

OUR IDENTITIES | OURSELVES

A Guide to Anti-Racist Data Collection for Case Workers and Other Frontline Staff



DATA COLLECTION TIPS



- Ask young people and families about how they identify their race, ethnicity, and their pronouns.
 - Self-reporting is the **most accurate source of information** because it reflects how young people and families describe themselves, acknowledging that each family member might identify in different ways.
 - Self-reporting allows young people and families to **update their information over time**, particularly as the young person grows and develops.
 - Place yourself in the **mindset of a “learner” rather than “expert.”**
 - **Do not assume** that the young person or family will tell you about their race, ethnicity, pronouns, or other personal information if you do not ask. Do not take omission of this information to mean it is not important to the young person or family members.



- Ask young people and family members about their identities in **a private place**, keeping in mind that conversations about race and ethnicity may be triggering. Some people may be disconnected from their birth families or don’t otherwise know their ancestry.
 - How and when the questions are asked matters. Asking about race and ethnicity should not be for the purpose of checking a box but rather **a starting point for a conversation**.
 - Acknowledge that young people and family members might not want to share information or would only share aspects of their identity with you **if it is kept confidential** from other people (judges, caregivers, siblings, etc.).



- Be mindful of the purpose of collecting this information. Purposes include developing a relationship with the family, connecting young people and families to culturally relevant services, and collecting accurate and affirming data on a macro level to inform policy, practice, and resource allocation decisions.



- Be aware of your state’s **privacy laws and any data-sharing agreements** the child welfare agency has with other agencies.



- Be non-judgmental and affirming. Maintain positive body language. Reassure young people and family members that **you are not judging them**, and this information will not be used against them.



- Ask young people and family members questions about their identity throughout your relationship. As time goes on, their **identities may change** due to personal growth, increase in trust, or other factors.



- **Be curious.** Ask open-ended questions and think about how you would like others to ask you questions about your own identity.



- Acknowledge that you may have **implicit biases and assumptions** that you should reflect on and question. These biases may be related to race, ethnicity, or other aspects of identity, and are caused by systemic factors, but have very real consequences.



HOW TO TALK ABOUT THIS WITH YOUTH AND FAMILIES

Young people and families may be concerned when you ask questions about their race, ethnicity, national origin, disability, language, sexual orientation, or gender identity and expression. Ask your supervisor how the agency uses data on personal identity, so you can better explain it. Research shows that once young people and families understand the purpose of questions and can ask about and get answers to their concerns, they are more likely to respond.

Start by explaining the following:

- We are collecting this information from all young people and families that we serve.
- We hope this information will improve our practice with all young people and families. The data are collected to get to know all aspects of your identity.
- Data will be analyzed to examine whether all young people and families are receiving quality services that build on their strengths and meet their unique needs.
- Data will NOT be used to discriminate against young people and families.
- Data will NOT be shared with immigration services. We are NOT asking about documentation status.
- We will NOT ask you or any member of your family to interpret on your behalf. If you would like an interpreter, we will find one for you. You can speak in whatever language you prefer.
- Data will be used to identify inequities in practice, services, and resources, and to inform policy and practice changes at a systems level.
- This data will be kept private whenever possible. It may be shared with a supervisor and/or program staff to ensure that you are connected to culturally relevant services that meet your needs. Data will only be reported publicly in de-identified form, at an aggregate level (meaning your information will be combined with everyone else’s data, so it cannot be tied back to you). You can update this information at any point in time.
- Provide a copy of the agency data privacy statement along with the *Our Identities, Ourselves* “Know Your Rights” Guide for Young People and Families.



SAMPLE CONVERSATION STARTERS

1. I would like to get to know you so that I can best support you. How do you describe yourself? What is the most important thing for me to know about your identities to best serve you?
2. How would you like me to address you? What name should I use?
3. What are your pronouns? Mine are_____.
4. What’s important for me to know about your race, ethnicity, the language you speak, and other identities to make sure you get services that are accessible to you?
5. What are some incorrect assumptions that people have made about you and your family that have created problems for you in the past? If I say something that is not right, please feel free to correct me.
6. Can you tell me about any traditions, celebrations, and practices that are important to you and your family?
7. Where are you from? Where did you grow up?
8. What types of foods are important to you? What foods are important to your parent/child?
9. What television shows or music do you like? Is anything you like to watch or listen to related to your cultural background or personal identities?
10. What language(s) do you speak or want to maintain? What languages do your parent/child speak?