

KEEPING IT REAL

Supporting the needs of African American children in out-of-home care.



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treehouse4kids.org



INTRODUCTION:

Research shows that nationally African American children come into the foster care system at higher rates and stay in foster care longer than their White peers.

We know statistically that this is not a result of higher abuse rates within the African American community, rather other factors are at play including institutional bias. In addition, child welfare systems nationally are challenged to license enough African American foster families to provide substitute care for children who cannot return home.

More often than not, Black children are placed into the homes of caring, compassionate White caregivers, who, while well-intentioned, lack some basic knowledge about the very real risks and struggles Black children face.

This video was created to candidly discuss some of the less than fair treatment that African American people experience daily, often without White people ever knowing it occurs. Simply by being White, many are exempt from the scrutiny and stereotypes that follow our Black children.

It is not enough to say, "color doesn't matter to me." Because color DOES matter to so many. We have to do more. We must be open, we must learn, we must afford African American children opportunities to positively experience their culture, we must courageously confront our own biases, and we must vocally advocate for the children in our care.

FACTS N STATS

Black children in Washington state are almost twice as likely to be referred to Child Protective Services (CPS) than White children.

African American children are disproportionately represented at every phase of the child welfare continuum with the greatest disparities occurring:

- ◆ When the initial referral to CPS is made.
- ◆ When children are in care for longer than two years.

“There is White Privilege and it's real... and when foster parents don't acknowledge it—we aren't truly loving our kids.”

Compared with White children referred to CPS in 2004, after the initial referrals:

- ◆ Black children were 1.2 times more likely to be removed from their home.
- ◆ Black children were 1.5 times more likely to remain in care for longer than two years.

After a referral for alleged abuse or neglect, Black children when compared to White children:

- ◆ Are more likely to have a referral accepted.
- ◆ As likely to be reunified with parents within two years.
- ◆ Less likely to be adopted within two years.*

In Washington state as of January 2009, there were 1,477 African American children statewide placed in out-of-home care**. These placements may have included:

- ◆ Licensed foster homes
- ◆ Adoptive homes
- ◆ Relative placements
- ◆ Guardianships

*Racial Disproportionality in Washington state 2007

**Washington state CAMIS data, January 2009 download.

WORDS TO KNOW

Biracial

A person who has one parent of African American descent and one parent of another racial or ethnic background.

Prejudice

An adverse judgement or opinion formed before hand or without knowledge or examination of the facts.

Racial Profiling

The practice, usually by law enforcement, of assuming certain groups are engaging in illicit activity based solely on skin color.

Racism

The belief that race accounts for differences in human character or ability and that a particular race is superior to others.

The Game

A reference to the unspoken rules of society around race relations and privileges frequently based on prejudice.

Transracial Foster Home

A home in which the caregivers are of a different race or ethnicity than the children placed in their care.

White Privilege

A series of rights, liberties, privileges, and courtesies extended to people who are or are believed to be Caucasian. These are extended based solely on the appearance of “white” skin and are not based on merit or behavior. White privilege is invisible and unspoken, those who receive it do so without knowledge of the disparity between their treatment and the treatment of others who do not appear Caucasian.³

AWARENESS

Pretending that racism doesn't exist only allows racism to flourish. Saying color doesn't matter to you only devalues the child who knows for a fact that color **does** matter. Pretending that you have no personal biases or prejudices only allows those biases to express themselves in ways you may not be aware of. Most of us have been raised in a culture of White privilege and have been conditioned to have preconceived notions about people who are different than we are. The key to successfully supporting children who are of a different race or ethnicity is to acknowledge all of the issues around race and ethnicity that nobody wants to talk about.

“What a Caucasian caregiver can do first and foremost is not live in denial. You have an African American child in your care.”

What can you do?

- ◆ Celebrate Black beauty in hairstyles, dress, skin tone, features. Let your children know those things make them beautiful.
- ◆ Expand your social circle to include people of many races, faiths, lifestyles, and abilities. Create opportunities for your child to be in the majority.
- ◆ Help your children find Black heroes.
- ◆ Fill your home with images, music, books, and toys that your black child can identify with.

CHECK YOURSELF (no self editing, go with your first reaction!)

Does your home look and feel inviting to black children? Do you have art work reflective of African American culture? Are there books on your shelves that are about Black history, heroes, and experiences? Do you make an effort to know about events and activities that support ethnic and racial pride?

SAFETY

Parents strive to keep their children out of harm's way but a Caucasian parent may not always know about the additional dangers faced by African American children and teens. It is important that we increase our awareness about these added risk factors and be proactive in helping young African Americans avoid pitfalls.

Dating

African American young men are often seen as sexually aggressive. It is important to caution them about intimacy and their dating preferences. They need to know that there are those who will be suspicious of them because they are Black. *(Learn more about the misperceptions of young black males in the book Why pick on Me? School Exclusion and Black Youth by Maud Blair or go to www.blackcommentator.com/98/98-calderon rape racism.html)*

Dress and grooming

Teach your child to adjust his or her appearance according to the situation. Like-it-or-not, they will be judged based upon the clothing they wear. Urban wear is often mistaken for gang clothing and paraphernalia increasing the likelihood of negative impressions.

