



Knowing Who You Are

Helping youth in care develop their racial and ethnic identity

Viewer Guide





A Word from the Producers...

On behalf of Casey Family Programs, we want to thank you for taking the time to watch this video about the importance of helping youth in out-of-home care develop a healthy sense of racial and ethnic identity. We, along with many others, believe that the issues raised in the video represent important aspects of development that require our concerted effort and attention for each youth's ongoing sense of self, security and well-being.

Knowing Who You Are was designed as a positive first step in helping social workers, social work supervisors, and child welfare administrators increase their awareness of this issue.

It is our hope that this video provides the catalyst for inspiring courageous conversations and ultimately helping youth in care develop a healthy perspective and vision about their racial and ethnic identity.

If you have any questions about this video or the accompanying materials, or would like to speak with someone further about the *Knowing Who You Are... Helping Youth in Care Develop their Racial and Ethnic Identity* project, contact productsupport@casey.org.

— Holly Merz & Malcolm Hightower
Producers

Why Racial and Ethnic Identity?

At the heart of identity formation is the “challenge of preserving one’s sense of personal continuity over time, of establishing a sense of sameness of oneself, despite the necessary changes that one must undergo in terms of redefining the self” (Harter, 1990.) During the process of identity development, especially during adolescence, we all typically experiment with multiple selves and multiple roles within a number of major dimensions, including religious affiliation, occupation, social class, gender, immigration status, sexual orientation, and race and ethnicity. Some of these identities are to be kept, nurtured, and committed to over a lifetime. Others are worn briefly and discarded.

While all aspects of identity development are critical, one area that is often overlooked, especially for youth in out of home care is racial and ethnic identity. Issues of disproportionality and disparate outcomes for youth of color, the high number of multiracial youth in care, and the prevalence of cross-cultural placements in the field of child welfare cannot be ignored. Coupled with the realities of society regarding ever-changing demographics and, more importantly, the impact of race and ethnicity on how individuals are viewed, this aspect of identity cannot be neglected.

We all want positive outcomes for youth in out-of-home care. Unfortunately, all too often, youth are separated from their families and communities, both of which are primary sources of experience and understanding for youth about racial and ethnic identity. Without these anchors, many youth identify instead with the culture of foster care and feel forced to adapt and change who they are based on their living situation.

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Development of a healthy racial and ethnic identity can help youth establish consistency in their life with regard to how they view themselves and can be an important anchor from which positive outcomes are possible.

As a system of social workers and organizations, we must understand why racial and ethnic identity matters. We must make sure that youth in care have ample support and opportunities for exploring this important aspect of themselves.

What does a healthy racial and ethnic identity look like?

A healthy sense of racial and ethnic identity is exemplified by an individual who:

- Identifies as a member of a particular racial/ethnic group or groups;
- Has a generally positive attitudes about being a member of that group, but also has a balanced view of the strengths and challenges associated with it;
- Affiliates with members of his or her own group but is also generally accepting of people from other groups; and
- Is able to cope successfully with perceived or real racism and discrimination and has possibly shown some effective strategies for dealing with it.

Why Here—Why Now?

Knowing Who You Are—The Video/DVD

The “*Knowing Who You Are...*” video was developed to raise awareness about the importance of helping youth in care develop their racial and ethnic identity. This video is the first component of a three-part project. The intent of the video serves as a call to action for those who work with youth to understand why racial and ethnic identity matters, the impact that it has on youth when it is not addressed, and why it is especially important for us to attend to with youth who are in out-of-home care. The ultimate goal of the video is to give those working in the child welfare system a place to begin thinking and learning more about racial and ethnic identity. It also relates to the work being done with youth in care where the end result becomes a commitment or at least willingness to explore how this work can be integrated into day-to-day practice.

Target Audience

The target audience for *Knowing Who You Are* is social workers in the child welfare system, including those working directly with youth as well as social work supervisors and administrators in both public and private organizations. Since the responsibility for helping youth explore this part of their identity does not solely reside with social workers, others who interact with youth in care will also find this video beneficial.

