

## Development within the Context of Racism

### Introduction:

A growing body of research documents that racism/being subjected to racism can be considered an Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE). Concurrently, the child welfare system is undergoing an awakening to the presence of implicit racial biases as evidenced by disproportionality and disparity data. DCF is at the forefront of the work to dismantle racial inequality in child welfare.<sup>1</sup> DCF strives to identify practices, develop programs that promote positive outcomes, and utilize agency data to address and mitigate racism and disproportionality and disparity. For staff serving adolescents, understanding the effects of racism on adolescent development and having resources to mitigate these effects is critical in supporting healthy development for youth. The direct and indirect exposure of racism is recognized as detrimental to the development of a person and has been demonstrated to have long term effects on a person's physical and emotional well-being and their ability to maximize their outcomes. The consequences to youth of color, particularly Black youth, must be addressed systemically and at the individual level in the daily work. The American Academy of Pediatrics has correlated racism in our society, and the effects on children and adolescents, to a socially transmitted disease.<sup>2</sup> The American Academy of Pediatrics identifies that youth who have experienced racism may face Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, anxiety, depression, and grief.<sup>3</sup> The American Psychological Association's publication [Becoming an adult in the face of racism](#) provides an insight into the consequences of racism for African American and Black youth including the physiological, psychological, and sociopolitical consequences. The [effects of racism](#) on Black, Indigenous, and persons of color related to health and mental health is a recognized factor in contributing in the onset of disease.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> [Dismantling Racial Inequity: National Child Welfare Workforce Institute](#)

<sup>2,3</sup> [Trent, M., Dooley, D.G., Dougé, J. \(2019\). The Impact of Racism on Child and Adolescent Health: The American Academy of Pediatrics, Pediatrics August 2019, 144 \(2\)](#)

## DCF's Role in Mitigating the Effects of Racism for Young A

The effect of racism is unique to the person experiencing it. As DCF seeks to interact with each youth individually, to support them in reaching their full potential, one obligation is to be cognizant of who the youth is and if the potential for them to experience racism is present. This awareness should include the potential for systemic racism that may be present in the life of the youth.

Agency staff should be aware of ways in which to assess and discuss racism with adolescents, including how to recognize and address the traumatic impact of racism in general and specifically for the adolescent(s) they are working with. The ability to utilize resources to enhance our skill set provides agency staff with some of the tools needed to reduce the adverse effects of racism a youth has experienced and likewise work toward supporting the youth in achieving their full potential.

Agency staff are trained to be skilled at creating safe spaces for youth to speak openly. Conversations with our youth about racism are necessary to assess and address the effects of racism in a youth's life. These conversations should include age and cognitively appropriate exploration of the youth's experiences with racism and the effects of these experiences. From the comments some of our youth were comfortable sharing they experience racism in everyday activities from overt racism to microaggressions. DCF must address the reality of the daily life experiences of adolescents of color because failure to do so serves only to magnify, and leave untreated, the effects of racism our youth experience and the adverse outcomes that are caused by this ACE.

[The Traumatic Impact of Racism and Discrimination of Young People and How to Talk About It](#), an excerpt from [Reaching Teens, Strength-Based, Trauma-Sensitive, Resilience-Building Communication Strategies Rooted in Positive Youth Development, 2nd Edition](#), provides information regarding the "pervasive negative effects of racism on youth development, as well as on their health and well-being, and the toll it exacts on families and communities who have been racially marginalized."<sup>4</sup> It also provides guidance on how to begin the work to assess and address the effects of racism with youth.

*Across the street from Lois' foster home there is a supermarket. Lois is Black and she shared this experience. She went to the store to purchase milk and she "was immediately told to get out." She left without incident but felt that this was "clearly racism" and that "it was obvious to [her] they don't like Black people" and she "suspected the owners thought she was going to steal something." This incident is still fresh in her memory. Lois, age 18*

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<sup>4</sup> Ginsburg, Kenneth R MD,MS Ed, FAAP, FSAHM Editor and McClain, Zachary Brett Ramirez, MD, Associate Editor. [Reaching Teens, Strength-Based, Trauma-Sensitive, Resilience-Building Communication Strategies Rooted in Positive Youth Development, 2nd Edition](#), Chapter 42, p. 307.

