



AFDiT

Anti-racist framework for decision-making and transitioning children from minoritised racial and ethnic groups into transracial adoptive families.

Founded and developed by Dr Tam Cane, University of Sussex *Authored by Dr Tam Cane, Dr Sushri Puhan, Professor Gillian Ruch, Michael Wilson*
Co-created with People with lived expertise of transracial adoption – adoptees, adopters and social workers



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The emblem representing this framework, along with the jacaranda petals, go beyond symbolism; they serve as tangible manifestations of my African heritage. This connects my personal positioning within this research endeavour, establishing a link with individuals of racialised and minoritised ethnicities who have generously shared their narratives. It is my intention to offer something about myself by way of the jacaranda leaf and petals originating from my homeland, and birth roots.

Dr Tam Cane



We see this as a ground-breaking publication that underscores our unwavering commitment to improving positive identity outcomes for children in transracial adoption.

This framework was founded by Dr Tam Cane, and developed by the research team at the University of Sussex through a process of co-creation with social work practitioners, people with lived and living expertise of transracial adoption, and collaboration with Adoption South East and Coram BAAF. The research is funded by the British Academy and the Adoption England.

At its core, this document aims to provide a comprehensive framework that supports social workers in effectively understanding and addressing and protecting the identity needs of racialised and minoritised ethnic children who are moving into transracial adoptive families. Adoption, especially transracial adoption, is a complex and deeply personal journey for all those involved. The process of placing a child into a family of a different racial, ethnic or cultural background necessitates a thoughtful and sensitive approach, one that recognises and embraces the importance of identity formation and cultural connectedness.

As professionals dedicated to the well-being of children, it is incumbent upon us to champion their rights, nurture their self-worth, self-esteem, and core sense of integrated self and original identity, and empower them to forge a strong, positive sense of self.

Racialised and minoritised ethnic children in transracial adoption often face unique challenges as they navigate their multiple identities. They may experience a sense of disconnect or dissonance, or struggle to reconcile their cultural heritage with the cultural norms and experiences within their adoptive families and communities. The potential impacts of these challenges on their emotional, psychological and social development cannot be underestimated. Therefore, it is our collective responsibility to provide comprehensive guidance and support to social workers who play a pivotal role in these children's lives.

This framework aims to equip social workers with the tools, knowledge and resources necessary to facilitate positive identity development for racialised and minoritised ethnic children in transracial adoption. It recognises that cultural and racial identity are fundamental aspects of human existence, and any attempts to overlook or suppress them may inadvertently perpetuate harm. Instead, we must actively engage with these aspects, acknowledging their significance and nurturing them in a manner that fosters a strong and healthy sense of self. Gupta and Featherstone (2019) tell us that, adoption practice must be characterised by, among other attributes, humility, kindness, compassion, reflexivity and strengths-based approaches.

To achieve this, our framework outlines essential principles and best practices that social workers can employ when working with transracial adoptive families and racialised and minoritised ethnic children. It emphasises the importance of debiasing, developing confidence in talking about race, ethnicity, culture and difference per se, cultural humility, and encouraging social workers to continuously educate themselves on various cultures, customs and experiences. By enhancing their cultural literacy, social workers can navigate the unique dynamics of transracial adoption more effectively and sensitively.

Additionally, this framework underscores the significance of inclusive support networks and community engagement. It encourages collaboration among social workers, adoptive families who have transracially adopted, transracial adoptees, birth families, cultural communities, and relevant stakeholders. This is why this framework was developed through a co-creation process with contributors from these groups. By fostering connections and providing continued safe spaces for dialogue, we can ensure that all parties are actively involved in the child's identity journey and create an environment that values and respects diverse cultural heritages.

We must also recognise that this work is ongoing and evolving. As the societal landscape changes, so too must our approaches to transracial adoption.

By continuously evaluating and refining our practices, we can adapt to the needs and experiences of the children we serve, ensuring their well-being and affirming their identities. We must remain steadfast in our commitment to promoting positive identity outcomes, empowering minoritised ethnic children to embrace their roots while embracing their new families.

We want to express sincere gratitude to all the birth parents, adoptive parents, adoptees, social workers, academics and organisations who contributed to the development of this framework. Your dedication, expertise and passion have been instrumental in creating a resource that will guide social workers in their mission to support and protect the identity needs of racialised and minoritised ethnic children in transracial adoption.

"It would be beneficial to see this framework embedded in early permanency processes, as well as the Child Permanence Report (CPR) and the Prospective Adopter's Report (PAR). In this way, this tool would inform social workers' practice in both children's services and adoption."

Matching, Panel and Fostering Managers

How to use the AFDiT framework

Developing this reflective framework has been a labour of love and involved considerable intellectual and emotional resources.

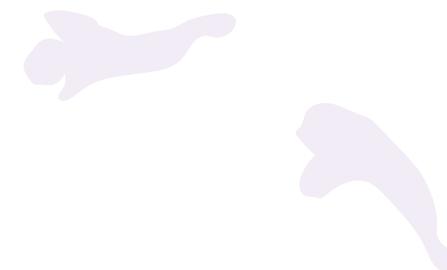
It would not be the document it is without this acknowledgement.

What it means is that for everyone beginning to familiarise themselves with the AFDiT framework and all the evidence and resources it encompasses needs to be willing to be intellectually and emotionally stretched. Whether you are a prospective adopter, foster carer, social worker, policymaker or academic we invite you to engage with the framework both personally and professionally. In fact we would go so far as to say that in order to engage meaningfully such a form of engagement is unavoidable, as AFDiT is about how we ALL are and how we then behave in the context of transracial adoption.

This will mean that you will need to be willing to undertake the different activities and exercises that AFDiT introduces, and be open to reflecting on the numerous questions that will have personal and professional resonance.

It requires humility and courage and a willingness to recognise our vulnerabilities in this complex, sensitive space, to make mistakes and learn from them. It is all about 'a way of being' that is open, fluid never ending, requiring constant learning and growth, as opposed to a 'way of doing', that treats learning as an instrumental activity that once undertaken is completed.

So what does this mean for how you approach the AFDiT framework. Here are a few 'rules of engagement' we think might be helpful.



1.

Before you begin you might like to simply free write for 3 minutes what comes to mind in response to: When I think about transracial adoption I feel...

The idea is you write without stopping for 3 mins, writing down whatever comes to mind, without stopping, editing or sanitising your feelings and thought.

If you read it back to yourself you might like to note down key words or phrases that catch your attention. As you then engage with the AFDiT framework you can notice how your unfiltered writing resonates with ideas outlined in the framework.

2.

It is not necessary to move through the framework sequentially.

Rather it will be important for you to engage at the point where you are currently located in the adoption process. That said there is important information in the first 8 pages that introduces the core elements of the framework and familiarising yourself with these is important for the work you will do in other parts of the framework.

3.

Whilst the AFDiT framework is focused on the process of placing children for adoption and will be used by social workers with prospective adopters, actual adopters, foster carers and birth families it is also a valuable resource to use in supervision to provoke reflection on particular children's circumstances or in team meetings/work discussions to help practitioners collectively to understand a child's experiences and needs and how they can best be addressed.

4.

The work involved in developing our anti-racist awareness and race intentionality is never finished. We need to remain vigilant. So revisiting the resources and questions at different points in time is encouraged in order to replenish our ways of being that are race intentional and race conscious.

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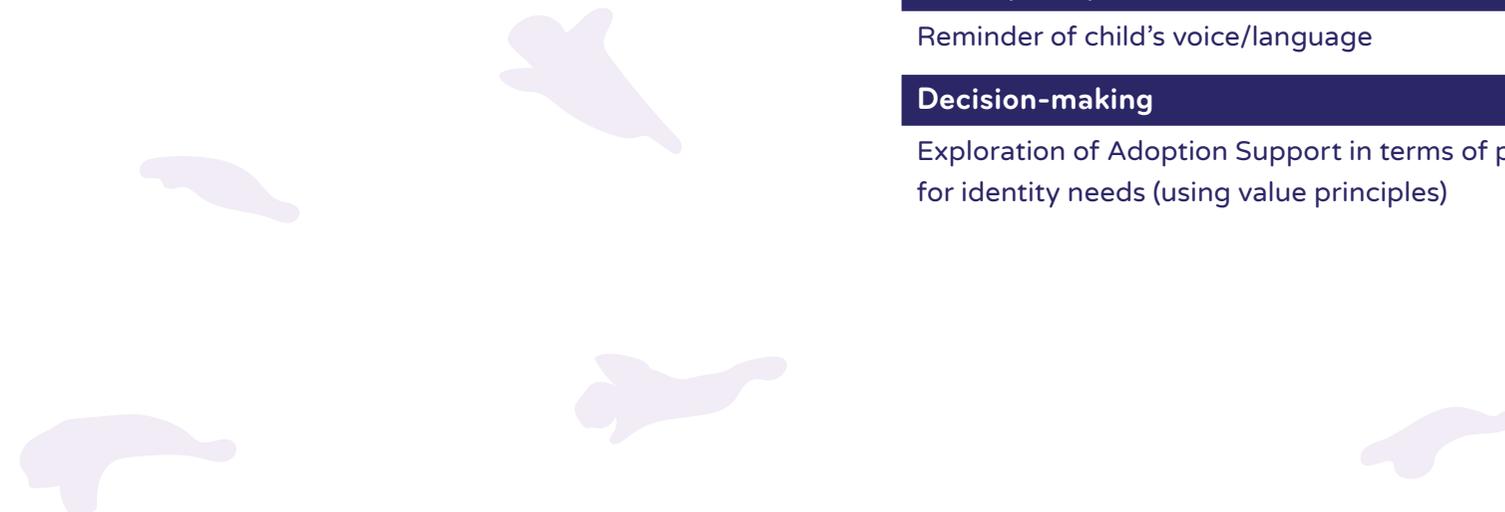
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Caution around terminology

We appreciate differences in preferred terms around racially and minoritised ethnic groups and acknowledge the need to avoid homogenising lived experiences (Cane, 2023).

It will be appropriate when using the framework to bear in mind the importance of using terms that children and families favour.

Therefore, when using this framework, please enquire with children and families of racially and minoritised ethnic groups right at the outset, what term they prefer or best associate with.

Terms such as global majority or ethnic minority have been used to define children who otherwise fall under this category. All these terms remain contested. In this paper we use the terms racialised and minoritised ethnic identities (groups) to acknowledge the social construction of race and ethnicity in the context of power structures that have led to the marginalisation of racialised and minoritised ethnic identities. This reflects the fact that these children remain, statistically, the least likely to be adopted compared to white majority children.

We use the term birth parents for familiarity within the social work practice context but recognise that this is not the preferred term for many adopted people and their first, natural or biological families. We recommend that you avoid assuming uniformity within racial, ethnic, cultural, or religious groups.

There is diversity within these categories – we cannot presume individuals define themselves in monolithic ways based on these attributes alone.

Explore the nuances of how each person relates to their background without resorting to simplistic generalisations.

Definition of transracial adoption

In the UK, and as part of this co-creation project, transracial adoption is defined as:

“where a racialised and minoritised ethnic child moves into an adoptive family of a different race, ethnicity or cultural heritage from that of the child, as opposed to the adoptive parents being from two different backgrounds, which is how it could be (mis)understood.”

This definition includes inter-racial, inter-ethnic, arrangements and trans-cultural adoption where adopters come from dissimilar cultural group than the adopted child.

It also involves children from the white majority moving into racialised and minoritised ethnic families although this can be rare in the UK context.

This anti-racist framework for decision-making and transitioning children from minoritised racial and ethnic groups into transracial adoptive families (AFDiT) is a framework that is intended to ensure positive identity outcomes for all minoritised ethnic children moving into transracial adoption.

It is a tool for social work practitioners to strengthen their decision-making and consider the right information, ask the right questions, ensure robust consideration around matching and linking, and implement the right strategies to remove bias in decision-making when moving a child to transracial adoption. The tool encourages holistic consideration of the long-term implications of racial identity.

AFDiT is grounded in principles that actively challenge and dismantle systemic racism, promote cultural responsiveness, and prioritise the well-being and identity development of minoritised children.

“We need a tool that encourages openness, and curiosity. Generally, adopters and social workers should not be afraid to talk about race, and racism.”

Social Worker

“This framework will be much welcomed by children’s guardians. It allows for everyone around the child to centre the child’s racial, ethnic, and cultural identity needs in transracial adoption.”

CAFCASS, Manager

“This tool is much needed in practice. Social workers can be very competent in the process but it can be challenging to have space and time for self-evaluation”

Social Worker



Why is AFDiT needed?



Terms such as cultural genocide in the adoption context can be difficult to use; however, this word has been used in adoption scholarship to refer to processes that oppressively erase, invalidate or disrupt traditional ways of life, community, spiritual practices and family structures (Leonard, 2022).

We invite you to reflect on the term 'cultural genocide' without focusing just on the latter word, as this term has been used by some people with lived experience of displacement and cultural loss to explain their experience.

The AFDiT transracial framework is a valuable tool that encourages a holistic consideration of the long-term implications of racial identity for Black, Asian, and minoritised, race and ethnic groups.

Where mixed identities are concerned, it is crucial to recognise that mixed heritage encompasses a wide range of racial and ethnic combinations beyond the often-assumed White/Black or White/Asian parentage. Mixed heritage includes a combination of a range of mixed racial, ethnic, or cultural groups (Gupta, A.).

Service level provision for recruiting adoptive families from racialised and minoritised communities remains crucial to both increase and maximise the pool of potential matches for children from similar backgrounds.

Moreover, service level provision for adoption support services must also be equipped to address racial, ethnic, and cultural identity issues. Among others, it is essential that these services provide appropriate emotional support, and facilitate support groups for transracially adopted children and adults, for example.

There are insufficient numbers of prospective adopters from minoritised racial and ethnic backgrounds to match the children of these backgrounds seeking adoption. It is this shortage that leads to a continuation of transracial adoption, while concerns around cultural genocide, internal colonisation and oppression of people of colour through transracial placements began around the 1960s (Ali, 2014).

Despite campaigns to attract adopters from Black and other minoritised backgrounds as well as amendments in legislation to promote racial and ethnic matching since the 1980s, there has been little progress. Minoritised ethnic children, particularly Black children, continue to be the most difficult to place (Barn, 2013). However, it is important to note that, government direction in the UK has prioritised avoiding strict ethnic matching in transracial adoption placements. While this change was intended to expedite the process and increase the number of timely placements, its practical implications have generated significant challenges for practitioners.

The shift in focus away from ethnic matching has created a sense of uncertainty and confusion among practitioners, making it difficult to navigate the complexities of transracial adoption effectively (Kirton, 2020). Practitioners in the field of transracial adoption are now confronted with conflicting expectations and professional standards due to the changes in government direction. This dissonance arises from the tension between the desire to adhere to the current policy guidelines and the awareness of potential consequences for children involved. The resulting dissonance, which arises from the conflicting beliefs and values, further compounds the challenges faced by practitioners. The complex nature of cognitive dissonance can lead to a tendency to overlook or minimise the challenges and disadvantages that transracial adoption may present for children.



Why is AFDiT needed? continued...

This impulse to avoid addressing these costs may stem from the inherent discomfort associated with the conflicting beliefs and values surrounding transracial adoption.

When transracial adoption is not carefully managed, an adopted child may experience conflict in identity, a lack of self-worth, they may internalise colour blindness, or have an increased desire to explore racial and ethnic identities (Lee, 2003). In some studies, children from minoritised racial and ethnic groups in transracial adoptive homes wished their adoptive parents had seen their family as multi-cultural and allowed them to develop a true sense of racial identity (Freundlich and Lieberthal, 2000). A critical problem is that child protection and permanency work are grounded in Eurocentric understandings (Selwyn and Wijedesa, 2014). People with lived experience of transracial adoption report that the current adoption system fails to address key concerns regarding transracial adoption. Firstly, adoptees face isolation and a lack of diversity within their adoptive family and in their wider surroundings; secondly, transracially adopted individuals encounter challenges in developing a healthy racial and cultural identity; thirdly, they become disconnected from their birth culture, and may encounter forms of racism, bigotry or prejudice from their adoptive family, whether it be the immediate or extended family, and similarly within community settings, and often adoptive parents are not equipped enough to deal with these problems.

These issues can be effectively addressed through enhanced practice policies and frameworks that take race into account, increased cultural competence training for adoptive families, and more rigorous assessments and preparation of prospective adoptive families' commitment to meeting the unique cultural and racial needs of the child prior to finalising the adoption.

This 'anti-racist framework for decision-making and transitioning children from minoritised racial and ethnic groups into transracial adoptive families (AFDiT)' to support children from minoritised ethnic groups moving from care into transracial adoptive families is focused on anti-racist decision-making, during the adoption pre-transition, transition and post-adoption support stages, to identify, guide, challenge and address issues that are likely to affect the racial identity of the adoptive child in the long term. It is a tool for social work practitioners to strengthen their decision-making and consider the right information, ask the right questions, ensure robust consideration around matching and linking, and implement the right strategies to remove bias in decision-making when moving a child to transracial adoption.

The tool encourages holistic consideration of the long-term implications of racial identity.

Having courageous conversations about differences in culture, race, ethnicity or religion is not intended to be seen as discriminatory practice but that which takes an open and sensitive approach to the long-term outcomes of children adopted transracially. We also hope that this framework serves as a cushion for practitioners doing their work courageously and ethically around issues of race, identity and culture.

"This framework intends to give professionals working in adoption a tool to aid courageous conversations around transracial adoption."

Adoption Manager

"This framework will definitely give me some confidence and the right terminology to use when working with adoptive parents and children in transracial adoption."

Adoption Social Worker

Note: In some instances the term post-adoption support is referenced as it was commonly known and used at the time of our research. However, 'adoption support' is now increasingly used to encompass support throughout the adoption process, from pre-adoption through to post-adoption. We are referring to adoption support broadly. You may use terms that are relevant and appropriate to your practice context.

AFDiT encompasses the following key principles presented below.

