

## **Religion and Culture**

### **Religion**

Foster parents must make opportunities available for a foster child to attend religious ceremonies chosen by the foster child, or the child's parents, within the community in which the foster family resides. The foster parents must respect and not interfere with the religious beliefs of the child and the natural family.

The role of the foster parents is nurturing and guiding foster children. Foster parents and agencies are not given the decision-making capacity for this area. Exceptions may occur when religious choices or decisions may harm or compromise the safety and welfare of a child, or when adolescents object to their parent's religious decision.

If religious decisions or choices have not been made by the child's parents, foster parents must work together with the social worker to discuss the needs of the child in regard to religious participation.

### **Culture**

The foster parents should be made aware of the cultural background (including ethnicity and family traditions) of the children in their care. Opportunities should be available for children in foster care to learn about and participate in those activities that are unique to their particular background.

## The Culture of Poverty

*Taken from "Bridges Out of Poverty: Strategies for Professionals and Communities" by Ruby K. Payne, Ph.D., Philip DeVol, and Terie Dreussi Smith*

Recent reform movements sweeping the country have placed America's poorest in the center of a bull's-eye. Welfare reform targets the people in generational poverty. They have been told, "Get a job in three years or else." Managed care, health care's answer to high costs, is now being aimed at Medicaid, the insurance program for the poor. Educational reform has narrowed the discussion to proficiency testing, zeroing in on the lower socioeconomic classes as the barrier to higher scores.

### **Some Key Points to Remember**

1. **Poverty is relative.** If everyone around you has similar circumstances, the notion of poverty and wealth is vague. Poverty or wealth exists only in relationship to known quantities or expectations.
2. **Poverty occurs in all races and in all countries.** The notion of middle class as a large segment of society is a phenomenon of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. The percentage of the population that is poor is subject to definition and circumstance.
3. **Economic class is a continuous line, not a clear-cut distinction.** In 1994, the poverty line was considered \$14,340 for a family of four. In 1994, 7% of the population made more than \$100,000 per year. Individuals are stationed all along the continuum of income; they sometimes move on that continuum as well.
4. **Generational poverty and situational poverty are different.** Generational poverty is defined as being in poverty for two generations or longer. Situational poverty is a shorter time and is caused by circumstances (i.e., death, illness, divorce, etc.).
5. **This work is based on patterns. All patterns have exceptions.**
6. **An individual brings with him/her the hidden rules of the class in which he/she was raised.** Even though the income of the individual may rise significantly, many of the patterns of thought, social interaction, cognitive strategies, etc., remain with the individual.
7. **Schools and businesses operate from middle-class norms and use the hidden rules of middle class.** These norms and hidden rules are not directly taught in schools or in businesses.
8. **For our clients to be successful, we must understand their hidden rules and teach them the rules that will make them successful at school, at work, and in the community.**
9. **We can neither excuse persons from poverty nor scold them for not knowing; as professionals we must teach them and provide support, insistence, and expectations.**
10. **In order to move from poverty to middle class or middle class to wealth, an individual must give up relationships for achievement (at least for some period of time).**

- 11. We cannot blame the victims of poverty for being in poverty.** Economic systems are far beyond the reach of most people to control. Factories close, small farms fold, racism persists, and the economy fails to provide enough well-paying jobs. What we offer is a way for individuals to do better.
- 12. We cannot continue to support stereotypes and prejudices about the poor.** There are many forms of welfare, but the poor are the only ones who are labeled “undeserving.” Others who receive welfare are students with government fellowships, homeowners with federal-tax and mortgage-interest deductions, corporations with government subsidies, and military bases that are kept open to prevent job losses.

### A Little Quiz

**Could you survive in poverty? Put a check by each item you know how to do.**

1. I know which churches and sections of town have the best rummage sales.
2. I know which rummage sales have “bag sales” and when.
3. I know which grocery stores’ garbage bins can be accessed for thrown away food.
4. I know how to get someone out of jail.
5. I know how to physically fight and defend myself physically.
6. I know how to get a gun, even if I have a police record.
7. I know how to keep my clothes from being stolen at the Laundromat.
8. I know what problems to look for in a used car.
9. I know how to live without a checking account.
10. I know how to live without electricity and a phone.
11. I know how to use a knife as a scissors.
12. I can entertain a group of friends with my personality and my stories.
13. I know what to do when I don’t have money to pay the bills.
14. I know how to move in half a day.
15. I know how to get and use food stamps or an electronic card for benefits.
16. I know where the free medical clinics are.
17. I am very good at trading and bartering.
18. I can get by without a car.

