

Supporting the School Readiness and Success of Young African American Boys

Strategies for Culturally Responsive Strength-Based Practices

Companion Guide

Why were the Strategy Guides developed?

The society in which African American boys live, play, and learn is one in which systemic racism and other forms of bias negatively affect their self-esteem, sense of identity, and belonging. As early as preschool, African American boys are nurtured less and disciplined more. Research shows that educators are less likely to form strong relationships with Black boys and tend to watch their behaviors more closely than other children's (Gilliam et al. 2016; Gilliam 2005). Black boys make up 9.6% of the preschool enrollment yet represent 34.2% of preschoolers receiving one or more out-of-school suspensions (U.S. DOE 2021). These experiences can have a lasting impact on their social and emotional development and learning.

The Supporting the School Readiness and Success of Young African American Boys Project began in 2013 in the wake of widespread concern about the increase in the educational disparities of Black boys and the establishment of the White House My Brother's Keeper Task Force, an interagency effort focused on eliminating opportunity gaps for boys and young men of color. The Office of Head Start (OHS) saw an opportunity to address these concerns by raising staff awareness and skills to meet the unique needs of Black boys and families. The original 2014 guide was informed by research, subject matter expert consultation, and feedback from Head Start programs and

childcare staff and families. The guide promotes a culturally responsive, strength-based approach (CRSB). This approach is designed to target issues of bias and deficit thinking that create inequities in program policies, practices, and services. It lays the foundation for personal, instructional, and institutional shifts—in adult knowledge, attitudes, and practices—toward supporting African American boys' school readiness and their families' success. The CRSB approach is applied through six essential, research-based strategies to:

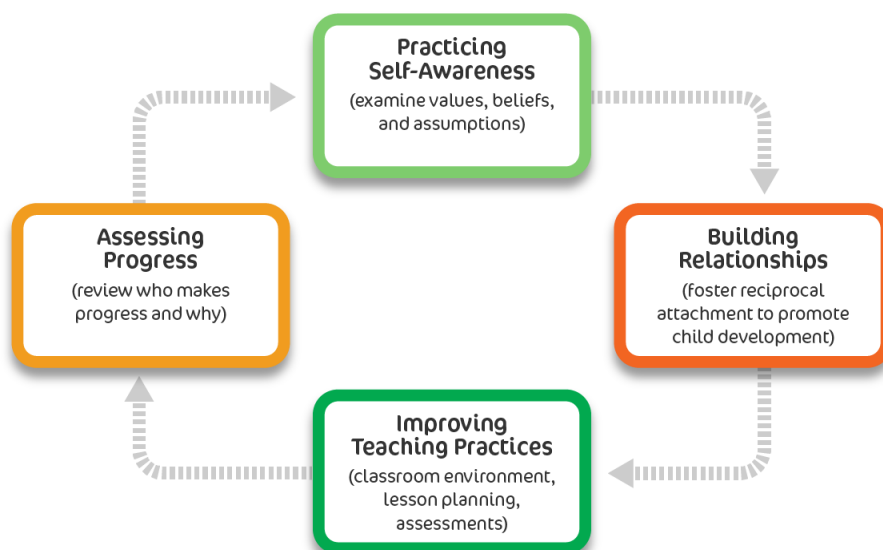
1. Build relationships.
2. Communicate high expectations for learning.
3. Promote social and emotional development.
4. Create learning environments with a focus on play and active learning, including literacy.
5. Implement developmentally appropriate curriculum and instruction.
6. Strengthen home-program partnerships.

In the Strategies for Culturally Responsive Strength-Based Practices resources, the six essential strategies are explored in more depth, and each is given a full section.

What is in the Strategy Guides?

Supporting the School Readiness and Success of Young African American Boys: Strategies for Culturally Responsive Strength-Based Practices is designed to elevate the work in the original 2014 guide. It provides added ideas for program leaders, teachers, home visitors, family childcare providers, coaches, and other staff to create more equitable learning environments for Black boys and their families. The resource supports education staff in moving through four phases of reflective practice to promote learning and application of the six essential practices listed above.

Four Phases of Reflective Practice



1. **Practicing self-awareness:** Guided reflection on personal values, beliefs, and assumptions and how these influence teaching and home visiting practices.
2. **Building relationships:** Focus on the importance of developing and sustaining positive relationships with African American boys and families, which promotes healthy development.
3. **Improving teaching practices:** High-impact, strengths-based practices are included throughout the resource and within each of the six strategies. While some of these practices may not be new, they are offered through a culturally responsive, strength-based point-of-view to intentionally support the development and learning of Black boys.
4. **Assessing progress:** Each guide has a section for program leaders, teachers, home visitors, family childcare providers, coaches, and other staff, to name a practice, try the practice, and track progress at using the practice over time to refine approaches and celebrate successes.

