

Race, adoption, reality and responsibility.

By Dr Yolandi M. Coetser

I am white. My daughter is black.

This inescapable fact is my reality, and more importantly, her reality.

And while race dissolves behind the front door, between her and I, and she is just my child, the truth is that the world out there is not friendly to her. It was built to privilege people who look like me, and prejudice people who look like her. It is also the case that in the adoption community, many families share our reality – white parents, black children. This is stark reality of a country like ours, with the horrendous history still fresh in our minds.

Many well-meaning white South Africans might now grab their metaphorical pearls, and loudly exclaim 'I don't see colour! Can we just get past this race thing? Why must everything be about race? We're all just people!'

As an adoptive parent, this might be one of the most detrimental narratives that you can take. Being a white parent to a black child brings with it certain responsibilities that you simply must not shirk. The first responsibility of the white parent is to become racially literate.

The first step is acknowledging that you are a racist. Now, you might respond, again, in your privileged whiteness, 'My best friend/colleague/cousin/husband/child is black – I cannot be a racist'. Yes, you can, and yes, you are. Acknowledging that racism is a *system*, and that you are part of the system, will take you a long way to becoming racially literate. It is about knowing that the world is built up around whiteness as the norm, and everything else as 'other'. And, that if you are white, you benefit from that fact, regardless of your interpersonal relationships.

If you have ever uttered the phrases 'All lives matter', or #notallmen, then you do not understand what systemic racism (and systemic patriarchy) is. You are a racist.

Once you have accepted this uncomfortable and unsettling reality, you can begin with your journey to recovery. I use the word recovery here, because like an alcoholic, you will always remain one. The good news is that you can be a recovering racist. Being a recovering racist means that you are not only 'not racist', but that you are actively 'anti-racist'. It means that you work every day to undo the system which you did not build, but which you benefit from.

While it is important for *all* white South Africans to become racially literate, as an transracial adoptive parent, you have an extra burden of responsibility. Words and phrases like 'white privilege', 'black lives matter', 'systemic oppression', 'injustice', 'intersectionality', 'white fragility' and the like must become part of your everyday vocabulary. Importantly, it means not being nice (looking at you, mommy who tries to keep the peace). It means calling Oom Piet out on a racist joke, it means unfriending friends who use the K-word, it means telling Ouma that it is not okay to talk about people in a certain way, it means asking Aunty Jean not to refer to your child as a 'monkey'. It means ruining birthday dinners and Christmas lunches. It means doing the emotional and psychological labour of undoing these oppressive systems.

You will, very likely, have to cut people who you love dearly out of your life. And it will also mean seeking out other people. Black people. It is important that your black daughter not

only see successful white women around her, but successful black women too. It means seeking out a good black male role model for your black son – not only on TV, but in your house, as your friend.

If you adopt a black child, it is your responsibility to prioritise her, over all others. She will be yours 'as if born to you', and if you cannot do the work, then please think long and hard whether adoption is the right move for you.

Adoption is hard. Transracial adoption is even harder. Yes, it is beautiful, and you will feel love that you never knew existed, but it comes at a price. And that price is making yourself uncomfortable, confronting the sins of your forefathers and foremothers, and taking responsibility for those sins, and *actively* making the world a better place for your children.

How do I become actively anti-racist?

Step 1: Educate yourself.

Here are some important resources to *start* your journey to recovery:

<https://mashable.com/article/how-to-be-antiracist/>

<https://www.vox.com/2020/6/3/21278245/antiracist-racism-race-books-resources-antiracism>

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/culturally-speaking/201608/anti-racist-action-and-becoming-part-the-solution>

Step 2: Become an ally

<https://guidetoallyship.com/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=45ey4jgoxeU>

Step 3: Fight racism every single day

<https://medium.com/wake-up-call/a-detailed-list-of-anti-racism-resources-a34b259a3eea>

The above presents a drop in the ocean, but it is a good start for you to start thinking about race and racism. Know this, that sweet chubby cheeked baby boy will be a young man in the not too distant future, and the world does not like black men (#georgefloyd, #rayshaardbrooks, #nathanieljulies and so many others). That adorable little toddler with her tiara and tutu will become a young black woman, and the world does not like black women (#breonnatylor, #alteciakortjie #gomolemolegae #uyinenemrwetyana and the list goes on).

It is *our* responsibility to change that.

#blacklivesmatter