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Principles for Anti-Racist Policymaking

The principles outlined here are designed to guide policymakers and advocates in developing and implementing anti-racist policy. We know that the road to undo and redress entrenched systemic racism is long, but a critical step forward is to ensure all policy is anti-racist from its creation to its implementation.*

Redress past injustices.

Anti-racist policymaking examines the drivers of present-day inequities, and seeks to undo and redress the harm caused by racist policies that have systematically disadvantaged children and families of color throughout our nation's history. White supremacy thrives on ahistorical thinking. Anti racist policy recognizes how racism, and anti-Black and anti-Indigenous racism in particular, have shaped policies and practices historically, and continues to shape all our experiences. Taking action to right historical wrongs is necessary in order to ensure that all children, youth, and families have the opportunity to achieve their potential, and that children and youth grow up knowing that they and their peers belong in this nation.

Meet the needs of children and families of color.

Anti-racist policy centers children and families of color, to ensure that they benefit directly from the policy. Policies that are purported to be “color-blind” or “race-neutral” have all too frequently been designed to benefit White children and families, and harm children and families of color directly and indirectly.¹ Anti-racist policymaking must be race-conscious, explicitly considering how policies impact Black, Indigenous, and other children, families, and communities of color, to ensure that the policies do not harm some racial and ethnic groups while benefiting others. For policies to effectively support children and families of color, they must recognize

how race and ethnicity intersect with class, ability, sexual orientation, and gender identity to shape people's experiences.² And families must be included in the policymaking process so that they can help shape solutions that meet their expressed needs. The goal should be to develop anti-racist policies that are deliberately designed to meet the needs of all children and families of color, in their diversity and variety of experience, so that in the end, all families receive the supports they need.

Support the whole family.

In order to create policies that support children and youth of color, anti-racist policy approaches should focus on whole families. In the past, public policy has too often been siloed, and policies intended to support children have failed to address the larger struggles their families face. Policy has even actively undermined families in the name of protecting children—as we see with the child welfare system, which disproportionately threatens and separates Black and Indigenous children from their loved ones.³ Anti-racist policy must be designed to support and strengthen the whole family and ensure family economic security, so that families can thrive together. This requires supporting not just parents and siblings but also grandparents and other caregivers and loved ones who constitute a child's family. It requires affirming children and families, building on their strengths, honoring and deepening their social connections, and connecting them to the basic supports they need.⁴

Serve all children and families in need.

Anti-racist childhood policy supports all children and families in need. In the past, policies that have artificially divided families between those who are “deserving” and those who are “undeserving”—pro-

viding services only to those considered deserving—have consistently buttressed White supremacy by leaving children and families of color without access to services and supports—or with access to services and supports that do not work for them, and sometimes actively do them harm.⁵ Narrowly targeting policies according to income and familial or behavioral characteristics has resulted in a social safety net with gaping holes, which are designed to let families of color fall through. Universal or near-universal programs are often necessary to ensure that children of color and their families are not excluded from programs. These broad-based programs must be designed with children and families of color at the center, to ensure that these programs are in fact meeting their needs, and that children and families of color receive the full intended benefits.⁶

About CSSP

CSSP is a national, non-profit policy organization that connects community action, public system reform, and policy change. We work to achieve a racially, economically, and socially just society in which all children and families thrive. To do this, we translate ideas into action, promote public policies grounded in equity, support strong and inclusive communities, and advocate with and for all children and families marginalized by public policies and institutional practices.

Note

*This excerpt was adapted from the full report, *What We Owe Young Children, An Anti-Racist Policy Platform for Early Childhood*, available at <https://cssp.org/resource/what-we-owe-young-children/>.

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Endnotes

- 1 Crenshaw, Kimberlé Williams et al eds. *Seeing Race Again: Countering Colorblindness Across the Disciplines*. University of California Press, 2019. Flynn, Andrea et al. *The Hidden Rules of Race*. Cambridge University Press, September 2017. Available at: <https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/hidden-rules-of-race/33D38E05D-CD5B288BBC4090CC900A967>.
- 2 On intersectionality, see Crenshaw, Kimberlé. *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics*. The University of Chicago Legal Forum, 1989. Available at: <https://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1052&context=uclf>.
- 3 Minoff. “Entangled Roots.”
- 4 Harper Browne, Charlyn. “The Strengthening Families Approach and Protective Factors Framework: Branching Out and Reaching Deeper.” Center for the Study of Social Policy, September 2014. Available at: <https://cssp.org/resource/the-strengthening-families-approach-and-protective-factors-framework-branching-out-and-reaching-deeper/>.
- 5 Katz, Michael. *The Undeserving Poor: America’s Enduring Confrontation with Poverty*, 2nd edition. Oxford University Press, 2013. Gordon, Linda. *Pitied but not Entitled: Single Mothers and the History of Welfare, 1890-1935*. Free Press, 1994. Quadagno, Jill. *The Color of Welfare: How Racism Undermined the War on Poverty*. Oxford University Press, 1994. Roberts, Dorothy E. “Welfare and the Problem of Black Citizenship.” *Yale Law Journal*, vol 105: 1563-1602. Available at: <https://digitalcommons.law.yale.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=7683&context=yjl>.
- 6 Our thinking is influenced by John Powell’s concept of targeted universalism. However, we believe that in some cases truly universal policies are necessary, and to be effective those policies need to be designed to work for children and families of color. On targeted universalism see Powell, John A. et al. “Targeted Universalism: Policy & Practice.” Haas Institute for a Fair and Inclusive Society, May 2019. Available at: <https://belonging.berkeley.edu/target-eduniversalism>.