Below is a chart describing useful elements you'll find in each of the six essential strategy guides.

Section	Purpose
What is the strategy	Gives a description of the strategy and how it supports the school readiness of African American boys.
Why it matters	Provides supporting research and related practices.
Reflect	Offers an invitation to think about the information shared and consider how that affects your practice.
Practices that promote the target strategy	Recommends methods that directly support the essential strategy, and are of increased importance for the development, learning, and school success of Black boys.
Try it!	Provides an opportunity to select one or more of the practices described, create a plan for trying it (or them), and check your progress.
Deepen your practice	Includes related resources for digging deeper into learning about the targeted strategy.
Head Start Alignments	Makes connections to the Head Start Program Performance Standards, the Multicultural Principles, the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework and Effective Practice Guides.
References	Cites research and articles used to describe the targeted strategy.

Who are the intended users of the Strategy Guide?

Supporting the School Readiness and Success of Young African American Boys: Strategies for Culturally Responsive Strength-Based Practices is designed to encourage dialogue and offer practical steps that support the school readiness of young Black boys. It is a tool for critically reviewing program services, systems, and practices to ensure African American boys will benefit from the early gains Head Start programs provide. Intentional focus on the needs of African American boys not only benefits Black boys and their families, but all children. The strategies are meaningful for education staff, directors, education managers, supervisors, coaches, and other staff who provide direct service or training and technical assistance. Examples of how Regional Training and Technical Assistance specialists can leverage the strategy guide in their work with program leaders are listed below.

Regional Training and Technical Assistance (TTA)

This resource tool can be employed by Regional TTA during a consultation with grantee recipient leaders. Examples of how the resource can be used by TTA include:

- As a companion resource for reviewing program goals, including school readiness goals, with program directors and managers to determine how program learning goals and activities support African American boys.
- As a prompt for reflective dialogue with education managers and coaches while analyzing child outcomes data e.g., Do you disaggregate data to track the progress of African American boys? How can the impact of integrating practices in this guide be measured using your data collection system?

- As a reflection tool to use with directors and education managers as they discuss and develop staff training and professional development.

children and families, helping staff individualize by considering new responses when current approaches fall short.

Program Directors

TTA specialists can support program directors to use strategies and resources found in the 2014 and 2022 guides and Management Systems Wheel to hold African American boys as a priority when designing systems and services that support all children. Examples of ways the information and tools contained in these resources can be used include:

- Providing training to policy council on the unique strengths and needs of African American boys.
- Enhancing early training of new staff in building awareness, understanding, and greater capacity to offer high-quality services for African American boys and their families.
- The 2014 guide *Taking a Look at Program Services* reflective activity supports reflection and analysis of data during annual self-assessment and review of Head Start management systems to aid in program planning and design.

Education Managers, Family Engagement Managers, Health Managers, Supervisors, and Child Development Specialists

TTA specialists can help managers, supervisors, and child development supervisors to use Strategies for Culturally Responsive Strength-Based Practices to facilitate discussions about signs of injustice and bias that staff see.

- The *Why it Matters* and *Reflect* sections of the strategy guides can be used by the team to address inequities in meaningful ways.
- The strategy guides can also help staff recognize that a single set of strategies does not work for all

Coaches, Trainers, and Other Professional Development Staff

The Strategies for Culturally Responsive Strength-Based Practices can be used by coaches, trainers, and other professional development staff working side-by-side with educators to learn and try effective practices with children and families. TTA specialists can support coaches and professional development staff to integrate these practices into individualized staff professional development plans and coaching goals.

- Coaching action plans can draw from the strategy guide practices, creating goals for applying new approaches to support African American boys.
- African American boys can be the subject of focused observation and feedback on coaching cycles.
- The strategies can be used as foundational content for the training of staff individually or in groups.

Teachers, Family Childcare Providers, Home Visitors, and Family Engagement Staff

The six essential strategies can be used independently or in groups for learning how to effectively support the growth and development of African American boys. TTA specialists can help program leaders design and offer opportunities for self-paced professional development and peer-sharing opportunities.

- The *Reflect* and *Try it!* sections can be included as activities within individualized professional development plans.
- Resources provided in the *Deepen Your Learning* sections are available for gathering more information and tools to strengthen practice.



National Center on

Early Childhood Development, Teaching, and Learning

This resource was supported by the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) of the United States (U.S.) Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as part of a financial assistance award totaling \$10,200,000 with 100% funded by ACF. The contents are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official views of, nor an endorsement, by ACF/HHS, or the U.S. Government. This resource may be duplicated for noncommercial uses without permission.