



Navigating Racial Identities: Interracial Family Communication



Let's Talk About It

Interracial Families: Families in which parents have different racial backgrounds from their children.

Multiracial Individuals: Individuals who have parents with different racial backgrounds than them (Cardwell, 2021).

According to Pew Research Center, Multiracial individuals comprise 6.9% of U.S. adult population, with this population predicted to triple in size by 2060 (Seto et. al, 2021). With this in mind, **it is important to learn how to communicate across racial and cultural differences within the family.**



Racial Identity Barriers Faced By Multiracial Children

Multiracial children have acknowledged the following challenges associated with growing up in interracial families:

- Colorism: A struggle due to a lack of phenotypical similarities or physical resemblance with other family members, affecting feelings of belonging and shared family identity (Cardwell, 2021).
- Cultural homelessness: Multiracial children with diverse racial identities can feel stuck between choosing their genetic origins or those of their family when their ideas, thought, and feelings do not align with a single racial or cultural group (Nelson & Colaner, 2018).
- Mono-racism: Racist remarks that target multiracial children's choice to engage in racial identity exploration, invalidating multiracial children's experiences (Cardwell, 2021).
- Color-blind ideology: The minimization of racism and racial inequality, which often occurs when parents encourage multiracial children to identify with a certain race that would be most advantageous (Seto et. al, 2021).

Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT)

Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT): As A Guiding Framework For Parents

In this case, adjusting communication behaviors can affirm multiracial children's experiences and heritages. These communicative adjustments foster positive family interactions and minimize racial identity barriers within families. Overall, families can build a stronger shared relational culture (Soliz et. al, 2009).



Communication Approaches For Parents

Discussing: Open lines of communication between parents and children allow parents to foster a relationship that welcomes questions and curiosity. It is important for parents to be willing to have discussions about race and culture with their children. These discussions should occur naturally and be age-appropriate, with conversations likely changing as children grow (Seto et. al, 2021).



Affirming/Praising: Affirming multiracial children's experiences and heritages actively acknowledges their individual identities, resulting in positive relational outcomes (Soliz et. al, 2009). Positively praising children's physical traits that are specifically associated with their race (e.g., beautiful, handsome, or adorable) instills pride in children's racial identities (Nelson & Colaner, 2018).



Storytelling: The stories parents share with their children can emphasize or de-emphasis children's cultural heritages. Additionally, the content and manner in which parents tell stories can have a positive impact on children's understanding of their racial/cultural identities, as children use these narratives to make sense of their identities (Nelson & Colaner, 2018).



Ritualizing: Incorporating children's race and culture into family practices can reinforce children's racial identities. Parents can bring elements of their children's culture into family life through celebrating cultural holidays, preparing different ethnic foods, and attending events/activities that embrace their children's heritages (Nelson & Colaner, 2018; Seto et. al, 2021).

