

Guide for Families Adopting Cross-Racially/Cross-Culturally

1. Identity Needs of Children Placed Cross-Racially/Culturally

The document will help your capacity and ability to meet the following unique identity needs of children who live with a family of a race or culture other than his/her own. In addition to the qualities necessary to enhance the normal development of any child, the needs of a child in a cross-race or cross-culture adoption are:

- An environment that provides the child an opportunity to participate in positive experiences with their culture, religion and language.
- An association with same race adult and peer role models and relationships on an ongoing basis.
- Environmental experiences that teach survival, problem solving, and coping skills which give the child a sense of racial and ethnic pride.
- A parent understands and relates to the child's life and daily relationship to racial and cultural differences and who can respond to those experiences with acceptance, understanding, and empathy.
- A parent who accepts and can help the child accept the child's racial and cultural ancestry and can comfortably share knowledge and information about the child's racial and cultural ancestry with the child.
- For the child to have adults around him/her who understand what it feels like for the child to look different from their parent.
- To have a parent that has knowledge of special dietary, skin, hair, and health care needs.

2. Capabilities of Persons Who Parent Cross-Racially and Culturally

To meet the identity needs of children who live with a family of a race or culture other than their own, it is desirable that persons who parent these children possess the following capabilities:

- An understanding of their own sense of personal history and how that helped form their values and attitudes about racial, cultural, and religious similarities and differences
- An understanding of racism and whose life experiences have given them an understanding of how racism works and how to minimize its effects.
- Life experiences and personal history which have given them the capacity or ability to parent cross-racially/culturally. Commitment to and capability of demonstrating empathy with the child's family of origin regardless of the socio-economic and lifestyle differences between them and the child's family.
- Capacity and commitment to provide the child with positive racial and cultural experiences and information and knowledge of their race and culture.

- Capability of preparing the child for active participation in or return to the child's racial and cultural community.
- Adequate support of those significant to them in their decision to parent cross racially/culturally.
- Residence in a community that provides the child with same race adult and peer role models and relationships on an ongoing basis.
- Tolerance and ability to deal appropriately with the questions, ambiguity, or disapproval which arises when people assume that the child is the applicant's birth child.
- Willingness to incorporate participation in cross-racial/ cultural activities into their lifestyle and participate in race/cultural awareness training.
- Acknowledgement that interracial/intercultural parenting makes their family an interracial/intercultural family which will have an impact on all family members and that a decision to adopt interracially will make the family interracial forever.
- Acknowledgement and preparedness to deal positively and effectively with the fact that as an interracial family they will experience discrimination similar to other minority families.
- The skills, the capacity, interest, and commitment to learn parenting skills necessary to parent children to understand and accept their race and racial identity and to work to change the feelings of children who deny their racial identity.
- Skills, the capacity, and interest to learn the skills to meet the child's special dietary, skin, hair, and health care needs.
- Appreciation of the child's uniqueness, and at the same time, help the child have a sense of belonging and full family membership.

ASSESSMENT GUIDE

1. Experiences and Understanding of the Role of Race and Ethnic Heritage:

Discuss your own nationality and sense of racial identity and knowledge of other races and cultures.

- When and how did you first become aware of your race and nationality? What role did your race and nationality play in forming your values?
- Can you remember when you first became aware of racial differences and similarities?
- What is your earliest memory of a person of a race other than their own?
- What have you done to learn about other races and cultures?
- What do you know about other races, especially the race of the child they are interested in parenting?
- Who are positive role models for that particular ethnic group and what do you know about these persons?
- Are there some role models that ethnic group considers positive but persons outside that community may consider negative? How do you feel about teaching your child about those role models?
- What do you know about how racial identity develops?
- Are there similarities and differences between your life style and that of the child's racial and ethnic group?
- How might a child feel about those differences?
- Have you had any experiences of being a minority? What were your feelings?
- Have you ever felt discriminated against? Describe the situation and feelings. What did you learn from this experience?
- How can you learn to know what it is like to live in an interracial situation so that you can be sensitive to the feelings of a child who would live with them?

Suggested Study Techniques:

Attend a community meeting, social event, place of worship, eats in a restaurant, or engages as a minority in other activities in an ethnic area and discusses their feelings about the experience. Interact with children of the same age and race of the child they wish to adopt.

2. Motivation and Support Systems

Discuss your reasons you are interested in parenting interracial/culturally and the impact of their decision on their family, extended family, friends, and neighbors.

- What made you consider parenting interracial/culturally?
- Are there people of other races in your family?
 - If yes, what have been their experiences with them?
 - How were they accepted in the family?
- Have you discussed your interest in parenting interracial/culturally with their family, extended family, friends and neighbors?
 - What was the reaction?
- Do you have friends or neighbors who are of the same race as the child they wish to parent?
 - How long have you been friends?
- Do you socialize with persons of other races/cultures?
 - How frequently?
- What racially mixed functions do you attend?

