

Diversity, Racial Equity, and Inclusion in Child Welfare: Terms and Definitions



Developing and using shared language are essential parts of efforts to advance racial equity. This glossary reflects one step in the Capacity Building Center for States' (the Center's) efforts to promote a shared understanding of diversity, racial equity, and inclusion terms commonly used in child welfare practice. Definitions were finalized following the Center's review of multiple glossaries developed by organizations working to advance equity and with a particular eye for relevance to child welfare.

It is important to recognize that individuals and groups may have different perspectives on terms as well as different preferences for how to refer to their own racial and ethnic backgrounds and identities. This glossary can be used as a starting point to reflect and align on language, and to ensure clarity in how these important and complex issues are discussed and understood.

The Center recognizes that language is continually evolving and will review, revise, and update the glossary on a regular basis. Check the Center's [website](#) for the most recent version of Diversity, Racial Equity, and Inclusion in Child Welfare: Terms and Definitions.

The views expressed in this document do not necessarily reflect the views and policies of the Children's Bureau.

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Terms and Definitions

Antiracism

Antiracism refers to an active process of identifying and challenging racism, by changing systems, organizational structures, policies and practices, and attitudes to redistribute power in an equitable manner (Center for the Study of Social Policy, 2019).

Bias

Bias refers to attitudes, beliefs, and associations about a person or group, especially ones that interfere with an individual's or group's ability to evaluate a situation objectively or accurately.

Implicit (or unconscious) bias

Implicit (or unconscious) bias refers to attitudes, beliefs, or associations expressed automatically that people unknowingly hold and that affect understanding, actions, and decisions (adapted from Center for the Study of Social Policy, 2019).

Explicit (or conscious) bias

Explicit (or conscious) bias refers to attitudes, beliefs, or associations about a person or group held on a conscious level (Perception Institute, n.d.).

Children and Families of Color

Children and families (or people) of color is a collective term referring to non-White racial groups, for example, populations with African, Asian, Latin, and/or Native American backgrounds.¹

Disparities

Disparities are the unequal experiences or outcomes of one racial or ethnic group as compared to the experiences or outcomes of another group (adapted from Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2021). Disparities are evident through comparisons of two or more groups when looking at the same issue, experience, or outcome.

Disproportionality

Disproportionality refers to the overrepresentation or underrepresentation of a racial or ethnic group with a particular experience or outcome when compared with the group's percentage in the total population (adapted from Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2021). While disparities compare differences across two or more groups, disproportionality examines the experience(s) or outcome(s) of a single group.

Diversity

Diversity is the presence of differences within a given setting, generally referring to psychological, physical, and social differences that occur among any and all individuals (adapted from University of Houston, 2022). A diverse group, community, or organization is one in which a variety of social and cultural characteristics exist and a variety of backgrounds, races, genders, abilities, sexual orientations, religions, cultures, and/or other identities are represented (adapted from University of Houston, 2022).

Equality

Equality refers to a state of being the same, especially in status, rights, services, and access to opportunities. Actions can be taken to advance equality (sameness); however, if the same strategies are

¹ Whenever possible, try to be as specific as possible in referring to racial, ethnic, or geographic groups, and honor that group's preferences in how they refer to themselves; different groups have different experiences.

used for everyone, they may not result in the same outcomes due to varying circumstances or different starting places. (See distinction under “equity.”)

Advancing equality

Advancing equality refers to the steps taken (or process) to create a state of equality (goal) by treating everyone the same or ensuring they have the same opportunities.

Equity

Equity means “the consistent and systematic fair, just, and impartial treatment of all individuals” (Exec. Order No. 13985, 2021). In an equitable environment, an individual or group is given what is needed to give them similar advantages, which is not necessarily equal to what others are receiving. Equity ensures everyone has the resources needed to succeed (Pacific University Oregon, n.d.).

Advancing equity

Advancing equity refers to the intentional steps taken (or the process) to get closer to the ideal state of equity (a goal) through fair treatment, equitable opportunities, and changes in systems, policies, and practices (Race Forward, n.d.).

Racial equity

Racial equity describes circumstances when race is no longer a predictor of outcomes and treatment of people of all races is consistent, systematic, fair, just, and impartial.

Advancing racial equity

Advancing racial equity refers to taking intentional steps and offering opportunities that move toward an ideal state in which inequities based on race or ethnicity disappear.

