

When Adoptions Cross Cultures

If the new addition to your family comes from a different heritage, don't ignore that sensitive issue.

Pimples. Braces. Dating. Finding your way through the teen years can be gnarly.

But when you're an adopted child of a different race or culture from your parents, "it adds a whole other layer of challenges," says David Youtz, president of Families with Children from China of Greater New York (www.fccny.org). "It's vital for parents of biracial/bicultural adoptees to acknowledge that their child is indeed different."

For example, like it or not, children adopted from Asia — who account for half of all U.S. adoptions — may be viewed by some as Asian, not Asian-American. "The goal is to help your child feel a sense of pride about their culture and race so it becomes a positive part of his or her identity," Mr. Youtz says.

The color-blind, culture-blind view that love alone can conquer all isn't realistic, experts say. "If you're in a rural area with little or no diversity, for instance, you'll need to be creative about facilitating connection with your child's heritage," says John Raible, Ed.D., assistant professor of diversity and cultural studies at the University of Nebraska.

Here are some ideas:

- **Start early.** Between ages 3 and 5 is an ideal time to talk about culture in ways that fit your child's age, Mr. Youtz says. A growing list of special storybooks can help. The goal is to help children learn about their heritage.
- **Go beyond dolls and festivals.** Dressing your child in a sari, dining on enchiladas or attending Chinese New Year celebrations isn't enough. Family talks about culture can help. But it's vital that children make friends with other youths who share their heritage.
- **Balance differences with similarities.** Shared likes of music, sports or personality traits aid bonding and help counter any "singling out" of your child.



- **Befriend parents who share your child's heritage.** It helps children in cross-cultural adoptions to see up close how parents of their culture raise their children, relate as a family and deal with race, says Dr. Raible.
- **Tap into university programs.** Take a Chinese dance or language class with your Chinese child, for instance. It's invaluable for sharing your child's heritage, says Mr. Youtz.
- **Consider a family heritage trip.** It can be a life-changing eye-opener for all of you. — Marcia Holman

To Learn More

North American Council on Adoptable Children: www.nacac.org/transracial.html