

# Equity Starts Early

Creating racially equitable environments for infants and toddlers



# A child's first experiences set the foundation for lifelong learning, health and happiness.

Our collective future is brighter when all our children are empowered to reach their potential no matter where they live, the color of their skin, or their home language. That's why it's vital to create safe, inclusive and liberating early learning experiences for all children at the very beginning.

The following tips are designed for families and early educators to help our children have confidence in their identity and become compassionate, empathetic individuals with an appreciation for others.



# Help infants build their lens for life

**Did you know?** Early exposure to other ethnicities makes a difference. Research shows racial bias in adulthood may arise from lack of exposure to other-race individuals in infancy. In one study, six-to-eight-month-old infants were more inclined to learn from an adult of his or her own race than from an adult of a different race.<sup>1</sup>

Arrange your environment to include positive and current representation of different races, ethnicities, genders, and abilities. This can include books, banners, photos, and toys.

Mirrors in common areas help children inspect their own faces, and gain an appreciation for themselves and others.



# Your actions matter

**Did you know?** Around 15-18 months, toddlers become acutely aware of the emotions, feelings and reactions of adults. What they observe can influence their view of self, and they even begin to imitate caregivers' behaviors.<sup>2</sup>

Observe and ask yourself: "How do I feel when I'm around people of other cultures, identities, and abilities? How are my biases affecting the environment I create?"

Take action: affirm children's own unique characteristics and curiosities about others.



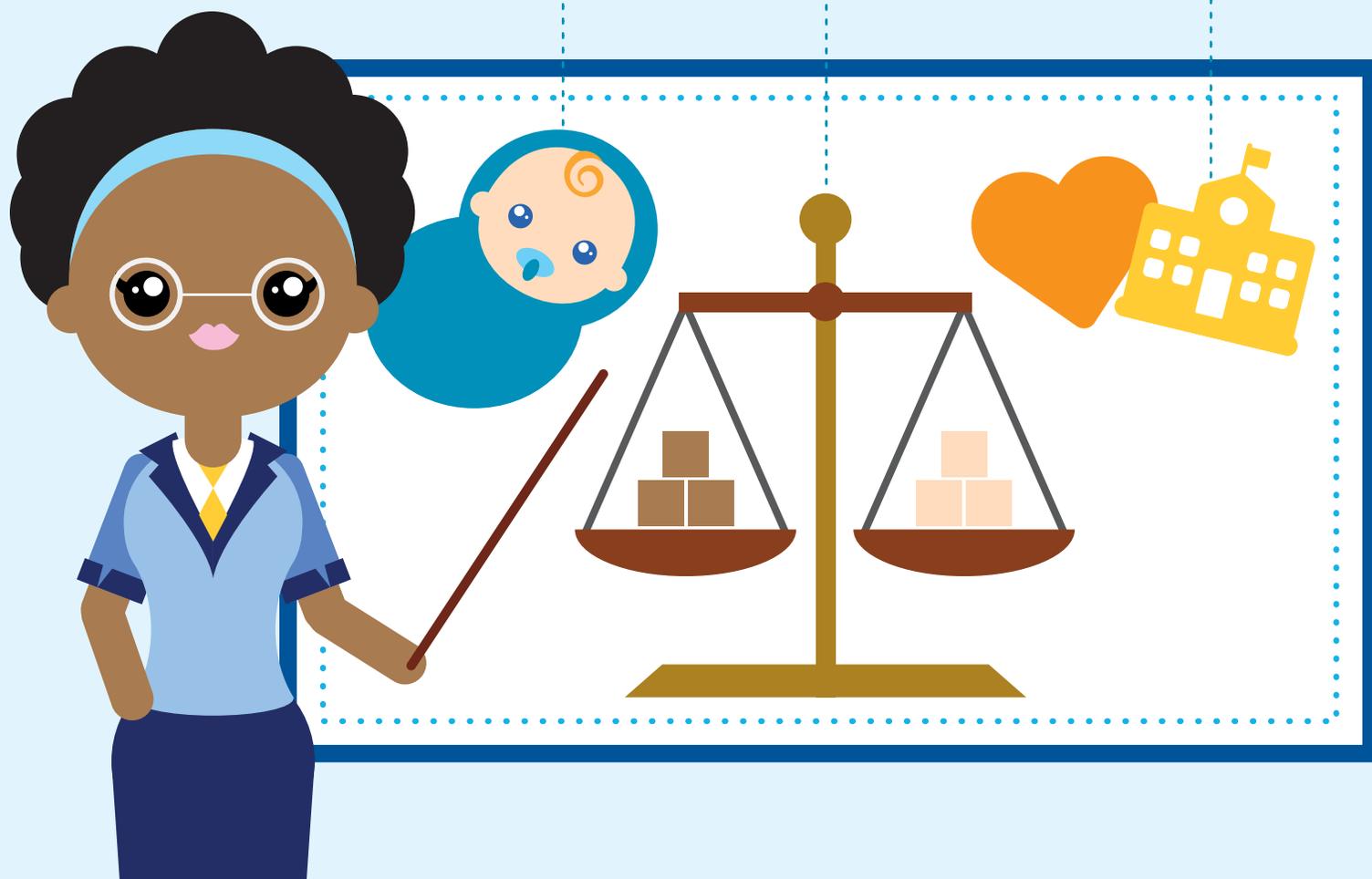
# Build empowered individuals through inclusive environments

**Did you know?** Children from lower-income households and children of color are more likely to be suspended than their peers. This is particularly true for young African American boys. Inclusive environments break down barriers for children to be seen, heard, and understood - this begins with you!

For infants and toddlers, lay on the floor to tap into their point of view. Then, ask yourself if it feels warm, welcoming and accessible from that perspective.

