

***STAGES IN CHILDREN'S DEVELOPMENT OF RACIAL¹/ CULTURAL²
IDENTITY & ATTITUDES***
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NOTE: The stage/age characteristics described here focus on salient aspects of racial/cultural identity and attitude development. These characteristics are generalizations, based on the behavior of many children. A particular child will show a few, some, or many of the characteristics of his/her age and stage.

Infants

- Gradually becoming aware of self as a separate being.
- Beginning to absorb a cultural identity through daily care giving interactions, household smell, sounds, etc. Beginning to babble a range of sounds and imitating intonation and sounds of the home language
- Beginning to notice and respond to skin color cues (around 6 months old)
- *Quality care/education programs provide cultural continuity with each infant's home culture and some caregivers from infants' racial/cultural group.*

Ones and Twos

- Continuing to develop their awareness of self as separate individual
- Learning to interact with others within the cultural rule system of their families. Pay close attention to "their" adults' feelings and non-verbal messages.
- Curious about physical characteristics of self and others (skin color, hair texture, gender anatomy); May "match" people based on physical characteristics.

¹ The concept of "race" is" biologically meaningless, but, as a social-political construct that underlies systemic racism, "race" does deeply affect how societal institutions and individuals respond to people. Consequently, skin color plays an early part in young children's developing sense of self and others.

² Family culture is children's first socializing context, giving children a sense of identity and a set of beliefs, values, language and rules of behavior for interacting with the world. By 3 years of age, dominant societal culture also influences children's ideas, beliefs and behaviors as they enter into and learn from societal institutions, such as school, media, faith-based and community settings.

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- Sometimes showing discomfort around unfamiliar people, including individuals with different skin color. May not have language to express or ask about aspects of difference that intrigue them.
- Beginning to vocalize 'words' from her/his home language. By two identifying self/others with words like "me", "mine", "you"
- *Care/education program continues incorporating home cultures and introduces diversity through books, posters, puzzles that are age appropriate.*

Threes and Fours

- Speaking and continuing to develop their home language , a critical time for development in their home language
- Becoming grounded in their family/extended family's cultural ways of being: language, rules about behavior, how emotions are expressed, gender norms
- Identify and match people according to "racial" physical characteristics and groups, but often confused about complexities of group categories (e.g., "" How can two children with dark brown skin be in different groups, e.g., African American and Mexican American).
- Can learn that skin serves the same purpose for everyone, regardless of skin color and appreciate that all colors are beautiful. Do not yet understand the concept of "melanin"
- Not yet clear about gender and racial identity constancy (e.g., will I always be a boy/girl; will I always have my skin color?); Curious, and sometimes fearful about disabilities and beginning to show awareness of socio-economic class
- Over-generalize and make incorrect associations about differences based on their limited experience and still limited ways of processing information. May have their own explanations for the differences they observe among people
- Absorb societal stereotypes from people and from media about other groups and may show discomfort or fear. May tease or refuse to play with others because of skin color, language differences, and physical disabilities.
- IN ADDITION, have a strong sense of empathy and interest in fairness and can begin to develop critical thinking about hurtful images, comments and behaviors.
- **Begin to show evidence of societal messages affecting how they feel about their self and /or group identity, i.e., evidence of beginnings of internalized superiority (IS) or internalized oppression (IO)**
- *Quality ECE programs foster: children's self and group identities, integrate home cultures and support home language to extent possible, promote learning about*

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each other's home cultures and each other's similarities and differences, introduce critical thinking (true/not true, fair/not fair) about pervasive stereotypes and teach skills for dealing with hurtful behavior among themselves.

Five and Sixes

- Children whose home culture and experiences significantly differ from the dominant or mainstream culture often face a "bi-cultural" crisis upon entering school. (This may be white children from low-income families, immigrant children, and children whose home culture/language differs from school culture/language). Ways children begin to handle the "bi-cultural" crisis include:
 - a. Rejecting home culture & learning dominant one
 - b. Rejecting school culture and insisting on home culture
 - c. Learning to code switch and to become bi-cultural
- Aware of and exploring meaning of the several aspects of their self and/or group identities (racial, cultural, gender,) and the societal messages about them. Develop gender and racial constancy
- Interested in how people get skin color and can understand simple scientific explanations about skin color differences
- Show evidence of societal messages affecting how they feel about their self and /or group identity, i.e., evidence of beginnings of internalized superiority (IS) or internalized oppression (IO)
- May select to play only with children close to their gender and racial/cultural identities, but may also reject members of their own racial/cultural group (e.g. darker skinned African American children, Spanish-speaking Latino children)
- May use prejudicial insults and name-calling to show anger or aggression, knowing that these terms hurt.
- However, do enjoy exploring the similarities and differences in the home cultures of their peers/classmates and can identify stereotypes, develop critical thinking skills, and engage in "social justice" activities on issues that directly touch them-- in their classroom, school and neighborhood.
- *Quality primary programs incorporate the four anti-bias education goals into the daily curriculum. Fives and sixes profit from the objectives described for preschoolers. They can apply learning about similarities and differences to creating behavioral "rules" for their classroom and to simple activism activities addressing hurtful prejudice or discrimination affecting themselves and their classmates.*

