

# Stages of Children's Racial Identity Development

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By the **age of two**, children begin absorbing socially prevailing stereotypes, attitudes and biases about themselves and people different from themselves. They begin to show discomfort or fear or even dislike toward a person with a different skin color, different language or with a physical disability.

By the **age of four** children seek labels for racial/ethnic identity and they have their own theories about what causes a disability, skin tone or gender. Adult verbal and non-verbal responses greatly influence these beliefs. They can understand that name calling and teasing about a person's looks, gender, background is unfair.

By **five years of age**, children begin to explore what it means to be from one race compared to another. They are taking cues from what the socio-economic make-up of groups and institutions tells them about who makes decisions/is in the leadership, who has access to resources, who is not there etc. These revelations begin to effect the child's sense of group and individual identity.

By **six**, children can and do describe worth, happiness and wealth in concrete terms – what they see. And they see themselves as a member of a (racial) group.

Children **six, seven and eight**, continue to gain information (correct and incorrect) and develop feelings about human differences. They begin acknowledge the many aspects of their identity (gender, ethnicity, class etc.) And they are capable of making judgments about equity/unfairness/privilege. They begin to voice the “truths”, stereotypes and biases they have been taught.

By the **age of 9 or 10** these attitudes have solidified. And for some it will take life-changing experiences to challenges them to not only rethink but to change their beliefs and behaviors.