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together

Parenting for Positive Racial Identity Development

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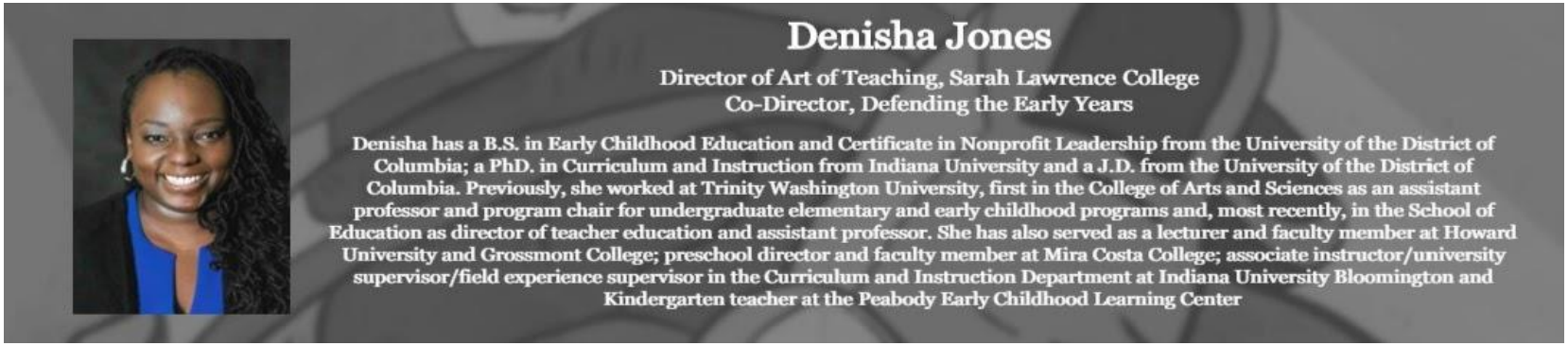
Introduction



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Denisha has a B.S. in Early Childhood Education and Certificate in Nonprofit Leadership from the University of the District of Columbia; a PhD. in Curriculum and Instruction from Indiana University and a J.D. from the University of the District of Columbia. Previously, she worked at Trinity Washington University, first in the College of Arts and Sciences as an assistant professor and program chair for undergraduate elementary and early childhood programs and, most recently, in the School of Education as director of teacher education and assistant professor. She has also served as a lecturer and faculty member at Howard University and Grossmont College; preschool director and faculty member at Mira Costa College; associate instructor/university supervisor/field experience supervisor in the Curriculum and Instruction Department at Indiana University Bloomington and Kindergarten teacher at the Peabody Early Childhood Learning Center

Overview

- What is racial identity development?
- Why does it matter?
- When does racial identity development happen?
- How can parents support it?
- Where are resources to support you?

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Understanding Racial Identity

- Everyone has a racial identity.
- Racial (or ethnic) identity refers to how a person defines themselves in terms of their race (or ethnicity).
- Racial identity is not just how we identify, but how we feel about ourselves as a racialized person.
- Racial identity development can be positive or negative.

Racial Identity Development

What Supports Positive Racial Identity Development

- Anti-racist practices and policies
- Racial affirmations
- Racial representations in children's books
- Positive depictions of people of color in the media
- Opportunities to see people who look like you in a variety of high paying respected jobs and careers
- Curriculum materials that fully integrate people of color
- Teach Black history through positive contributions and uplifting narratives
- Support for navigating racist encounters

What Leads to Negative Racial Identity Development

- Racist attitudes, beliefs, practices
- Deficit attitudes connected to race
- Lack of diverse representation in books
- Stereotypical portrayals of people of color in media
- Lack of visibility of people of color in diverse respected good-paying jobs
- Curriculum materials that omit people of color except as footnotes
- Teaching Black history through the lens of enslavement, pain, and emancipation
- Ignoring or downplaying racist encounters

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Racial Identity Development Matters

- **Positive racial identity development is linked to self-esteem, self-confidence, and perseverance.**
- **Children who develop a positive racial identity tend to do better in school and pursue fulfilling lives.**

Stages of Racial Identity Development

- **Psychologists have identified stages of racial identity development for each racial group.**

