

DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

Guest Writer



Hello DCFS Family,

I remember taking my stepdaughter shopping to use a gift card she had received for her seventh birthday. As we were standing in the toy aisle, she picked up and handed me a box with a blond-haired, blue-eyed doll. I stood there for a second, wondering why she hadn't chosen a Black doll that looked like her.

My mind recalled the "doll test" that investigated how Black children viewed their racial identities. After showing Black children a dark-skinned doll and a light-skinned doll, researchers asked them a series of questions, including which doll was good, bad, pretty and ugly. The results showed that the Black children identified positive characteristics with the white doll.

I began to wonder: Is it possible that my stepdaughter had a negative view of herself? I asked her why she picked the blond-haired, blue-eyed doll — it turned out it was because it came with more accessories. We laugh about this today, but it was the beginning of many conversations we have had about race, culture and identity.

While foster care is difficult for all children, I wonder: Who is talking with Black children about their culture and heritage?

Recently, I was in a meeting discussing Courageous Conversations, a report commissioned by the Foster Together Network (FTN) and UCLA Pritzker Center for Strengthening Children and Families, which examines how race intersects with foster care. Focus groups and interviews were held with non-Black caregivers, non-Black residential care staff, Black parents and relative caregivers, and Black young adults who spent time in foster care as youth.

While the number of participants in the study was small, reading about the experiences of the Black young adults while in care spoke volumes to me. It reminded me that, as our Department is implementing strategies to address the disparate number of Black children in care, we must also work to eliminate negative experiences Black children face *while* in care. For example, hair and skin care are important to a Black child's identity, but this need is often overlooked.

In the coming months, we will provide staff with information and resources as recommended in the report so we may improve the experiences of Black children and their families in care.

In the words of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., "The time is always right to do what is right."

In partnership,

Karen D. Richardson
Deputy Director