

Honoring a Child's Racial and Cultural Identity

Welcoming a child into your family is an exciting and life-changing experience. When that child comes from a different racial or cultural background—whether through birth, adoption, foster care, or kinship—the journey can bring unique joys and challenges. Some initial changes might seem obvious, but as time passes, you might learn and grow in ways you hadn't expected.

Understanding the Basics

- **Racial Identity** is the racial background a person identifies with. Many individuals have rich and diverse racial backgrounds and may connect more strongly with one over another.
- **Cultural Identity** relates to the culture someone feels most connected to, which might differ from their racial background.
- **Transracial or Transcultural Families** are families where the racial or ethnic backgrounds of children and caregivers differ. This includes all types of families—birth, foster, adoptive, and kinship.



Nurturing a Positive Racial and Cultural Identity

Children in transracial or transcultural families, no matter how they join the family, have their own set of emotional needs. Their experiences might be different from yours, and they could face challenges like racism or stereotypes that others in the family haven't

encountered.

Instead of expecting the child to fit into your family's existing culture, it's important that everyone in the family actively embraces and integrates the child's racial and cultural identity. This means making their heritage a vibrant part of your home life, not just an add-on.

The Ripple Effect on the Whole Family

Becoming a multiracial or multicultural family impacts the entire family. When every family member acknowledges and supports this new identity, it helps prevent the child from feeling isolated or different.

You might notice that relationships with extended family and friends change as they adjust to your family's new dynamics. At school, your child's peers might notice and comment on why family members look different from each other. Preparing your whole family for these situations and approaching them gracefully is essential.

Take a moment to reflect on your own beliefs and attitudes. Ask yourself:

- Am I committed and prepared to stand up on behalf of a child or another family member when they face racial injustices or cultural challenges?
- How will I address inappropriate comments or jokes?
- How will I handle intrusive questions or

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stares from peers, extended family members, or strangers?

Practical Steps You Can Take

- **Celebrate Diversity:** Show your family that you cherish differences in appearance, traditions, and cultural heritage. This helps the child feel valued and embraced.
- **Integrate Cultural and Racial Diversity:**
 - Read books that reflect diverse experiences and cultures ([visit our resource library](#))
 - [Join a community support group](#)
 - Attend cultural events, festivals, or ceremonies
 - Explore cultural practices together, like different foods or traditions
 - 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](#))
- **Build Representation:** Find positive role models who share the child's background, and bring this representation into your home through books, art, and media.
- **Foster Open Conversations:** Talk openly about race and culture with all the children in your care. Encourage them to engage with various cultural traditions and weave these into your daily life.
- **Celebrate Differences:** Help children understand their uniqueness, which makes them distinct and valuable.

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

Tackling Racism Together

It's important to discuss the possibility of racism with the children in your care before

it happens. Role-playing scenarios and discussing how to respond can empower them to handle difficult situations confidently.

As caregivers, you are role models. Your approach to confronting uncomfortable situations—whether with strangers or within the family—teaches children how to navigate challenges.

By blending your traditions with those of the children and youth in your care, you enrich your family's experience. This journey is an opportunity to celebrate your shared and distinct cultural elements, creating a beautiful and diverse family tapestry.



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Resources

From the [Resource Library](#)

- *In Their Own Voices: Transracial Adoptees Tell Their Stories*, by Rita J. Simon & Rhonda M. Roorda
- *Inside Transracial Adoption*, by Gail Steinberg & Beth Hall
- *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
- *The Harris Narratives – An Introspective Study of a Transracial Adoptee*, by Susan Harris O'Connor
- *All You Can Ever Know – A Memoir*, by Nicole Chung
- Partners Newsletter: [Transracial Adoption](#)
- Fostering Across Wisconsin Newsletter: [Transracial Parenting](#)
- *Native American Transracial Adoptees Tell Their Stories*, by Rita J. Simon & Sarah Hernandez
- *Transracial Parenting Project (Self Awareness Tool)*, by Jeanette Wiedemeier Bower, MPA & The North American Council on Adoptable Children
- *So You Want to Talk About Race?*, by Ijeoma Oluo
- *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria? And Other Conversations About Race*, by Beverly Daniel Tatum, PhD
- *A Kids Book About Racism*, by Jelani Memory

Tip Sheet

- [Promoting Healthy Cultural Identity for Children of Color Living in Transracial Families](#)

Training From [Champion Classrooms](#)

- [Transracial Parenting Series](#)

Inspiration & Hope from [No Matter What Families](#)

- [Race and Transracial Parenting](#)