Principle 1:

Transracial adoption can result in trauma:

Separation, racial and cultural disconnection can lead to trauma/racial trauma. The absence of supporting a child's cohesive and positive sense of identity and inadequacy of racial socialisation can contribute to the adoptee's sense of confusion and identity struggles.

Principle 2:

Equity:

Social workers and adopters must explicitly acknowledge and address the structural inequities and racism that minoritised children face within the adoption system.

Principle 3:

Anti-racism:

Practitioners and adopters must see race, ethnicity and difference in order to work actively to address bias and racism that arises from these differences. An anti-racist stance in adoption involves actively opposing discrimination, bias and stereotypes, and striving to eliminate systemic barriers that perpetuate racial inequalities.

Principle 4:

Cultural responsiveness:

AFDiT recognises the importance of cultural identity and connection. Social workers and adopters should prioritise the preservation of a child's cultural heritage and the need to embrace, celebrate and engage with the child's cultural links over time.

Principle 5:

Comprehensive assessment:

Comprehensive assessments around the child's identity and birth families' ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds. Including readiness to embrace the child's heritage should be ongoing to include the provision of adoption support.

Principle 6:

Collaborative partnerships:

This process should include early consideration of adoption linking and matching with the child's identity and heritage in mind. This is important where minoritised ethnic children are likely to remain in care longer.

Principle 7:

Collaboration and inclusion of birth parents:

Birth parents can be supported to provide comprehensive information regarding the child's racial and ethnic identity, and to understand potential challenges and benefits of transracial adoption.

Principle 8:

Pre- and post-adoption support:

Pre- and post-adoption support must be culturally sensitive and tailored to the specific and unique needs of minoritised children and their adoptive families. It must be alert to the current experiences of racism for the child and family.

Principle 9:

Monitoring and evaluation:

Regular monitoring and evaluation of transracial adoption practice and approaches' effectiveness are essential to ensure their impact and identify areas for improvement.

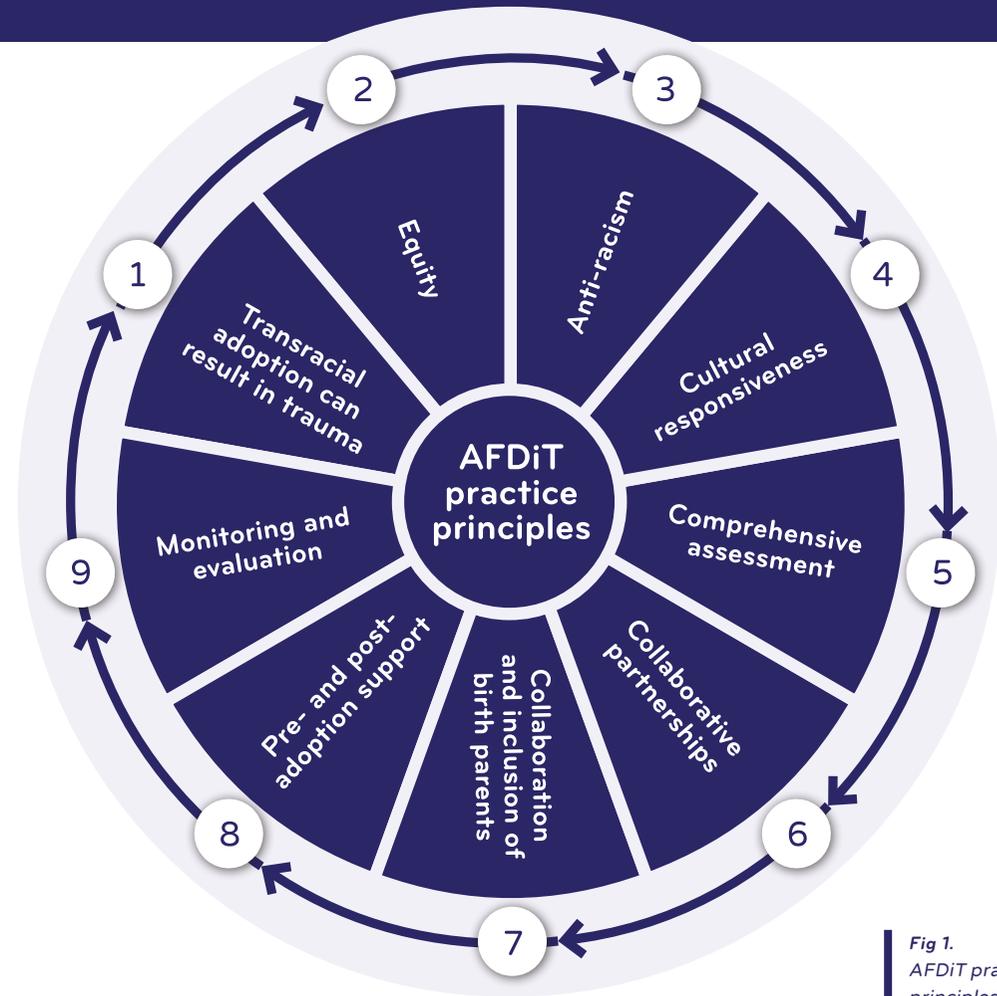


Fig 1. AFDiT practice principles



Race intentionality and racial consciousness are used in this framework to formulate a practice model that encourages practitioners to think carefully about children’s needs around race, culture, and heritage (inclusive of religion) in transracial adoption.

Race intentionality and racial consciousness models provide a framework for social workers and adoptive parents to think carefully about what should be in place to meet the needs of these children. The framework helps social workers to assess and make a professional judgement on what adopters can skilfully offer to meet the child’s identity needs.

Read on to understand how these two concepts can be combined to help with decision-making.

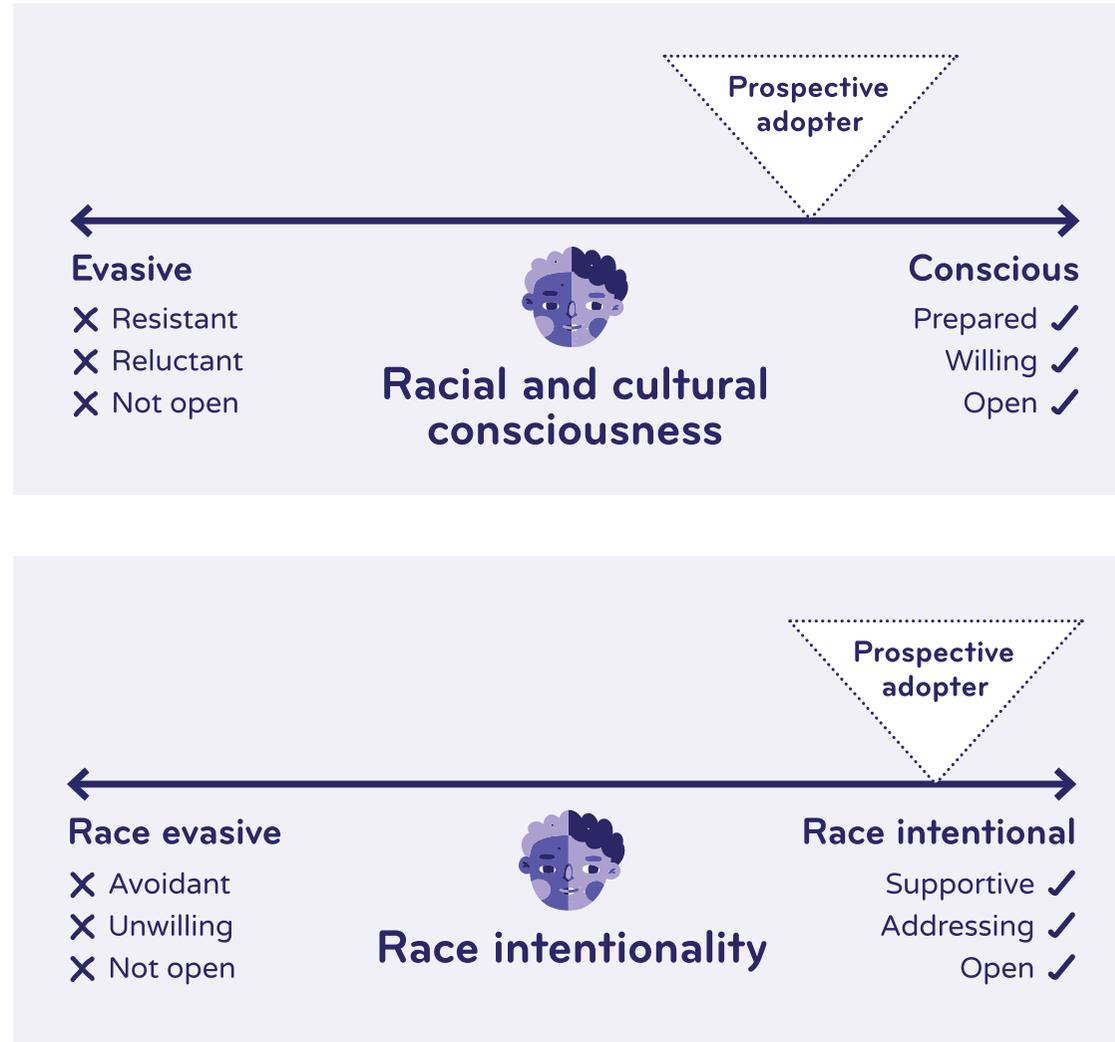


Fig 2. Race and cultural consciousness and race intentionality decision tool



For social workers...

The process of developing racial and cultural consciousness starts with the social worker working directly with families and children and consequently making decisions.

Be intentional in your work finding permanent and adoptive families.

The intention is to promote positive, long-term identity development for these children.

Examine your conscious understanding of how your own ethnic, racial, religious and cultural background gives you more power and privilege compared with the children and families going through the child protection and adoption system.

Also consider other identity factors and the privilege associated with them, whether they are earned or unearned.

The intention is to be anti-racist and remove any biases that may negatively impact your professional judgement.

For adoptive parents...



Race imposterism involves feeling like a fraud or doubting one's own racial or cultural identity due to racism, stereotypes, and micro-aggressions. It stems from a lack of racial affirmation, exposure, or education around one's authenticity in their race or cultural identity.

This sense of imposterism can arise from various factors, such as:

- Lack of exposure, knowledge, or understanding of racial, ethnic, or cultural identity.
- Limited exposure to or connection with racial or ethnic spaces or positive role models/people who share the same identity.
- Experiences of racism, discrimination, or micro-aggressions and lack of support or guidance on how to address this.
- Difficulty reconciling their adopted identity with their racial or ethnic identity.
- Not fitting in with the adoptive family whilst feeling disconnected from their authentic racial, ethnic, or cultural identity.

The impact is linked to identity confusion, low self-esteem, challenged sense of belonging, race-based trauma, and overall identity development (Castner and Foli, 2022).

If the adoptive parent is also from a minoritised ethnic group, they should also be supported to evaluate privilege they have in their own race, ethnicity, class and other identity factors.

The intention is to be more accountable and preventing race-trauma, as well as race and cultural identity imposterism.

The intention is to raise a child in an anti-racist manner, actively addressing any potential biases on your part.

Similarly, support adoptive parents to examine their own conscious understanding of how their ethnic, racial, religious and cultural background come with some privilege. Help them evaluate how these differ from the child's.

Adoptive parents need support to become more intentional in exposing children to their cultural heritage, helping them develop a positive racial and cultural identity.

The intention is to promote a strong sense of self, belonging, identity pride through celebrating their background.

Race and cultural intentionality:



Race intentionality involves explicitly addressing topics of race and racism (Chang-Bacon, 2022).

Being race intentional means you are consciously and actively seeking out to discuss, accurately record information and address issues of race, ethnicity and culture (Cane and Tedam, 2023).

Race and cultural intentionality is the purposeful actions, strategies, and policies aimed at acknowledging and dismantling cultural and racial biases, discrimination, and systemic inequalities.

It involves intentional efforts of fostering inclusivity, addressing racial disparities, and promoting equity in various aspects of life, and public services and social justice.

It involves the following commitments:

- ✓ Intentional cultural awareness of the self and others
- ✓ Intentional engagement in community activities
- ✓ Intentionally undertaking cultural education
- ✓ Supporting racial identity development
- ✓ Addressing stereotypes and myths
- ✓ Addressing and dismantling racial oppression and racism

e.g.

Race and cultural intentionality application:

Recognising the importance of preserving Maya's Roma Gypsy race and heritage, James and Michael as adoptive parents proactively educate themselves about Maya's cultural history, traditions, and customs.

They are deliberate in dispelling stereotypes and myths, ensuring an authentic understanding of the culture, ensuring they engage in community and educational events to gain deep and meaningful understanding of Maya's roots.

James and Michael, being aware of potential prejudices Maya may experience, are proactive in addressing any instances of racism or discrimination that Maya may encounter. This instils pride and confidence in Maya's identity.

Racial consciousness:

e.g.

Racial consciousness application:

The social worker is racially conscious by recognising and respecting Usthman's racial identity as a Muslim, Pakistani and Urdu speaking.

They find Usthman a family that acknowledges his cultural background, and provides them with resources and guidance see about the child's culture and the potential challenges of transracial adoption. They ensure that the adoptive parents are well-informed and prepared.

Krystal, adoptive parent, acknowledges the privilege associated with their White British background, and disparities Usthman might face. They challenge negative stereotypes about Muslim and Pakistani communities, attend community and religious events, display birth family pictures at family events, and Usthman now attends Islamic classes. Krystal is very committed to addressing any challenges with sensitivity.

Racial consciousness is an individual's awareness and understanding of their own race and that of others as a significant factor in shaping personal identity, social interactions, and systemic structures.

It involves recognising the impact of race on one's own experiences and the experiences of others, as well as acknowledging the existence of racial disparities and inequalities within public services and society. Racial consciousness extends beyond personal awareness to include a broader understanding of historical and contemporary issues related to race, systemic racism, and social justice (Omi & Winant, 2014).

It involves the following processes:

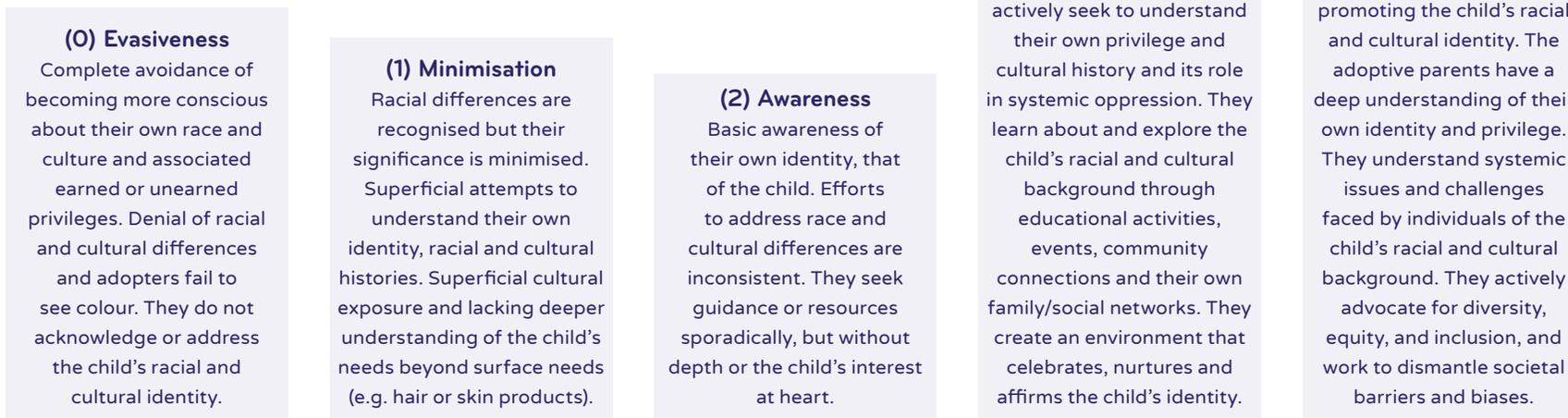
- ✓ Awareness of racial identity, the self and others
- ✓ Acknowledges the existence of racial inequality and inequity
- ✓ Exercises empathy for diverse racial and cultural experiences including religious, and race discrimination, language barriers, racial profiling, microaggression, privilege disparities, cultural insensitivity and negative media representatives:
- ✓ Active consideration of unique experience around race and culture
- ✓ Recognition of privilege associated with adoptive parents' background and disparities
- ✓ Open to analysis of negative representations, stereotypes and biases
- ✓ Commitment to social justice
- ✓ Cultural humility



Race evasiveness means avoiding discussing race and ethnicity.

We suggest assessing each component separately and then combining assessment rankings to make an overall judgement and provide recommendations.

