



# The Intersection of Adolescent Development and Anti-Black Racism

## *Recommendations from the National Scientific Council on Adolescence*

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 can be amplified and deeply felt.

Fortunately, the monumental growth and learning that occur during adolescence make these years a time when interventions and approaches that counter or eliminate racism and discrimination can make a real difference. Insights from developmental science remind us that adolescence is an important time to promote positive racial identity 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 well-being and positive development among Black adolescents in key contexts of their lives:**

### **Peers and Social Media**

- Peer groups provide a crucial support system for Black youth. Adults can help provide opportunities for Black adolescents to connect with social groups, including affinity groups or those organized around interests and activities, that increase their sense of belonging and support a positive sense of ethnic-racial identity.
- Policies and programs addressing technology use by young people must find ways to expand the positive opportunities technology provides to Black youth while limiting negative effects due to exposure to racism online.

### **Family**

- Black families can help adolescents respond to discrimination and other forms of racism in positive ways, including approaches based on cultural values and beliefs, that lessen the negative effects of these experiences.
- State and federal policies must address the unique challenges faced by Black families (not just Black adolescents) to ensure the well-being of Black youth.

## Schools

- Learning about how policies, practices, and systems have contributed to inequities in power and resources over time as a part of adolescents' education may increase interest and participation in civic engagement and lessen the negative impact of structural racism within schools.
- Changing approaches that push Black students out of schools and affirming the identities of Black middle and high school students will require investments in:
  - Educator training and practices to curb racial disparities in discipline such as restorative justice, which addresses challenging behaviors and learning through relationship building and supportive practices, rather than punitive and exclusionary ones
  - Instructional practices that affirm cultural identity and civic engagement and ethnic studies curricula
  - Approaches that support students' identity development such as social-emotional learning strategies that include examining root causes of inequity and developing equitable solutions

## Community

- Black adolescents who feel that their lives have purpose and meaning may be less negatively impacted by daily experiences with racism. Adults can help youth cultivate a sense of purpose by supporting programs, activities, and experiences that encourage young people to think about how they can contribute to the world around them.
- In addition, supporting adolescent involvement in anti-racism campaigns and activism benefits Black adolescents by:
  - Promoting the key adolescent milestones of identity formation and belonging, increasing agency and exploration and sense of purpose
  - Furthering Black youths' capacity to advocate on behalf of themselves as well as their own and other marginalized communities
  - Fostering positive, mutually beneficial relationships between adolescents and adults (which also promote resilience among adolescents experiencing discrimination and other race-related inequities)



Read the Full Council Report, [\*“The Intersection of Adolescent Development and Anti-Black Racism”\*](#)

