

Twenty Ideas for Keeping Connections to Racial and Cultural Identity

Parenting a child of a race or culture other than your own will likely be one of the most rewarding experiences in your life, but it is also likely to be one of your biggest challenges. When you adopt a child who is of a different ethnicity or culture, it's important for your whole family to develop as a multi-cultural family.

Wisconsin foster and adoptive parent Mary Jane Proft and her husband Tom have adopted 13 children from different backgrounds and abilities, and she says about her kids, "They have enhanced our family. We have learned things about other cultures and adoption that we never would have if we had not adopted them."

She goes on to say, "We also have more empathy for other minorities. We have learned to advocate for our kids and learned how to teach them how to do the same."

Your family will probably want to understand the importance of celebrating not only your child's culture, but other races and cultures, as well.

Here are some helpful ways that you can

help your family and child embrace ethnicity and culture.

1. Have children's books in your home that represent people of different cultures and races.
2. Learn a folk tale or song about different ethnicities or cultures and have your child illustrate it.
3. Have magazines in your home that represent different cultures.
4. Celebrate both your children's heritage and your own when decorating their rooms. (Of course, one your kids are teenagers, all bets are off as to what they'll want!)
5. Have multicultural pictures and artwork in your home. Some examples include: African masks, Hmong tapestries, Norwegian rosemaling, Native American pottery, and instruments and costumes from various cultures.
6. Learn some new words or simple phrases in your child's native language or dialect of the culture.
7. Watch TV shows and movies that



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represent all types of ethnicities in a positive manner.

8. Start a group—or join one that already exists—where families get together to celebrate different ethnicities. Try having a potluck with multicultural food—from pot stickers to collard greens to Irish soda bread and everything in between.
9. Include your child in helping prepare a meal that represents their ethnicity or culture as well as other cultures.
10. Attend different cultural festivals in your community. A good place to start is the Wisconsin Department of Tourism site, travelwisconsin.com.
11. Go to specialty grocery stores to purchase some food or some spices. See if they also sell music, books, art, toys, and clothing that represent your child’s ethnicity and culture.
12. Visit a local museum and see an exhibit that depicts different cultures.
13. Identify a positive mentor or advisor for your child who is of the same cultural heritage.
14. Discuss current events with



your child that involve his ethnicity or culture, as well as other cultures.

15. Identify cultural resources within your community like theaters, recreational centers, and camps.
16. Take trips to places that represent and reflect your child’s heritage. This could be a trip to your child’s old neighborhood, a museum, or even your child’s place of birth.
17. Regularly attend a religious institution frequented by your child’s ethnic or cultural group.
18. Educate your child about various cultures by teaching them about people who have made a positive contribution to the world.



19. Take your child to hear a speech by a prominent community leader or a business leader who represents the same ethnicity or culture as your child.
20. Reside in a neighborhood that is rich with cultural diversity and provides the opportunity for your child to come into contact with other people who are of the

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same race or culture as they are.

To honor their kids, the Profts have done a lot of the suggestions on this list. “For each culture, we have a room decorated with artifacts, furniture, and flavor of that culture,” says Mary Jane. “There is no doubt that everyone knows where the Asian, African American, Hispanic, and Native American rooms are!

“We made an effort to learn authentic recipes/meals from each culture and eat them regularly. On birthdays, the kids can request whatever meal they want. They

usually request a meal from their culture—even if they don’t like it!”

All families benefit from racial and cultural diversity. Education is an important piece for blending a multicultural family, and it doesn’t happen with a few social outings, but rather is gained over years. It requires the same perseverance needed in the adoption process that brought your child to your family.

The rewards are immeasurable. As Mary Jane says, “We are better people for the experience.”



Resources from the Coalition Library:

For Adults:

- *Being Adopted: The Lifelong Search for Self*, Brodzinsky and Schechter
- *Raising Adopted Children: A Manual for Adoptive Parents*, Lois Ruskai Melina
- *Are Those Kids Yours?* By Cheri Register
- *Tapestry-Exploring the World of Transracial Adoption*, by Janelle Peterson
- *Birth Marks*, by Sandra Patton
- *My Journey Home*, by Jackie Patridge
- *Cross-Cultural Adoption*, by Amy Coughlin and Caryn Abramowitz
- *Culture Keeping: White Mothers, International Adoption, and Negotiation of Family Difference*, by Heather Jacobson

For Children:

- *A Mother for Choco*, by Keiko Kasza (age 6-10)
- *More More More Said the Baby*, by Vera B. Williams (preschool and younger)
- *Katie-Bo*, by I. Fisher (ages 3-8)
- *Families are Different*, by Nina Pellegrini (ages 3-8)
- *Horace*, by Holly Keller (ages 3-8)
- *Chinese Eyes*, by M. Waybill (ages 4-10)
- *Why Am I Different?* by Norma Simon (ages 4-10)

- *Why Was I Adopted*, by C. Livingston (ages 4-10)
- *My Head is Full of Colors*, by Catherine Friend (ages 5-8)
- *Being Adopted*, by M. Rosenberg (ages 5-10)
- *We Adopted You Benjamin Koo*, by Linda Walvoord Girard (ages 6-10)
- *Is That Your Sister*, by Catherine and Sherry Bunin (ages 6-12)
- *We Don’t Look Like Our Mom and Dad*, by Harriet Langsam Sobel (ages 6-12)
- *Real for Sure Sister*, by A. Angel (ages 8-12)
- *Two Lands, One Heart*, by Jeremy Schmidt (ages 9-12)
- *Molly By Any Other Name*, by Jean Davies Okimoto (ages 12-up)

Support Groups and Websites

- Coalition for Children, Youth & Families wiadopt.org
- North American Council on Adoptable Children nacac.org
- Rainbowkids.com—The Voice of Adoption rainbowkids.com
- Adoption Online (Transracial Adoptions) adoptiononline.com/aectrans.cfm
- Pact: An Adoption Alliance pactadopt.org