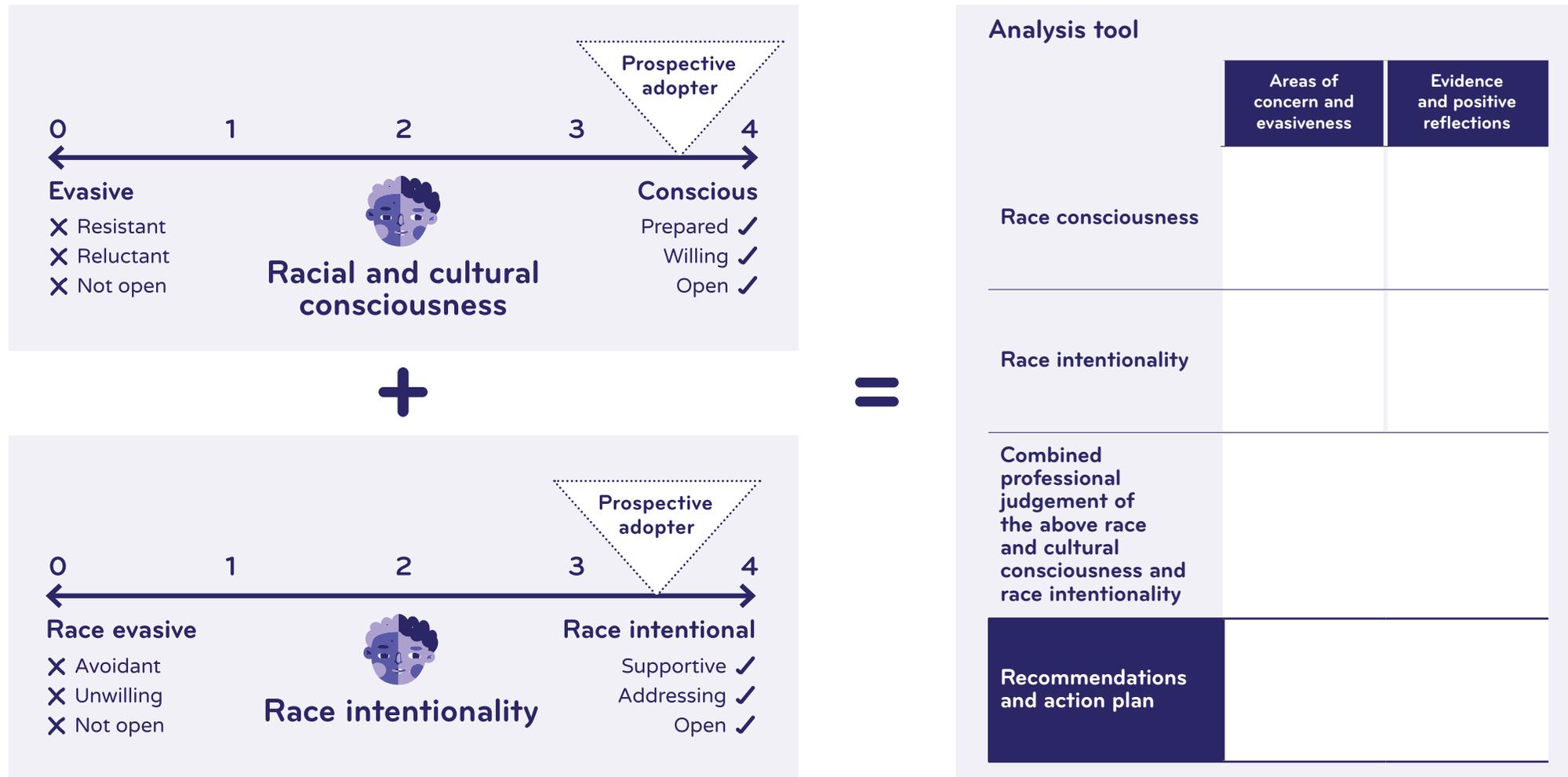
Ratings and definitions:



Tip:
Adoptive parents can also use this for self-assessment.

Social workers can assess the race intentionality and race consciousness using sliding scales to aid professional judgement and reach a decision about potential adopters' suitability for transracial adoption. This work can feed into the Prospective Adopters' Report.

Fig 3.
Race
Intentionality
as a Model for
Practice



This model encourages practitioners to think carefully about children’s race, culture and heritage and what they need from a transracial adoptive family. It also helps social workers to assess what adopters can skilfully offer to meet the child’s identity needs.

The sliding scales in Fig 3 can be used to assess how the prospective adopter is able to meet the child’s identity and cultural needs based on the child’s here and now against the AFDiT principles and decision values. The scales are a decision-making tool aligned to the lens of our practice model’s racial consciousness as well as race and cultural intentionality.

First, assess the adopter’s racial and cultural consciousness as this is about understanding one’s racial identity and their understanding of racial, ethnic and cultural privilege and how that may result in contributing to systemic racism. It is then about how they understand the child’s identity experiences and possible future challenges around racism and systemic injustice and their skills, willingness and ability to prevent, avoid and dismantle racism.

Next, assess the adopter’s racial intentionality as part of the adoption process, as this sheds light on their motivations and commitment to supporting the child’s racial, ethnic, and cultural identity.

Understanding why transracial adoption is being pursued and how the adopter plans to approach race, culture, and identity with the child is crucial. An adopter with positive racial intentionality will have carefully considered the extra challenges of transracial adoption and made an active commitment to equip themselves and the child to navigate those challenges in a healthy way. Assessing racial intentionality helps determine if the adopter has the mindset, skills, and capacity to mitigate the risks and nurture the strengths of transracial adoption. It is a key part of evaluating if this is the right fit for the child’s holistic well-being and ability to develop a positive integrated identity across racial and cultural lines. Examining racial intentionality helps ensure the adopter is pursuing transracial adoption for the right reasons and in a responsible, educated manner.

These concepts, holistically, will aid the social worker to make a professional judgement about the adopter’s readiness to meet the needs of the child of a different racial, ethnic and cultural heritage.

Combine the assessment of the adopter’s racial intentionality and cultural/racial consciousness, and from this make an overall analysis. By looking at consciousness and intentionality together, a more complete picture can be formed of the adopter’s readiness and suitability for transracial adoption. This enables the creation of an informed analysis of their strengths, gaps and areas needing growth.

Based on the integrated assessment, specific recommendations can be made on preparation steps, education and skills building needed before adoption. An action plan can be developed with the adopter to address development areas, ensure they are fully prepared to meet the child’s identity needs and provide recommendations for resources to enhance cultural humility and further reflections.

The social worker too needs to be racially conscious about their identity, the power that comes with it and how that limits or enables their understanding of other identities and what needs to be put in place to best meet the identity needs of the child. If the social worker is not racially conscious or intentional, their practice and decision-making is likely to be flawed and biased.

Social worker’s reflective point



Try using this model for yourself and in your own supervision sessions, assess your own race and cultural consciousness and race intentionality to (i) promote cultural sensitivity, cultural humility and cultural attunement in your own practice and (ii) identify areas of professional development in the area of transracial adoption.

e.g.

Race consciousness

Acknowledging race and ethnic privileges, and the reality of racism.

Recognising differences must not lead to discrimination or oppression.

Recognising differences in racial, ethnic, and cultural experiences must lead to being more conscious and proactive in developing strategies to support the child in navigating the challenges they may face due to their race.

Consciousness results in integrating the child’s cultural elements and connections in the adopter’s everyday life to nurture positive race and cultural identity.

Race intentionality

Intent is about: commitment, dedication, and determination to successfully parent a child from a different ethnic, racial, cultural or religious background.

This is about what is done practically and with intent to achieve positive identity outcomes.



AFDiT decision values

The way to decide if someone is ready or not is based on these principles:



Decision value 1.
Evaluation of power, privilege and bias



Decision value 2.
Effective collaboration with birth parents



Decision value 3.
Accurate and detailed recording of the child's identity factors



Decision value 4.
Cultivation of connection across difference



Decision value 5.
Trauma- and relationship-led



Decision value 6.
Identity affirmation



In international adoption support, information must come from the birth family, orphanage or home where the child was living before adoption and memorabilia.

In domestic adoption, information must come from the child's birth family and their previous carers.

Where there are gaps in identity consider genetic and DNA testing if required and as appropriate.





Decision value 1.

Evaluation of power, privilege and bias

Acknowledge power imbalances between the dominant culture and the marginalised communities from which transracial adoptees often come. Examine power dynamics, which can affect the adoptee's sense of identity, belonging and experiences within their adoptive family, immediate community and wider society. This involves recognising the advantages and benefits enjoyed by the adopter compared with an ethnically, racialised and minoritised child.

e.g.

Example of how to consider this value:

Social worker

Reflect in the child's records, the child and birth parents, experiences related to racial inequality, power, privilege, and bias.

Children's guardian and Independent reviewing officer

How will you navigate potential influence of your own power and privilege to ensure equitable outcomes for transracially adopted children.

Race consciousness

Show conscious understanding and acknowledgement of stereotypes related to the child's heritage, race, ethnicity, culture and religion.

Share insights and engage in constructive discussions to enhance awareness and understanding. Show willingness to adapt family practices and attitudes based on new insights and evolving understandings. Sometimes it means moving from a less diverse community.

However, acknowledge that living in a diverse area does not guarantee or evidence the need for good community connections although this is a foundation for it.

Race intentionality

Challenge and counteract your own stereotypes through education and positive exposure to diverse perspectives.

Take intentional steps to create an environment that values and respects all racial and cultural identities.

Tip:

This information can be useful for supervision.

Social worker's critical reflection of power

? What are the power differences between the child, the social worker, birth parents? Relate this to foster carers and prospective adopters.

? What steps can I take to ensure this decision-making process is ethically sound and anti-racist?

? What are the current political and media narratives surrounding adoption in the UK, and how are they contributing to further power imbalances for birth parents and children from minoritised ethnic backgrounds who are involved in transracial and transcultural adoptions?

Using scaling questions for adopters' intentionality

? Are the adopters' motivations for transracial adoption based on conscious reflection or evasive of power dynamics and is there intention to consciously reflect on the power their identity brings over the child's?

? Is their planned approach to discussing race, power and privilege with the child ready or not ready? Are they ready or not ready to support the child's cultural identity and ability to navigate racism?



Decision value 2.

Effective collaboration with birth parents

With effective communication, birth parents can provide valuable insights into the child's cultural heritage, traditions and customs. Collaborating with them allows adoptive parents to gain a deeper understanding of the child's cultural background and ensure that it is integrated into their upbringing.

"Recording of the child's needs must be rich, and analytical. It must provide clear information about what is needed to protect the child's sense of identity so that this information is not lost throughout the move/different moves they may make."

Adoption Manager





Decision value 3.

Accurate and detailed recording of the child's identity factors

Cultural preservation can be achieved through detailed and accurate documenting of the child's cultural identity factors.

Information about the child should be collected in ongoing collaboration with birth parents and the birth family, child's ethnicity and cultural background.

Through the process of co-creating this framework, concerns have been raised about poor recording standards and practices that provide very little information.

The AFDiT emphasises the need to capture detailed information about the child's identity factors as this ensures important aspects of the child's heritage are preserved and shared with foster carers and adoptive families. Importantly, this information should support with careful and more considered linking and matching processes.

Ensuring clear recording of information gained through collaboration between social workers, the guardian, and/or IRO. This is important as children or birth parents may not always share information with the social worker.

e.g.

Example of comprehensive recording of a child's identity features:

Race

Ngozi is South African Black with African ancestry and related physical features linked to her genetic heritage. The name Ngozi is a Xhosa name that reflects her identity, and her birth parents have asked for her name to continue reflecting her origins.

Ngozi's skin requires nourishing, moisturising every day and she has hair that requires specialist care. She would require adoptive parents who are prepared to undertake special training on African hair and skin care protocols before the transition process begins as special care is required to meet these needs.

Social worker to make note that this information was sought and, where there are gaps, to explain how and why.

Nationality

South African.

Ethnicity

Ngozi is of the Xhosa ethnic background. Her family predominantly came from the Western Cape of South Africa. As a Xhosa, Ngozi speaks isiXhosa, a Bantu language, and English. Ngozi will benefit from knowing her ethnic long history of Xhosa people fighting colonial forces, and language preservation by keeping her exposed to the language that reflects her identity.

Traditions

Ngozi's family observe rituals and ceremonies associated with birth, rite of passage ceremonies (i.e. ulwaluko), marriage and death ceremonies, and cultural celebrations. They report these events being significant in Ngozi's culture and it will be important to her that these practices remain a constant feature with her adoptive family.

Customs

Ngozi has already been taught and exposed to the importance of respecting the elderly through customs like handshake, curtsy and greetings as a sign of respect. While Ngozi is too young to perform these, her culture places strong emphasis on respecting and listening attentively to elders. Ngozi would also need to be exposed to ancestry ceremonies, culturally tailored food preparation and consumption practices. Her family also take pride in wearing Xhosa traditional clothing styles and Ngozi has some clothing that reflects her customs.

Practices

South African Black cultural practices include music and dance forms, storytelling, art and craft techniques, culinary preferences, and community-based activities. She has enjoyed traditional storytelling and Ubuntu values of community support and empathy. Dietary wise, Ngozi is given age-appropriate traditional meals regularly including umphokoqo (maize meal porridge).

She is used to these foods in her diet and it will be in her interests if this practice is maintained.

Religious Background

Ngozi's parents are Christian, Seventh-day Adventists who observe Saturday as the Sabbath (from Friday sunset to Saturday sunset, it's their day of rest and no work). They emphasise a holistic approach to health, community, and spirituality.

Her parents have expressed a desire for Ngozi to be raised an Adventist and an active Pathfinder, until she is old enough to consider whether or not she wishes to be baptised.

"Take care when describing children's specific identity and the language used."
Social Worker





Decision value 4. Cultivation of connection across difference

During pre-transition, social workers should continue assessing, supporting and empowering adoptive parents to educate themselves about the child's heritage and to show they are integrating elements of their culture into the family's daily life.

Adoptive families should also demonstrate they are proactively seeking out opportunities to connect with individuals and families and other community groups who share the child's racial or ethnic background. This can involve participating in cultural events, joining community organisations, and engaging with support groups or networks specific to transracial adoption.

Reflective question for social worker

? What have the adopters told you about their plans and intentions to integrate the child's heritage and identity into the family's everyday life? Are they pro-actively thinking about the child's identity and need for belonging?

? Are the adopter/s fully aware of the significance of the child's ethnic and cultural history and its potential impact on their identity development and adjustment as a transracial adoptee?

Social worker's reflective discussions with adopter

? Have you heard of the term race trauma?

? Could you talk me through your understanding of what race trauma and identity imposter syndrome look like? How are they exhibited at different developmental stages?

? What strategies will you put in place to prevent this?

? The social worker can use the racialised trauma and relationship-led perspective to prevent racial re-traumatisation model overleaf.

Is he in the right place?



"Racial socialisation and celebration of a child's culture must not be a one off or yearly event. It must feature in everyday life."
Adoptee

Consider where and how accessible the child could be to racial mirrors?



Race trauma is directly and indirectly experienced. It is also inter-generational. Race trauma can be caused by an accumulation of psychological and emotional harm caused by experiences of racial micro-aggressions, identity confusion or conflict regarding one's racial identity due to being raised in a family of a different racial or ethnic background. Feelings of invalidation and internalisation of racism caused by exposure to negative societal messages and stereotypes about their race may lead transracially adopted children experiencing self-doubt, low self-esteem, and psychological harm (Samuels, 2009). An important message here is racial, cultural and religious socialisation.





Racial trauma, or race-based trauma, is the cumulative impact of racism on an individual's mental and physical health. It is observed in numerous Black and Asian communities and individuals of all ages, including young children. Racial trauma can be experienced vicariously or directly and is intricately linked to a complex history of oppression, racism, slavery, forced removal of Black children from their homes into white adoptive families. These processes led to racial displacement, erosion of cultures, languages, cultural attire, spiritual practices, and humanity. Race trauma is exacerbated by recent or current experiences of, or witnessing, racism and micro-aggressions.

Decision value 5.
Trauma- and relationship-led

This principle is about acknowledging early childhood trauma children may have experienced including trauma associated with their race, ethnicity, religion and heritage.

Taking a holistic approach, there is an emphasis placed on the importance of creating an environment where the child feels secure and can build trust with their adoptive family.

This includes understanding the impact of racism, discrimination and cultural disconnection on the child's well-being.

"There should be an insistence that love will not be enough. An unwillingness to make connections with the child's race, ethnic and cultural heritage can only lead to race trauma."
Adoption Manager

When using the scale to assess, the social worker may ask these questions to make professional judgement.

? How ready are adopters to cultivate connection across their own identities and that of the child?

? What is their level of cultural intentionality?

? Where on this scale are adopters ready to intentionally put in place strategies that will prevent racial trauma?

Using scaling questions for adopters consciousness

? Can they reflect on how their own identity, biases and privileges impact their ability to connect with a child of a different race/culture?

? Have they demonstrated commitment to learn about and immerse the child in the child's cultural practices, values and community?

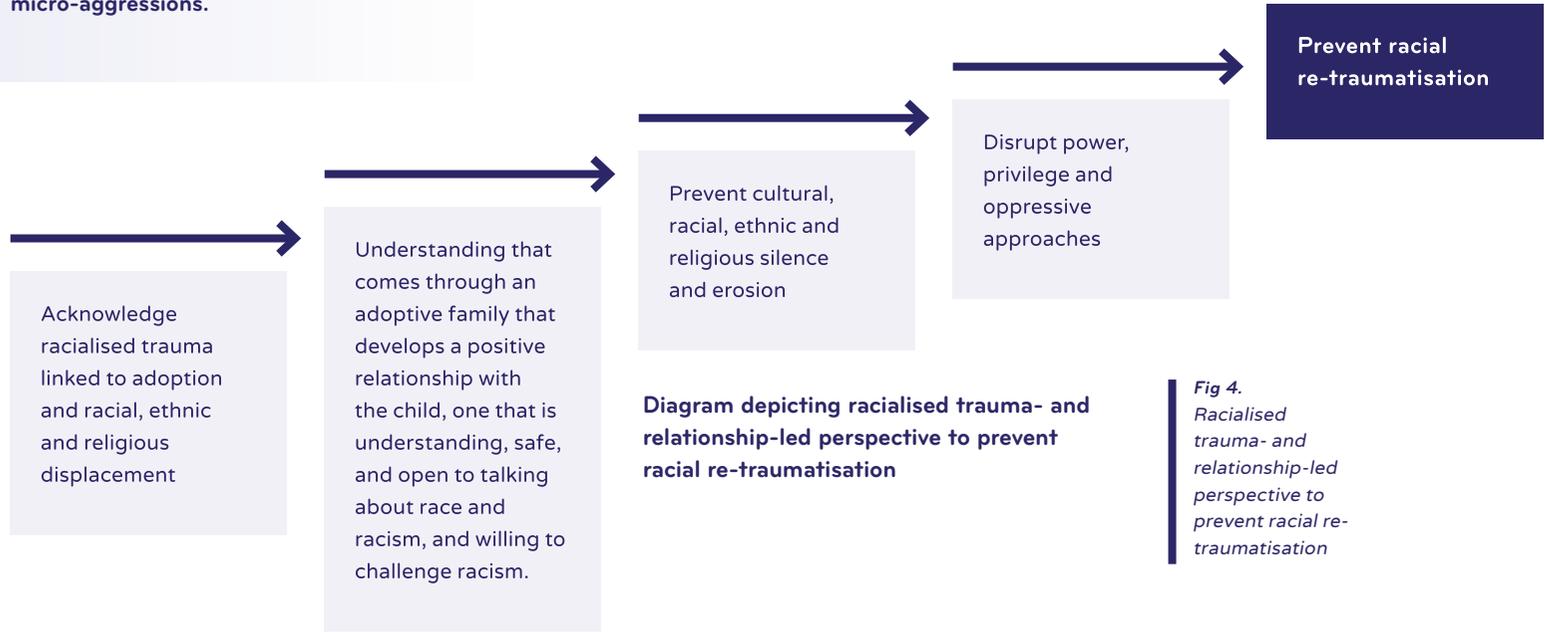


Diagram depicting racialised trauma- and relationship-led perspective to prevent racial re-traumatisation

Fig 4. Racialised trauma- and relationship-led perspective to prevent racial re-traumatisation





Decision value 6. Identity affirmation

We identified that some children adopted transracially feel and see themselves as white rather than their own racial identities and they reported racial imposterism. They found it hard to address discrimination and micro-aggression as some adoptive parents disregarded their racial identity.

