Transracial Parenting in Foster Care and Adoption: Strengthening Your Bicultural Family

A guidebook by IFAPA, funded by Polk County Decategorization.

This booklet will help you understand the importance of race and culture for your family; and share helpful hints, parenting tips and resources for you on the culturally rich journey of transracial parenting. Building your child’s sense of racial identity, connecting your child to his or her culture and race, and preparing your child to deal with discrimination are important and often intimidating parenting tasks. It is okay to be uncomfortable. Knowledge is key to helping you navigate the path of transracial parenting effectively. Ask questions, seek information, and forge through the discomfort and anxiety. This is an exciting and eye-opening journey, full of ups and downs, full of laughter, and full of heart-warming experiences. Parenting a child of another race and creating a bicultural home environment will be the foundation for success in your family.

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Introduction by Kevin D. Hofmann, author of Growing Up Black in White

Fifty years ago this August my eventful life began. I was the product of an affair between my white mother and black father and at the insistence of my white mother’s white husband I was immediately placed for adoption. Ninety days later I was welcomed into the home of a white family who had three biological white children before I arrived. This began my introduction into a world and life that would be defined oftentimes by the color of my skin. Our family was a multi-cultural family long before there was such a term. My parents had no role models; no other families like ours to help them navigate this interesting life. They assumed they could parent a child of color in the same manner they parented their white biological children. Soon after I arrived home they realized their good intentions didn’t prepare them for what this new life would bring.

Our family struggled. We struggled with where to live and where to go to school. We struggled with finding a balance where all the children would feel safe and accepted.

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Seven Suggestions for a Successful Transracial Adoption

Advice and considerations shared by adoptive parents and child welfare professionals

From AdoptUSKids

When planning to adopt, many people say that the child’s race or ethnicity does not matter. Parents mean this in the best possible way. They mean that they could love a child unconditionally, regardless of whether they look like them or share their cultural heritage and traditions.

But race and culture do matter—especially to children who have already lost so much. Losing connections to their culture and racial heritage—or being raised in households where their importance is not acknowledged—can affect children throughout their lives.

Learning about and respecting a child’s culture—and finding ways to maintain their connections to it—are critical components to helping an adopted child thrive.

Adoptive families and child welfare professionals provide the following advice on transracial adoption.

Talk with your family and friends

When you are deciding whether transracial adoption is right for you, talk with your family about what becoming a multiracial family will mean. How will they respond to the changes it brings? Are your extended family members enthusiastic about your decision and ready to support you and your child? Do you live in a community that values racial and cultural diversity and is likely to be accepting of the child you bring into your family?

Find mentors and role models for your child

Because you are their parent, your child will turn to you for guidance in many areas. But there may be questions related to their race and culture that you cannot answer and problems you simply cannot understand. Involving adults in your child’s life who share their culture will give them valuable role models and allies.

Also, surround your child with positive images and stories of people from a variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds, including their own.

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