

Embracing a Child's Cultures

As resource parents, a lot of our work is focused on providing a safe environment and strengthening a child's self-worth and well-being. Families that help a youth identify with his or her cultures find it can lead the child to a sense of belonging and promote positive attitudes about his or her own race, ethnicity, beliefs, sexual orientation, and gender identity or expression.

When welcoming a child into your family, remember that not all cultural differences will be immediately visible. Resource parents are often not aware of their child's sexual orientation, gender identity, or customs. Regardless of the child's visible or invisible cultural differences, a family that is open minded around cultures creates an atmosphere of safety and provides the child a feeling of security with and within their new family.

Multicultural Home Environment

To create a safe home for a child of any age, parents should provide a wide variety of books, toys, art, and entertainment that positively reflect the child's cultures as well as the cultures of others. By being sensitive to the possibility of stereotypes, parents need to let children pick which toys they want to play with and be accepting of that choice, for example, if a boy wants to play with dolls.

Research has shown that children who are affirmed and supported for who they are have better outcomes and well-being. Children and youth who are not affirmed or supported are at great risk for negative health outcomes, such as suicide and drug use. A child raised with positive exposure to multiple cultures and interests, will internalize ownership of his or her own cultures.

Personal Cultural Needs

Be sure to provide hygiene and health care products that are suitable for the proper care of culturally different children. For instance, African American children may need certain kinds of brushes, combs, and hair and skin products to keep their hair and skin moisturized and healthy. Gender fluid and transgender youth may need clothing or grooming products that match and affirm their gender identity and not their anatomical sex, such as boxer shorts for trans boys or hair accessories for trans girls. If you have questions, seek advice from experienced professionals.

Convey positive messages to children about what is obvious, be it their skin tone, the style and texture of their hair, or their gender identity and expression, as well as their intellect and talents.

Cultural Experiences Outside of the Home

Visit places (museums, businesses, communities) where children's cultures are represented. Make sure that all children, including LGBTQ youth, see themselves represented in positive role models, in supportive images such as pictures and posters, and within their communities and among their peers.

Family Roles and Schedules

Children might come from homes where they failed to receive much hands-on parenting. It may take a while for children to adjust to differences in access to their caregivers. Family members can help by explaining the family's schedules and how those affect family dynamics. In a nonjudgmental way, discuss family values about work, education, leisure, roles within the family structure, and quality time with family.

Friendships with Culturally Different People

Resource parents can make significant statements about how they value cultural differences in the way that they live day-to-day. This can be conveyed in a number of ways:

Activities the parents can do

- join social clubs or participate in community activities that draw people from other cultures
- establish meaningful relationships and interactions with culturally different people
- choose activities that are inclusive of the children's asserted gender identity and expression

Building a Positive Environment

- communicate with friends, family, neighbors and coworkers your intention to foster/adopt culturally-different children and invite their support
- advocate for cultural sensitivity in the school and the community
- take action if you feel culturally different children in your community are not valued or are unsafe