## Assessing and Preparing Yourself for the Work to Address the Effects of Racism in Your Agency Role

Racism has a long history in human society. Each person is shaped by upbringing, community, and life experiences. Many are also formed by the past of ancestors, be it their good fortunes or their subjection to persecution or racism. An initial step in preparing to work with youth to unpack the effects of racism in their life as we support them in achieving their full potential is to look inward at who and what formed us and at implicit biases. [Project Implicit](#) provides a series of self-administered tests designed to assist someone in identifying their individual potential implicit biases; among the available test there are tests for race, religion, gender, orientation, and physical appearance or ability. Specific tests related to potential implicit bias Black-White, Asian, Skin tone, and Arab Muslim can be accessed [here](#). Using this tool, in conjunction with the DCF Implicit Bias training, can support an individual in being aware of any implicit biases to ensure they are able to address them and prevent them from adversely affecting the work.

*Collise was approximately 15 or 16 years old when she experienced the following incident. She and her younger sister were in a store when a woman commented "You Black kids are having kids too young." Collise informed the woman that the "child" was her sister. She wasn't going to allow this lady to say what she wanted and walk away. The woman said nothing after Collise's statement. ~Collise, age 23*

White Privilege is a term used to reflect that a society is structured to create a system whereby white persons have privileges that people of color do not. For staff, learning about white privilege and the impact it has had in their life is another key step in preparing to build the foundation to lift up and support the youth to persevere when faced with racism. It is also a needed step to be able to have the open and honest conversations our youth need to assess the effects of racism for our youth and to provide the necessary interventions to enable the youth to survive the effects of racism without long term negative outcomes. Some

resources to understand white privilege are [Peggy Macintosh's White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack](#) and [Learning for Justice's "What is White Privilege Really"](#).

Staff preparation for these conversations may be necessary. A tool to prepare for talking about race with youth is available [here](#). Although this material is designed for creating equity in libraries, [Module 1](#) has information that is beneficial when seeking to prepare for conversations with the youth they are working with related to race and racism.

Recognizing strengths and limitations is important in the work to mitigate the effects of racism on adolescent development. Seeking opportunities to continue our ongoing learning related to racism is an evolving and/or ongoing process. There are many in DCF who are here to assist be it the chain of command and/or the DCF Academy for Workforce Development (AWD), and also numerous educational clearing houses; staff are all encouraged to continue to learn to address the impacts of racism on the development of the adolescents. There is no tool that can assist in either assessing the effects of racism or supporting youth in overcoming racism. Today's best approaches are to be prepared to begin the conversation, to initiate the conversation in a safe space, be an active learner, be active in asking the right questions, practice active listening,

respect the youth's statements, and most importantly respect where the youth is and their comfort with the conversation. Asking the wrong questions, or not opening a dialogue about the issue, can result in not addressing the topic or racism and the effect it has on the youth and likewise can leave the issue and effects unaddressed. Additionally, staff should be cognizant of DCF's role and ensure that when indicated appropriate providers are engaged to address and mitigate the effects of racism for the respective youth.

A tool that may be of interest in racial equity that may build on knowledge and skills is the [America & Moore Diversity Education, Research, and Consulting's 21 Day Racial Equity Habit Building Challenge](#). Throughout this work DCF team members should be prepared to do no harm, and are skilled to intervene or secure an appropriate provider to do so in a safe manner and advocate as needed.

