

Fostering Positive Cultural and Ethnic Identity for Trans-racially Adopted Children

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Support, information and advocacy
for foster, adoptive and kinship families
since 1975

First, about the Coalition:

- Founded in the 1960s. Incorporated in 1975.
- Founded by adoptive parents to support one another and advocate on behalf of children and families. Foster parents became part of “the family” soon thereafter.

Our Goal:

Support, information and
advocacy for foster, adoptive and
kinship families.

Our Vision:

- No foster, adoptive or kinship care family in New York State will feel alone or unsupported and that all such families will have the tools, support and community they need to nurture their children and be role models for others.

What We Do: Seven Areas of Service

- **HelpLine**
- **Foster and Kinship Care Support**
Assistance with understanding family court, dealing with allegations, where to start, etc.
- **Parent Support Groups**
- **Adoption and Guardianship Assistance Program for Everyone (AGAPE)**
- **ETA: Education and Training Academy**
Annual Foster Care and Adoption Conference, Education Support Series
- **Advocacy and Outreach**
- **Online Service Directory and Website**

And now . . .
Fostering Positive Cultural
and Ethnic Identity for
Trans-racially Adopted
Children

“reaching an acceptance
of, and comfort with,
oneself” (Erikson, 1959)

Ethnic & Culture Identity

Ethnic Identity: One's self-perception and sense of belonging to a particular group of persons with a common affiliation

Cultural Identity: Is determined by the society to which the person belongs and is socially transmitted from one's family and community

3 Aspects of Personal Identity



1. Characteristics by which a person identifies themselves and by which they are recognized by others
2. Individual's sense of how various aspects of their identity fit together
3. One's sense of continuity over time, connecting the past, present and future

Identity Development

Identity Development is a dynamic, life-long process, which requires active decision making and self exploration

It is the integration of one's self-definition, one's definition by others, one's ethnic identity, and one's cultural identity

Identity Development for Trans-racially Adopted Children

The integration of ...

- Their native ethnic and cultural heritage
- Their adoptive family's ethnic and cultural reality
- Their physical appearance
- The perceptions of them by others
- Their personal values and beliefs
- The society's values and beliefs

Stages of Development: Toddlerhood

Child becomes aware of physical differences and learns names for specific groups

But does not assign significance to these differences



Stages of Development: Preschoolers

Child becomes aware of racial differences and can usually identify their own ethnic group



Stages of Development: School Aged

Child explores what it means to be a member of their cultural group and develops a firm understanding of their own ethnic identity.

They also begin to identify their own and other's racial affiliations and form racial attitudes and preferences

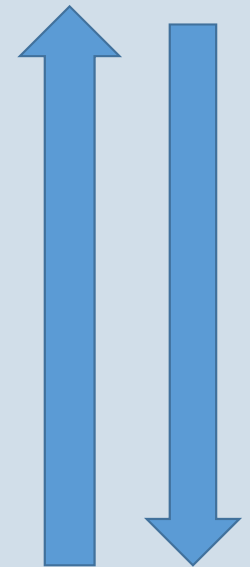


Stages of Development: Adolescence and Young Adulthood

Time of exploration and identity resolution which includes determining the significance of race, ethnicity, culture, and adoption in the person's identity formation. They are making decisions about which group(s) to be committed to in terms of values, attitudes and culture.

A Paradox – The Evolution of Family

- I. Toddler/Preschoolers – Parents enthusiastically and consistently engage in native cultural activities and place great value in multiculturalism and racial integration
- II. School Ageds – Families begin to deemphasize or become ambivalent about integrating their child's native culture and experiences with their child's racial group
- III. Adolescence – Parents' enthusiasm and interest for cultural/ethnic immersion wanes



Factors Influencing Healthy Development



#1: Family Engagement with the child's native culture and ethnic heritage. Encourage and co-participate in activities of the child's native culture (e.g. language, foods, holiday celebrations, traditions)

Factors Influencing Healthy Development

#2: Balancing of the multiple cultures represented in the family and community. Incorporating the child's cultural heritage, the adoptive family's cultural heritage, and the society's culture into life so the child will feel apart of each

Parents who either deny differences or insistent on differences can make it difficult for the child to synthesize their dual identities

Factors Influencing Healthy Development

#3: Recognition of extra-family forces; no child or family lives in isolation. Transracially adopted children will experience both racism and tolerance, discrimination and equality, exclusion and acceptance, and difference and sameness

Children who's parents who provide their children with strategies to cope with racism, discrimination, exclusion and difference are better able to develop a positive sense of self

Factors Influencing Healthy Development

#4: Involvement with ethnic and cultural reference groups and role models

Children need to be exposed to, interact with, and develop relationships with role models from their native ethnic group



Successful Identity Formation

The vast majority of children adopted transracially and transculturally successfully integrate their personal, ethnic, and cultural identity.



Questions?

Thank you!

We're always here to help:

HelpLine: (888) 354-1342

Statewide. Free. 24/7.

Main Office: (646) 688-4321

Website: www.affcny.org