

Race and Hispanic Origin

Since 1994, federal law and regulation have required states to collect case-level information on all children for whom the state child welfare agency has responsibility for placement, care, or supervision and on children adopted under the auspices of the state's public child welfare agency. The Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) includes information on foster and adoptive parents. The information required by AFCARS is what a social worker would normally collect during the course of assessment, planning, and service provision, so workers do not need to collect additional information solely for the purpose of meeting AFCARS requirements. The Administration for Children and Families (ACF) uses the data for many purposes, such as responding to requests from Congress and the public for current data on children in foster care or those who have been adopted; policy decisions; budget decisions and state allocations; monitoring; and technical assistance for states.

The information collected and reported via AFCARS is critical to the federal government. The government uses it to determine a state's level of compliance with the national standards on child safety, permanence, and well being. In connection with these standards, all states have undergone a Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) and have developed a CFSR-related Program Improvement Plan. The government either has reviewed or will review the automated information systems of states with an operational Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System, and at some point, expects all states to have an AFCARS Assessment Review.

The following discusses errors identified during the AFCARS Assessment Review process. This information is intended to assist reporting agencies in improving the quantity and quality of the information that they report via AFCARS.

Errors Identified During AFCARS Assessment Reviews

A state's automated information system must support a worker's ability to select multiple racial categories for all clients or to select "unable to determine" if a client is abandoned or refuses to give his or her racial information. In addition to asking clients about their racial information, workers must ask if a client is of Hispanic or Latino ethnicity and record that information in the state's automated information system. Workers should collect and store racial and ethnic information as separate pieces of information about the client. Race and ethnicity information is

based on how a client perceives himself or herself, or in the case of young children, how the parent identifies the child. Workers must ask clients this information and not make assumptions on which or how many races a person may be, or whether the client is Hispanic or Latino. When a worker, rather than the client, makes this determination, he or she may be underrepresenting all possible races. A worker can prepare the client for this question by stating, "I recognize that many people identify with more than one race and identify with a specific ethnic group." The worker can then ask the client with what race or races and what ethnic group, if any, he or she identifies. If the client is not sure about



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an ethnicity, the worker can give examples, such as, Spanish, Latino, Hispanic, and so on.

For AFCARS extraction and submission purposes, information not collected or not available for a particular client record for whatever reason is mapped as all blanks (not all zeros, all 9s, etc.). Missing information should never be mapped to a valid AFCARS value.

Technical Assistance: Readers may obtain technical assistance from the Children's Bureau's National Resource Center for Child Welfare Data and Technology (NRC-CWDT). The resource center can be contacted at 877/672-4892, or at its Web page: <http://nrccwdt.org>. If you wish to request onsite technical assistance from the NRC-CWDT, contact your ACF Regional Office.