**Could you survive in middle class? Put a check by each item you know how to do.**

1. I know how to get my children into Little League, piano lessons, soccer, etc.
2. I know how to set a table properly.
3. I know which stores are most likely to carry the clothing brands my family wears.
4. My children know the best name brands in clothing.
5. I know how to order in a nice restaurant.
6. I know how to use a credit card, checking account, and savings account – and I understand an annuity. I understand term life insurance, disability

insurance, and 20/80 medical insurance policy, as well as house insurance, flood insurance, and replacement insurance.

7. I talk to my children about going to college.
8. I know how to get one of the best interest rates on my new-car loan.
9. I understand the difference among the principal, interest, and escrow statements on my house payment.
10. I know how to help my children with their homework and do not hesitate to call the school if I need additional information.
11. I know how to decorate the house for different holidays.
12. I know how to get a library card.
13. I know how to use most of the tools in the garage.
14. I repair item sin my house almost immediately when they break – or know a repair service and call it.

**Could you survive in wealth? Put a check by each item you know how to do.**

1. I can read a menu in French, English and another language.
2. I have several favorite restaurants in different countries of the world.
3. During the holidays, I know how to hire a decorator to identify the appropriate themes and items with which to decorate the house.
4. I know who my preferred financial advisor, legal service, designer, domestic-employment services, and hairdresser are.
5. I have at least two residences that are staffed and maintained.
6. I know how to ensure confidentiality and loyalty from my domestic staff.
7. I have at least two or three “screens” that keep people whom I do not wish to see away from me.
8. I fly in my own plane, the company plane, or the Concorde.
9. I know how to enroll my children in the preferred private schools.
10. I know how to host the parties that “key” people attend.
11. I am on the boards of at least two charities.
12. I know the hidden rules of the Junior League.
13. I support or buy the work of a particular artist.
14. I know how to read a corporate financial statement and analyze my own financial statements.

The first point about this exercise is that if you fall mostly in the middle class, the assumption is that everyone knows these things. However, if you did not know many of the items for the other classes, the exercise points out how many hidden rules are taken for granted by a particular class, which assumes they are a given for everyone. What, then, are the hidden rules? The subsequent grid gives an overview of some of the major hidden rules among the classes of poverty, middle class, and wealth.

## Hidden Rules Among Classes

	<b>Poverty</b>	<b>Middle Class</b>	<b>Wealth</b>
Possessions	People	Things	One-of-a-kind objects, legacies, pedigrees.
Money	To be used, spent	To be managed	To be conserved, invested
Personality	Is for entertainment. Sense of humor is highly valued	Is for acquisition and stability. Achievement is highly valued	Is for connections. Financial, political, social connections are highly valued
Social Emphasis	Social inclusion of people he/she likes	Emphasis is on self-governance and self-sufficiency	Emphasis is on social exclusion
Food	Key question: Did you have enough? Quantity important	Key question: Did you like it? Quality important	Key question: Was it presented well? Presentation important
Clothing	Clothing valued for individual style and expression of personality	Clothing valued for its quality and acceptance into norm of middle class. Label important	Clothing valued for the artistic sense and expression. Designer important
Time	Present most important. Decisions made for moment based on feelings or survival	Future most important. Decisions made against future ramifications	Traditions and history most important. Decisions made partially on basis of tradition and decorum
Education	Valued and revered as abstract but not as reality	Crucial for climbing success ladder and making money	Necessary tradition for making and maintaining connections
Destiny	Believes in fate. Cannot do much to mitigate chance	Believes in choice. Can change future with good choices now	Noblesse oblige
Language	Casual register. Language is about survival	Formal register. Language is about negotiation	Formal register. Language is about networking
Family Structure	Tends to be matriarchal	Tends to be patriarchal	Depends on who has money
World View	Sees world in terms of local setting	Sees world in terms of national setting	Sees world in terms of international view
Love	Love and acceptance conditional, based upon whether individual is liked	Love and acceptance conditional and based largely upon achievement	Love and acceptance conditional and related to social standing and connections
Driving Force	Survival, relationships, entertainment	Work, achievement	Financial, political, social connections
Humor	About people and sex	About situations	About social faux pas

