



# STAGES OF RACIAL AWARENESS

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Louise Derman-Sparks

# Infants

- Gradually becoming aware of self as a separate being.
- Beginning to absorb a cultural identity through daily care giving interactions, household smell, sounds, etc.
- Beginning to babble a range of sounds and imitating intonation and sounds of the home language
- Beginning to notice and respond to skin color cues (around 6 months old)
- Quality care/education programs provide cultural continuity with each infant's home culture and some caregivers from infants' racial/cultural group

# Ones and Twos

- Continuing to develop their awareness of self as separate individual.
- Learning to interact with others within the cultural rule system of their families. Pay close attention to “their” adults’ feelings and non-verbal messages.
- Curious about physical characteristics of self and others (skin color, hair texture, gender anatomy); May “match” people based on physical characteristics.

## Ones and Twos Cont'd

- Sometimes showing discomfort around unfamiliar people, including individuals with different skin color. May not have language to express or ask about aspects of difference that intrigue them
- Beginning to vocalize 'words' from her/his home language. By two identifying self/others with words like "me", "mine", "you"
- Care/education program continues incorporating home cultures and introduces diversity through books, posters, puzzles that are age appropriate.

# Threes and Fours

- Speaking and continuing to develop their home language, a critical time for development in their home language
- Becoming grounded in their family/extended family's cultural ways of being: language, rules about behavior, how emotions are expressed, gender norms
- Identify and match people according to “racial” physical characteristics and groups, but often confused about complexities of group categories (e.g., “” How can two children with dark brown skin be in different groups, e.g., African American and Mexican American).

# Threes and Fours Cont'd

- Can learn that skin serves the same purpose for everyone, regardless of skin color and appreciate that all colors are beautiful. Do not yet understand the concept of “melanin.”
- Not yet clear about gender and racial identity constancy ( e.g., will I always be a boy/girl; will I always have my skin color?); Curious, and sometimes fearful about disabilities and beginning to show awareness of socio-economic class
- Over-generalize and make incorrect associations about differences based on their limited experience and still limited ways of processing information. May have their own explanations for the differences they observe among people

## Threes and Fours cont'd

- Absorb societal stereotypes from people and from media about other groups and may show discomfort or fear. May tease or refuse to play with others because of skin color, language differences, and physical disabilities.
- IN ADDITION, have a strong sense of empathy and interest in fairness and can begin to develop critical thinking about hurtful images, comments and behaviors.

## Threes and Fours Cont'd

- Begin to show evidence of societal messages affecting how they feel about their self and /or group identity, i.e., evidence of beginnings of internalized superiority (IS) or internalized oppression (IO)
- Quality ECE programs foster: children's self and group identities, integrate home cultures and support home language to extent possible, promote learning about each other's home cultures and each other's similarities and differences, introduce critical thinking (true/not true, fair/not fair) about pervasive stereotypes and teach skills for dealing with hurtful behavior among themselves.



# Five and Sixes

- Children whose home culture and experiences significantly differ from the dominant or mainstream culture often face a "bi-cultural" crisis upon entering school. (This may be white children from low-income families, immigrant children, and children whose home culture/language differs from school culture/language). Ways children begin to handle the "bi-cultural" crisis include:
  - Rejecting home culture & learning dominant one
  - Rejecting school culture and insisting on home culture
  - Learning to code switch and to become bi-cultural

## Fives and Sixes Cont'd

- Aware of and exploring meaning of the several aspects of their self and/or group identities (racial, cultural, gender,) and the societal messages about them. Develop gender and racial constancy
- Interested in how people get skin color and can understand simple scientific explanations about skin color differences
- Show evidence of societal messages affecting how they feel about their self and /or group identity, i.e., evidence of beginnings of internalized superiority (IS) or internalized oppression (IO)

## Five and Sixes Cont'd

- May select to play only with children close to their gender and racial/cultural identities, but may also reject members of their own racial/cultural group (e.g. darker skinned African American children, Spanish-speaking Latino children)
- May use prejudicial insults and name-calling to show anger or aggression, knowing that these terms hurt.
- However, do enjoy exploring the similarities and differences in the home cultures of their peers/classmates and can identify stereotypes, develop critical thinking skills, and engage in “social justice” activities on issues that directly touch them-- in their classroom, school and neighborhood.

## Fives and Sixes Cont'd

- Quality primary programs incorporate the four anti-bias education goals into the daily curriculum. Fives and sixes profit from the objectives described for preschoolers. They can apply learning about similarities and differences to creating behavioral “rules” for their classroom and to simple activism activities addressing hurtful prejudice or discrimination affecting themselves and their classmates.