This value simply emphasises 'seeing race and difference.' Social workers, foster carers and adopters must acknowledge difference, positively and inclusively work with it, validate, foster pride in the child's racial identity, and ensure cultural continuity.

This value involves delving into the adoptee's personal story, understanding the challenges they may face (may have faced), and acknowledging how these experiences may have influenced their sense of self. Additionally, social workers should be aware of the presence of unseen aspects within the adoptee's racial identity. For example, unseen, unvoiced, invisible and untold or hidden elements, such as cultural heritage, family background, ancestral ties, spirituality, disabilities, or religion can significantly impact identity affirmation. By recognising and validating these often overlooked dimensions of identity, social workers can better support transracial adoptees in developing a strong and resilient racial identity.

e.g.

Example of how to consider this value:

Social worker

Record in life-story work, memorabilia and relevant documents evidence of ongoing validation of the child's racial and cultural background, acknowledging the richness of their heritage.

Prospective adopters

Celebrate cultural milestones, festivals, and traditions specific to the child's background (family/community). Use literature, music, language, hobbies, and art from their background. Show the child positive role models from the child's racial or cultural background and positive relationships with individuals who share the same cultural background. Ensure that family photos and visual representations within the home include the child's cultural background. Equip the child to deal with stereotypes, racism and micro-aggressions.

For both domestic and international adoption: consider the benefits of the child revisiting their birth country and whether in the future the child may wish to obtain citizenship.

Using scaling questions

- ? How well do adopters demonstrate intentional awareness and respect for the child's racial and cultural heritage in everyday interactions and activities?
- ? To what extent do adopters intentionally and actively seek out resources and opportunities to expose the child to their racial and cultural background?
- ? How effectively do adopters engage in open and honest conversations with the child about their racial identity and experiences of discrimination or micro-aggressions?
- ? How committed are adopters to fostering a sense of pride and belonging in the child's racial and cultural identity, while also acknowledging and validating any challenges they may face?



Tip: This image can be useful to aid reflections with prospective adoptive parents.



The AFDiT framework

The AFDiT framework covers all aspects of a child's sense of self:

- Race
- Ethnicity
- Heritage
- Language
- Diet
- Ethnic personal care
- Values
- Religion & spirituality

These traits of the child's identity instil the following thoughts, feelings and beliefs for the child:

- reassurance
- immersion
- understanding
- secure
- comfort
- natural
- observed
- seen
- smelt
- felt
- embody
- belonging
- certainty
- predictable
- comfortable
- familiar
- reassurance

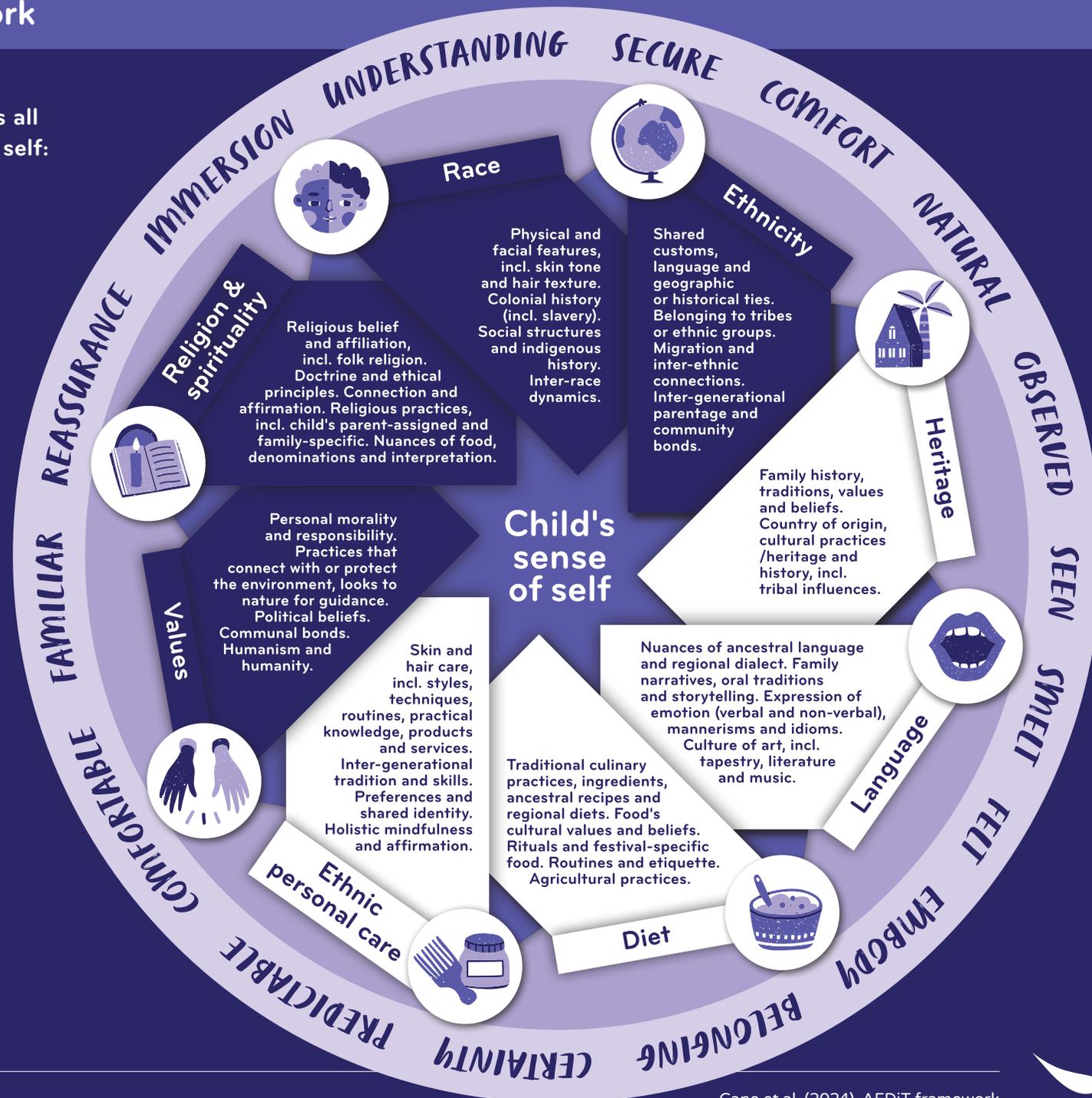


Fig 5. AFDiT framework



Evaluating transracial adoption suitability during permanency planning

The primary consideration in any possible adoption case is the child's best interests. Social workers should be prepared to explain how transracial adoption aligns with the child's needs for safety, stability, overall well-being and what is in their best interests.

Social workers must document the efforts made to identify and assess potential kinship carers to keep the child in their family. They must record an exhaustive search for relatives, extended family members, and families within the child's racial or cultural community who might be willing and suitable to adopt.

The importance of preserving kinship and maintaining connections with extended family members or members of the same cultural community should be thoroughly explored before considering transracial adoption.

However, where adoption is an option, begin early, to consider the possibility of transracial adoptive families working alongside adoption teams and family finders in the early stages of permanency planning to consider possible links.

"It's a bit late to start making considerations for transracial adoption during the linking and matching. It should be started early in the permanency planning process."

Social Work Manager

✓ **Early in permanency planning, demonstrate that possible adopters bringing a different race or cultural identity have the following traits:**

i) cultural humility; ii) cultural sensitivity; iii) cultural attunement; and iv) can demonstrate race intentionality to provide a culturally appropriate and sensitive environment for the child.

✓ **Explain fully to the child why reunification with their birth family or same-race kinship carers or adopters are not a viable option** and how these alternatives were assessed and ruled out.

✓ **Consider how transracial adoption will impact the child's racial and cultural identity**, and demonstrate that you have considered strategies to support the child's connection to their racial and cultural heritage within a transracial adoption placement.

✓ **Consultation with experts in the field of transracial adoption and child welfare can provide valuable insights** and guidance in assessing the potential benefits and challenges of transracial adoption.

✓ **Acknowledge the potential challenges and risks associated with transracial adoption**, including the need to address issues related to racism, discrimination, and the child's ability to navigate a different racial or cultural environment.

✓ **Social workers and prospective adoptive parents should have access to transracial adoption, racism, micro-aggressions, racialised trauma and cultural humility training** to ensure they can adequately support the child's cultural identity and development.

✓ **Provide a comprehensive assessment of the child's physical, emotional, and psychological needs**, taking into account the child's history, early childhood trauma, racialised trauma, and experiences, and how these may be best addressed through transracial adoption.

As the guardian and independent reviewing officer, have you ensured that the child's cultural needs and well-being in transracial adoption are effectively communicated within the legal and advocacy processes, with the child's wishes and feelings given full consideration?

Decision-making around permanency in a transracial adoption family

Questions for social workers and decision makers.

This section is about the adoption decision itself. It helps the team to think about transracial adoption against our decision values. Important during this stage is the question:

How can we make transracial adoption work in order to achieve the best identity outcomes for children of minoritised ethnic backgrounds?

Decision value 1.

Evaluation of power, privilege and bias

- ? Were possible stereotypes, biases, power or privilege influencing decision-making around this child fully explored and detached from decision-making?
- ? Does the team making this decision have a shared understanding of the mental, physical, and emotional health and development in a transracial adoption?
- ? Have the team reviewed how the child experienced systemic racism already within children's social care and fostering?
- ? Is this recorded and an action plan for support to prevent this further happening in place?

Reflection for the social workers and decision makers

- ? Have you been racially and culturally intentional?
- ? Have you been conscious about your own identity and the power you have against that of the child?

Decision value 2.

Effective collaboration with birth parents

- ? How were differences between professionals' opinions and those of birth parents about transracial adoption managed?
- ? Were birth parents consulted fully about their racial, ethnic, heritage, culture and religious identities?
- ? Were any differences between parents recorded to inform how the child may choose to identify in the future?
- ? Has information been obtained about siblings' identities, fathers including non-resident parents?

Reflection points

- ? How can parent-social worker dynamics be improved to facilitate better collaboration and sharing of information?
- ? How would the child feel in the future if they realise identity information used in permanency planning was incorrect? For example, if it misrepresented their culture and now they have to start again in understanding who they are.
- ? What is the impact and harm caused to the child due to incomplete and incorrect identity information in the long term?

Decision value 3.

Accurate and detailed recording of the child's identity factors

- ? Is the child's identity fully recorded including any recommendations and decisions for DNA testing?
- ? Have we recorded all options, including kinship options, that were approached, and not viable?
- ? For the child's future record, is there a clear message to the child that race, heritage cultural connectedness were fully explored and why this was unsuccessful?
- ? Where birth parents may relinquish their children or return to countries of origin/heritage, are the parents' whereabouts clearly and sensitively recorded and what this may mean to the child's identity?

Decision value 4.

Cultivation of connection across difference

? Identify the benefits of transracial adoption, especially where previous foster placements were a match, in terms of either race, ethnic, religion or cultural match.

? Justify why and how the benefits of a transracial adoptive placement outweigh an existing fostering arrangement or a transracial early permanence placement. (Think about cases where the current or previous foster placements were a match)

? Have you ensured clarity for the child regarding the recommendations made for prospective carers to enhance cultural connections in the context of transracial adoption?

Decision value 5.

Trauma- and relationship-led

? As a social worker or decision-making team, am I working with a good understanding of what may be 'lost' for the child? Are we considering our own understanding of, and concerns around, cultural erosion, displacement, the risk of race trauma, and racial identity imposterism?

? Was there a good understanding of how race trauma and racial identity imposterism are playing out / may play out in the future given the child's current, here and now presentation?

Decision value 6.

Identity affirmation

? Were enough efforts made to explore all alternatives before opting for transracial adoption?

? Have you explained why alternatives that mirror the child's identity were not appropriate and what was done to help. If this was not possible, not explained to the child verbally or in the child's records, why not?

? Have we made efforts to affirm the child's racial, cultural, and ethnic identity throughout pre-permanency and permanency planning?

Important case reflective questions for social workers

? Consider what will be 'lost', in regards this child's cultural heritage including, race, religion, ethnic, language, if they move to a transracial adoption and how?

? How will this be addressed in a transracial adoption?

? Have we considered clear recommendations to avoid cultural displacement, erosion and race identity imposter syndrome?

? What would be the benefits of making sure that this child's part of their identity is not lost or erased?

? What will be the impact on their esteem and identity confidence if these are not addressed by a future placement or adoptive family?

? What information will be gained from the birth parents to support this transition?

? How will we make a transracial adoption placement work?

? How do you allow for openness and having conversations, particularly about children waiting longer, sibling groups and those with additional needs?

? Have you considered pre-verbal trauma?



"Racial mirrors" are positive role models, representations, and connections that reflect the child's racial and cultural background. For example:

Seeing people who share their racial identity in positions of achievement, leadership, and positive influence. This helps counter negative stereotypes.

Having access to books, toys, media etc. that positively depict characters and stories from their racial/cultural heritage. Opportunities to interact with adults, peers, and community members from their same racial background.

Environments (schools, neighbourhoods, activities) where their race is visibly represented and embraced.

Without such mirrors, children may struggle with low self-esteem, internalised racism, or disconnection from their racial roots.



Integrating identity outcomes in permanency planning and linking

As well as planning for the child's permanency, it is important to consider, during early linking considerations, the child's future identity outcomes.

One way to think about transracial adoption is the consideration of what will be 'lost' if nothing is put in place to support connections and continuity with the child's identity and heritage.

Identity is closely tied to psychological well-being. Children who are disconnected from their cultural and ethnic roots may experience identity confusion and internal conflict.

Permanency decisions that take into account the child's identity can contribute to their mental and emotional health, alongside pride in one's culture, racial and ethnic heritage.

Ensuring that children's identity is integrated into permanency decisions can lead to the selection of adoptive or permanent families or placements that are culturally competent.

This means securing adoptive parents who can understand the impact of cultural loss, and can support the child's cultural and identity needs effectively.



"Observe racist fetishisation of Black, Asian and mixed race babies and toddlers."

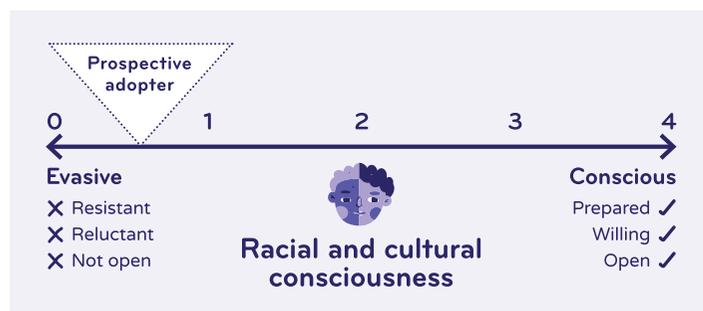
Adoptee

"Complete information is crucial for enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of the adoption matching process. Comprehensive and accurate profiles are essential in ensuring the best possible outcomes for adoptive families and waiting children."

Social Worker

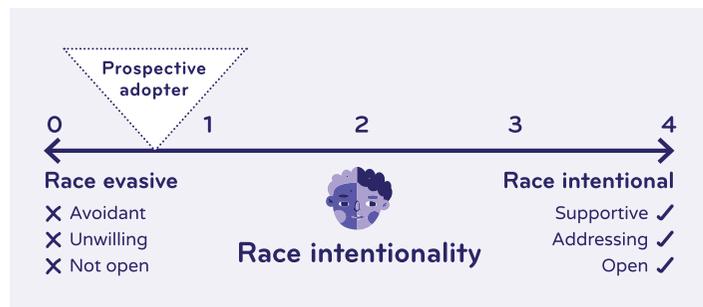
An example below of a completed analysis tool, following use of the race consciousness and race intentionality sliding scales, which demonstrates an unsatisfactory judgement in the 'areas of concern and evasiveness' column alone.

e.g.