## **Seven Tasks for Parents: Developing Positive Racial Identity**

*By Joseph Crumbley, D.S.W.*

*Each night, without fail, she prayed for blue eyes. Fervently, for a year, she had prayed. Although somewhat discouraged, she was not without hope. To have something as wonderful as that happen would take a long time. Thrown, in this way, into the binding conviction that only a miracle could relieve her, she would never know her beauty. She would only see what there was to see: the eyes of other people.*

In her description, in *The Bluest Eyes*, of a young black girl who wishes that her eyes were blue so would be as beautiful as all the blond, blue-eyed children in her school, author Toni Morrison captures the struggle that many transracially and transculturally adopted children face: judging their own beauty by the standards of a culture that is not their own.

Although transracial adoption and foster care have been a controversial topic for more than a decade, the number of children entering such placements continues to increase. In 1997, approximately 17 percent of all domestic adoptions were transracial placements in which at least one of the parent's race was different from the child's. In 1998, Americans adopted 15,774 children born outside of the United States. The largest number of these children were adopted from regions of the former Soviet Union and from China. As of March 31, 1998, at least 110,000 children were in foster care, with the goal of adoption. Twenty-nine percent were white, 59 percent were African American, and 10 percent were Latino. Twenty-seven percent (3,601) of the African American children who were adopted and 7 percent of the white children were in transracial adoption. The realities of children living in transracial families raise many questions:

- How does a child develop a positive racial or cultural identity?
- What are the affects of transracial adoption or foster care on a child and his or her family?
- What are the special needs of adopted or foster children living in transracial families?
- What are the parenting tasks specific to transracial families? And
- What skills, attitudes, knowledge, and resources must parents in transracial families have or develop?

### **How Positive Racial Identity Develops**

Theories on social learning, object relations, and identification are useful in explaining how a child's identities (racial, religious, ethnic, class and gender) develop. These theories are also useful in understanding the similarities and differences in how identities develop in children from dominant groups and from children in minority groups experiencing discrimination.

Object identifications suggest that a child's identity is influenced by significant role models and relationships to which the child is consistently exposed in his or her environment (family, school, society, and the media). The child from the dominant group – the group that has power over the

distribution of goods, services, rights, privileges, entitlements, and status – begins his or her identity formation by:

1. observing what group is in power
2. observing that members of the group in power are like him or her (i.e. in race, gender, or religion), and
3. assuming that because he or she is like members of the group in power, he or she has the same rights and will achieve similar accomplishments and power as members of that group.

The ultimate result of the child's identity is a sense of positive self-esteem, confidence, worth, entitlement, and goals. In contrast, the child from the minority group – the group subject to the power, control, discretion, and distribution of goods and privileges by another group – begins his or her identity formation by:

1. observing what group is in power,
2. observing that group members who are like him or her are not in positions of power and control,
3. observing or experiencing prejudice, discrimination, and exposure to stereotypes, and
4. assuming that because he or she is like members in the minority group, he or she has the same limited rights, can only achieve the same accomplishments, position and status as similar group members, and that members of the minority group are not as good as those in power.

The minority child's identity affects his or her self-esteem, confidence, goals, worth, self-respect, sense of entitlement, and expectations by making him or her feel inferior. This inferiority is not the result of identifying with or being a member of a minority group, but from exposure to discrimination, prejudice, and negative stereotypes about the group. A child from a minority group that is celebrated, held in esteem, or that shares power and control with the dominant group can have identities that are just as positive as a child's from the dominant group.

To counteract a minority child's formation of negative identities, he or she must see and be told:

1. that members of his or her minority group can also make positive achievements if given equal opportunities,
2. that he or she and his or her minority group should also have the same rights and entitlements as members in the dominant group,
3. that he or she and his or her group are equal to and as good as any other group,
4. that stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination are wrong, and
5. that there is proof that prejudices and stereotypes are untrue. The child must be able to see it to believe it.