Sevens, Eights & Nines

- Establishing group identities and membership -often form groups to act within own cultural

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rules and to reinforce sense of group identity. Able to learn to consciously code-switch between home/community and school cultures

- Children of color aware of racism against own racial/ cultural group. May show negative impact of internalized racism: third grade is when many children "psychologically" drop out of school (Their bodies are in the classroom, but their minds are elsewhere).
- See rise in name-calling based on racial, gender, class, disability and sexual orientation identities. Show influence of dominant culture myths about class (being poor is the individual's choice/ fault; having money is a sign of superior abilities). However, they also now have a greater capacity for empathy about the hurt name-calling causes.
- Can identify and critically think about interpersonal dynamics of racism, sexism and classism, and how to interrupt them. Understand scientific explanations for skin color and how individuals get their skin color. Understand nature and harm of stereotyping.
- Like to learn about the "history" of their own people and communities. (Interviewing people and writing about them are popular activities that also build literacy skills)
- Role models of people active in anti-racism /social justice struggles very important to them. Can engage in group activities to challenge individual and cultural forms of racism in their community
- *Quality educational programs use children's greater cognitive abilities to understand their self and group identities, while also fostering children's empathy for people across differences and their critical thinking and acting skills for countering prejudice and discrimination . It is important to teach about people in their and each others communities who work to end prejudice and discrimination. All aspects of curriculum make visible the contributions of all racial/cultural groups.*

BE AWARE

By age 9, "when faced with counter-stereotypic information, children that showed highly stereotyped attitudes tended to forget that information, or, even more disturbingly, to distort it in memory to make their ideas consistent with their stereotyped beliefs" (Bigler & Liben, 1993, *Child Development*).

"After age 9, racial attitudes tend to stay constant unless the child experiences a life-changing event" (Frances Aboud, *Children & Prejudice*, NY: Basil Blackwell, 1988).

Tens, Elevens, Twelves

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- Want to learn more in-depth information about their cultural group and its true history. Role models of people who made contributions and also worked to end injustices are very important to them.
- Aware of differences in perspective between dominant culture and their own group's culture. (e.g., "They (dominant culture) think about us this way...; we think about ourselves in other ways...)
- Continue to show impact of learned misinformation, stereotyping and dislike of other racial/cultural groups. However, have the cognitive ability to examine these more objectively with new information and can compare & contrast two different perspectives in an issue
- Conscious of and often disturbed by contradictions between what significant adults (e.g., family, teachers, religious figures) say and do about racial issues.
- Need a place to voice their concerns about injustices they see in their own lives', in their communities in the media. begin to understand concrete forms institutional racism
- Interested in history and geography, if it deals with real people; becoming aware of and interested in world events
- Interested in learning about current and past people who engaged in a range of anti-racist and other social justice activities from all racial/cultural groups
- Can engage in anti-racist activities in their community related to their understanding and interests (e.g., helping an anti-racist or other social justice focused community group with their work)
- *Unless middle school children have had quality diversity and equity education in previous years, they will show the negative affects of racism on their identities and attitudes towards others. However, they also have the cognitive and emotional capacities to benefit from working on the four anti-bias goals as they relate to their own lives and in the various school subjects. Middle-school children also quickly pick-up teachers and school policies "talking' but not "walking" the diversity/equity path.*

Adolescence and Young Adulthood

- Attitudes toward self and other groups are well established. So, too, is a strong sense of fairness and justice, although it may lie dormant in school settings.
- With opportunities to honestly voice their life narratives, and accurate knowledge about their own and other groups, can apply their critical thinking and sense of fairness to changing attitudes and behaviors. However, many may have to overcome lack of training/experience in critical thinking.
- Have the capacity to understand fully how cultural and institutional racism

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internalized superiority and internalized oppression work. Can engage in critical examination of their own beliefs, cross-racial/cultural dynamics and develop empathetic connections and interactions

- Reworking of personal and group identity can go in positive or negative directions.
 - Adolescents/young adults -of-color may: (a) Reclaim their identity/history; (b) Act out internalized racism against themselves and others, or, (c) Show aspects of both.
 - White adolescents/young adults may: (a) Reject/deny anti-racism teaching and actively carry out racism in speech and in behavior (e.g., name-call classmates, join groups such as the Skin Heads); (b) insist on a "color-blind" stance, passively (conformity) participating in racism; (c) Reject white racism (as they understand it) and try to develop an anti-racist identity and behavior
- Learning accurate history about all groups of people, as well as accurate history of racism and anti-racism plays a crucial role in choosing positive personal and group identity.,
- Working on social justice issues appeals to adolescent/young adults critiques of their society the may also show interest in the injustices in other parts of the world. Their passionate sense of justice can positively nurture their sense of power in the world.
- Great capacity to commit to and help organize creative anti-racism/social justice action in their community. May need guidance to keep realistic. Remember that it was adolescents and young adults who were the heart of the great civil rights movement of the sixties.
- *High school and two or four-year colleges can capitalize on the strengths of adolescents and young adults in all aspects of the curriculum. Specific courses in ethnic studies and social justice history, as well as community service work are also very useful.*