



The WHALE Study  
Family Newsletter  
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## Supporting your Child's Racial and Ethnic Identity Development

We get a lot of messages about who we are, what other people think about us, and what value we have based on our group memberships – our skin color, culture, language(s), even the food we eat.

We get these messages from family members, friends, school, teachers, movies, music, social media, political leaders, and our community leaders. These messages are all a part of our **racial and ethnic socialization**, which is how we come to learn about race, ethnicity, culture, and racism. Racial and ethnic socialization contributes to our attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions of our group(s) and belonging to our group(s), otherwise known as our **racial or ethnic identity**.

Research shows that having a healthy and positive racial and ethnic identity is **extremely important** in helping minoritized youth deal with negative experiences of bias, racism, prejudice and contributes to our **sense of well-being** and self-worth.

The home and family can represent a critical space for racial and ethnic socialization to help young people develop a healthy sense of self. When we avoid conversations about race, ethnicity, and racism, children still learn about these things – it just won't be with our support. Research shows that youth who are engaged in these conversations are more respectful of other groups, have a better understanding and appreciation for their own heritage, and can better recognize and respond to difficult situations in the future. That sounds wonderful, but you may wonder, where can I start? **Here are some tips for supporting your child's healthy racial and ethnic identity development:**

(adapted from the [RESilience parent tool tip](#))

- **Check in with yourself.** Many caregivers never had these conversations when they were growing up. Before you start talking to your child, ask yourself about your own experiences with race and ethnicity, your feelings about these topics, and how race and ethnicity is viewed in your community, school, and larger society. What do you want your child to know and understand about race and ethnicity?

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Check out the page below for more resources!

Click [here](#) to tell us what topics you want covered in future newsletters!



Please reach out if you have any questions, comments, or concerns regarding The WHALE Study or the COVID-19 situation. Staff can be reached by call, text, or email: [whalestudy@unc.edu](mailto:whalestudy@unc.edu) | 919-914-0588  
Find us on Twitter: [@circlelab\\_unc](#), Instagram: [circlelab\\_unc](#), and [Facebook!](#)

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- **Tailor your conversations to your child’s developmental level.** [Developmentally](#), children begin to notice differences between themselves and others between the ages of 3 and 5, so conversations about difference should focus on acknowledging and celebrating differences. This can look like reading books, watching movies, or sharing music that is diverse – that may discuss physical differences, share cultural traditions, or have diverse characters. When possible, limit their exposure to media about violence and provide [comfort and reassurance](#). Children at this age cannot process complex issues, so try to answer questions in simple language they can understand. From ages 6 to 11, children are likely to notice racial or ethnic differences and how groups are treated. Therefore, continue to provide healthy and positive representations of their cultural group(s) through media and educational experiences. As children bring questions or concerns about what they notice in their daily lives or see in media, explore with them: acknowledge their experiences or reactions, and answer their questions about what they are observing.
- **Get support!** It can be hard to have these conversations! You won’t have all the answers and that’s okay. Stay supportive, open, and let them know you are there to have these conversations now, and in the future. Get support from other caregivers – talk about what it’s like to have these conversations.
- **It’s a process.** Developing a healthy identity may look differently across different life experiences, and for many of us, our relationship with our identity [changes over time](#), with our own growth, and changes in our environment/context. Remember that this is a marathon, not a sprint.

### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Explore these **mini courses from [EmbraceRace.org](#)** to learn more about discussing race with young children:

- [How can I help my children of color develop a healthy racial identity?](#)
- [Why is it important to talk to children about race?](#)
- [How do I talk about race with young children?](#)
- [How can I use picture books to talk about race?](#)
- [What is the personal race work I can do as an adult?](#)

### COMMUNITY RESOURCES

#### HOUSING

- [Durham Continuum of Care \(CoC\)](#)
  - Eviction Information: 216-965-5095
- [Durham Rescue Mission](#)
  - 919-688-9641
- [Orange County Partnership to End Homelessness](#)
- [Urban Ministries of Durham](#)
- **Social Services:**
  - [Durham County](#)
  - [Orange County](#)
  - [Wake County](#)

#### FOOD & GROCERIES

- [Food Bank of Central & Eastern North Carolina](#)
- [No Kid Hungry NC](#) - Text FOODNC or COMIDA to 877-877 to receive information about 3 drive-thru or pickup sites with meals for kids closest to you.
- **Free/Reduced Price School Meals:**
  - [Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools](#)
  - [Durham County](#)
  - [Wake County](#)
- **Food Resources by County:** [Orange County](#) (Updated Nov. 2022), [Durham County](#), [Wake County](#)

More community resources can be found on our website: [circlelab.unc.edu](http://circlelab.unc.edu)