Suggested Study Techniques:

Ecomap and genogram, a family meeting that includes the extended family and children.

3. Community and Opportunities for Same Race Role Models and Peers Relationships

Evaluate the racial composition of the neighborhood; including schools and churches, child care centers, and other organizations a child would be a member of.

- What is the racial composition of the neighborhood, including facilities that would be used by the child?
- What is the attitude of school, churches, and their neighborhood toward members of the child's racial ethnic group?
- Are like race role models and peers available to the child as a regular part of the child's daily life?

Suggested Study Techniques:

Ecomap, visit a neighborhood school to observe how children of other races/ethnic groups function in that setting.

4. Life Style and Parenting Ability

Assess your life style, ability to teach a child racial coping skills and a sense of racial knowledge, pride and identity.

- What do you know about the values of the child's race or ethnic group?
- What do you know about the music, entertainment, and eating preferences of the child's race or ethnic group?
- What do you know about the skin and hair care and dietary and health needs of the child?
- How will a child in their home learn about the child's own race/culture, history, and customs?
- How will they involve like race people in the child's life?
- How do you feel that your decision to parent interracially will benefit them?
 - How do you feel it will benefit the child?
- How do you feel that your decision to parent interracially might negatively affect them?
How do you feel it might negatively affect the child?
 - How will they handle the negative effects and the hurt?
- Because of your interracial/cultural parenting decision, will others relate to you and view you the same or differently as you do now?
- How will you respond to the child in their home if the child is called racially derogatory names?
- How will you teach coping skills to a child of a different race or mixed race background?
- What problems do you think might come up in school, in the neighborhood?
- How will you handle social mixing, dating?
- How the issues for the child change as the child might become older?
- How might the issues change for you as the child becomes older?
- Might their child one day resent them for making this decision?
- How will they deal with it?

Suggested Study Technique:

Role play, attend a parent group with others who are parenting cross-racially, utilize a home study group, visit a family who is parenting interracially/culturally and whose child is an adolescent or adult, provide opportunities for the applicant to interact with children of the race they wish to parent.

Role-Play (Situations 1 to 4)

Situation I

Your family has known the Smiths for years, are good friends and your children grew up together. As the children were growing up they always played together, participated in activities together and were close friends. Your minority son is now 16 as is the Smith's oldest daughter. Your son asks their daughter to go to party with him as his date. She tells your son she can't go with him because he is not white. Your son comes to you questioning why he could be her friend all these years but can't take her to a party.

- 1. What would you tell your son?**
- 2. How would you, as a parent, feel?**
- 3. How would this affect your relationship with the Smiths?**

Situation II

Twelve year old Tina, who is a minority, comes home from school visibly upset. When questioned, she begins to cry and relates the following events to you: Her friend, Joyce, told Tina that her mother said that in the Bible it says that it is a "sin" to mix the races. Joyce's mother said that not only is your family a sin but because Tina is mixed race her birth was a sin.

- 1. Tina loves to go to church and religion is becoming important to her. She is very troubled about what Joyce told her and wants to know if this is true.**
- 2. What is your initial reaction?**
- 3. What would you tell Tina?**

Situation III

You are at a shopping center with your minority infant. You notice several people looking at you. Two men seem to walk by you several times and finally one seems to purposely bump into you (or your wife). He then looks at his friend, laughs and makes some remarks about you or your wife's morals. He uses several derogatory terms about your child's ethnic heritage mixed with a lot of profanity. Although he is talking to his companion, it is obvious that the remarks are intended for you to hear.

- 1. How would you feel?**
- 2. Would you respond to the remarks?**
- 3. How will you deal with such remarks when your child is old enough to understand them?**

Situation IV

You are grocery shopping and have your minority toddler in the cart seat. a woman approaches you in the aisle, smiles at you, and asks, "Is your child adopted?" You reply that she is. She comments, "What a wonderful person you are! God will certainly reward you in heaven. And what a lucky little girl she is!"

- 1. How would you feel?**
- 2. What would you respond to the woman?**
- 3. What might be your concerns for your child in interpreting the woman's comments?**

Situation V

You are at a school conference. It is the first one for your dark skinned child, as a kindergartener. Your impressions of your child, as you have watched him with other children his same age, are that he is at least average in his development and perhaps excels in some areas. The kindergarten teacher informs you that your child is in the "low group" in academic groupings. She comments that she doesn't think he will need particular "special help" in school such as a Title I tutor or a referral to special education services, but she thinks school may be difficult for him.

- 1. What is your initial reaction?**
- 2. Would you disagree with this teacher?**
- 3. What steps might you take in setting the tone for your child's school years?**