



Position Statement

Race and Culture in Child Welfare, Foster Care, and Adoption

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The Issue

Children identified as belonging to certain racial and ethnic groups including, Native American/American Indian/First Nation/Aboriginal, African American/Black, Latino/Hispanic, and New Americans/Immigrants are disproportionately represented in the child welfare system.¹ The disproportionality that occurs is linked to a history of racism, structural inequalities, and systemic barriers that contribute to how and why these families are engaged with the child welfare system. Race and culture matters and impacts policy, procedure, and practice decision-making in child welfare. It is the responsibility of the professionals, including social workers, guardians ad litem, the courts, care providers and all other involved adults in the child welfare system to understand and acknowledge their own implicit and explicit bias as they work with the children, youth, and families to influence the best possible outcomes for the child.

Practice and Policy Values

- Families are given culturally appropriate services to assist with reunification and every effort is made for children/youth to safely remain in or return to their family, community and culture of origin.
- Children will be placed with a family who recognizes that preservation of the child's ethnic and cultural heritage and relationships are the child's inherent right.
- Public and private agencies are responsible for diligent and continuous recruitment of potential foster, adoptive, guardianship, and kinship families who reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of children in the community for whom a family is needed.
- Those who work with the child welfare system including: Direct care staff, foster parents, adoptive parents, group home staff, administrators of programs, social workers, private agencies, must be trained and held accountable to implement culturally relevant, responsive, and respectful practices.
- Race and culture matter and children's voices need to be respected, in part because they can often identify options for culturally appropriate and/or least disruptive interventions
- Families who adopt and/or foster children of ethnic and racial backgrounds different from their own must recognize and understand the ethnic and cultural heritage of the child goes beyond clothes, hair, and music. The agency must prepare the family to recognize the realities of race and racism as it pertains to preparing the child to navigate the complexities of the various systems that the child comes into contact with.
- On-going relationships between adopt/foster parents and birth family are the primary vehicle for preservation of a child's cultural history and identity.
- States, tribes, and public and private agencies are urged to recruit resource families from children's own communities to further ensure their connection to culture and tradition.
- States, tribes, and public and private agencies are expected to provide all potential foster and adoptive parents with cultural awareness, humility, and responsiveness training, and encourage the utilization of cultural mentors.

¹ Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) FY 2014, United States Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children's Bureau

Additional Resources

NACAC Policy Statement on Race and Culture: <http://www.nacac.org/policy/race.html>