transracial family or a transcultural family.

### Definitions

Here are some definitions that most people use when referring to race and culture:

**Racial identity** is the racial background with which you identify. Many people today have backgrounds from more than one culture or race, and many of these people will pick on that they feel they can relate to the best.

**Transracial or transcultural adoption** means placing a child who is of one race or ethnic group with adoptive parents of another race or ethnic group.

**Cultural Identity:** chosen or adopted culture.

### Creating Positive Racial and Cultural Identity

A child who has been adopted and is a different race will have varying emotional needs. Your children will be treated as members of your family at home, but may have a different experience in the world at large. It's these experiences that contribute largely to the development of their identity. They may deal with racism or stereotypes that you or your children have never had to deal with in the past.



This requires preparation and open family communication. Rather than expecting that your child adapts to your family, your family will need to adapt to your child and his or her racial and cultural identity. Your

child's race and culture should become a part of all family members experience and be present throughout your home.

### The Impact of Transracial Identity

Adopting transracially impacts the entire family. The whole family now becomes transracial—not simply the child. If all family members think about their family unit in this way, it can prevent the child who was adopted from feeling alienated.

Relationships with extended family

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members and friends may be challenged or even changed when they are asked to accept and respect you as a transracial family.

At school, peers may question your children about why they look different from you or a sibling. Not only will your children need to be prepared for these occurrences, but so will the entire family.

As a family, reflect on your own beliefs, attitudes, and experiences so you can understand the messages that are being sent to your children.

- Am I committed and prepared to stand up to someone of my own race on behalf of a sibling of another race?
- When I hear an inappropriate and offensive racial joke or comment, am I comfortable to speak up and defend my child by asking the person to stop?
- How will I feel and how will I potentially react when others stare at my family when we are in public?
- How will I feel when I am asked intrusive questions about my family’s racial difference by peers, extended family members, or strangers?

*Showing your children that you take the time to learn about and honor different cultures will help teach them to do the same.*

**What Can You Do?**

Celebrate all cultures and races. Demonstrate to your family that you value differences in appearance, traditions, and cultural heritage. Showing your children that you take the time to learn about and honor different cultures will help teach them to do the same.

Additionally, it reinforces your interest in

learning about the culture and traditions that your child will add to your family.

Ideas to incorporate culture and racial differences into your family include:

- Read books with your children. ([Visit our lending library.](#))
- [Join a parent group.](#)
- Attend cultural events, festivals, or ceremonies.
- Become educated about differences that

impact daily life, including eating and grooming. (We have a tip sheet on African American hair care that you may find helpful.)

For more ideas, please check out our tip sheet, [Twenty Ideas for Keeping Connections to Racial and Cultural Identity.](#)

It’s never too early to start planning and discussing ways to incorporate another race or culture into your family. Think about where you live and the people who you interact with on a daily basis—teachers, doctors, neighbors, postal carriers, dentists.

Is your child’s race reflected in these people? Does the location where your family lives provide positive same race role models?

Even when moving isn’t a feasible option, there are other things you can do to incorporate racial and cultural identity into your home. Items in your home can represent the race and culture of all members of your family as well as the community through artwork, books, toys, movies, greetings cards, etc.

Talk openly with all of your children about

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race and culture. Encourage them to participate in your racial and cultural traditions and incorporate their traditions into your family.

Acknowledge your children's differences. An adult adoptee of another race (than her white parents) said, "When I looked in the mirror, I was surprised that I wasn't white, too."

Acknowledging differences can be confusing for children who were adopted transracially. In addition to the mirror reflecting back their differences, others who interact with them outside of their home will also reflect differences.



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Along this journey, you will discover amazing things about your family. What a great opportunity for your family to embrace your cultural differences and similarities!



### Addressing Racism

Discussing the possibility of racism before it happens can better prepare your children, as well as yourselves to assertively deal with it. Role playing with them and giving them the words to use when faced with discrimination will empower children to stand up to it rather than internalize their race/culture or that of a sibling as negative.

As will most anything, parents are great role models for how to handle these difficult and uncomfortable situations. When your children see you appropriately handling a situation with a stranger in the grocery store or with an extended family member at a reunion, it will reinforce their value and set a great example for how to handle these challenging situations when you're not around.

Adopting transracially adds another level of creating a cohesive family. However, you can successfully navigate this road by being open to both sharing your racial and cultural traditions and expanding them to include those of the new member of your family.

### Resources from the [Coalition Library](#)

- ***Transracial Adoption and Foster Care: Practical Issues for Professionals***, by Dr. Joseph Crumbley
- ***In Their Own Voices: Transracial Adoptees Tell Their Stories***, by Rita J. Simon & Rhonda M. Roorda
- ***Inside Transracial Adoption***, by Gail Steinberg, Beth Hall
- ***Brothers and Sisters in Adoption***, by Arleta James
- ***Come Rain or Come Shine***, by Rachel Garlinghouse
- ***Broken Links, Enduring Ties—American Adoption Across Race, Class and Nation***, by Linda J. Selgmann
- ***Pieces of Me, Who Do I Want to Be?***, by Robert L. Ballard



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