

CHILDREN'S UNDERSTANDING OF RACE

Age of Child	Child's Understanding
<p>Birth – 3 years</p>	<p>Toddlers become aware of physical race and skin color differences and learn the names for specific groups.</p> <p>They do not comprehend the real meanings of these labels, and may be puzzled by the use of colors to describe both people and objects.</p>
<p>4 – 6 years</p>	<p>Preschoolers can usually identify their own racial or ethnic group and may place a positive or negative value on their own and other groups.</p> <p>Feelings about groups are acquired by absorbing societal messages from the media, literature, toys, and their surroundings, even in the absence of contact or parental instruction.</p> <p>Children notice their own racial and ethnic differences from their parents and may express a desire to be the same race and ethnicity as the parents the children love. Some children act on this desire by avoiding sunshine, or trying to change their skin or hair color with chalk, flour, or soap.</p> <p>By the age of six, children notice that most of their peers are of the same race as at least one parent and that most of their playmates are not in foster care.</p> <p>Peers question children about their ethnicity and family composition.</p>
<p>7 – 11 years</p>	<p>Latency-age children usually have a firmer understanding of their own racial and ethnic identity and, given the opportunity, will explore what it means to be a member of this group.</p> <p>This can be a prime age for participating in group activities with a cultural or education focus, as well as a time when role models are especially important.</p>

<p style="text-align: center;">7 – 11 years continued</p>	<p>Most children are comfortable with their interracial family status (if applicable), especially if parents strive for open communication regarding race and related issues. These children are usually accepted by their dominant culture peers with whom they want to fit in. A child may assume a sort of “celebrity status”, especially if he or she is the one-and-only child of color.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">12 – 18 years</p>	<p>This is a time of exploration, including determining the significance of race, ethnicity, culture, and foster care/adoption. The youth will examine how these apply to themselves.</p> <p>A teen’s past experiences with his or her ethnic group identity are important as they determine whether their identity is positive, negative, or in transition. Teens who have had little or no contact with members of their own group may model themselves after media images, which may be exaggerated or negative. Teens’ interracial family status can add another layer of embarrassment.</p> <p>Some teens form interracial friendships, while others may experience rejection from dominant culture peers who were previously friends. This may particularly occur with respect to dating.</p> <p>Some teens in foster care may meet others of the same racial or ethnic heritage for the first time in school and may not be accepted by these individuals as they do not, “act their color”. This can be a very tumultuous time.</p>

Adapted from Joan D. Ramos, MSW for *Adoption Today*