White Students (Helms, 1990)	Students of Color (Cross & Vandiver, 2001)
1. Contact Unaware of own race and little to no concept of racism	**1. Pre-encounter** Internalization of racist messages (personal significance unrealized)
2. Disintegration Aware of racism and uncomfortable with this topic	**2. Encounter** Coping mechanisms vary
3. Reintegration Victim blaming used to cope	**3. Immersion/emersion** Desire to be with members of own race and to learn more about African and African American experience
4. Pseudo-independent Pull between feeling that change must happen and confronting one's own discomfort	**4. Internalization** Reframe internalized messages with positive self-image of one's race
5. Immersion/Emersion Seek out white role models who typify "anti-racist" stance	**5. Commitment** Commitment to solving problems faced by one's race
6. Autonomy Comfort in multicultural settings, positive association with change	

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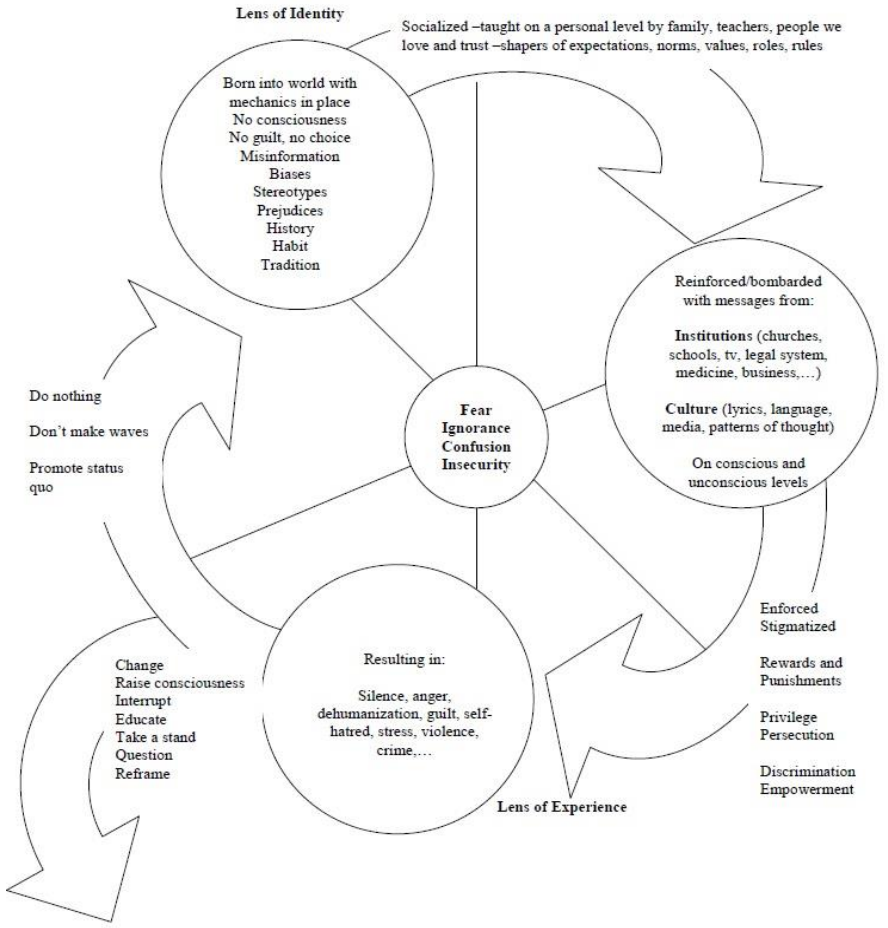
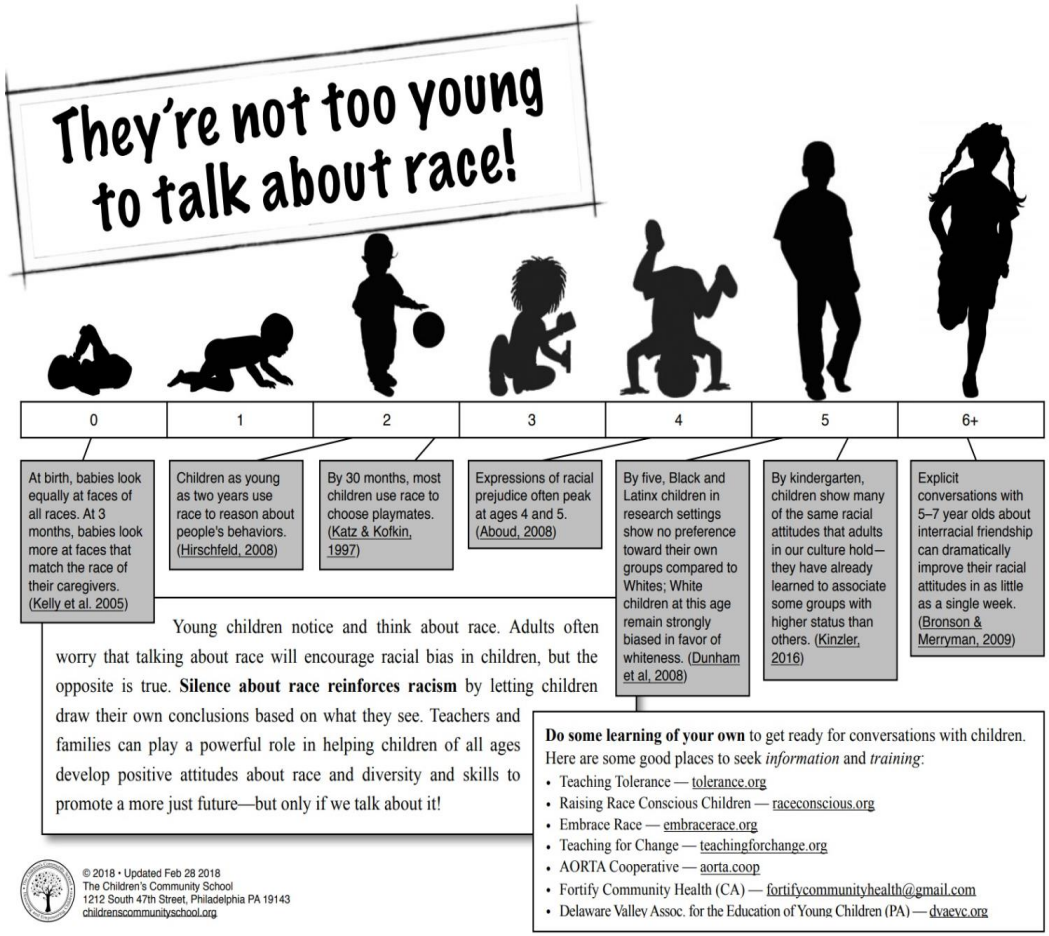
How Children's Identity Develops