Inclusion

Inclusion is a state of belonging in which people with different backgrounds and identities feel welcomed and valued as decision-makers and collaborators (Center for the Study of Social Policy, 2019). Inclusion also refers to the ongoing process of working toward this state of belonging by welcoming, respecting, and supporting people of all backgrounds and identities and offering them opportunities to apply their talents and to grow.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality is the idea that all individuals have multiple identities that intersect to create a whole identity and influence the ways an individual experiences the world and is seen by the world. The intersecting identities may include race, gender, social class, ethnicity, nationality, sexual orientation, religion, age, mental or physical disability, mental or physical illness, as well as others (Dalhousie University, n.d.).

LGBTQIA+

LGBTQIA+ is an acronym standing for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning/queer, intersex, and agender/asexual/ally.²

Intersex

The term intersex is used to describe variations of sex characteristics, which could include mixed chromosomes, elements of both male and female reproductive systems, or genitalia that do not appear clearly male or female at birth (QIC-LGBTQ2S, n.d.).

Agender

² This acronym has evolved over time to recognize diverse sexual orientations and gender identities. Different variations, such as LGBT, LGBTQ+, and LGBTQIA2S+, may be used by other individuals, groups, and resources.

The term agender refers to a person who does not identify with any particular gender or who identifies without gender (QIC-LGBTQ2S, n.d.).

Asexual

The term asexual describes a person who generally does not experience sexual attraction but may experience other forms of attraction (QIC-LGBTQ2S, n.d.).

Oppression

Oppression refers to “a system of supremacy and discrimination for the benefit of a limited dominant class that perpetuates itself through differential treatment, ideological domination, and institutional control” (Center for the Study of Social Policy, 2019).

Systemic oppression

Systemic oppression is systematic subjugation of one group by a more powerful group in ways that are institutionalized over time.

Race

Race is an intentional social and political construct—“with no inherent genetic or biological basis”—used to “categorize and divide groups of individuals based on physical appearance (particularly skin color), ancestry, cultural history, and ethnic classification” (adapted from Center for the Study of Social Policy, 2019).

Racism

Racism is a “belief that race is a fundamental determinant of human traits and capacities and that racial differences produce an inherent superiority of a particular race; also the attitudes or behaviors that reflect and foster this belief” (Merriam-Webster, 2021). Racism is the systematic subjugation of members of targeted racial groups, who hold less sociopolitical power and/or are categorized as non-White, as a means to maintain power and advantages among individuals identified as White (adapted from Center for the Study of Social Policy, 2019 & Racial Equity Tools, 2021).

Anti-Black racism

Anti-Black racism refers to any attitude, behavior, practice, or policy that explicitly or implicitly reflects the belief that Black people are inferior to another racial group (Center for the Study of Social Policy, 2019).

Individual racism

Individual racism refers to racism that takes place when a person’s beliefs, attitudes, fears, behaviors, and actions are based on and driven by biases or prejudices against another race (adapted from Center for the Study of Social Policy, 2019). Also referred to as personal racism. Individual racism can be deliberate or unknowing.

Internalized racism

Internalized racism refers to when an individual’s acceptance of the dominant society’s racist stereotypes and views about their own race or culture (Center for the Study of Social Policy, 2019).

Interpersonal racism

Interpersonal racism refers to biased or bigoted interactions between individuals; can include face-to-face behavior (e.g., racial slurs) or covert actions that express prejudice, hate, or bias based on race.

Institutional racism

Institutional racism refers to the laws, policies, and practices—of lack thereof—that perpetuate racial disparities, create advantages for White people, and harm people of color and keep them in negative cycles (adapted from Center for the Study of Social Policy, 2019).

Structural and systemic racism

Structural and systemic racism refers to historical, social, political, institutional, and cultural factors that contribute to, normalize, legitimize, and maintain racial disparities, which routinely advantage White people while producing cumulative adverse outcomes for people of color (adapted from Center for the Study of Social Policy, 2019; Lawrence & Keleher, 2004).

Whiteness

Whiteness and White racialized identity refer to the way that White people, their behaviors, norms, and beliefs, operate as the standard by which all other groups are compared. Whiteness and the normalization of White racial identity throughout America's history have created a culture where non-White persons are seen as inferior or abnormal (National Museum of African American History and Culture, n.d.).

White privilege

White privilege is the unearned power and advantages that benefit people just by virtue of being White or being perceived as White (Center for the Study of Social Policy, 2019).

White supremacy

White supremacy is an institutionally perpetuated and ever-evolving system of exploitation and domination that consolidates and maintains power and resources among White people. This system promotes the ideology of Whiteness as the standard and the belief that White people are superior to other races (Center for the Study of Social Policy, 2019).

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