

# Cultural Issues in Parenting

## FosterParentCollege.com® A Viewer Guide

### Introduction to the Course

It's important to be aware of differences in children's cultural backgrounds and how these differences can influence the way children behave, process information, and view the world. This class will provide examples of cultural differences to expect when a child enters the home and will explore aspects of culture. Culture can affect children at different ages. This course also examines how parents can support children's cultural development.



*Tanya Coakley, PhD*

Dr. Tanya Coakley, specialist and professor in the studies of foster care and cultural competency, shares her years of experience.

At the end of this course, you will be able to:

1. Give examples of cultural differences to expect when a child enters a home.
2. Describe aspects of culture.
3. Recognize stereotypes based on race, color, and ethnicity.
4. Describe the cultural needs of children by age group.
5. Give examples of ways to support a child's sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression.

This companion guide provides the content of this course.

Before taking in a child who comes from a different culture, parents should explore their own biases about people's differences and learn about racism and discrimination. Parents can evaluate the customs and beliefs that are important to their family and anticipate how having a child who is culturally different might affect those.

Some cultural differences to expect when a child enters the foster home are:

- diet
- dress
- religion
- celebrations/observances

## Cultural Identities

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Parents can prepare for cultural differences by learning about the child's culture. Foster parents need to be accepting of the child's culture, understand the differences, and identify the child's personal strengths.

Some cultural differences are visible, while others are less obvious. Racial differences, as well as one's dress, are differences people can see. Differences in socio-economic status or living environment are not visible, but also shape a child's point of view or way of life.

## Aspects of Culture

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Culture refers to the learned and shared values, beliefs, behaviors, and customs of a group of people, and can include:

- **Color**  
Color refers to skin pigmentation, complexion, or tone. Children in transcultural placements are likely to associate beauty with the foster family's color, or gauge their own beauty based on what they perceive the foster family's standards of beauty to be.
- **Race**  
Race is a social construction. Throughout history, in many societies, people have believed that differences in physical appearance were signs of biological differences and that some groups are biologically better or more advanced than others. This is not true. Race is not an accurate way to categorize people, because there are no significant biological differences between members of the human species. However, race can help people identify as a group, maintain their heritage, and ensure that certain groups have access to educational and employment opportunities.
- **Ethnicity**  
Ethnicity refers to the shared traditions, customs, learned behaviors, and language of the place where one's ancestors originated. People can change aspects of their ethnicity by rejecting current practices or accepting practices from another ethnic orientation. Hispanic, Latino, and Spanish are examples of ethnicities.

Individuals might identify with several cultural groups.

## Race, Color, and Ethnicity Exercise

In a short interactive activity, a stereotypical statement is made and viewers are asked to determine which aspect of culture (race, color, or ethnicity) that statement is based on.

**Asian people are better than Caucasian people at science. Is this based on race, ethnicity, or color?**

*This is a stereotypical statement based on race and compares the Asian race of people to the Caucasian race of people. Race is not an accurate biological categorization of groups of people, because there are no significant biological differences between members of the human species.*

**Why can't Hispanics learn to use English as their language? They live in this country! Is this race, color, or ethnicity?**

*This stereotypical statement is based on an ethnocentric view about one's ethnicity; the statement expects people who live in a country of their choice to stop using their country of origin's language because English is a superior language. This statement shows a bias against retaining a minority person's language tradition.*

**Black people are good at basketball. Is this race, color, or ethnicity?**

*The answer is race and also color; the stereotype assumes that a person would be better at playing a game because of his race or skin color.*

**Native Americans love to gamble. Is this race, color, or ethnicity?**

*This statement is based on race. The stereotype is false. Native American and American Indian tribes are considered sovereign nations and therefore have a unique government-to-government relationship that allows them to operate casinos as businesses.*

**White people are racist. Is this race, color, or ethnicity?**

*This statement is based on skin color. The stereotype is based on a preconceived notion that people with white skin – or of Caucasian descent – are always racist. It's false, because not all people with a white skin color are racist. Racism knows no boundaries; just as in any other skin color group, there are some people who are racist and others who are not.*

**The lighter skin black children are more sensitive than the darker skin children. It seems that the black children with darker skin are just rougher and harsher, and their feelings are not as easily hurt. Is this race, color, or ethnicity?**

