

Transracial and Transcultural Adoption

A transcultural adoption is an adoption which crosses cultural boundaries, with the adoptive child being of a different culture than that of the adoptive parents. Many transcultural adoptions are also transracial, which means that the child has a different racial background in addition to a different cultural background. Both transcultural and transracial adoption are extremely common in the United States, but they are surrounded by complex social and cultural issues.

People choose to adopt transracially or transculturally for a variety of reasons. Some prospective adoptive parents feel connected to a particular race or culture because of their ancestry or through personal experiences such as travel or military service. Others simply like the idea of reaching out to children in need, no matter where they come from.

While you may think you know yourself and your family members very well, it is important to examine your beliefs and attitudes about race and ethnicity before adopting a child of another race or culture. Try to think if you have made any assumptions about people because of their race or ethnic group. There are two reasons for this exercise: (1) to check yourself -- to be sure this type of adoption will be right for you; and (2) to prepare to be considered "different."

When you adopt a child of another race or culture, it is not only the child who is different. Your family becomes a "different" family. Some people are comfortable with difference. To them, difference is interesting, wonderful, and special. Other people are not so comfortable with difference, and are scared by it. Thus, some friends, family members, acquaintances, and even strangers will rush to your side to support you, while others may make negative comments and stare. During the pre-adoption phase, you should think about how you will respond to the second group in a way that will help your child feel good about himself or herself.

Before considering a transracial or transcultural adoption, take a look at your current lifestyle. Do you already live in an integrated neighborhood, so that your child will be able to attend an integrated school? If not, would you consider moving to a new neighborhood? Do you already have friends of different races and ethnic groups? Do you visit one another's homes regularly? Do you attend multicultural festivals? Do you enjoy different kinds of ethnic foods? How much of a leap would it be to start doing some of these things?

It is always good for siblings to be adopted together. It is no different in the case of transracial or transcultural adoption. Siblings who are adopted together have the security of seeing another person in the family who looks like them. They are able to bring a part of their early history and birth family with them to their adoptive family, which may help them adjust better.

Listed below are techniques compiled by experts from books and articles on adoption.

Parents in a transracial or transcultural family should do the following:

Become intensely invested in parenting;

Tolerate no racially or ethnically biased remarks;

- As adoptive parents in an interracial or intercultural family, you should refuse to tolerate any kind of racially or ethnically biased remark made in your presence. This includes remarks about your child's race or ethnic group, other races and ethnic groups, or any other characteristic such as gender, religion, age and physical or other disability. Make it clear that it is not okay to make fun of people who are different, and it is not okay to assume that all people of one group behave the same way.

Surround yourselves with supportive family and friends;

- Surround yourself with these family and friends that support your plans to become a multicultural family.

Celebrate all cultures;

- As a multicultural family, you should value all cultures. Teach your child that every ethnic group has something worthwhile to contribute, and that diversity is this country's and your family's strength.

Talk about race and culture;

- Talk about racial issues, even if your child does not bring up the subject. Use natural opportunities, such as a television program or newspaper article that talks about race in some way. Let your child know that you feel comfortable discussing race-the positive aspects as well as the difficult ones.

Expose your child to a variety of experiences so that he or she develops physical and intellectual skills that build self-esteem; and

- While society has made strides in overcoming certain biases and forms of discrimination, there remain many subtle and not-so-subtle color or race-related messages that are discouraging and harmful to young egos. Be alert to negative messages that are associated with any race or culture. Point them out as foolish and untrue. Emphasize that each person is unique and that we all bring our own individual strengths and weaknesses into the world.

Take your child to places where most of the people present are from his or her race or ethnic group.

- If you bring your African-American child to an African-American church, or your Peruvian child to a Latino festival, your child will experience being in a group in which the number of people present of his ethnic group is larger than the number of Caucasians present. Adoptive family support group events are other places where this might happen. Children usually enjoy these events very much.

As a transracially or transcultural adoptive parent you should strive to instill in your child an understanding of their roots, as well as a sense of cultural identity and pride.

While adopting a child from another race or culture, can have many unique challenges, it can also be very rewarding for families.

Information contained in this article provided by the following:

Child Welfare Information Gateway

http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_trans.cfm

Adoption.com

<http://library.adoption.com/articles/transracial-and-transcultural-adoption.html>

Adoptive Families Magazine

<http://www.adoptivefamilies.com>