### **Resources to Understanding Racism**

The experience of racism is both individual and race specific. The racism a person or group experiences is not something that someone of a different race or group will experience. However, there are resources available to support developing a greater understanding of the effects and experiences of racism on an individual and larger level. To prepare to enter the field of social work required an educational background. DCF is a learning agency and recognize that continued learning is necessary to allowing us to be most effective in meeting the needs of the children and families. Learning about racism and developing an understanding is imperative in serving youth of color. Not being an active learner diminishes the work with youth of color and in turn perpetuates the societal effects of racism.

There is a wealth of resources available that can support staff in gaining a more in-depth understanding of racism in America. The knowledge of racism in this country is evolving and staying up to date in our knowledge regarding racism is a responsibility the agency and staff each hold in order to best provide for the children, youth, and families. DCF strives to ensure that the agency and staff remain focused on and aware of ongoing and rising racist tides as related to the effects on those served. Likewise, staff working with adolescents need to be diligent in ensuring they are prepared to support the youth they serve to address and mitigate the effects of racism as they work to create the path for youth to achieve their full potential. DCF's pre-service training provides a foundation for staff to continue to build their knowledge across a wide variety of topics, including promoting racial justice within a child welfare agency. Beyond pre-service training, agency staff complete a minimum of 30 hours of training each service rating year. The AWD offers in-service training to all staff, issuing a new course catalog every season. Beyond DCF's AWD, organizations continue to produce educational opportunities related to racism that are pertinent to the long-standing systemic and individual racism persons of color face and the changing landscape of racism in America.

## Accessing Resources for Adolescents Impacted by Racism

Racism is an epidemic that must be addressed. For DCF youth, addressing the effects of this epidemic on their development and well-being is a mandate. "Failure to address racism will continue to undermine health equity for all children, adolescents, emerging adults, and their families."<sup>5</sup> Social workers are skilled at identifying needs for the youth need to include in the assessment of needs the presence and effect of racism in their lives. Beyond the assessment DCF staff provide youth with the tools and skills to grow and develop as healthy adolescents. Assessing the effects of racism includes the conversations with the youth, their caretakers, and a team approach in DCF to develop a plan to address and mitigate the adverse childhood experiences resulting from experiencing racism. Traditional services may include clinical intervention and/or prosocial opportunities for youth such as community groups. Prep for Prep provides an extensive listing of opportunities for youth of color [here](#). Addressing an epidemic also takes creativity. Creative interventions such as reaching out to a local Black Fraternity or Sorority Chapter or local faith-based organizations and houses of worship may provide opportunities for youth of color to connect with caring adults who have experienced racism and survived and thrived. Following is a partial list of resources for this work that are youth and/or educationally focused, in alphabetical order<sup>6</sup>.

[100 Black Men of Stamford](#)

[Anti-Racism Resources for the Asian American Pacific Islander Community](#)

[Arts Council Greater New Haven Anti-Racism Resources](#)

[Asian Pacific Policy and Planning Council](#)

[Black Lives Matter: Anti-Racism Resources for Social Workers and Therapists](#)

[Center for Latino Progress](#)

[Connecticut Clearing House: Mental Health and Wellness Resources for the Black Community](#)

[Hispanic Coalition of Waterbury](#)

[Hispanic Federation - Latino Connecticut homepage with Programs and Advocacy Listings](#)

[How Do I work with Young People on the Issue of Racism](#)

[How Racism Can Affect Child Development - A Graphic](#)

[In the Fight for Justice Native American Stories Should Not Be Ignored](#)

[National Child Welfare Workforce Institute: Racial Equity](#)

[Native Americans Want to Be Included in Race Talks](#)

[PBS Talk - Race in America](#)

[PBS - The Black Church, This is Our Story, This is Our Song](#)

[Tackling Anti-Racism with Youth](#)

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<sup>5</sup> Trent, Dooley, Dougé, 2019

<sup>6</sup> Additional resources can be sent to (enter an email address) for addition to this guide.

[The Racial Healing Handbook \(purchase required\)](#)

[Resources - Tackling Stereotypes Against Native Americans](#)

[Society for Adolescent Mental Health Anti-Racism Toolkit](#)

["The Talk"](#)