*This stereotype is based on skin color. It's false, because skin color does not influence people's personality or emotions. But if people are made to feel bad about their appearance or bombarded with negative stereotypes based on the color of their skin, then they may internalize that and act out.*

## More About Culture

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- **Assimilation**  
 Assimilation occurs when an individual shares the majority culture's attitudes, values, beliefs, and language preferences rather than those of his or her minority culture. Individuals can be assimilated in some ways but not others, or they can be fully assimilated.
- **Blood Quantum**  
 Blood quantum refers to the degree of ancestry shared with a particular American Indian tribe. Blood quantum laws were enacted by the United States government to determine one's membership in a particular tribe. Most tribes today apply the concept of blood quantum to determine tribal enrollment.
- **Sex, Gender, Sexual Orientation**  
 Sex refers to whether a person is physically male or female. Gender, unlike sex, is not a physical attribute. Gender role is the expectations that a society has for someone based on his or her sex. Gender identity is how a person sees him- or herself. For most people, gender identity and sex go together. However, some children will have a gender identity that does not match their biological sex. Sexual orientation is different from both sex and gender, and refers to one's romantic or sexual interest. A heterosexual is someone who is sexually attracted primarily to people of the opposite sex. A homosexual is a person who is sexually attracted primarily to people of the same sex. A bisexual person is sexually attracted to people of both sexes. An asexual person is someone who lacks a sexual attraction for any sex.

## Cultural Differences

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The term "SOGIE" is an individual's sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression.

- **Sexual Orientation**  
 Refers to one's inclination to feel romantic or sexual interests towards other people of certain gender or genders.
- **Gender Identity**  
 Refers to the way people think about themselves as male or female. It is not the same thing as anatomical sex. "Transgender" is an individual whose gender identity differs from his/ her anatomical sex, and "Cisgender" is a person whose gender identity and anatomical sex match.
- **Gender Expression**  
 The ways in which people communicate or display their gender to others such as through behavior, clothing, hairstyle, and voice. These are often measured as "masculine" and "feminine."

## **Cultural Needs of Children by Age Group: Infants**

### *Birth to 1 year*

At this stage of development, children are learning to trust their caregivers and form attachments.

When a child from another culture is placed in their home, parents can start by introducing the infant to family members and friends and ensuring that they are committed to contributing positively to the child's life. Parents should discuss the topic of transcultural parenting with family and friends and gauge their attitudes and feelings before the child is placed.

If parents are unable to prepare for an infant from a different racial or ethnic group before placement, they can use the training provided in online classes and review the handouts from this class. Social workers would also be a good source for foster parents to find supportive resources and groups for transcultural foster parents.

## **Cultural Needs of Children by Age Group: Toddlers**

### *1 to 3 years*

At this stage of development, children's cognitive functioning and memories are expanding.

Foster and adoptive parents and kinship caregivers can provide nurturance and build a supportive network of family and friends with diverse backgrounds who are loving and accepting of differences.

Parents can support their child's cultural identity by exposing her to pictures of her birth family members or extended family, talking positively about them, and letting her know she is a part of two families – birth and foster, adoptive, or kinship.

## **Cultural Needs of Children by Age Group: Pre-School**

### *3 to 5 years*

At this stage of development, children understand what skin color is, and which traditions and customs their family practices.

Parents should provide children with continued nurturance; reassure them that they are appreciated, loved, and valued; and establish and maintain a trusting relationship before any questions arise about their differences and incidents arise concerning how they are treated by others.

When a child has been abused or neglected, foster parents need to build trust by being sensitive to and accepting of the child's feelings and perceptions, even if the parent does not fully understand or agree with the child's view.

Foster parents should make available various arts, music, games, and books that reflect the child's culture. Parents should be willing to read and play with the child and talk about the cultural aspects of the content. Parents should use age-appropriate language when talking with the child.

Children have better self-esteem and pride when they are raised to maintain their own cultures as they develop and are socialized within a foster or adoptive family's culture. Children of minority cultures need to learn, at a very young age, "survival skills" that will help them live in a society that can be indifferent or even hostile toward their cultural differences.

