

# Understanding and Addressing the Impact of Racism on Children's Mental Health

a guide for parents and professionals



*We empower our families to succeed and thrive, while celebrating their diversity.*

*Click here to learn more about the Adoptive and Foster Family Coalition's DEIB Statement.*



# WELCOME!

*"The Coalition supports open and honest conversations about the importance of mental health and social/emotional well-being."*



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# Why Racial Healing Matters

1

It restores individuals to wholeness by helping people share their stories, lean into difficult conversations, constructively engage in conflict and face conscious and unconscious biases.



2

It supports relationship building, trust, belonging, authenticity, constructive dialogue and repairs the damage caused by systemic bias.

3

It cultivates a culture of belonging that can advance racial equity and inclusion.

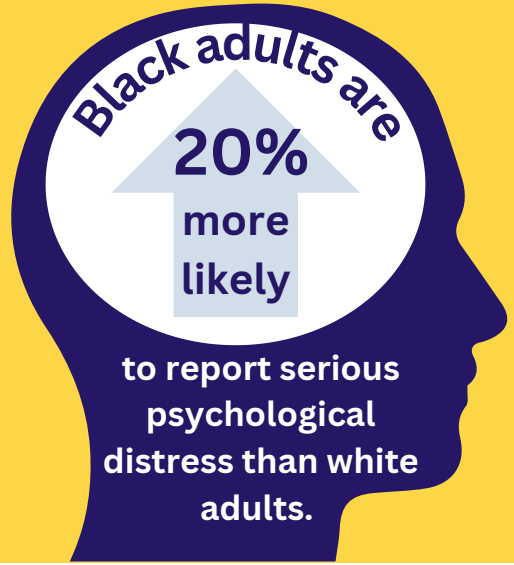


4

It deepens our understanding of the differences in opportunities, burdens, and needs relating to how people racially/ethnically identify.

# Racism Impacts Mental Health

Persons from marginalized groups have poorer mental health, including...



## Racism can create

- acute and chronic toxic stress
- undue adversity
- intergenerational trauma



All of which can cause brain adaptations that can lead to mental health challenges.



Indigenous adults have the *highest* rate of mental illness of any race.

The link between racism & negative mental health is *strongest* for Asian Americans and Latinx-Americans.



Marginalized populations tend to have more barriers to mental health services.

This is caused by...



Being in an unwelcoming and stigmatizing environment

Not being heard, understood or trusted

Being treated with hostility

Misuse of client-provider power dynamic

Being underdiagnosed or misdiagnosed

Providers are culturally insensitive and incompetent

Receive poor or ineffective services

Service Inadequacies

# PROTECTIVE FACTORS

## The Hierarchy of Racial and Cultural Needs of Transracial Adoptees by Dr. Chaitra Wirta-Leiker



**If you do NOT share your child's race**

You can **only** meet the **top 3 levels of need** in a limited capacity.

Add a little bit of body text



**What you CAN do!**

**Self-Actualization**  
Supporting and motivating others.

**1**

**Accept** your natural limitations as a parent who does not share your child's race.

**Self-Esteem**  
Feeling that you matter to the world.

**2**

**Connect** your child with people who are racial/cultural mirrors & can fulfill those needs.

**Love & Belonging**  
Daily access to racial and cultural mirrors.

**3**

**Engage** in anti-racism work consciously & continuously.

**Safety & Security**  
Understand the intersectional aspects of race, culture, and adoption.



**Attend events that offer racial & cultural mirroring.**



**Seek out adoption-competent mental health providers.**

**Physiological**  
Access to medical and mental health providers, hygiene care, and basic survival resources.

# Supporting Your Child

## 1 Prepare

- Give your child language to speak about their experiences.
- Provide a safe space for open conversation.
- Educate yourself on racial trauma.

## 2

## Talk

- Address issues with empathy and cultural awareness.
- Open communication and active listening can help your child feel heard and supported.

## 3 Reassure

- Ensure they know you are on their side.
- Validate their feelings.
- Show love, understanding, and support.

## Share

- Express your sadness, compassion, or outrage, but be sure to moderate your feelings so that your child doesn't feel obligated to step into a role of taking care of you.

## Act

- Speak up against what is wrong and empower your child to do the same.
- Encourage self-care.
- Offer resources.
- Advocate for mental health services.

## 7

# Courageous Conversations

*There are no scripts for difficult conversations and tricky topics, so it's important to think about difficult topics before your child asks.*

*How do you respond when you hear someone using a racist/sexist/homophobic slur?*

*What would it look like to feel safe at school?*

*Who made you laugh today?*

*Who in your life are good listeners?*

*Do you want me to feel it or fix it?*

*Have you or your friends ever thought of hurting yourself or committing suicide?*

*Tell me how class/lunch/soccer practice went today.*

## QUICK TIPS

● **Use P.A.C.E.** ●  
Practice using Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity, and Empathy before, during, and after your conversation.

● **Plan Ahead:** ●  
Think about what you would like to achieve and what you would like to say.

● **Give your child time to think about it:** ●  
Provide them a general idea of what you want to discuss and ask when might be a good time to talk.