- Young children begin to create a personal sense of self and multiple social identities.
- Children learn about their own and other's social identity through explicit and hidden messages.
- Children try and make sense of what they see and hear.
- Young children absorb negative attitudes, stereotypes, and misinformation about others.
- The cycle of socialization hinders positive racial, cultural, and ethnic identity development.





Myths about Young Children and Race

Supporting Racial Identity Development: Children of Color

- Compliment children's dark skin color and curly or kinky hair early and often.
- Provide access to a collection of diverse books and dolls.
- Listen for signs of internalized racial inferiority and respond appropriately.
- Find racial mirrors in your community for your child to see themselves in.
- Talk openly and honestly about what it means to be a member of your racial group.
- Instill racial, cultural, and ethnic pride.

Supporting Racial Identity Development: White Children

- Provide child-appropriate explanations for why people have different skin colors (i.e., melanin).
- Give your child diverse books and dolls.
- Listen for signs of racial superiority and respond appropriately.
- Introduce your child to diverse people.
- Talk openly and honestly about what it means to be white and how white people contribute to anti-racist work.

Resources

- P.R.I.D.E. Positive Racial Identity Development in Early Education Pittsburgh- https://www.racepride.pitt.edu/
- Embrace Race- https://www.embracerace.org/
- Our Skin: A First Conversation About Race Picture Book
- Woke Kindergarten- https://www.wokekindergarten.org/
- What We Believe: A Black Lives Matter Principles Activity Book

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Trying Together supports high-quality care and education for young children by providing advocacy, community resources, and professional growth opportunities for the needs and rights of children, their families, and the individuals who interact with them.

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Thank you.