



Welcoming Black Dads:
Action Steps and Reflections on Becoming Culturally Competent
Saturday, July 8, 2023, Sheraton Hotel, Dallas, Texas

Fathers report that being a parent is one of the most important roles they have in life. This interactive session will share five practices that early childhood educators can follow to become culturally competent in building relationships with Black fathers of children in their schools and classrooms. Participants will be equipped with new tools and strategies as they go through the following practices.

Action Steps for Practice 1: Examine the Curriculum

1. Using a racial and ethnic lens, examine your curriculum for evidence of oppressive structures. Tell more of the whole story, the child's story, by building relationships and taking into account the social and cultural contexts of each child and family.
2. Use ratings tools that are designed to help understand how your particular curriculum measures up on a cultural competence scale. For example, explore the Curriculum Consumer Report on the Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center website (eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/curriculum/consumer-report), which offers information about how different curricula relate to Head Start Program Performance Standards. One of the criteria specifically examines and offers a rating for cultural responsiveness.
3. Consider tools that will help you listen to the ways you talk with young children, including how you address them. Find recommendations for specific ethnic and local materials to support or expand your curriculum.

Reflection Questions, Practice 1: Examining Curriculum

1. How are various races and ethnicities represented in your setting? While this starts at the obvious, such as books, look for more subtle and hidden materials and mannerisms. How can you intentionally supplement your curriculum to make it more inclusive?
2. How do your mannerisms coincide or conflict with how children are spoken to in their homes?

Action Steps for Practice 2: Build Relationships

1. Intentionally connect with African American fathers by taking time to get to know who they are, what they value and are concerned about, and what they enjoy doing with their children. Using a strengths-based approach when learning about African American fathers, Cooper et al.'s 2020 study highlights Black fathers' concerns about how racism will impact their children and the strategies fathers use to help them cope and thrive (see also thestarlab.org/wpcontent/uploads/2020/07/black-fathers-voices-project-2.mp4). This knowledge can inform how you think about and respond to children and families.
2. Rather than telling them how to be involved in school, seek input from fathers on the most effective way that schools can operate.

Reflection Questions, Practice 2: Build Relationships

1. How do you build relationships with African American fathers? How does it differ from the ways that you connect with fathers or mothers of other races or ethnicities?
2. How do school personnel recognize and acknowledge the influence of race and racism in Black fathers' parenting?
3. While there may be culturally relevant styles, every dad parents differently. Ask the fathers in your setting how they parent, and share with them your genuine respect and curiosity toward the lessons they identify as critical for their children. You might find that after learning to listen, you have begun to talk the talk with each father, sometimes in unexpected and unfamiliar places.

Action Steps for Practice 3: Talk the Talk

1. Dig deeper into the funds of knowledge attained in barbershops. To learn more about culturally relevant, community-based education programs that take place there, visit www.barbershopbooks.org.
2. Mirror the enriching learning spaces that children are accustomed to outside of your setting. Ask fathers for their vision in building a play area that mimics barbershops.
3. Seek the support of Black fathers to understand what is needed to make the classroom a safe space where their children can learn.

Reflection Questions, Practice 3: Talk the Talk

1. What are the selection criteria for your settings' books and other materials? How many books are written or illustrated by authors of color? Do children see themselves in the books, and is there alignment with the books they may be exposed to in their home and community contexts?
2. What opportunities are available to tap into the wealth of knowledge that happens at the barbershop and to bring it directly into the classroom in a way that allows fathers to be the subject matter experts?

Action Steps for Practice 4: Walk the Walk

1. Enter into the world of the child and their family. Find ways to engage and participate in the ways Black fathers parent their children. It may be very different, or it might be just a nuanced shift from ways more familiar to what teachers are accustomed to. This shift is more than words; greater than actions. There are profound transformations that occur when teachers actively pursue a greater understanding of other cultures, other families, and other fathers.
2. Examine the cultural experiences and household norms of the Black fathers in your community. Find ways to access and enter into the richness of diversity in the parenting exhibited there.

Reflection Questions, Practice 4: Walk the Walk

1. No one is immune to bias. Take time to explore what you consume about African American fathers via television, radio, curriculum, and other sources. How may this impact the relationships you create with these fathers?
2. What can you change or do more of in your classroom because of insights learned from home visits?

Action Steps for Practice 5: Become Culturally Competent

1. Representation matters in teaching, learning, and relationships. Be intentional about including all fathers in your program. Ask them in as many different ways as it takes to include them.
2. Analyze the images of Black fathers that families receive from your setting. Include not just pictures, but expectations and conditions for engaging.

Reflection Questions, Practice 5: Become Culturally Competent

1. How does an increasing awareness of race and racism affect your appreciation and value of your own culture and upbringing?
2. In what ways do you actively recognize the positive role models that Black fathers represent? The best step to take to help the children of Black fathers is to boldly step through the sliding glass door and become competent in the cultural context of each child.