● **Use Active Listening:** ●  
Be patient, ask clarifying questions, and withhold judgment.

● **Know When to Press Pause:** ●  
If the conversation is going in the wrong direction, take a breather and re-evaluate the situation.

● **If the chat didn't go as planned,** ●  
remember that you gave your child something to reflect on.

*What is it like being a Person of Color at your school?*

*What kind of worries do you have today?*







# Crisis Lines



## 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline:

988 offers 24/7 access to trained counselors for people in emotional distress.

## Crisis Text Line:

Text GOT5 to 741741. This anonymous texting service is available 24/7.

## National Domestic Violence Hotline:

Call: 1-800-799-SAFE (7233)

Text: "START" to 88788

## BlackLine:

Peer support and counseling by and for BIPOC folks

Call & Text: 1-800-604-5841

## The Steve Fund's 24/7 Text Crisis Line:

Supporting the mental health and emotional well-being of young people of color.

Text: STEVE to 741741

## Trevor Project:

Confidential 24/7 service for LGBTQ+ youth.

Text: Text 'START' to 678-678

Call: 1-866-488-7386



# Parent and Caregiver Resources



## Reminders When Coping With Grief



*There is no right or wrong way to grieve.*

## Advice to Parents Adopting a Child of Another Race

## How Does Racism Impact Our Bodies?

*Experiences of racial discrimination can cause racial trauma.*



AFFCNY Parent Toolkit: Understanding Race and Racism

## Supporting Your Child in the Face of Trauma



How Do Transracial Adoptees Develop a Racial Identity?



Lived Experience of Racism in Intercountry Adoption

## Intercountry Adoptee Voices (ICAV)

Culture Resources  
Race Resources



Transracial and Transcultural Adoption: Preservation, Policy, and a Personal Perspective



# Resources & Support for Children & Teens

## AFFCNY's Book Lists:

[Books for Kids](#)

[Books for or about  
Teens](#)

[Memoirs and Books  
Written By Adoptees  
and Youth Formerly in  
Care](#)

## Additional Resources:

[The Ultimate  
Adoption Resource  
Guide: Books for  
Kids & Teens](#)

[Welcoming Schools:  
Embracing All Families  
Booklist \(K-8\)](#)



## [Additional Resources:](#)

[Adoptees Connect:  
Adoptee Recommended  
Resources](#)

[I Am Adoptee:](#)  
A community built around  
mental health and  
wellness by adoptees for  
adoptees.










[Intercountry Adoptee  
Voices \(ICAV\):](#)  
Support network created  
by intercountry adoptees  
for intercountry adoptees.


## [Support Groups for Adopted Youth:](#)

AFFCNY:  
[Teen Adoptee Group \(9-17\)](#) (virtual)  
[Express Yourself \(9-17\)](#) (hybrid)

Spence-Chapin:  
[Teen Voices of Adoption \(13-17\)](#) (virtual)  
[Junior Mentorship Program \(10-12\)](#) (in-person)  
[Teen Mentorship Program \(13-18\)](#)(in-person)



-  [AFFCNY Parent Toolkit: Understanding Race and Racism](#)
-  [Cultural Competence in Adoption](#)
-  [Racism and Microaggressions in Transracial Adoption](#)
-  [Children are Not Colorblind: How Young Children Learn Race](#)
-  [Conversation Guide](#)
-  [National Day of Racial Healing Event and Activity Ideas for Children, Youth and Communities](#)
-  [Impact of Racism on Child and Adolescent Health](#)
-  [Intercountry Adoptee Voices \(ICAV\)](#)
  - [Race Resources](#)
  - [Trauma](#)
  - [Culture Resources](#)
-  [Mental Health Disparities: Diverse Populations](#)

*Excellent, comprehensive factsheets that provide a snapshot of the current state of mental health of minority populations and some factors that may contribute to mental health disparities among these groups.*
-  [Asian American Transracial Adoptees:](#)
  - [Attachment and Identity in Higher Education: Lived Experience of Korean Adoptees](#)
  - [Asian-American Adoptees and Challenging Identity in the white family.](#)
  - [Where do I belong? An in-depth look at how adoption affects identity formation in Chinese American adoptees](#)



# References

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Mental Health America <https://www.mhanational.org/racism-and-mental-health>

American Academy of Pediatrics' Policy Statement "The Impact of Race on Child and Adolescent Health"

<https://publications.aap.org/pediatrics/article/144/2/e20191765/38466/The-Impact-of-Racism-on-Child-and-Adolescent?autologincheck=redirected?nfToken=00000000-0000-0000-0000-000000000000>

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Video - "Racism and Mental Health" by Psych Hub <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aV4Hk4PQ4Tc>

Video - Dr. John Berardi Show "CDC Acknowledges Racism as a Risk Factor for Poor Health"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vKML-rkARpc>

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**Understanding and Addressing the  
Impact of Racism on Children's  
Mental Health | AFFCNY**



# AFFCNY HelpLine

*The only FREE statewide 24/7 service of its kind for foster parents, adoptive parents, relative caregivers, adult adoptees and professionals.*

**888.80.HELPLINE**  
**that's 888.804.3575**



**AFFCNY**