



Adopting Across Racial & Cultural Lines

Caucasian families adopting across racial and cultural lines through avenues such as international adoptions from China, Vietnam, Guatemala, India, etc, and domestic adoption of African-American and Latino children are on the rise. Caucasian families deciding to adopt through these avenues need to be aware that once they adopt, they are no longer considered to be a "white family", they are now a multi-racial, multi-cultural family. With the unique status of the multi-cultural multi-racial family comes the issue of building a racial and cultural identity for the adopted child, focusing not only on their ethnic heritage but also their adopted status. Many families who adopt across racial and cultural boundaries, particularly those who choose to adopt internationally, may not feel that they need to address race or racism with their children. They want to raise their children in a color-blind environment as "Americans". Unfortunately our society still places a large emphasis on race and ethnic heritage.

What many Caucasian Americans don't understand is that the identity development process is different for members of racial and ethnic minority

groups. Most Caucasian Americans were raised to think of themselves as individuals, because society at large doesn't assign them to a specific group, they are in the majority. Individuals of Color have to deal with how society perceives them both as individuals and as members of a group. The more prepared adoptive families are to deal with issues of race and cultural identity the more willing they are to make changes that will help prepare their children to live as adults in a race conscious world. Learn about racism in every way possible, talk to friends from other cultures or races, prepare your child for the day that they encounter racism, because it will probably not be an "if it happens" but a "when it happens". Many children experience racial prejudice as young as elementary school but most face it in middle and high school, often unbeknownst to their families. By ensuring in every way possible that your child feels secure in his or her ethnic identity you will be raising a child that is proud and can hold their head high, overcoming some of the negative effects that racism can have.

Consideration of place of residence, schools and

communities is also important. Many families buy books, culturally appropriate dolls, toys, art and music into their homes to provide positive images of their child's heritage. Culture camps, holiday celebrations, special events, and museum exhibits are also helpful and important in developing identity. However, this is not all that is needed. What children see in their every day lives, and what they pick up in non-verbal cues from their parents are what make the largest impact.

What does your circle of friends look like? Are they multi-cultural? Do you have friends of the same racial or ethnic background as your child? It is important for children to see members of their own race and culture as part of their lives. This helps them to take pride in their identity. Parents need to form inter-cultural relationships in the community around them in a natural way. If you adopted domestically across racial lines it may be important for you and your children to maintain contact with your child's birth family, particularly if your immediate community is not that diverse.

While family support groups, play groups and culture specific schools are a wonderful

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BOOKS TO HELP

Hate Hurts: How Children Learn and Unlearn Prejudice by Caryl Stern-LaRosa & Ellen Hofheimer Bettmann

- In simple easy to understand text, this book gives good advice on how best to teach children what it means to be a citizen in a diverse society, one where people of different races, religions, nationalities, ethnicities, ages, sexual orientations, looks and customs all participate equally but where, a good deal of prejudice and misunderstanding still exist. The authors offer insights and suggestions that are always practical, though not always obvious. What's more, part of the proceeds go towards efforts by the Anti-Defamation League to eradicate prejudice. AFTH price \$10.00

Everyday Acts Against Racism-Raising Children in a Multiracial World by Maureen T. Reddy

- A book of essays by mothers and teachers, Everyday Acts Against Racism examines the effects of racism on our children and communities--and suggests ways we can end our society's racial stratification. Writing from many cultural perspectives, the contributors provide provocative commentaries on the realities of racial intolerance and their own experiences in fighting racism. For example, you will meet a white adoptive mother of two Latina children, a white mother of an African-American daughter and an African-American mother preparing her young children for the journey of life in a not yet tolerant society. AFTH Price \$12

way to show your child that they are not alone in their family make-up, also seek out activities for children that are not part of cultural educational programs. Find programs that represent a child's extracurricular interests, such as sports, church groups, music, etc... that have a high level of participation of children of specific or diverse racial and ethnic groups. This is easier to achieve in larger, more metropolitan areas. You don't want to travel too far to join these types of activities because it becomes difficult to form or maintain friendships when long commutes are necessary. Families can also look into mentoring programs at local colleges.

Remember that you don't always have to find families of the same exact ethnic background. Sometimes finding families of the same racial background is sufficient. You should still attempt to teach your child the difference but not make a huge issue of it. For example a Guatemalan child may often be mistaken for Mexican since Mexican-Americans are the largest Latino population in America. To not take your child to a Mexican festival because it isn't their cultural heritage would be denying the child the chance to connect with other Latinos in their area. While providing your child with opportunity to learn more about their culture also don't force them into the experience. If you suggest going to a museum exhibit or a cultural festival and they don't want to go - go yourself. This will provide the child with the knowledge that

you are interested in their heritage for yourself as well as for them. Telling them you will go with or without them may also change their mind!

The world is only less racist to those who don't experience it. The continued existence of racism and inequality needs to be faced head on by adoptive parents. Increased attention by parents to the unique issues connected to adoption as well as to children's racial and ethnic identity development, will go a long way to promote optimal mental health for inter-racial and inter-culturally adopted children. Our families may be color-blind but unfortunately our society isn't and for many multi-racial and multi-cultural families this is a challenge. As children grow they question where they "fit". We may raise our children in loving, tolerant and accepting families but as they grow and interact with the world around them, chances are they will run into racism at some point in their lives. Lets help them prepare for it.