Are you prepared for transracial adoption?

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Personality
Transracial adoption means that your family becomes “public” because your differences are readily apparent to others. Do you feel sick at the thought of the lady in the grocery store who asks inappropriate questions about your child, or do you relish the thought of learning how to help your child develop the strength and capacity to cope with racial bias? As a parent, you will be “on display.” You will need to seek help from adult mentors of colour who understand firsthand your children’s experiences in ways that you can’t.

As a transracial family, you can expect challenges ranging from differing hygiene rituals to preparing your child for situations you have never faced. If you hate to seek help or dislike contact with strangers, such tasks will likely prove demanding for you. If you enjoy complexity in life, transracial parenting will suit your strengths, whereas the challenges may be unappealing for those who prefer simplicity. If you enjoy being different and standing out, great. If you like to blend in and go with the crowd, think again. If you believe there is one right way to do most things, you should consider how you will incorporate into your family the different points of view that will likely stem from your child’s different experiences. If you are attracted to learning new ways of thinking, you will enjoy the challenge. Parenting should be enjoyed, not weighted down by tasks so foreign to you they will almost certainly feel like a burden. Look to your strengths. Acknowledge your weaknesses. Now is the time to determine the compromises you can live with forever or those that would create a lifetime of discomfort you may not want to take on.

Attitude
“The first time someone asked, ‘Whose child is she?’ I was unprepared to answer. Now the kids and I have three or four ways to respond, depending on our mood. The other night right before bed, our youngest began to cry. I heard my oldest son tell her, ‘People are mean. Because we are brown, some people don’t like us., I know it’s hard, but we can’t let them win.’ I wanted to run in and scoop them up, tell them I could protect them and that it would be okay, but I know I can’t do that. Watching your five-year-old learn to toughen up is hard, but better tough than unable to survive.”
When you choose to become a family that is different from most, you must be prepared to confront your own racial biases in both overt and subtle ways. The first step in the process is also the one that never ends. Acknowledging your own racism and “adoptism” is painful, particularly since it means you carry prejudices against your own child. Though you may feel yourself free from these biases, it is more likely that you just don’t recognize them fully yet. If you think that racism is getting better, you probably aren’t dealing with it much. If you think that most people feel adoption is a good thing, you probably haven’t yet had the opportunity to experience people’s “special” reactions to special families. If you haven’t had much experience with these issues, your antennae are not yet well-developed. The more you know, the more you will realize how much race and adoption matter. The more you realize how much they matter, the more you will know how much there is to learn. If growth and learning sound like fun, jump in. If confronting stereotypes and bias sounds overwhelming, here’s your opportunity to pass. Either way, you’ve expanded your thinking and been honest about some of the most hotly-contested and visceral issues of our time.

**Lifestyle**

Day-to-day living—what we do, who we see, where we go—this is how and where children learn the most important lessons of their lives. More than our words, and regardless of our intentions, children take our actions to heart. If there are many people of colour important to your life, you will deliver the message that people of colour are important and valued. If your child is the only one, how will you avoid the message that she is an exception to her race, or that there is something wrong with his ethnicity? You probably want a child more than anything and may be willing to go to great lengths to bring a child into your family. But down the road, if your child wants and needs connections beyond your experience, will you be willing to change your life to meet those needs? Will she have to do it without you, or will you help create the path, providing access to the culture that is hers by birthright? If you can comfortably imagine expanding your lifestyle in ways that may mean changing comforts and connections you currently enjoy, then transracial parenting will offer you many opportunities to do so. If this sounds like a burden, you can modify and plan how to best manage the challenges for all of you.

**Knowledge**

What we know—and what we think we know. What is—and what has been. For the sake, strength and often the safety of their children, transracial families need to examine these questions more than most white families. Schools teach us mostly European-based history and knowledge. Society teaches us to view the world from the point of view of white America, a point of view that sometimes includes immigrant- or minority-bashing to justify our history and current actions. Parents must understand the limitations to such “official” versions, going beyond what is easily available in order to learn more and to provide access to more knowledge for their child of colour. Without positive history and a realistic understanding of current race-based realities, children will think that white is better and that people of colour have accomplished little. Such limited understanding cannot help but to undermine their self-esteem and sense of ability and possibility. As a parent, you will have to safeguard and promote your child’s cultural legacy in order to offer him or her the chance to thrive.

**Where Do I Go From Here?**

If you have decided that transracial adoption is not for you, search out information about how to adopt children who share your race.

Transracial adoption is a lifelong journey, complex and challenging. It can work well for kids and families when parents are prepared to look at things from a new point of view.

Most adoptive parents can tell stories about how they fell in love with their own most precious child, the child they love more and better than all the sweetest and most gratifying pleasures of the universe. Most parents raising a child not born to them can recount the wonders of coming to know that their family was destined to belong to each other and discovering for sure that, although blood may be thicker than water, love is thicker than blood. We know from personal experience that on top of all that, being white adoptive or foster parents of a child of colour is as exhilarating and world-
altering as standing on your head for long periods of time. Upside down, everything looks different—is it the world that has changed? Or is it we who are different, glimpsing a new view of the way things are all the time—a view that usually exists outside our frame of reference?

We believe multiracial families are enhanced by developing the ability to catch a glimpse of each member’s unique vision, deepening and pooling their collective insights, and wondering at the beauty and complexity of the world as seen through the differing prisms. In learning how best to raise their children, most parents use their intuition and their lifetime of personal experiences. It is important to remember that for our children of colour, life is like that other world—the one we see when we are standing on our heads, the one in which things differ from our usual view. Our children are viewed and judged and measured by standards and assumptions other than those we're familiar with. That other world and its judgments are not the one we’re used to—but they are real, nonetheless. In some ways, the challenges faced by white parents who adopt or foster children of colour can be compared to those of a single father trying to raise a daughter on his own, or those of parents of average intelligence trying to raise a child with a sky-high IQ. Because Caucasian parents’ direct experiences do not generally encompass racial challenge and prejudice, our sense of the world will significantly differ from that of our children. It's just about a miracle—and a gift to our families—if we can keep that idea in mind.

Excerpted with permission from, “Below The Surface” by PACT, An Adoption Alliance, which gives parents the chance to quiz themselves in four areas pertinent to transracial parenting. www.pactadopt.org

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