It is our hope that, after watching this video, many of you will ask: “What’s next?” “How do I begin to do this work?” “How can I make a difference in the life of a child?” The other two components of this project may help you understand how.

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The Remaining Two Components

To ensure opportunity for increased learning, two other project components have been developed to complement the “*Knowing Who You Are....*” video portion of this project. These components include an online e-learning (Web-based course) and an in-person learning event. (See page 9 for more details).

These components provide participants with more in-depth information, knowledge, and skills necessary for incorporating this work into day-to-day practice. In addition, both components emphasize the journey that

those working with youth must take into their own personal racial and ethnic identity in order to be able to assist youth doing the same.

Key Aspects of Racial and Ethnic Identity

- Racial & Ethnic Pride
- Multicultural Competence
- Preparation for Racism & Discrimination

More information about the e-learning course and the in-person learning event is provided under Additional Activities and Opportunities at the end of this guide along with additional follow-up opportunities.

Project Background

In July, 2004, thirty people representing a variety of races, ethnicities, experiences, and roles in the child welfare system—including youth currently in care, young adults who were previously in care, foster parents, biological parents, social workers, and other child welfare professionals—came together to build upon existing work regarding racial and ethnic identity development for youth in care. The groups’ task was to identify, from their own understanding and unique viewpoint, the knowledge, skills, and supports social

workers would need to address racial and ethnic identity formation for all youth in care.

Their experiences, which were shared openly and honestly, formed the foundation of this entire project. Beginning with a call to action for social workers and other staff to commit to helping youth in care reach a developmentally appropriate, positive, and healthy sense of racial and ethnic identity, the project evolved as it took on a greater sense of purpose.

The participants increasingly realized that, in order for social workers to assist youth in exploring and developing a healthy sense of their own identity, it was also essential for the workers to arrive at some level of understanding and awareness regarding their own individual racial and ethnic identity.

This essential outcome demonstrated recognition that this work is not only important, but imperative to the success of youth, their identity, and their development as a whole.

Additional Activities and Opportunities

Viewing the video *Knowing Who You Are* is just one of many steps in the journey towards understanding the importance of racial and ethnic identity formation, both as a social worker or other staff member for youth in care. Organizations and groups are encouraged to dig deeper into understanding racial and ethnic identity as well as the many issues that relate to this work.

In addition to participating in the online e-learning course and the in-person learning events described below, there also many other opportunities that exist to grow and develop knowledge and skills in this area:

- Look for opportunities within your community and workplace to discuss the topics raised in this video and identify events, workshops and classes that might help to further grow and develop skills.
- Find out about local and national conferences addressing topics such as institutional racism, white privilege, anti-racism, etc.
- Surf the Web. There are a number of good resources, articles, tools, quizzes, discussion groups, etc that can be accessed online.

E-learning Course

The focus of this interactive, self-paced online course is to assist participants in developing the knowledge and skills needed to effectively help youth in care achieve a positive and healthy sense of racial and ethnic identity. The course, which can be found at www.casey.org provides participants with opportunities to:

- Explore their own racial and ethnic identity, their assumptions and biases, and the influences affecting how they view themselves and others.

- Examine the realities of how race and ethnicity play out in our society, especially within institutions such as the child welfare, education, and health care systems.
- Begin to develop skills for talking about race and ethnicity, addressing racism and discrimination, and beginning to integrate this new knowledge and skills into day-to-day practice.

In-Person Learning Event

The format of the in-person learning event is to support further exploration and honing of the knowledge and skills acquired in the video and e-learning. In addition to staff participation, the two-day in-person event may also include youth, alumni, resource family members and birth parents as participants. It is intended to provide a safe environment in which participants can observe, reflect, practice, and integrate knowledge and skills into day-to-day practice.

“You know, young people, social workers, foster families, everybody, we can’t be afraid of it because that’s what is going to make a difference [addressing this issue]. And that’s what is going to change things. We have to take it one step at a time, but I know there is strength in everybody. We’ve just got to find ways to bring it to the surface, and talk about it, and not be afraid.”

— Pamela, Birth Parent



For additional information, resources and assistance visit www.casey.org



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