Associations

Your children will be judged by the company they keep. Encourage your children to make good choices about peer groups.

Signs and Symbols

Sadly, there are still groups who violently target African Americans. It is important to recognize some of the signs and symbols of hate groups operating in a community. These include but aren't limited to: Ku Klux Klan, Aryan Nation and Neo Nazis. Some symbols are shown below.



Ku Klux Klan: This is the symbol of the infamous KKK.



Aryan Nation: Symbol used by this hate group and others who agree with their philosophy.



Confederate flag: Symbol of Southern pride and racism.



Noose: Hate symbol associated with the lynchings of Blacks.

CONNECTIONS

Children are constantly trying to formulate their identity based on social and cultural experiences, images and external information. Transracially placed children have two distinct influences, that of their family of origin and that of their substitute caregivers.

Being the only Black child in a household or community can be isolating for a child who is already experiencing the trauma of being removed from their family.

Foster parents who believe that “a child is a child and all they need is love,” are only partially correct. Love certainly goes a long way toward healing a hurting heart but caregivers must do more.

Responsible transracial foster parents must make certain that the children in their care have opportunities to interact with other children and adults from their racial or ethnic group.

Foster parents may have to go above and beyond, even risking some discomfort themselves by attending churches that are predominately Black, attending events and celebrations in which they are the minority, and making every effort to ensure that children have positive connections to their culture of origin.

These efforts while uncomfortable initially will do much to further your child's connection not only to their community but to you as well.

CHECK YOURSELF (no self editing, go with your first reaction!)

If you are White but foster African American children, you probably already celebrate diversity but how would you feel if your biological child wanted to date or marry an African American person? Why would you feel the way you feel?

RESPONDING TO RACISM

Talking about racism and prejudice can be difficult for anyone. Racism is ugly and has no basis in fact. If you are White and parenting Black children, you may feel anxious about addressing the issue. Avoiding the topic doesn't make the problem go away. In fact avoiding the issue only makes children feel worse about themselves. There are some things you can do to help the children in your care to respond to racism in the most positive way possible.

- ◆ Talk as a family about racism and your own family values. Show your children that not all families are of similar racial or ethnic backgrounds and some may react with fear or anger to your interracial family.
- ◆ Explain that racism is not the fault of the person on the receiving end of prejudice.

Rather it is the result of fear or ignorance in the child who calls them names or the adult who shuns them.

- ◆ Start the conversation about race early. Even young children understand and feel differences in behavior or treatment. If you let your child know you are aware of these issues, they may be more likely to come to you if problems arise.
- ◆ Use age appropriate language when talking to your children. You may also want to avoid asking them directly if they've experienced racism. They may feel defensive or ashamed. Bring things up in general terms, use personal examples of when you've seen racism, this opens the door for dialogue without making the conversation quite so personal.
- ◆ Advocate for equal treatment of your child. Let your child know that you will not tolerate racism in your household.

CHECK YOURSELF (no self editing, go with your first reaction!)

When you hear racist jokes do you laugh or speak up against them?

EDUCATION

African American children are at greater risk of being labeled with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)*, learning disabilities, and emotional disabilities by educational professionals than are their Caucasian counterparts. Moreover educators have lower expectations of their African American students than other students, these tendencies often combine to set Black children up for failure. Caregivers must be involved in every aspect of their child's educational experience and be prepared to advocate for your child.

It is important to meet with teachers regularly to monitor student progress. Being present, lets teachers know that you are involved and ready to advocate on your child's behalf. If you don't feel that your child's needs are being met, go to the principal or school counselor, do whatever is necessary to help ensure your child's success. You are that child's voice.

Keeping children connected to their community of origin can also help build a sense of personal pride and can do much to motivate young African Americans toward academic success. Remember, you are the bridge between your child's difficult past and future potential. (**Healthcare News Volume 3, Issue 7*)

CHECK YOURSELF (no self editing, go with your first reaction!)

When you get a negative report from a school teacher about your African American foster child, who are you most likely to believe first, the teacher or the child? Why? Would you have a different reaction if your foster child was White? Would you react differently if it was your biological child?

RESOURCES

Adoptive Families

www.adoptivefamilies.com

Boys and Girls Clubs of America

www.bgca.org

Child Welfare League of America

www.cwla.org/programs/culture

Child Welfare Information Gateway

www.childwelfare.gov

MAVIN Foundation

www.mavinmag.com

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)

www.naacp.org

National Urban League

www.nul.org

Northwest Adoptive Families Association

www.nafaonlin.org

Speakout!

www.speakoutnow.org

The Black Star Project

www.blackstarproject.org

Products for African American children and youth

Books and Toys

www.dollslikeme.com
multiculturalt toys4u.co.uk
www.perspectivespress.com

Hair and Skin Care Products

Mixed Chicks
www.mixedchicks.net

Blended Beauty
www.blendedbeauty.com

Treasured Locks
www.Treasuredlocks.com

Our Hair
www.ourhair.com



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