Parenting Strategies in Transracial Foster Care Placements

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Introduction: Previous research has indicated a discrepancy in foster parents’ perceptions of their cultural competence as it relates to parenting children in transracial placements, and a lack of reported behaviors associated with facilitating positive cultural identities for their foster children. The skill set of occupational therapists is valuable in addressing these discrepancies using a cognitive-behavioral frame of reference.

Purpose: To explore the childhood occupations and parenting strategies helpful in promoting positive cultural identities as indicated by experienced foster parents of transracial foster placements.

Methodology: Fifteen past or current foster parents participated in semi-structured interviews.

Results: Social participation and education were emphasized as the primary areas of occupation in which transracial foster children learn about culture. Parents indicated a lack of behaviors relating to equipping their children with the necessary coping skills for racial differences. Addressing cultural differences were perceived to be mostly relevant later in the child’s development, rather than in the present.

Discussion: Assertive communication, active listening, and education on ethnic-identity development could be helpful areas to incorporate in cultural awareness foster parent training.

Abstract

Inclusion criteria
- English-speaking
- Fostered transracially a minimum of 6 months
- Fostered through AGAPE

Procedure
- Consent form
- Demographics survey
- 15 to 60 minute semi-structured interview
- At home or AGAPE office

Demographics survey
- Based on previous research at AGAPE

Literature Review

- 28% of approximately 400,000 children in foster care are placed in transracial placements.
- Education of parents on racial socialization may be missing in transracial placements.
- Positive ethnic identity associations
  - Higher intellectual abilities
  - Avoiding from antisocial behaviors
  - Substance abuse
  - Higher self-esteem
  - Lower risks of depression
  - Increased ability to cope with daily stress
  - Ability to recognize and cope with prejudice and discrimination
- Ethnic identity of foster children may be addressed through examining cultural competency of parents.

Discussion

The results of this study led to a better understanding of the perspectives of AGAPE foster parents as they relate to addressing the cultural identities of children in transracial placements. Participants in this study indicated an awareness of the value in exposing their children to professionals, peers, and community members of the child’s race. They were able to identify race as an important aspect of culture, and expressed value in instilling an appreciation for cultural diversity within their children. They gave specific examples of avenues for cultural exploration, which may be used for suggestions to future transracial foster parents within an informal support group setting. However, results indicated inconsistent implementation of methods to teach coping strategies to their children, and a lack of understanding about ethnic identity development. This was evidenced by the expressed fear of overemphasizing racial differences before it is addressed by the child, a lack of active listening when their foster children had questions regarding differences in physical appearance compared to that of other family members, and a lack of parent-modeled communication strategies to deal with racial intolerance and/or racially-biased comments or behaviors.

Limitations
- Two couples may have been influenced by their spouse’s responses
- Limited ability to generalize
- Limited racial diversity in parents and foster children

Implications for Occupational Therapy

Educational needs of transracial foster parents
- Teaching children coping strategies
- Implementing developmentally-appropriate activities for cultural identity exploration in play and leisure
- Ethnic-identity development
- Active listening
- Assertive communication

Future research
- Longitudinal study on the effectiveness of cultural competency training that emphasizes active listening, assertive communication, and education on ethnic-identity development
- Exploring correlation of education level, gender, and cultural competence of foster parents with effectiveness of cultural competency training

Methodology

Data Analysis

Racial awareness: recognition of how race affects their child’s, their own, and others’ lives
Survival skills: knowledge on how to help their children develop a variety of survival skills necessary to cope with prejudice and racism
Multicultural planning: creation of avenues for child to learn about and participate in his or her culture of birth

Results

Racial Awareness/Parental Responsibilities
- “Don’t look for problems where none exist.”
- “Children prefer friends who look like them.”
- “Children will experience discrimination.”
- “There are larger issues than race.”
- “We have to know how to do African American hair.”

Survival Skills
- Emphasizing beauty
- Emphasizing similarities
- Emphasizing differences
- Scientific explanations
- Modeling positive behaviors
- Utilizing teachable moments
- Surrounding with supportive community

Multicultural Planning
- Race-specific activities and relationships
- Activities/relationships for appreciation of all cultures
- Lack of cultural emphasis on leisure pursuits
- Importance of racial diversity in child’s environment

Figure 1

Figure 2

Identified themes structured by components of cultural competence.