

RESILIENCE AND JOY

4 Essential Ways to Foster Pride and Self-Love in Children of Color



As caregivers, we have the power to connect children of color to their racial and ethnic backgrounds in ways that foster a positive sense of identity, belonging, and pride. Researchers call it “cultural socialization.” When children are rooted in community, feel a sense of connection to their family history, and see strong and beautiful representations of their own identities, they are empowered to dream big and forge their own paths ahead. By helping children know and love who they are, we can also build deep wells of resilience and self-worth among children of color that they can draw from when facing challenges, including experiences of prejudice and discrimination.

1. Share family stories.
2. Teach and learn together about children’s racial and cultural groups.
3. Share empowering books, media, toys, and activities that reflect children’s identities.
4. Identify family beliefs and values.

1. Share family stories.

Stories help children frame their experiences. When we share stories with children about their parents, aunts and uncles, grandparents and great grandparents, and others connected by biology or love, we help them feel grounded in relation to others, even across time. In fact, researchers have found that knowledge of family stories is a marker of children’s physical and psychological well-being and resilience.

Here are some specific ideas:

- If you don’t have access to your family stories (e.g., as part of a transracial adoptive family or due to estrangement as a result of trauma or abuse), think carefully about how to help your child discover them or get curious about them. Take the child’s lead on this as this can be a sensitive matter. You can also help them write the stories based on their imagination or fantasies.
- Tell stories about the good times. Boost self-worth by showing children they are the latest in a line of joyful, loving, triumphant, fun, and funny people.

- Tell stories about the hard times. By talking about challenges your family has persisted through, children learn about how to face adversity and persist through difficult experiences — and learn that they come from a line of people who have done the same.
- Make children active characters in these stories! Involve children at family gatherings. Ask family members to tell stories about children, in which their individual strengths and wondrousness are made explicit.
- Tell children the story of their name. How was it chosen? Where does it come from? What does it mean? For educators, having children share the story of their name, and emphasize its correct pronunciation, signals respect and instills pride, especially among children with names that may not be common or celebrated in dominant culture. Educators can create open-ended activities that prompt children to seek out and share stories about their families, like asking children to interview an older family member. These activities can help children learn about their families and build community within the classroom.
- Get creative! Ask children to draw themselves with their family members, or draw family members from three different generations. You can also create and talk about family trees, or create a card deck with pictures of family members on one side and stories about them on the other.

When you know better, do better — as your circumstances allow. While you may not engage in all of these practices consistently, if we hold ourselves accountable to routinely doing what we can, our kids, families, and communities will all do better.



2. Teach and learn together about children’s racial and cultural groups.

Share your own knowledge and learn together with children about the history and present realities of their racial, ethnic, and cultural groups. Feeling rooted in culture and community is important for transracially adopted children as well as children who share their parents’ racial and ethnic backgrounds.

- Talk about the collective histories and experiences of children’s racial and cultural groups, ranging from distant ancestors to modern-day lived realities. Read books, watch videos, and talk about them together. (For example, check out *Where Are You From?* by Yamile Saied Méndez and *Born on the Water* by Nikole Hannah-Jones and Renée Watson for inspiration!) Take children to concerts, plays, festivals, or other events where their ethnic or cultural background is represented.
- Talk about the contributions of those groups to history, knowledge, the arts, technology, and all domains of life. Tell children about famous figures as well as lesser-known stories of people who have done good and great things, past and present.

- It's also okay to acknowledge the less flattering parts of those histories as well, to show how groups of people can make mistakes and course-correct over time. We can also acknowledge the many different experiences of individuals within racial and cultural groups, in addition to their shared history.
- Celebrate the cultural roots of daily life. Notice where culturally-linked food, music, dance, artwork and craftwork, clothing, games, etc. appear in the children's lives, and talk about them. If they're not there already, consider how to incorporate them into children's lives in authentic and meaningful ways. Help children savor the tastes, smells, sights, and sounds associated with their cultural heritage. Ask, "How does this make you feel?"
- If there is a specific language associated with your family's or your child's background, commit to making it part of their life and the way they communicate. If you don't know the language, learn some of it with them! Start small, add new words each week, and don't be surprised if your child picks it up faster than you do! If you do speak the language, integrate it into everyday life. Language can be a strong source of pride for a child and a community, so being intentional about preserving the language can serve to foster pride and self-love.
- As caregivers, seek opportunities for children to learn together with their peers. Children are significantly impacted and motivated when engaged in learning and cultural experiences alongside their peers.

3. Share empowering books, media, toys, and activities that reflect children's identities.

Be sure children of color see their own ethnic and cultural background reflected and celebrated in images and stories to build a foundation of pride, belonging, and empowerment.

- Share books with children that reflect their own identity and highlight the beauty of their cultures, their physical features, their names, and their families. Check out books like *The Me I Choose to Be* by Natasha Anastasia Tarpley and *Regis and Kahran* by Bethencourt, *Eyes that Kiss in the Corners* by Joanna Ho and Dung Ho, *Your Name is a Song* by Jamilah Thompkins-Bigelow and Luisa Uribe, and *I Am Every Good Thing* by Derrick Barnes and Gordon C. James.
- Use the ["Beautiful Life" category at Diverse Bookfinder](#) to discover books that reflect and celebrate your child. Also, explore the booklists organized by theme at the [Social Justice Books: A Teaching for Change Project](#) website. The Social Justice Books website includes a [Guide for Selecting Anti-Bias Children's Books](#).
- Seek out other age-appropriate media providing affirming messages and representation for children. Examples are Sesame Street's "I Love My Hair" video (with versions in [English](#) and [Spanish!](#)) and the Oscar-winning short film "[Hair Love](#)."
- Make sure children of color have dolls and other toys that reflect their racial background and art materials that they can use to portray the colors of their own skin, eyes, and hair, and those of their family members. You can also ask family and friends who might give your child gifts to prioritize diverse and representative items!

- Educators can ensure that their classroom walls and libraries are full of empowering (and of course, non-stereotypical) representations of the backgrounds of their students. In classrooms, particularly with young children, use photos of the children and their families to make “diversity” visible, meaningful, and concrete.
- Participate in or organize activities (at school and home) that reflect children’s diverse racial identities.

4. Identify family beliefs and values.

Research suggests that reflecting on one’s deeply-held values — especially those that make us feel connected to others — can promote belonging, protect against the stress caused by negative stereotypes, and boost children of color’s performance in school. By starting early, we can instill core values in children that will help them stay true to themselves and navigate the world as they grow.

- Come together as a family to develop a set of “core family values.” Even young children can participate, and the whole family can discuss what each value means to them and looks like in practice. Write them down and/or represent them visually so you can refer back to them in the future, and think of ways to make the process fun and engaging! Try searching online for templates to help make the family values/mission statement activity fun and interactive with children.
- Identify the cultural values and beliefs that have guided the groups your family identifies with, such as respect for elders, community, hard work, celebration, respect for nature. How does your family express those traditional values now?
- Educators can invite families to share their values and think about how they are reflected in the classroom community.
- As a family, revisit the family beliefs and values when challenges and opportunities arise so that the family beliefs and values can serve both as grounding and as the family’s North Star.

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