+

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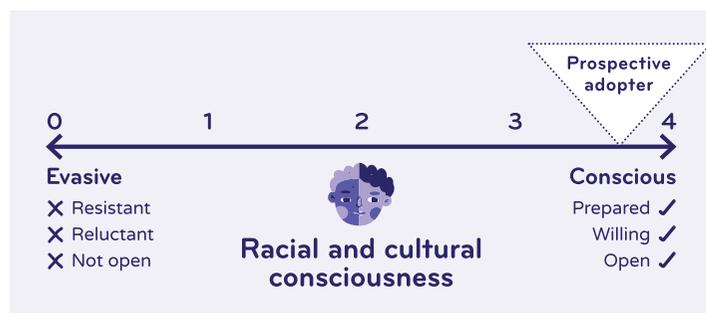


	Areas of concern and evasiveness	Evidence and positive reflections
Race consciousness	<p>Policies, procedures and resources in the service failed to ensure intentional and culturally conscious practice:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ child's records are incomplete ✗ gaps in assessments ✗ gaps in the child's profile ✗ lack of information from birth parents 	
Race intentionality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ decision makers and social workers demonstrating race evasiveness, where they fail to consider or acknowledge the child's culture and race adequately. ✗ they may avoid confronting their own positionality regarding race, power, and privilege, and overlook exploring identity factors such as those that are told, known, untold, invisible, and hidden, thus neglecting to adequately prepare for the child's journey into adoption. 	
Combined professional judgement of the above race and cultural consciousness and race intentionality	<p>Uncertain if all factors have been taken into account to support a transracial adoption placement. This may not adequately promote positive identity outcomes for both the short and long term.</p> <p>Race evasiveness demonstrated.</p>	
Recommendations and action plan	<p>Expanding on engagement with cultural activities, celebrations, and customs related to the child's background beyond a surface level.</p> <p>Build authentic relationships and connections with networks and communities that share the child's racial/ethnic/cultural/religious identity.</p> <p>Seek out diverse neighbourhoods, schools, and social circles where the child's identity is positively represented and affirmed.</p> <p>Create a home environment that visibly incorporates cultural artefacts, artwork, literature, and media reflective of the child's heritage.</p> <p>Seeking out micro-aggressions training.</p>	



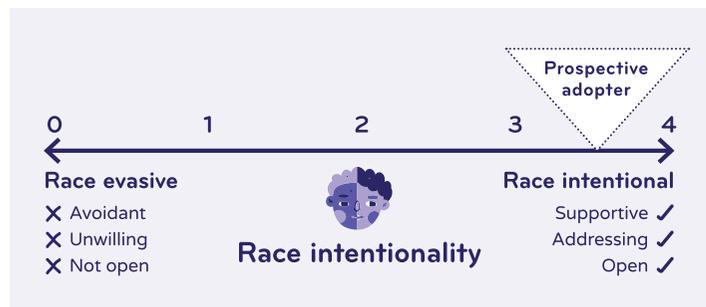
This page shows an example of a completed analysis tool demonstrating a positive judgement in the 'evidence and positive reflections' column alone.

e.g.



+

=



	Areas of concern and evasiveness	Evidence and positive reflections
Race consciousness		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ child's records are complete and comprehensive ✓ no gaps in child's profile ✓ good collaboration with adequate information obtained from birth parents ✓ child is well prepared and understands why they cannot be with birth parents ✓ they understand where their birth parents are and why the TRA ✓ arrangements for open adoption or post-adoption contact are fully explored and included in relevant plans
Race intentionality		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ practitioners and decision-makers have examined their own positionality regarding their race, power, and privilege and how this impacts decision-making or understanding the child's needs ✓ this includes exploring all identity factors, including those that are told, known, untold, invisible, and hidden, to prepare for the child's journey into adoption
Combined professional judgement of the above race and cultural consciousness and race intentionality		<p>Fully considered and confident that everything has been taken into account and implemented to facilitate positive identity outcomes in both the short and long term.</p> <p>All decision-makers have considered the child's culture and race intentionally to ensure their racial and cultural needs are fully acknowledged.</p>
Recommendations and action plan		



Involvement of birth parents

This cartoon can be interpreted in different ways.

You may use this image to consider best practice in your discussions around permanency planning

In light of these different changes, what conversations are you having with birth parents? What would they want to know and what would the carers and adoptive parents need to know?

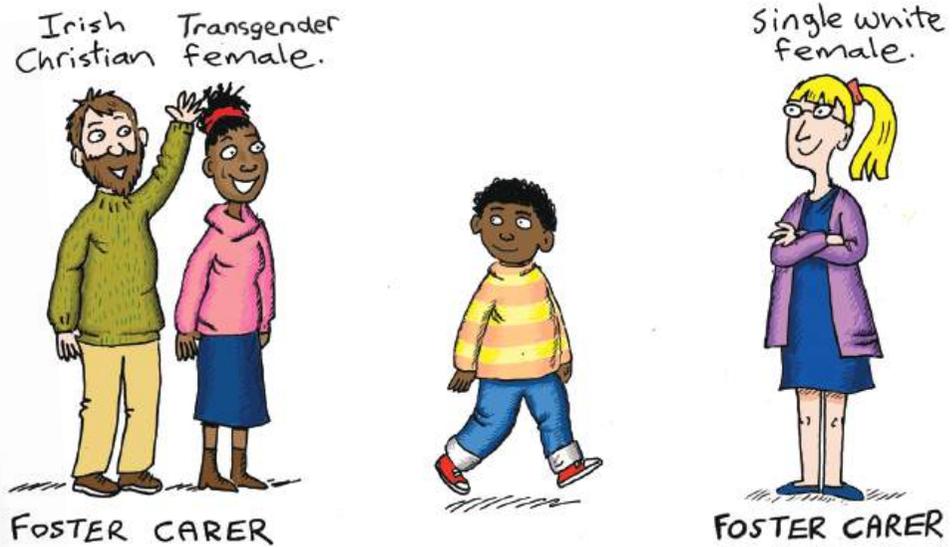
Put yourself in the child's shoes and think about what they might feel and need on their journey.



Help adopters acknowledge what they don't know and how birth family can be a source of that information.

Check out information about siblings and paternity information.

As much information as possible must come, first hand, through conversations with birth family. This should help you to be more specific to the child.



Ensure life letters are available and life story work accurate, detailed and sensitively written.



Collaborating with birth parents in transracial adoption is crucial for facilitating cultural connections, racial awareness, emotional support, identity formation, and continuity (Barn, 2018).

Open dialogue with birth parents nurtures the child's sense of belonging and self-acceptance (Patel, 2022). By drawing upon birth parents' insights around the child, ethnic, cultural or family history, traditions, and lived experiences, adoptive parents can better understand and celebrate the child's heritage, address potential challenges, and promote positive racial identity development and overall well-being.

Where religious heritage is concerned, using the concept of lived religion, (Cheruvallil-Contractor et al. 2022; 2023) talk about the importance of understanding the extent to which religion is understood or practised within birth families. They also emphasise the need for social workers and adoptive families to invest in developing the necessary religious and cultural knowledge to adequately support children in understanding their religious heritage as appropriate.

Explain that the circular process in figure 6 continues as part of sharing information and feedback loops in adoption process, preparing for letter box contact and open adoption.

These conversations empower birth parents to share information that they had never shared with other professionals. Ensure support for birth children and siblings. Sign post the family to any helpful resources.

Explore reluctance in foster carers to engage with the child's birth parents' practices, e.g. food, soothing objects etc... such that these processes are not tokenistic. This process should include discussions with independent reviewing officers overseeing the child's plan. Some agencies will have birth family support workers engaged with families during adoption transition. Ensure you also tap into their knowledge and liaise with them as necessary.

"Tell me how I will find my son, adopters should not be allowed to change birth names. You know what I mean, you get it right? Why do they change the names so how do you even start"

Birth Parent

"I was one of the lucky birth parents to meet my son's adoptive [parent]. He asked about traditional foods, things like that... He took time to get to know the background and stuff like that which was really nice."

Birth Parent

"Social workers did not take time to think about heritage and religion. We have three in my family and the child's father is different. There are many types of Indian, African and Muslim heritage. They come in many different shapes and sizes. Different races and nationalities. What are you placing him? Who are you placing with? I should have been asked to specify exactly what 'he' needed to be taught. Specific language, religious practice and like teaching things he needed to know."

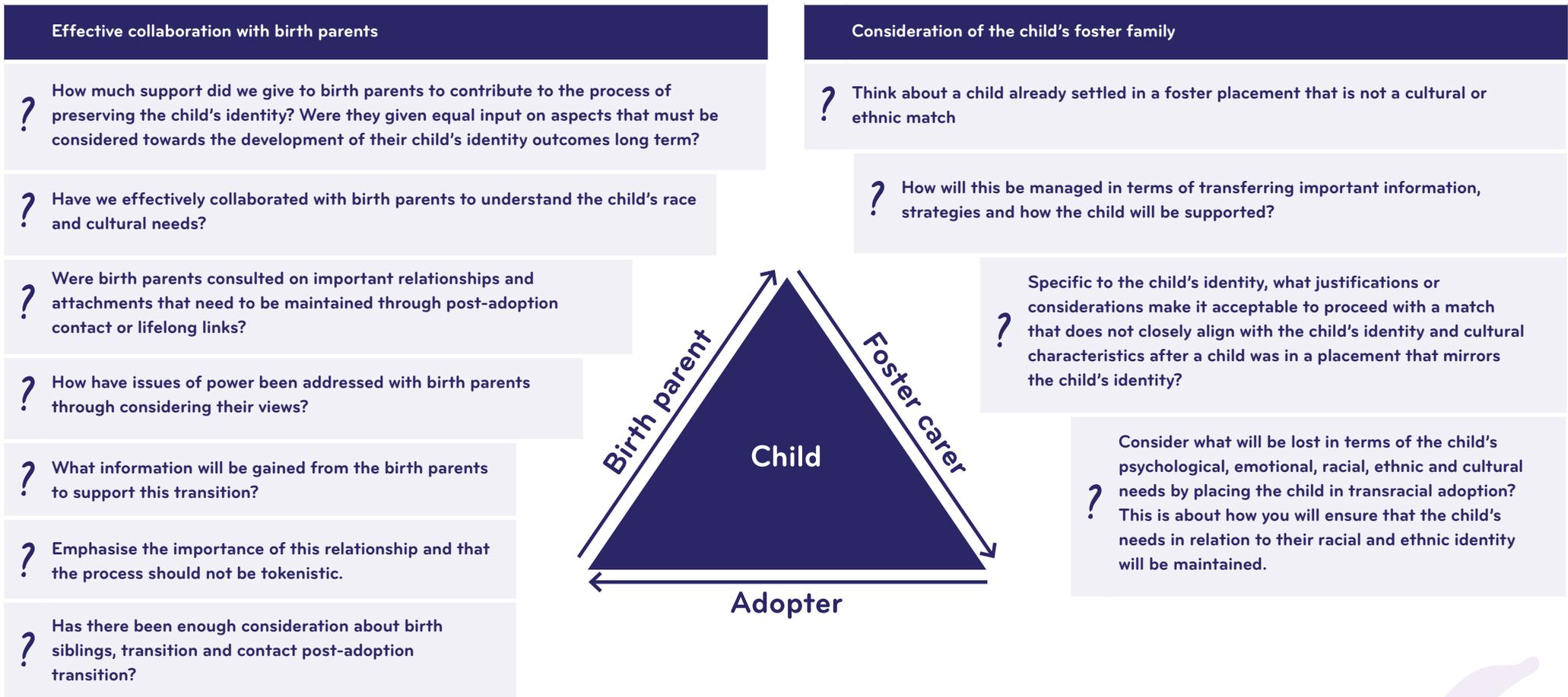
Birth Parent

"These social workers don't see our pain, they don't think we have feelings, you know. We constantly wonder how our children are doing, and they [adopted child] obviously wonder how we are doing all the time. It has been difficult, as there hasn't been much support to help us. Social workers should communicate with us; it's not as if we don't want to help our children understand their identity when they are adopted; so ask us. Obviously, it would have been much better if social workers had helped with having contact from the beginning and not letting it stop just like that. Now it is much harder to find my child."

Birth Parent



Fig 6.
Circular process
of involving birth
parents



Reviewing the child's experience in foster care and considerations for linking

Questions for social workers and decision makers using the decision values.

Decision value 1.

Evaluation of power, privilege and bias

Has any systemic racism in foster care been recorded, addressed and considered where a link is in mind? Think about the child's here and now: (i) will these needs be addressed by an identified link? (ii) do they have skills to protect the child from future racial trauma? Foster-to-adopt parents may have not accessed the same loop of support from the preparation for bias and adoption preparation training programmes.

?

Are there clear procedures and policies to help foster-to-adopt carers gain the same support as adoptive parents adopting through the traditional route, to equip them for transracial adoption?

?

Decision value 2.

Effective collaboration with birth parents

Where there are differences, tension and conflict with parents around matching and what is deemed to be in the child's best interest, how is this explored?

?

What must be prioritised and addressed in regards to meeting the child's racial and cultural needs where a foster placement that has now been approved for adoption had not previously addressed aspects of the child's identity?

?

What is the birth family (maternal and paternal) recommending as strategies and ways to support the child's understanding of their identity and heritage in the future?

?

Decision value 3.

Accurate and detailed recording of the child's identity factors

Have we obtained and are we utilising the right and detailed information about the child?

?

Is the recording of these specific and accurate, to show the child's unique identity?

?

How much is recorded about possible future stereotypes and racism that may occur, how this will affect positive identity outcomes and what needs to be done about this? As such, has this been explored in detail during linking and matching discussions/panels?

?

Decision value 4.

Cultivation of connection across difference

Has contact with previous foster carer been explored as part of important connections and the child's well-being and sense of identity?

?

Have we considered differences between birth parents and foster carers in lifestyles and beliefs including sub-cultures within specific faith, race, culture, language, heritage, or lifestyle?

?

Have we given the adopters enough time and space to explore this? Are you confident they are open, willing and committed to making adaptations?

?

We do need to be thinking about the child's here and now in the foster placement.

We need to consider what has already been lost, in regards to the child's identity and how this can be addressed.

Where a child in care is placed with registered foster carers who are also approved as adopters, those carers need additional support and training around transracial adoption.

Reviewing the child's experience in foster care and considerations for linking continued...

Decision value 5.

Trauma- and relationship-led

? Do the adopters understand why aspects of the child's racial/cultural identity were overlooked, and how this might have impacted the child?

? How will the now foster-adopt and identified link support the child in processing feelings about prior unmet identity needs?

? What are your observations of trauma including race trauma. Assess pre-verbal and verbal presentations, emotional responses and perceptual responses. What are the views and signs of concern?

? Have you considered the here and now experience of children and the support they need to internalise beauty from a race and cultural perspective?

Reflection for social worker

? Where a social worker has not changed during linking and adoption planning, consider and ensure the focus in thinking has changed from child protection.

? How can I change my working style and approach to show full understanding of the risk and impact of racial identity imposter syndrome, race trauma and cultural erosion?

? Am I/are we, acknowledging the benefits, challenges and impact of transracial adoption long term.

? Does my understanding of the child's needs sufficiently equip me to evaluate whether the adoptive family can, and will, meet the needs of the child?

Decision value 6.

Identity affirmation

? Account fully for what will be 'lost' in terms of the child's psychological, emotional, racial, ethnic and cultural needs by placing the child in transracial adoption when the plan for transracial adoption is underway?

? If necessary, did we seek collaboration with cultural experts from the child's ethnic or religious background to ensure a nuanced understanding of the cultural, racial, and identity needs of the child?

? Are there clear reflections on what may be lost around a child's identity if no efforts to maintain their connections with their race and heritage are made?

Reflection for social worker

? Think about the steps that have been taken to find an ethnically matched placement. Is there anything else that can be done?

There are children where foster carers have asked to adopt.

Consideration should be made on how to support these arrangements with a race and cultural consciousness and intentionality lens.

The preparation for transracial adoption and matching



Cultural humility is an approach to intercultural interactions that involves self-reflection, openness, and a commitment to lifelong learning about diverse cultures. It acknowledges the limitations of one's own cultural perspective and emphasises the importance of valuing and respecting others' cultural backgrounds.

Cultural sensitivity refers to the awareness, understanding, and responsiveness to the cultural norms, values, and practices of individuals or groups different from one's own. It involves recognising and adapting to cultural differences to ensure effective and respectful communication and interaction.

In the process of adoption matching, it is crucial to consider intersectionality with regard to the child and prospective adoptive parents' race, ethnicity, sexuality, gender, class, and religion, among other factors.

The focus should be on how the adoptive parents are aligned with the child's needs.

The emphasis should be on the adopters' willingness to embrace cultural integration and their acceptance that the family experience will undergo a transformation. Adopters need to demonstrate a readiness to venture into unfamiliar territories where they may find themselves in the minority. They must show a commitment to prioritising the child's experiences and perspectives.

It is essential to evaluate the adopters' capacity to understand and honour the child's unique identity. This understanding should extend beyond surface-level appreciation and involve a genuine willingness to learn, adapt, and create an environment that celebrates and nurtures the child's roots. The goal should be to find a match that not only meets the child's immediate needs but also supports their long-term well-being, identity development, and cultural continuity.

Review exactly when a transracial arrangement was agreed. Assess any gaps in knowledge, enhance understanding, and provide support in line with the principles of AFDiT.

Intersectionality:

Taking an intersectionality approach allows us to see how a child's intersecting identities and experiences of discrimination impact their sense of belonging, well-being, overall development, and access to support. For instance, a child from a racialised and minoritised ethnic background who also identifies with a disability, marginalised religion, gender, or sexuality, and whose birth parents are from a low economic status, may face unique and compounded challenges. These challenges arise due to discrimination and systemic oppression.

They will require adoptive parents who are attuned to the reality of racism and the impact of intersectional marginalisation, compounded by the child's racialised and minoritised background. The adoptive parents must also be willing to disrupt systemic racism.

This is crucial to provide specific support to the child in navigating their multiple marginalised identities within the adoptive family and wider community.

"I always see gaps in matching forms with missing information about the child or adopter's identity, religion or actual heritage. The information recorded is not comprehensive."
Social Worker

"There is no such thing as a perfect match."
Social Worker



The preparation for transracial adoption and matching continued...

A solid justification for a transracial match against other non-viable options is of paramount importance, primarily due to its profound impact on the well-being of the child involved.