*Feeling self-confident about his or her ability to cope with an appropriately respond to discrimination reinforces a child's positive self-image and identity.*

This last task may be the most difficult and challenging to accomplish if the minority child's group is not in a position of power, control, and success in the child's environment. Alternatives may need to include:

1. exposing the child to historical figures and information about his or her group's accomplishments, capacities, values, and culture.
2. redefining and reframing the child's definitions of success, strengths, and accomplishments by not using standards and definitions based on those of the dominant group (e.g. highlight individual accomplishments, family commitment, group survival, spiritual and moral integrity, and civil rights activities against discrimination),
3. exposing the child outside of his or her environment to members of the minority group in positions of power and control (e.g. geographically, in other countries, through films and other media).

### **Parenting Tasks that Facilitate Positive Racial Identity**

Because children from minority groups (Asian, Latino, Africa American, or Native American) who experience prejudice or discrimination are subject to developing negative racial identity, they require monitoring, with attention paid to their perception of racial identity. They should not be expected to develop positive racial identity without support and reinforcement from their families, role models, and the community. Parents can provide support and reinforcement through the following 7 tasks.

#### **TASK 1: Acknowledge the existence of prejudice, racism, and discrimination.**

Adoptive parents must recognize not only that racism, prejudice, and discrimination exist, but that they, too, have been victims and survivors of it. By admitting the existence of inequities, parents can avoid racist, prejudicial, or discriminatory behavior. By admitting being a victim and survivor, parents are able to: 1) recognize inequities and how they affect others; and 2) elicit strategies for intervening on behalf of their child, based on personal experiences and knowledge.

While the victimization of minority groups is fairly obvious, that of members from the dominant culture and race may not be. Children in the dominant group are victims of racism by inadvertently developing superiority complexes.

Superiority complexes occur when a child:

1. observes that those in power are racially the same as he or she is,
2. observes those not in power are of a different race or color,
3. observes or is exposed to prejudicial and discriminatory beliefs and practices against a minority race,
4. assumes, therefore, that he or she and his or her race are better without having any contact with a minority group.

Once parents understand how racism victimizes members from both the dominant and minority communities, they are prepared for the second task.

#### **TASK 2: Explain why the child's minority group is mistreated.**

Parents must explain and define racism, prejudice, discrimination, and bigotry, and why such behavior exists. Understanding the behaviors beyond their simply being "good or bad" will enhance the child's coping skills. Understanding the functions and reasons for the behaviors increases the child's range of responses beyond anger or retaliation.

**TASK 3: Provide the child with a repertoire of responses to racial discrimination.**

Parents must work to minimize their children's feelings of helplessness. A child's identity can be more positive if he or she perceives him or herself and members of racial groups to be empowered with choices, resources, and the ability to acquire and protect their rights. This repertoire of responses may include:

1. selective confrontation or avoidance,
2. styles of confrontations (passive, aggressive),
3. individual, legal, institutional, or community resources and responses (i.e. grievance, suits, NAACP, protests)
4. priorities and timing (when to avoid and when not to avoid issues),
5. goal-oriented responses rather than unplanned reactions,
6. institutional/organization strategies (positioning, coalitions, compromising).

**TASK 4: Provide the child with role models and positive contact with his or her minority community.**

Parents of a different race from their child are quite capable of modeling and helping the child develop various identities (i.e. gender, class). However, counteracting the racial identity projected by a racially conscious or discriminating society requires positive exposure to same-race models or experiences. These contacts and experiences require: 1) interacting with the child's minority community, 2) providing the child information about his or her history and culture, and 3) providing an environment that includes the child's culture on a regular basis (i.e. art, music, food, religion, school, integrated or same race community).

This task requires that the parents be comfortable with 1) being a minority when interacting in the child's community, and 2) sharing the role of modeling with members from the child's race. Same race contacts and experiences function to: 1) counteract negative stereotypes, 2) teach the child how to implement the repertoire of responses, and 3) provide a respite from being a minority (i.e. the only child of color, the object of stares, or needing to prove one's equality).

**TASK 5: Prepare the child for discrimination.**

Providing the child with information on how his or her racial identity might be degraded helps him or her develop better coping skills and methods of maintaining a positive identity. Feeling self-confident about his or her ability to cope with and appropriately respond to discrimination reinforces a child's positive self-image and identity.

Same race role models may be a helpful resource for information and preparation if an adoptive parent has not experienced discrimination similar to the child's minority group (i.e. double standards, slander, interracial dating, and gender issues).