Use positive reinforcement for children's behavior, and attend evidence-based trainings on anti-racism and positive discipline.

Be sure to use inclusive language like "our home" or "our classroom" when talking about the environment.



# Talk about race

**Did you know?** Many adults wait until a child is five-years-old to talk about race, yet children are aware of race long before that.<sup>3</sup>

Foster diverse relationships between peers early, exploring norms and contributions of different cultures through books, songs, and conversations.

Teach children empathy through problem solving together, giving compliments, taking turns, and helping one another.

Keep it simple! Talk honestly and positively about similarities and differences in skin tone, hair, gender expression, abilities, and language.



# Nurture positive racial identity

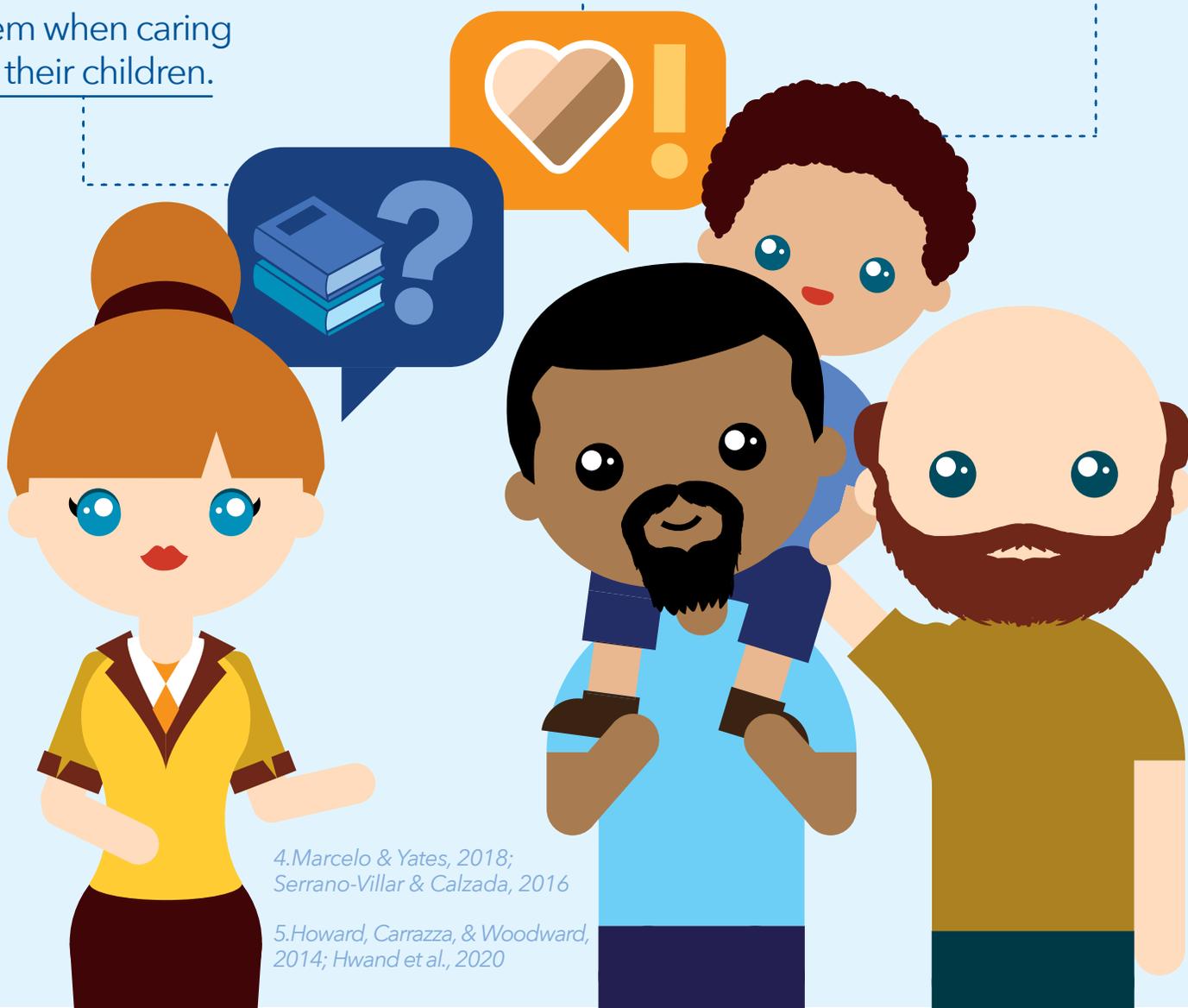
**Did you know?** When children have a strong ethnic-racial identity, they can better navigate institutionalized racism, as well as the prejudicial attitudes and practices included within it.<sup>4</sup>

Diverse environments create a diverse lens for children to see the world. Research indicates that children who grow up in culturally and linguistically diverse communities are more receptive to people outside their own racial group.<sup>5</sup>

If you're an early educator, build strong relationships with the families you serve. Ask what matters most to them when caring for their children.

Construct a positive racial identity for your children by integrating their home culture in your learning environment.

Be responsive in a gentle, confident, and respectful way to establish trust with infants and toddlers.



4. Marcelo & Yates, 2018;  
Serrano-Villar & Calzada, 2016

5. Howard, Carrazza, & Woodward,  
2014; Hwand et al., 2020



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## You are an ambassador for equity

We know that equity starts early. When we foster genuinely inclusive environments that support children in their understanding of race and culture, we are creating an equitable world and brighter possibilities for our children. The little changes you implement today creates the stronger tomorrow we all deserve.

**Learn more and advocate for equity with us at [child360.org/equity-starts-early](https://child360.org/equity-starts-early)**