

The Intersection of Adolescent Development and Anti-Black Racism

Recommendations from the National Scientific Council on Adolescence



UCLA
Center for
the Developing
Adolescent

Adolescence represents a particularly important period of experience and opportunity during which we identify who we are, who we want to be, and where we belong in the world. It is also a key window during which the effects of racism are amplified and deeply felt.

Fortunately, the monumental growth and learning that occur during adolescence make these years a time when interventions and anti-racist approaches can make a real difference. Insights from developmental science remind us that adolescence is an important time to promote anti-racism in ways that can positively impact young people today, their futures, and the communities and country that they will come to lead.

As we continue the struggle to address racial bias and inequities in our society, the following research-based suggestions can support wellbeing and positive development among Black adolescents in key contexts of their lives:

Peers & Social Media

Schools and Community-based Organizations: Create space and provide resources for youth to connect with social groups that increase belonging and support positive identity.

Parents and Other Caring Adults: Talk with adolescents about what they see, hear, and are exposed to online, including open dialogues about race-related content.

Media and Researchers: Build and strengthen connections between researchers, media producers, and youth, such as via collaborative youth councils, to inform media representations of and content for Black adolescents.

Youth: Create, advocate for, and participate in affinity groups and other affirming social spaces.



Family

Policymakers: Conduct an equity analysis to identify and remediate disparate impacts of existing federal and state-level health and social policies on Black families.

Funders: Fund the expansion of existing evidence-based, strengths-focused programs and the development (via research and refinement, for example) of new programs that support Black families with adolescents.

Parents and Other Caring Adults: Talk with adolescents about their experiences with race and racism, acknowledge your own emotions around these topics, and build capacity to support adolescents' social and emotional needs.

Youth: Share your views of race and racism with your family (however you define “family”) and learn about different experiences and perspectives as you develop your own ideas.



Schools

Schools: Conduct an equity analysis to identify and remediate disproportionate access to advanced coursework and enrichment programs, and disparate impacts of discipline and other school policies on Black adolescents.

Schools: Allocate resources for culturally responsive social-emotional learning programs and assess the implementation and benefits for Black adolescents.

Schools and Universities: Provide pre-service training and ongoing professional development for anti-racist teaching methods and curricula.

Funders: Fund the expansion of evidence-based best practices for promoting anti-racist and equitable school settings as well as the development and testing of new, transformational programs and practices.

Youth: Create, advocate for, and participate in opportunities to build racial equity in your school community and encourage adults to take action.



Community

Funders: Increase resources for community organizations committed to supporting youth activism and other activities that create space for Black adolescents to cultivate their sense of purpose and contribute to their communities.

Community-based Organizations: Build staff capacity through training and ongoing support to reduce turnover and increase sustainable adult-youth relationships.

Community-based Organizations and Universities: Develop or strengthen partnerships for training and supporting youth development program staff in using evidence-based best practices to meet the needs of Black adolescents.

Youth: Engage in community-based programs that support your capacity for social action; share these opportunities with other youth and take advantage of social media platforms to communicate your message and involve others in the work.