This justification highlights:

- ✓ there is evidence from adopters of transparency and accountability in the process
- ✓ information from other professionals, foster carers, adoptive parents, birth parents and other involved professionals
- ✓ adopters see difference and are able to challenge stereotypes, bias and are empathetic of the impact of racism
- ✓ willingness and readiness to make practical and psychological adjustments to ensure the child's race, ethnic, religious and cultural needs are fully met
- ✓ the adoptive parents can demonstrate capability to challenge racism within the home and beyond
- ✓ the adoptive parents' preparedness to offer the child essential support in embracing their cultural and racial identity across all family and social systems the child will experience
- ✓ the family's eagerness to participate in cultural education and activities, guaranteeing that the child's heritage is not just acknowledged but celebrated
- ✓ openness to contact with birth family
- ✓ that the child is not deprived of the opportunity for adoption simply because of differences in racial or ethnic background

Deserves to know where the reasoning comes from.



"We heard of incidents where some adoptees were inaccurately promised remedies to become white, and others peeling their skin off due to genuine feelings of hating one's skin and attempting to become white. The impact of race-based trauma and failing to promote racial identity pride can be draconian. A lot of care is needed during matching and it requires the social workers to feel comfortable exploring deeper and uncomfortable topics around motivation, intent, and capability."

Dr Tam Cane

The preparation for transracial adoption and matching continued...

Questions for social worker.

Decision value 1.

Evaluation of power, privilege and bias

? Have you explored motivators, and why the interest in transracial adoption of this particular child and their identity? Assess, explore and disrupt fetishism or saviourism?

? What are the facilitators and possible challenges around this transracial adoption?

? Are you confident adoptive parents will confidently challenge micro-aggressions, racist family members and in other community settings?

Decision value 2.

Effective collaboration with birth parents

Decision value 3.

Accurate and detailed recording of the child's identity factors

? Establish how committed adoptive parents are to contact significant people in the child's birth family or previous foster family?

Decision value 4.

Cultivation of connection across difference

? Have you understood how adoptive parents will position themselves in the child's life? Do they see themselves as advocates, allies, or disruptors of racism concerning this particular child's racial, cultural, religious, and heritage background? Explore what this positioning looks like and its significance.

? Did you provide psycho-educational groups where prospective adopters/transracial adoptive parents have the chance to explore a range of current and historical affairs that shape the child's identity?

? Have you explored adoptive parents' culturally informed experiences? Think about this child's specific culture. Are they informed beyond a mere short holiday experience?

? Are adoptive parents comfortable and confident to challenge racism?

? How confident are you that adoptive parents have the capability to overcome barriers that come with transracial adoption long-term?

? Are adopters able to see and acknowledge difference in their ethnicity, race, culture, and religious identities? Have they given you confidence about what they will put in place to merge those differences?

? Are there art or images in the home that demonstrate their active efforts to be inclusive and to promote the child's culture?

Get adopters to reflect on their own experience of being a minority? If they know how it feels, can they empathise with the child?

Decision value 5.

Trauma- and relationship-led

? Have you gained a detailed understanding of how adoptive parents will engage difficult conversations about difference, race, racism, religion, and colonial history with the child and others? For example, how to handle complaints about racism and micro-aggressions or the child's realisation about family ties with slavery, colonial and other race, religion and cultural oppression they can discuss this with you.

? What discussions have you had in regards to diversity around adoptive parents' geographical location, and diversity. Where adoptive parents live in non-diverse communities or predominantly white areas, are they willing to move, and do they understand that this is in the child's best interest?

The preparation for transracial adoption and matching continued...

Decision value 6.

Identity affirmation

? Do prospective adopters welcome Black, Brown, or other racialised and minoritised people into their homes? How often? What you do not want to see is a superficial arrangement.

? How much and where are adoptive parents undertaking anti-racism and anti-bias/training work? Is this visible and obvious in your discussions?

? Are they reflecting on the learning gained? Analyse what this means for the child's future should they experience racism in their family.

? Is their training covering faith, spirituality, language, cultural and racial history, and socio-cultural differences? Will this meet this child's needs, and is anything else needed?

? Discuss how adoptive parents will help the child understand race and racism (think about gender, racial profiling, adultification, stereotypes?)

? Assess the adoptive parents' views about supporting the adoptive child to explore and affirm their racial, ethnic, cultural, religious, and identity factors?

? Have you explored concerns around previous or potential racism, micro-aggressions, and isolation for the child?

? Understand the adoptive parents' views about this and how this will be managed.

? What is the adoptive family's capacity to actively learn, engage with, and support the child's cultural identity and needs?

? Evaluate how racial mirrors are embedded in the everyday life of adopters? How will they influence the child's upbringing?

? Have you undertaken an evaluation of who is in the adoptive parents' family and social networks? Do they mirror the child's identity? Can they diversify their networks to reflect the child's?

What matching tools are you using to support your matching process in transracial adoption?

Reflection for social worker

? What has come to mind for you that has not been addressed?

? Have you explored this with the adopters?

? Is their plan to avoid white saviourism and exerting power over the child well considered and genuine?

? Are they consciously educating themselves on systemic inequities and how to provide empathetic guidance?

? What situations have adoptive parents been in as a minority? How did they feel? Reflect with them. What are their reactions about this?

? Adopters need to be curious about recipes, and show willingness to ask specific things from birth parents

Do adopters know the traumas that come with their own identities and cultural histories?

If they are not aware or conscious of this, how will they reconcile with the child's own inter-generational racial trauma and cultural needs?

Social workers need to explore this with adopters.

The preparation for transracial adoption and matching continued...

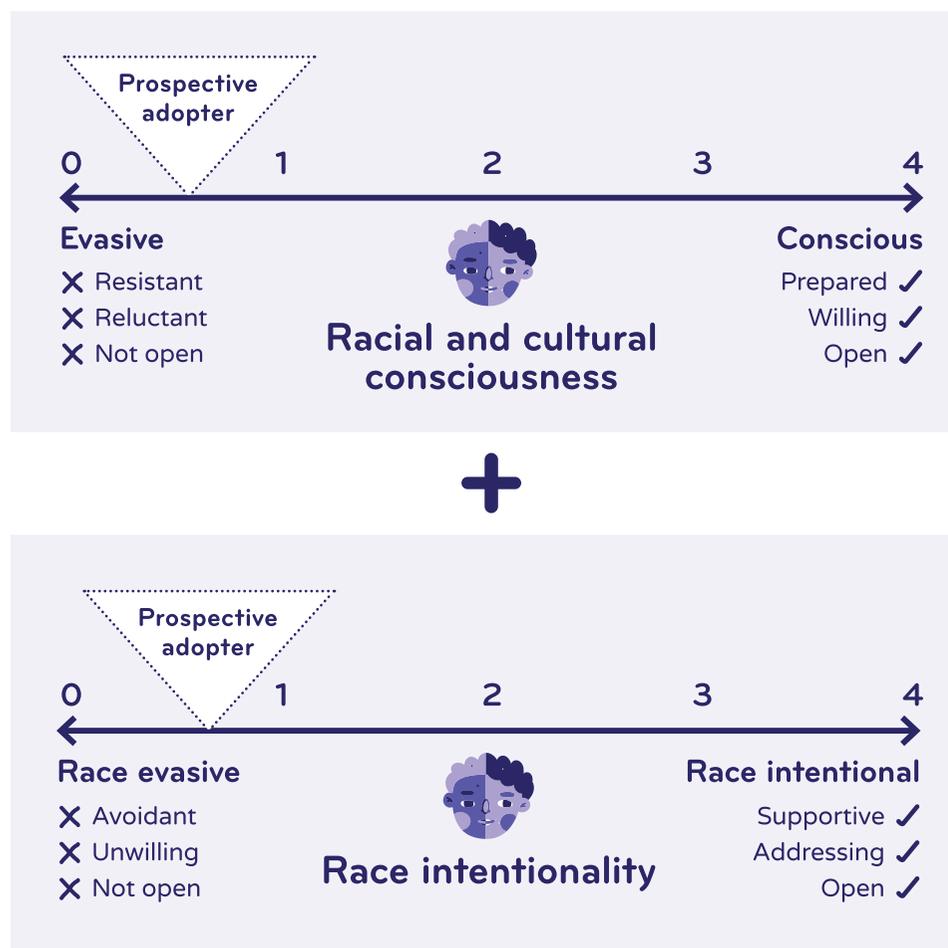
When using the sliding scales:

In the context of matching, this approach would involve ensuring that prospective adopters are aligned with the child's cultural and racial background, preferences, and needs. This includes considering factors such as the adopters' openness to transracial adoption, their understanding of the child's cultural heritage, and their ability to provide a supportive and affirming environment for the child's racial identity development.

Evasiveness:

This would involve overlooking or disregarding the child's cultural and racial background in the matching process. This could result in mismatches where the adoptive family may not fully understand or appreciate the child's cultural heritage, leading to potential challenges in identity development and integration within the family.

In instances where prospective adoptive parents from ethnic minority backgrounds seek to adopt children from the dominant racial group, it's crucial that professionals involved are culturally competent to provide appropriate support throughout the process. This includes being aware of potential complexities, challenges and strengths that may arise due to the racial dynamics. Professionals must be equipped to facilitate open dialogues, provide relevant education and resources, and ensure the child's racial/cultural identity needs are prioritised. Ongoing training and self-reflection are essential to develop this competence and avoid making harmful assumptions based on one's own racial background.



Entering the child's world in decision-making around transracial adoption

Evaluating transracial adoption suitability during permanency planning.

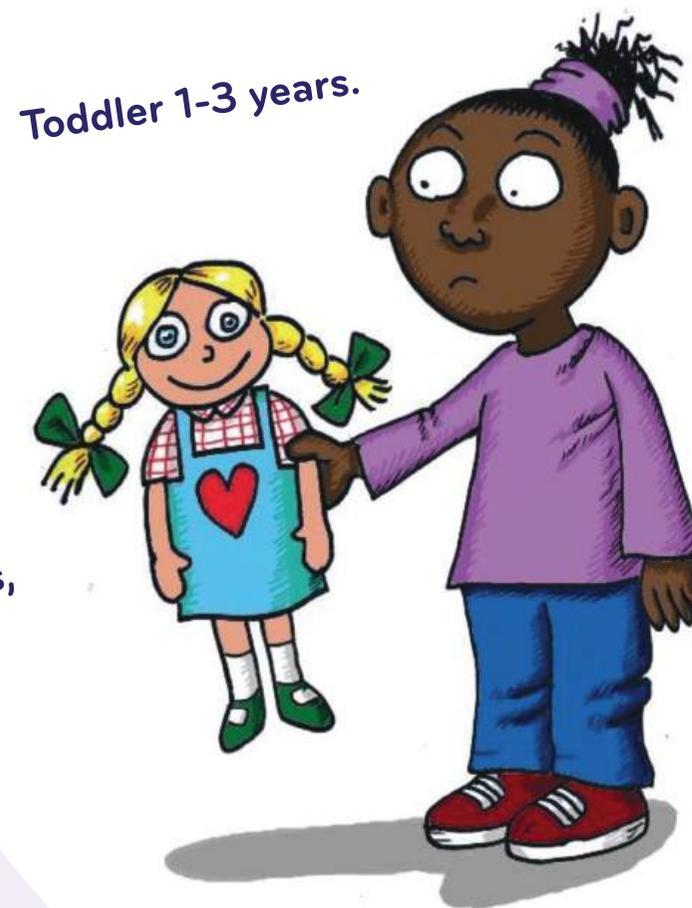
AFDiT emphasises on accountability and responsibility to the child. The hope is that when the child grows and looks back, they can feel confident that social workers and adoptive parents were racially and culturally intentional when matching and providing for their race, ethnic, cultural and religious needs.

It is acknowledged that based on the age of the children being adopted, most are unable to speak for themselves or to understand decisions that have been made on their behalf and in their best interests. It is important for practitioners to step into the child's worldview and consider children's feelings and views about this transracial adoption decision.

We recommend the following:

1. Sensitivity and attunement to how children moving to transracial adoption families explore and understand their racial and ethnic identities.
2. Recognising the unique challenges children may face and offering child-appropriate support.
3. Empowering children's participation and centring the child's voice

Children of colour seeing themselves represented in mirrors, peers, fellow families, toys, media, books, cards for special occasions.



Tip: Future-proof your language and have some foresight when writing about race, culture, heritage and identity. How will the child feel about how I have written about my understanding of their race, culture, identity, birth family and circumstances when they read their adoption file in the future? Does my language reflect bias, stereotypes or detachment from the child's situation and worldview? Am I truly and accurately hearing and seeing the child's world now and in the future.

The AFDiT framework

The AFDiT framework covers all aspects of a child's sense of self:

- Race
- Ethnicity
- Heritage
- Language
- Diet
- Ethnic personal care
- Values
- Religion & spirituality

These traits of the child's identity instil the following thoughts, feelings and beliefs for the child:

- | | |
|-----------------|---------------|
| - reassurance | - felt |
| - immersion | - embody |
| - understanding | - belonging |
| - secure | - certainty |
| - comfort | - predictable |
| - natural | - comfortable |
| - observed | - familiar |
| - seen | - reassurance |
| - smelt | |

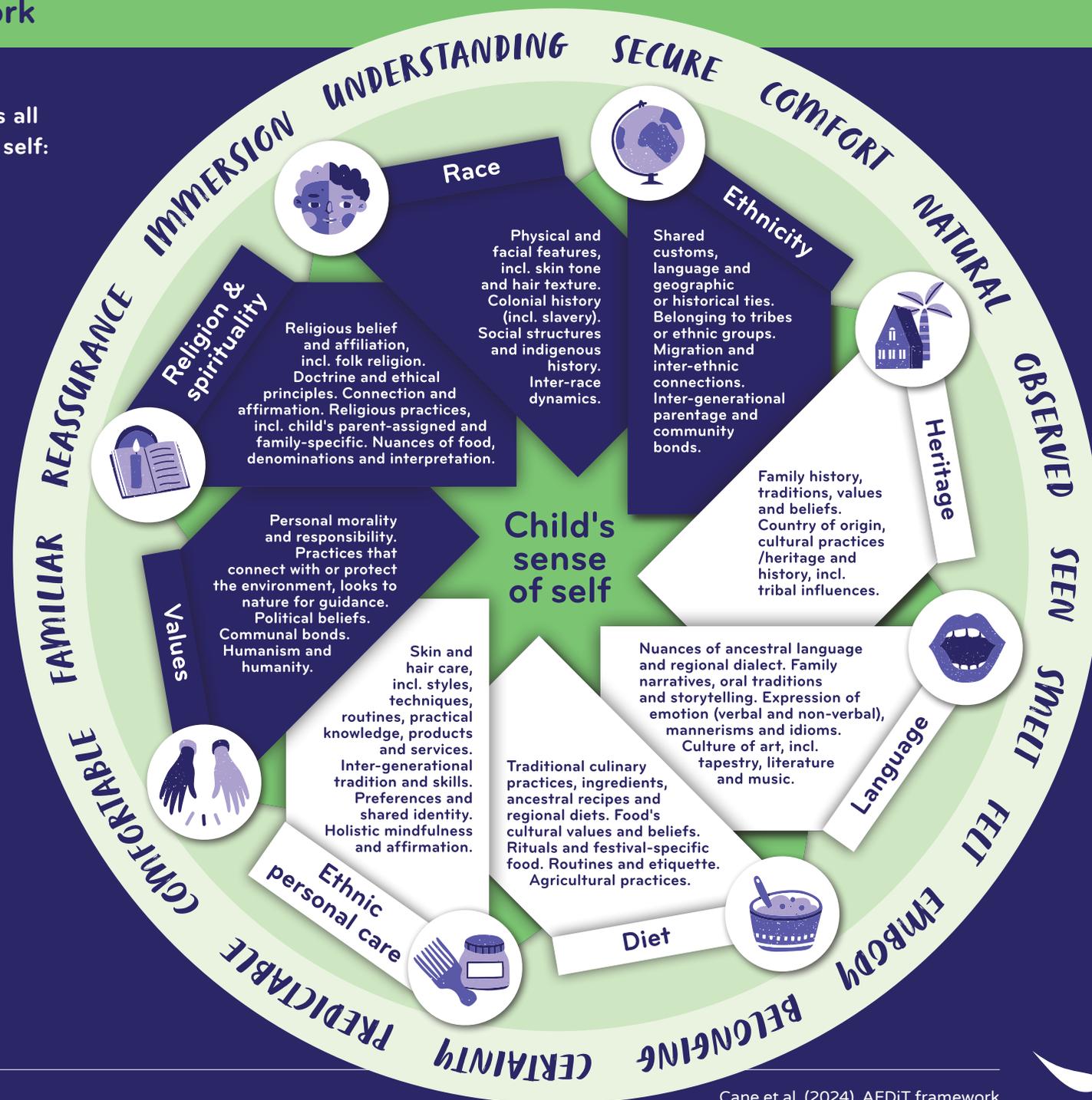


Fig 5. AFDiT framework



A transracial adoption implies a further change, either from a foster placement representing elements of their identity or none at all, into an adoption that does not reflect their identity, race, religion, heritage or cultural background acquired from their birth family.

The pre-transition framework identifies the importance of seeking detailed information from birth parents, recorded comprehensively and passed on to the next carer and family. **This information is vital to facilitate transitions.** A useful analogy is a team relay race, with each runner completing a leg and passing the baton to the next runner within a marked exchange zone, ensuring careful and successful handover. This analogy highlights the importance of providing continuity also during adoption transition periods.

Assess

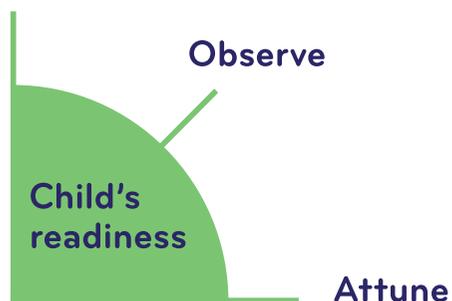


Fig 7. Perception triad of understanding the child's readiness. The process of professionals including adopters and foster carers perceiving, understanding, and interacting with the child to understand their readiness to transition.