## **Cultural Needs of Children by Age Group: School-Age**

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### *6 to 11 years*

At this stage of development, children are experimenting with being social. They also have an increased awareness of who they are in terms of belonging to a particular racial or cultural group. Developing a sense of belonging to groups they identify with influences their self-esteem and self-worth, so it is important for parents to share positive information about their heritage.

Because children spend a great deal of time during the day away from their parents, it is necessary to give them tools to deal with insensitive or harmful incidents they might encounter. Children need help to develop their own skills to handle and cope with negative incidents concerning their differences. Parents should not always tell children to ignore racist and prejudiced acts or insensitive teasing. Instead, they need to help children build multiple survival skills.

Children should not feel as though they have to speak on behalf of or defend their race or group in every instance. Over time they will develop the right responses to different types of problem incidents based on their personalities and capabilities. The types of survival skills they'll need to use will depend on the situation. Not reacting at all is considered an acceptable survival skill that is useful in certain situations.

## **Cultural Needs of Children by Age Group: Early Adolescence**

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### *12 to 14 years*

At this stage of development, youths experience changes in the way they think, understand, perceive, and reason. They are very involved in being connected within their own social worlds.

In order for young people to develop positive self-esteem, they must feel good about their families and cultures of origin. Parents can help children become involved in experiences or programs that provide education about their culture and celebrate it as well. Parents need to maintain a good relationship with their children and keep the lines of communication open. Before a problem arises, they can discuss and build survival skills with their child and rehearse possible reactions to situations.

During this stage, children have a heightened level of sensitivity and a strong need for acceptance and

belonging. They are susceptible to affiliating with gangs or acting out in extreme ways when they experience ongoing rejection, hostility, and isolation. Parents should gauge whether their family, neighborhood, and immediate community promote a safe and positive experience for all children, regardless of racial or cultural background.

If there are serious issues in the immediate community that make it not conducive to raising a racially or ethnically different child, the parent must advocate for fair treatment. If all avenues have been exhausted to the best of the parent's ability, and it is not possible to protect the child from harm, then alternative living arrangements should be considered in order to protect the youth.

## **Cultural Needs of Children by Age Group: Late Adolescence**

### *15 to 18 years*

This is the final stage of development before adulthood. At this stage of development, children continue to explore and develop their cultural identity and establish a sense of belonging in order to become well-adjusted. They also have an increased level of sensitivity about the way they look and how they are perceived. Acceptance from their peers is very important at this time, so they strive to have the right relationships and material things, like clothes and music.

Parents should continue to develop and maintain a strong relationship with their adolescent, recognizing their new role in helping the youth to transition to independent living. Parents can help teens verbalize and express their own ideas about their racial or cultural identity or sexual orientation in their dress, actions, and friends. Foster parents may want to begin a conversation by first asking their teen what types of things he or she is interested in doing and why, or how the teen feels about things that are going on at school and why.

Parents should find resources that will provide knowledge and support for adolescents with cultural differences. That support could be a program or experience provided by a mentor, recreation center, cultural support group, etc. and should relate specifically to the child's race, sexual orientation, or group; it should also be meaningful and age-appropriate. Additionally, parents can provide adolescents with information about their heritage or group through seminars, DVDs, books, theater, and other forms of media that speak factually and positively about racial and cultural differences.

Parents should express to their teens that it is fine for them to explore and learn more about their heritage and group without feeling as though they are betraying or rejecting the foster or adoptive parents or the foster parents' values.

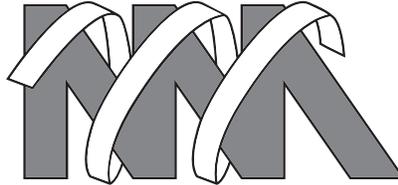
## In Closing

The key point to remember is that this is about the children and helping children to have good self-esteem. Parents should work to build strong parent-child trust and to be open to hearing a child's feelings. This is done through listening to and openly communicating with children. For young children, parents need to spend time with them, be there for them when they need it, and show them love and affection. Children feel that they can trust and depend on people who make time for them and show that they care about them. The same goes for older children and adolescents, but in addition, parents need to create a relationship where the children feel comfortable sharing things about their life that are sensitive.

Viewers are reminded to access the printable handouts that accompany this course and are encouraged to re-watch relevant portions of the course.

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