**TASK 6: Teach the child the difference between responsibility to and for his or her minority group.**

This task relieves the child of: 1) feeling embarrassed or needing to apologize for his or her racial identity or group, 2) not having to overcompensate or prove his or her worth because of his or her racial identity or negative stereotypes. However, the child is able to develop a commitment to both his or her individual and minority group's accomplishments, resources, and empowerment.

The Clark Doll Test suggests that children are aware of differences in race as early as four years old. This study also found that African American children became aware of stigma associated with race as early as seven years old. Although parents cannot stop the minority child's exposure to racial prejudice, discrimination, and stereotypes, parents (adoptive, birth, same or different race) of any minority child must help develop the positive racial identity necessary to counteract the effects of racial inferiority.

**TASK 7: Advocate on behalf of your child's positive identity.**

The purpose of this task is to provide the child an environment that is conducive to the formation of a positive identity. The parent should advocate for family, social and educational experiences that are respectful, reflective, and sensitive to cultural diversity. Therefore, the parent may need to be prepared to correct or confront individual or institutional racism, prejudice, or discrimination that the child may encounter.

As an advocate the parent models for the child how to advocate for themselves. The child also sees and feels their parent's protection, loyalty, and commitment, which are essential in attachment and bonding. Confronting prejudice and discrimination on the child's behalf is no longer optional once a parent adopts transracially.

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## Identifying Diverse Community Resources

Please take 10 to 20 minutes to fill out the table below. Consider as many of the resources in your community of which you are aware. Try to list at least three resources for each box.

	African American	Latino/S. American	Native American	Eastern European	Asian	Other
Churches						
Ethnic Celebrations						
Community Groups						
Ethnic Newspapers/ Magazines						
Ethnic Restaurants						
Ethnic Stores						
Hair Salons/Barbers						
Radio Stations						

This exercise is included in NACAC's *Transracial Training Curriculum*.

## What are You Willing to Do?

Parents who bring a racially or culturally diverse child into their world often forget the challenges the child must face. Consider the exercise below:

<b>Child's Challenges</b>	<b>Are You Willing To:</b>
Transplanted from his biological home and placed with your family – a new home, new family, new neighborhood, etc.	Visit your child's old neighborhood or extended relatives? Move to a neighborhood that reflects the child's background?
Expected to make friends with the children of your friends.	Develop close, positive relationships with persons of your child's race or culture?
Expected to attend your place of worship.	Regularly attend a religious institution familiar to your child? Join a religious institution with a diverse population?
Attend school, daycare, or a community center in your neighborhood.	Participate in activities at a community center in a neighborhood that reflects the child's background? Drive you child to a daycare center in the child's neighborhood?
Asked to eat food common to your culture.	Include your child in the choice and preparation of ethnic foods for your family?
Endure prejudiced comments from neighbors, classmates, and relatives.	Respond constructively when you hear prejudiced comments from colleagues, acquaintances, and loved ones?
Expected to fit in and be grateful for being adopted.	Incorporate the child's culture into your family?
Asked to take vacations with your immediate or extended family.	Plan trips to places that reflect the child's heritage, or are familiar to the child?

This exercise is included in NACAC's *Transracial Parenting Self Awareness Tool*.

## Recognizing Prejudice

Consider the scenario below. Answer the questions on your own, then discuss as a family.

Eleven-year-old Ramon was adopted from Bolivia by the Cossanto family when he was only two. His adoptive father, Tony, is Italian American and part owner of a restaurant with his brother, Ted. Although the business takes much of his time, he loves spending Sunday afternoons playing catch with Ramon and watching ball games on television. Ramon plays little league baseball and is proud when his dad attends his games. Tony has the loudest cheering voice of all the other fathers – his nickname for Ramon is “Slugger.”

At times, Ramon feels uncomfortable when his father and Uncle Ted get together to watch ball games. Often, they criticize certain players. “Why did the team release Wilson and draft Sanchez? Couldn’t they find an American 3<sup>rd</sup> baseman?” Ted remarks. “They’re lazy, everyone knows that!” Tony laughs. Although Ramon loves his father and uncle, he questions whether they feel the same way about him. “I’m from South America,” he thinks. “Am I lazy, too?”

### Questions

- What things did Tony do well with his family?
- What things could he have done better?
- Describe how you think Ramon feels when his father and uncle make negative, insensitive comments.
- How should Ramon respond to his family, and what can he do to cope with the situation?

This exercise is included in NACAC’s *Transracial Training Curriculum*.