The key objective should be making children's emotions bearable and initiating a manageable process, rather than subjecting them to traumatic disruption. When children experience placement changes, it can feel like starting anew, akin to returning to infancy. However, their earlier infancy experiences were marked by abandonment patterns, not just of family but also race, ethnicity, religion, cultural identity and heritage. Children who have experienced such losses may see adoption itself as trauma, unable to endure feelings of losing another parenting figure. These feelings require adoptive parents who can maintain "maternal reverie" by being attentive, empathetic and responsive, attuned to the child's emotional and identity needs, understanding their experiences, and providing a safe, comforting environment where the adoptive parent fully steps into the nurturing role, navigating the child's complex emotions, behaviours and identity needs linked to their past experiences.

The AFDiT framework emphasises the importance of transferring the child's racial, ethnic, religious and cultural identity from the foster carer to the adoptive family during the transition process. Adopters should learn from foster carers who have experienced positively meeting the child's identity needs.

Open dialogue, empathy and professional support are essential to foster understanding and cultural sensitivity, cultural humility and cultural attunement.

During the transition stages involving visits, practical tasks and familiarisation, assessing the child's readiness to move into a different cultural environment is crucial. This should involve culturally tailored interactions, observing behaviours, preferences, and using familiar objects, music, language and cultural symbolism to honour the child's identity and build trust.

While exploring their racial and ethnic identity through discussions, exposure and connections are important during and after the transition, introducing trusted family/friends who mirror the child's identity early can be invaluable. However, the loss of racial, ethnic and cultural connections can be painful, and children should be given space to grieve this loss.

Upon moving in, the child's emotional ties to their birth and previous foster families should be acknowledged, with contact maintained as cultural mirrors. Dismissive responses to the child's cultural practices or lifestyle will be damaging, suppressing essential aspects of their identity.

Adoptive parents should create an environment that embraces the child's diverse background, staying attuned to their racial, ethnic, religious and cultural needs. Listening, validating and empathising with their experiences allows the child to develop resilience. Parenting attitudes that make children feel uncomfortable about their race, ethnicity or culture are unacceptable.

Intersectionality:

Apply intersectionality as a helpful lens in this process and as part of your perception triad of understanding the child's readiness.

Reflect on the impact on siblings who will be separated during this process of adoption transition.

Adoptive parents must recognise the significance of exposing their children to diverse representations in their daily lives:

In some cases, adoptive parents, while sharing the same race or ethnicity, as the child, may not necessarily have the same cultural background or experiences as the child.

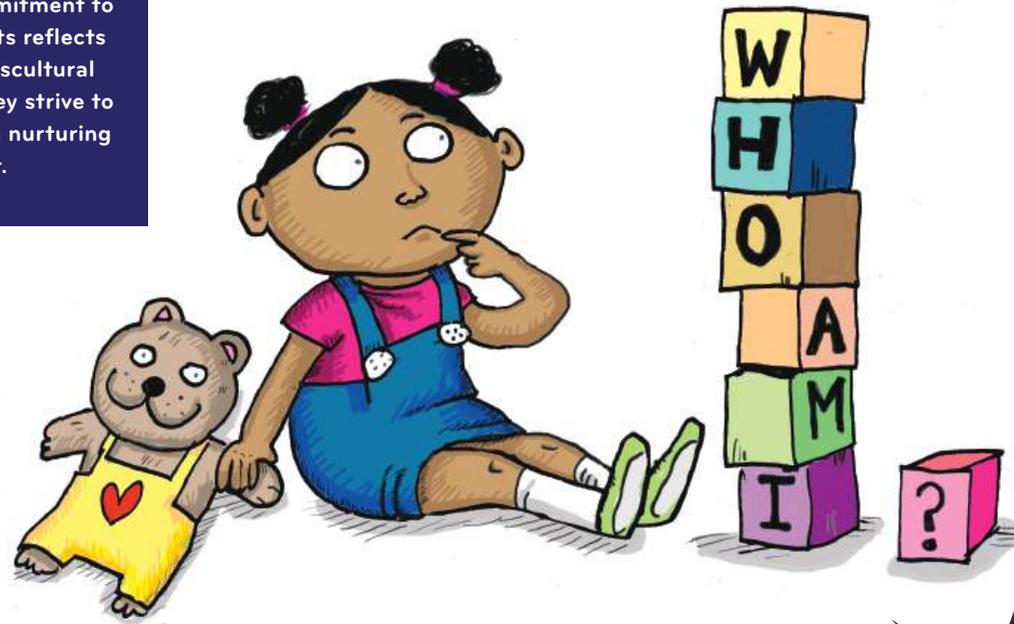
So, despite some children having adoptive parents who share the same race or ethnicity, it remains essential to surround them with various resources such as soothing methods, books, toys, models, colouring pens, playmates, films, and more, that reflect their own cultural identity. This is because, cultural identity is complex and multifaceted, encompassing different aspects such as language, traditions, values, beliefs, and customs.

By providing children with positive imagery, adoptive parents actively strive to prevent feelings of isolation and foster the development of their children's self-esteem and identity. This practice is crucial and fundamental to parenting a child from a different race or culture, and every adoptive family should aspire to incorporate it into their approach.

Within the confines of their home, adoptive parents should purposefully seek out meaningful artwork that resonates with their children's heritage. For instance, they may acquire a map depicting the child's country of origin/heritage and a local artist's painting showcasing a people from that country and instil pride. These deliberate choices stem from the deep love adoptive parents have for their children's cultural background and their desire to cultivate a strong sense of identity and pride within them. These efforts must not be sporadic or isolated acts but rather an integral and consistent part of the adoptive parents' overall parenting approach. A commitment to incorporating these elements reflects the core values of their transcultural and transracial family as they strive to provide their children with a nurturing and supportive environment.

This transition phase can be aligned with other models of transition, such as the UEA Moving to Adoption model or other standard practice models, depending on the organizational context (Neil, Beek and Schofield, 2020).

AFDiT emphasises the importance of everyone in the child's transracial adoption journey being accountable to the child. In the future, will the child truly be confident that we all supported them to understand their racial and cultural identity?



We recommend the following should be put in place to support this work. You may use this framework in line with the UEA model for transitions and your standard transition models. Ensure this process is aligned to your organisational process.

- ✓ A full recording and understanding of how many cultures the child has been exposed to before this adoption transition.
- ✓ Careful consideration about who should prepare the child to understand the differences in ethnicity, race, culture, religion and identity between the child and adoptive family, what will be lost and how this will be addressed.
- ✓ These discussions should be child appropriate through direct work and life-story work.
- ✓ Ensuring that the child's life-story book and later life letter include detailed information about all individuals involved in the child's life, necessitates a collaborative effort. This includes incorporating the birth parents' cultural background, traditions and heritage.
- ✓ There should be a strong connection and communication between social workers, foster carers and adoptive parents, with the foster carers taking on board what they have learned and sharing it with the adopters, including successes and mistakes.

- ✓ Prioritise learning from the birth parents and being attuned to the child's heritage through interactions with birth parents and by passing on this knowledge to the child.
- ✓ Training and ongoing support should be provided to foster carers and adoptive parents to develop confidence in discussing and celebrating the child's culture. It is essential for everyone involved to feel comfortable being curious and respectful, fostering an environment where questions about culture are encouraged.
- ✓ Adequate preparation of carers should be provided to ensure they are equipped to navigate these aspects of transracial adoption successfully as they prepare to pass the baton on.
- ✓ An assessment of the child's emotional readiness to move with a family with a different identity for them. The social worker and foster carers should 'know the child well' to establish what trust and readiness feels like for them.

- ✓ Assume conversations about the complexities of transracial adoption and the importance of maintaining the child's identity have not happened.
- ✓ Where conversations are happening, evaluate what they entail, educate, broaden the knowledge or refer to further support.
- ✓ Evaluate how foster carers are supported and trained to manage transracial adoption and what support is needed
- ✓ Information from previous social workers should be fully gained and not lost in translation.
- ✓ There should be collaborative conversations, thinking about the length of time the child was in previous placements and learning from foster carers.
- ✓ It is important to think about what children may wish to take on from these previous placements. How can those positive different cultural exposures be maintained and nurtured to support the child's sense of identity and belonging?

Moving towards transition: the child's needs and preparing for transracial adoption.

Decision value 1.
Evaluation of power, privilege and bias

Decision value 2.
Effective collaboration with birth parents

Please go to page 41 to see questions for decision values 1 and 2.

Transracial adoption practice in the UK:

Transracial adoption practice in the UK, can learn from research wisdom that tells us that, failing to meet the child's racial, ethnic, and cultural identity needs has resulted in incidents where transracial adoptees have expressed the desire of "wanting to be white"; being concerned and sometimes uncomfortable about their visible differences from the family and how this may generate unwanted attention and need for explanations; and being characterised as "acting white" by peers from minoritised communities" (Castner and Foli, 2022; Park-Taylor and Wing, 2019; Kirton).

Decision value 3.
Accurate and detailed recording of the child's identity factors

? Have you requested and obtained adoptive parent(s)' self-reflection demonstrating their understanding of a racialised and ethnic minority child? This should include how they plan to create and nurture space for exploring identity, culture, and heritage. Does this reflection give you confidence about adopters' readiness, commitment, and greater understanding of the child's here and now and future needs?

"We all really need to reflect on what cultural genocide looks like in this child's situation and possible cost on the child's identity outcomes."
 Social Worker

Decision value 4.
Cultivation of connection across difference

? Are you confident adoptive parents will create and nurture space for exploring identity, culture, and heritage? Were you given a clear picture regarding where and when/ how frequently this will occur in everyday life, rather than as one-off events?

? What is your assessment of the adopters' skills to hold all strands of their cultural identities and those of the child. Discuss how they will prevent identity imposterism.

? Do you get the impression that adoptive parents know how it feels for the child to be in a different environment that smells, feels, and provides different food and soothing resources from their birth parents or previous placement that matched their identity/cultural needs? How will they soothe and support the child's transition?

? How confident are you that adoptive parents can instil identity security in the child, within the family?

? How confident are you that adoptive parents possess knowledge and understanding of the significance of creating a multifaceted milieu that facilitates their child's optimal growth and fosters the formation of a robust self-concept.

? Have you assessed how much adoptive parents understand the importance of committing to providing racial mirrors and reflections that build and affirm independent relationships reflecting their identity, promoting self-esteem and confidence?

? Have you explored adoptive parents' strategies to provide diversity and racial mirrors beyond books, music, and food, ensuring the child has the opportunity to immerse themselves in a community?



Decision value 5.

Trauma- and relationship-led

? Establish how adoptive parents will create something new from the interaction they have with the child's cultural identity. Discuss recommended strategies to embed in their daily life. If not, enquire about evidence, solutions, or support strategies.

? Have you assessed the adoptive parents' interest in discussing with the foster carer how they managed racism/micro-aggressions and learning from that experience?

? Have you discussed with adoptive parents about how to confidently create friendships with individuals from diverse backgrounds without feeling shame and uneasiness?

? What was the adoptive parents' understanding and reflection of how racialised identities are externally imposed and internally constructed through perceptions of racial differences, othering, and stigma? Do they empathise with what this feels like?

Decision value 6.

Identity affirmation

? Are you assured how adoptive parents will ensure the child will not feel shame, stigma, or experience cultural ignorance and inferiority around their identity? Seek understanding of how they will foster self-esteem and self-confidence.

? Have you understood whether adoptive parents are prepared to take and effectively respond to the child's cues about opportunities to connect with their identity? This includes friendship circles and other resources that help them develop their identity.

? Enquire if they are prepared to put these strategies in place and how soon.

? Are the adopters open to continue with any soothing objects and the child's diet to support their connectedness to familiar and culturally based soothing approaches?

Do not overlook my experiences of racism/ racial trauma and micro-aggressions. Please protect me from cultural genocide.



Child's voice

- ✓ During the pre-transition and transition process, I/we have ensured the child understands that adoption and transracial adoption were the last resort due to the absence of suitable matches that mirror their race and cultural heritage.
- ✓ I can confirm the child is assured that the local authority left 'no stone unturned' in attempting to keep them within or closely connected to their birth family.
- ✓ I have worked with the child and evaluated their understanding in the decision for transracial adoption being made "in their best interest when all else failed."
- ✓ The child is confident that social workers truly understood the importance of maintaining cultural connections and a relationship with the birth family unless no other course of action was possible.
- ✓ The social worker gauged the child's confidence that they (social workers) had sufficient resources to ensure their identity, race, and cultural heritage are fully nurtured and preserved throughout their adoption journey.
- ✓ There is solid evidence that the child was involved in decision-making around adoption and indeed the option of transracial adoption.

"The representation of adult adoptees who had positive experiences is very quiet, if not completely absent [...] My parents, were not given the tools and guidance they needed to help me deal with racism and that; they gave me a really good grounding in education, work ethic and, yes, how to achieve things as an adult."

Adoptee

"I would have wanted my parents to give me more support on how to behave and how to be as a Black boy."

Adoptee

"My adoptive parents said they loved me... they didn't defend me from racism in the family and they said some racist things... Let's call it what it is, it's race trauma."

Adoptee

"Sometimes I hated my skin. I wanted to peel it off... The risk of racialised trauma, as I now know it, really needs to fully be considered."

Adoptee

Birth names:

Consideration must be given to birth names and how birth parents and the child make sense of names in the context of the child's birth heritage or identity rights. What might be the child's voice around their birth name? Discussions should be had about this with adoptive parents, especially in their journey of family-making and how this relates to the practice of openness in adoption (Pilcher et al. 2020).

"I remember when I was 18 and went to [anonymous city] for the first time. I saw a lot of Black people in one community; I was shocked. It was like, wow! I had never seen so many Black people in my life. I felt lost among my own people, [...] people who looked like me, yet I thought, umm, yeah, it's strange, I think I belong here. It shouldn't be like that, really."

Adoptee



Every child is different, and handling of issues has to be tailored to their individuality, rather than a 'one size fits all' approach (Kirton, D.).

The AFDiT framework

The AFDiT framework covers all aspects of a child's sense of self:

- Race
- Ethnicity
- Heritage
- Language
- Diet
- Ethnic personal care
- Values
- Religion & spirituality

These traits of the child's identity instil the following thoughts, feelings and beliefs for the child:

- reassurance
- immersion
- understanding
- secure
- comfort
- natural
- observed
- seen
- smelt
- felt
- embody
- belonging
- certainty
- predictable
- comfortable
- familiar
- reassurance

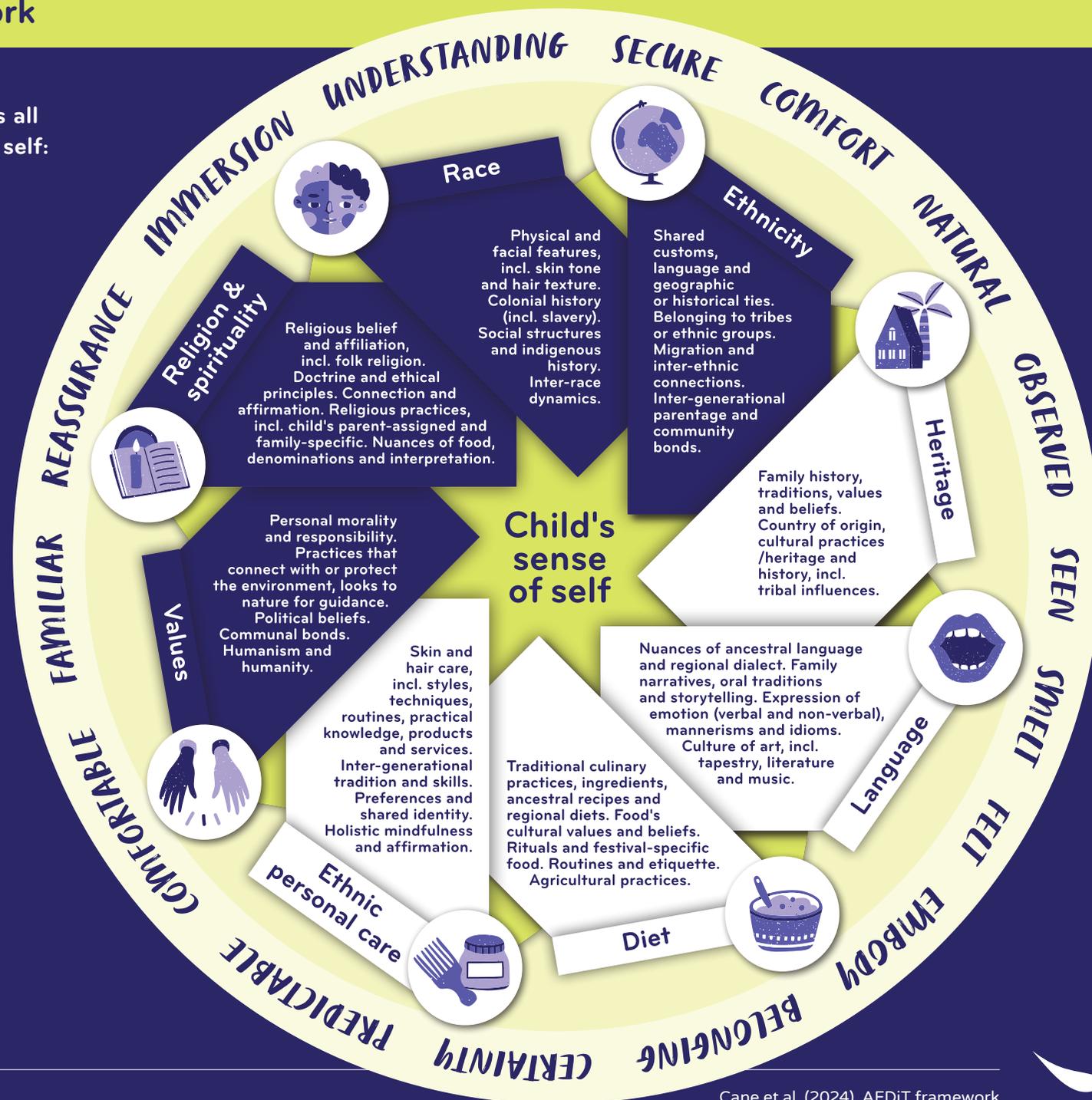


Fig 5. AFDiT framework



Transracial adoption researchers overwhelmingly emphasise the importance of comprehensive adoption support to nurture adoptees' cultural identity development and overall well-being.

Studies reveal that without proper ongoing assistance, even the most well-intentioned families struggle to provide adequate racial socialisation, cultural enrichment, advocacy against discrimination, and identity affirmation (Lee 2003; Mohanty 2007; Tuan 2008).

Yet too often, support drops off after legal finalisation, leaving adoptees isolated and families unprepared as challenges emerge (Brodzinsky 2013). Scholars emphasise the need for lifelong learning, assessment, and skill-building so adopters can adapt to adoptees' evolving identity integration needs (Vonk et al. 2010, Baden et al. 2012).

Research makes clear that transracial adoptees thrive when immersed in their cultural communities, empowered through open dialogues about race, and embraced in the fullness of their intersectional identities (Butler-Sweet 2011; Samuels 2009; Baden et al. 2016).

During the course of developing this AFDiT framework, we identified similar concerns from social workers and adoptees. This AFDiT framework, as captured through the outer 'cushion' of the framework diagram itself, highlights that children from racialised and minoritised backgrounds often received reassurance, immersion, understanding, security, comfort, familiarity, and other identity-affirming factors from their birth families.

But these can be disrupted during foster care and adoption transitions. We argue the pre-adoption stages prepare adopters to achieve this: however, post-adoption support must also help adopters consciously replicate such identity nurturance. As adoptive parents often have different racial/cultural backgrounds from their adopted children, additional guidance assisting them in avoiding identity conflicts is critical.

Comprehensive adoption support frameworks incorporating ongoing racial socialisation coaching, cultural enrichment activities, advocacy training, self-assessment tools, amplification of adoptee perspectives, tailored identity development resources, and disruption of problematic colourblind approaches can equip families to provide the layered identity affirmation adoptees need (Hrapczynski et al. 2021; Davenport 2020).

With research-grounded, culturally conscious post-adoption support, agencies can nurture transracial adoptees' pride in their heritage and fulfilment of their potential. Using the same format as in previous sections, we prompt social workers to consider support against decision values of the AFDiT framework explained in the following sections.

"When you are Black or mixed race, you don't have to come out with your race, it's all just there... you are absolutely obviously different. I have done the white thing, I have done the Black thing. Unconditional acceptance... unconditional rejection, both ends. [It's really a big deal]..."

Adoptee

Forge links with other children and people who mirror my own race and cultural background.



Note: In some instances the term post-adoption support is referenced as it was commonly known and used at the time of our research. However, 'adoption support' is now increasingly used to encompass support throughout the adoption process, from pre-adoption through to post-adoption. We are referring to adoption support broadly. You may use terms that are relevant and appropriate to your practice context.

Questions for social worker.

Decision value 1.

Evaluation of power, privilege and bias

- ? Have we integrated identity consciousness and continued race intentionality assessments in adoption support?
- ? How will adopters continue addressing issues of racial power and privilege in a responsible way across the child's developmental stages?
- ? Have training and resources been offered on discussing racism, privilege, and power in a developmentally appropriate way at different ages?
- ? Have consideration and recommendations been offered for transracially adopted youth to access cross-cultural mentoring programmes to mitigate feelings of isolation?
- ? Are adopters now skilled to give the 'talk' or teach the child how to act or behave in a way that aligns with their own racial and cultural identity without feeling naïve about systemic racism in the community and in educational institutions?

Decision value 2.

Effective collaboration with birth parents

- ? If an open adoption, how will adoptive parents facilitate positive, ongoing contact and collaboration between identified key people in birth family and siblings?
- ? Is there an agreed plan to mediate any conflicts about power and privilege that may arise between the birth family and adoptive families post adoption?
- ? What about organising visits to the child's country of origin or the child's birth family's country of origin/heritage to facilitate cultural immersion and connection to their heritage?

Decision value 3.

Accurate and detailed recording of the child's identity factors

- ? Has the child's life-story book been prepared comprehensively including the child's cultural background, traditions, religion and other identity needs?
- ? Have we updated records to reflect the child's evolving cultural interests, knowledge, and experiences over time?
- ? Have we discussed when it may be right to access adoption records, visit birth country/country of heritage or DNA testing?



Please talk to me about racism and how I respond. Stand up for me. I can't teach you about racism myself.

"We have had to be proactive in seeking out connections to his ethnic community but that's because I am prioritising what my son needs and I know I just have to do it."

Adoptive Parent

"One thing that we wanted our social worker to help us with was language. We have no idea which language to prioritise. We know our child's birth family has about three languages in the family. We have several languages between us as well. In terms of teaching language and ethnic connection, which one do we prioritise?"

Adoptive Parent

Decision value 4.

Cultivation of connection across difference

- ? Are the adopters confident to expose the child to diverse environments and people?
- ? Do they know where to access culturally or religiously tailored services and resources?
- ? Have we prepared and offered support to help adopters immerse the child in cultural events and communities?
- ? Have we prepared adopters to confront discomfort in building cross-cultural connections? Do they know how to manage any questions about difference without colour blindness or causing or perpetuating micro-aggressions?
- ? Do adopters know where to access cultural food and clothing?
- ? Can they cook and do they know where to access the food that meets the child's cultural need?
- ? Will music, religion and cultural history be discussed?
- ? How can will adopters provide guidance to help the child navigate their complex, mixed identities and any conflicts that may arise in understanding their own identity?

Decision value 5.

Trauma- and relationship-led

- ? How will adopters adapt their lifestyles to ensure the child's cultural identity is embedded in the family's everyday? This includes soothing, music and religious routines passed on from the birth family.
- ? Have adopters been educated on talking about race and race-based trauma the child may experience and how to provide empathetic guidance?
- ? Do adopters understand how to balance secure base and trauma parenting and identity affirmation?
- ? How can we ensure adopters are providing ongoing opportunities for cultural exploration and identity affirmation? This may include mentorship or coaching.
- ? How will the adoptive family provide racial mirrors and identify activities that offer the child opportunities to see and interact with other people who look like them?
- ? Have the adoptive parents identified strategies to ensure the child remains connected with their roots through their birth family's language in a way that is age-appropriate and tailored to the child's individual and developing needs and interests?
- ? Have we provided details about age-appropriate cultural activities, mentors, or camps we can connect the child and family to?
- ? Are details of adoption support groups or workshops provided for peer support and/or to amplify their voices and experiences?

? Have we explored how to choose a neighbourhood, nurseries, school and colleges that are diverse?

? Do adopters know where to access therapeutic support for their children?

? Have we explored intersectional needs including developmental delay, trauma, disability, learning difficulties/neurodiversity, gender and sexuality issues and how these can be managed with and against culture and religion?

"One concern is that once post-adoption support ends and is withdrawn formally, there is no guarantee that adoptive parents will reach out and seek support when they face challenges. We need to be thinking about what happens after that. It is a difficult one because adoptive parents have rights to privacy. Other than sending post-adoption newsletters and invitations to support groups, it is hard to monitor generally whether adoptive parents have got it all right with the child's adoptive journey. The support we give them while they are still connected to us, and the education and coaching have to go a long way. We can only trust and hope adoptive parents do what they say they will do, but it is not always the case."

Social Worker

Further suggested questions to explore during adoption support.

Child's perceptions and experiences of racial and cultural identity

? How does your child perceive their racial and cultural identity?

? How do you ensure that your child has the space to express their identity in their daily life and interactions, both at home and outside?

? Could you share any instances where your child has felt a strong sense of belonging or connection to their racial or cultural heritage?

? Have there been any instances where your child has faced discrimination or challenges related to their racial or cultural background? How have you supported your child in coping with these experiences?

? Have you considered seeking therapy or counselling to help your child navigate their racial and cultural identity? If so, what impact has it had?

Family support and understanding

? How do you actively support and encourage your child's exploration and understanding of their racial and cultural identity?

? What steps are you taking to educate yourself and your family about your child's cultural background and heritage?

? How do you incorporate this knowledge into your family life?

? Can you provide examples of how you address discussions about race and racism within your household?

? How do you navigate difficult conversations or situations that arise around race, ethnicity, religion, and belonging?

? How have children already in the adoptive family been prepared for their new adoptee sibling and how do they understand, appreciate and value their differences?

? Is there evidence in the parenting of children already in the adoptive family of promoting knowledge and understanding of different cultures, religions and backgrounds and anti racist and inclusive values?

Community and peer interactions

? How do you facilitate your child's interactions with peers from diverse racial and cultural backgrounds?

? How do you respond to instances of racism or discrimination within your child's school or community environment?

? Are there supportive networks or community resources that you utilise to help your child engage with their racial or cultural community?

? How is your child accepted within your community? Do they feel included and supported?

? How does your community address acceptance and inclusion of minoritised religions? Are there provisions in place to ensure their inclusion and participation?

Continued contact with birth family and siblings

? Does your child have continued contact with their birth family or siblings? If so, how is this facilitated?

? What barriers, if any, have you encountered in maintaining this contact? How have you managed these barriers?

? If contact with birth family or siblings has stopped, can you share why? How was this decision reached and how is it being managed?

? Some children may have siblings and birth family abroad and may be somewhat disconnected from the everyday norms of living in a birth country. What support is in place for the child to remain connected?

? When the child visits or reconnects with their birth country/country of heritage, will they feel at home and positively connected with their siblings and roots?



Managing mediaverse content consumption and their influence on identity

? What messages are adoptees getting from social media about race – TikTok, Instagram, YouTube?

? Have adopters considered advertising settings and content settings and educating their child on online safety, cyber bullying and representations of racism on social media?

? Are adopters aware and keeping a check on content on social media and whether their child is accessing content that could lead to a child viewing parts of their identity negatively? Do adopters understand it is very difficult to control and monitor what their children access while encouraging open discussions and challenging values that could be discriminatory?

? Have adopters talked with their children about how to manage comments from others online or on WhatsApp groups they may join with school and peers?

? Are young people having access to a variety of representations and understandings of beauty and positive body image rather than just the ideals of the dominant culture?

? If the child or young person is self-harming, have unmet identity needs and racial trauma been explored as part of the analysis of the reasons for this?

? Are the support services such as for the child's additional needs, therapist etc., for the child/ young person a cultural match for the child and if not are they culturally competent? Is the child and/or adoptive family facing racism in relation to services and accessing them?

? Have social workers and adopters found ways to communicate around identity and race with a child who has different abilities that impact on communication?

Talking about race and belonging

? How do adopters talk about race with children already in the adoptive family whether they are adopted or birth children?

? Do they know where to access resources and tools to discuss race and racism?

? Have the children already in the adoptive family had a chance to discuss with social workers and their family about how to respond to racism and other people's questions at school, with peers and in the community about the differences between them and their adoptive sibling?

? How will adoptive parents deal with micro-aggressions regarding their family structure (class, gender, race, class intersections)?

? When these micro-aggressions happen in public and in front of the child, how do they manage this?

? What work are they doing to prepare the child for any questions and micro-aggressions regarding the structure of the adoptive family?

Racial mirrors and representation in the home

? How do you ensure that your child has access to racial mirrors and positive representations of their racial and cultural identity in the home?

? Are there specific images or representations of your child's racial or cultural background that you prioritise displaying in your home?

? How do you incorporate images of your child's birth family into your home environment? Is there a specific approach you take to displaying these pictures?

Access to cultural goods and resources

? Do you know where to buy specific cultural foods, clothes, music, books, etc., relevant to your child's racial or cultural background?

? How do you ensure that your child has access to cultural items that are important to their identity?

? Are there any specific cultural items or resources that you find challenging to access or locate? If so, what steps have you taken to address this issue?

Do you have dedicated time in supervision sessions to discuss and reflect on cultural humility and cultural sensitivity and its impact on your practice?

Are there trainings/resources to reflect on these issues?

"Don't expect mini 'mes'; let them pursue what they want and who they want to be, even if it means challenging white-dominant environments to let your child fit in."

Adoptive Parent

"Some children may need father figures or mother figures. This will be important for those in single adoptive households."

Adoptive Parent

Think of a time when you felt different to everyone else in a situation. How did it feel? What did you do? How might a child feel if this is their routine experience? What will they need?

Have you listened to the stories/voices of transracial adoptees?

Examples of age specific support

Age	Need	Deprivation	Signs of race trauma
0 - 4 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Culturally appropriate soothing - Exposure to toys, cartoons, food, books, music and other aspects of comfort/soothing that relate to their culture - Clothing and dressing up activities that promote internal beauty and pride - Cognitive resources including language that expose the child to their culture/race/ethnic/religious groups that connect the child to their identity - Diverse playgrounds and nursery - Connection with birth family and celebrating traditions, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lack of exposure to toys, books, food, and role models that reflect her racial, ethnic, religious and cultural identity - No culturally suited soothing and comforting resources - No cultural and identity attunement or understanding of the child's responses to difference 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fear – crying/distress around those of a different race - Avoids looking at own face/body
5 - 8 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Books, films and games that feature diverse characters and those that mirror the child's identity features - Educational activities that explore child's race, ethnic, culture and religious histories - Contributions to various cultural groups - Celebrating festival and cultural events - Diverse friendships and peers that mirror the child's identity - Continued exposure to activities in the earlier age group - Support to affirm and explain their race, difference and identity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Unable to answer questions when others ask about race, skin and hair - Questions about differences in race are not answered by parents and others around them - Lack of clarity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Feelings of shame, guilt and embarrassment - Unprepared to answer questions about identity - Unable to challenge micro-aggressions - Somatic symptoms and anxiety
9 - 12 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Continued provision from the previous age group - Help with critical thinking about societal issues around race, ethnicity and racism - Support with involvement in activities linked to ethnic and cultural or religious group - Arrange culture-based trips - Continue fostering an inclusive environment - Equip to challenge racism and discrimination 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lack of awareness of societal attitudes, stereotypes and racism - No skills to healthily process and challenge racism or bullying - No connectedness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pressured to conform to stereotypes - Destructive behaviours and depression - Shame about racial and ethnic features - Unable to challenge micro-aggressions
Adolescence onwards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provide opportunities to engage in discussions around race, ethnicity, religion, and cultural heritage - Encourage engagement in social justice activities - Associate with cultural representatives and provide representation around their own identity - Support participation in culture-based activities - Create space for sharing experiences and challenges around their identity - Seek specialist parent support and parent advisors - Consider counselling support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lack of understanding of birth culture/family history - Lack of skills to healthily process and challenge racism - Lack of connectedness - Culture eroded 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Struggles to process anger, hurt and confusion - Suicide ideation - Wrestles with questions of belonging and identity - Explores birth culture and history

Thank you

We started by describing the creation of the AFDiT framework as a labour that drew on both our intellectual and our emotional resources. As you have navigated your way through the resource and drawn on the elements of it relevant to the stage of the adoption process that you were engaged in, no doubt you too will have felt intellectually and emotionally stretched.

This is to be expected and encouraged as it is evidence that, like us, you too are engaging seriously with these issues and their importance for children's futures.

We encourage you to share your experiences with others, create spaces – in supervision, team meetings informal conversations with peers – to talk about what has come up for you in becoming familiar with the AFDiT framework.

It is through being more courageous about talking about these difficult issues and developing our race intentionality and consciousness that we can exercise our responsibility for improving the prospects for children in transracial placements.

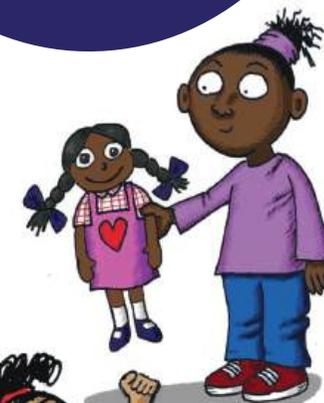
Thank you for the part you are playing in this vital work.

"It will improve people's learning, [AFDiT] will improve outcomes for children because it will show that they matter... For me, I thought it was really powerful."
Social Worker

"When you are amplifying the importance of the child's identity can have on their mental health I think obviously, you are going to reduce that risk, aren't you, if they've not got those challenges around the right identity and stuff."
Social Worker

"I have really held it [AFDiT] in mind whilst working on progressing a transracial match through to Panel. I have every confidence that it will be of similar help to my colleagues in the future"
Senior Adoption Social Worker

"I think it will help us not be tokenistic when we talk about children's race, heritage, traditions, etc..."
Social Worker



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Shalima Books

Websites:

Adoption East Midlands <https://www.adoptioneastmidlands.org.uk/adopters/resources/equality-and-diversity/>

Adoption England resources and support <https://adoptionengland.co.uk/about-adoption-england>

Adoption stories: <https://www.adoptionstories.org.uk/resources/literature>

Adoption UK <https://www.adoptionuk.org/>

Birth mother stories: <https://www.pac-uk.org/about/publications/>

Black Adoption Project <https://adoptlondon.org.uk/want-to-adopt/our-children/black-adoption-project/>

Black Care Experience Directory <https://www.theblackcareexperience.co.uk/>

Black skincare: <https://www.blackskindirectory.com/>

Coram BAAF <https://corambaaf.org.uk/events/lunch-learn-webinar-transracial-adoption>

CVAA resources and support <https://cvaa.org.uk/>

Diversity Adopt <https://diversityadoption.wordpress.com/author/yoniejo/>

Eclipse Theatre <https://www.eclipsetheatre.org.uk/>

Expressions of self: supporting minoritised children's identity: <https://www.researchinpractice.org.uk/children/content-pages/open-access-resources/expressions-of-self-supporting-minoritised-children-s-identity/>

Home For Good <https://homeforgood.org.uk>

PAC-UK resources and support <https://www.pac-uk.org/>

Replenish box: <https://www.replenishculture.co.uk/contact-us>

The Staff College <https://thestaffcollege.uk/>

Other:

Food: Explore Asian and Afro-Caribbean supermarkets.

Religion: Check specifics with the birth family first. Seek guidance from social networks and religious leaders for a supportive transition and guidance.

Specialist clothing: Check with the birth family based on the child's actual cultural identity, then consult cultural experts.

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