

A STARTER GUIDE

# THEY ARE NOT INVISIBLE™

Creating Safe Spaces & Sparking Change for  
Young Men of Color, Including Those with Foster Care & Adoption  
Backgrounds

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## A Call to Action

**What Black Men—especially those who were adopted, in foster care, or navigating identity—need to thrive.**

# WHO THIS IS FOR

This guide is designed for professionals, caregivers, and anyone who works with or loves:

## Adopted Boys & Young Men

Navigating identity, belonging, and who they are—often across cultural, racial, and family boundaries.

## Young Men of Color

Carrying the weight of stereotype threat, systemic barriers, and a world that often sees threat before it sees potential.

## Foster Care Alumni

Who've moved through systems that too rarely asked what they needed—and even less often built it for them.

*If you see yourself in any of these young men—or see them in the young men you serve—keep reading.*

# MY LIVED EXPERIENCE

I've seen firsthand what happens when young Black men, especially those who've been adopted or moved through foster care—enter spaces that were never built with them in mind.

Where questions on identity, story, and belonging, arrive before confidence ever gets a chance to.

**This work is personal. And it's lifelong work I am committed to**

Ed.D. • Trevecca Nazarene University • Research: Mentoring at PWIs & HBCUs

*"Being seen—  
really seen...  
changes everything."*



# WHAT THE RESEARCH SHOWS

**Key Finding: Self-efficacy—belief in one's own ability—was significantly higher at HBCUs than PWIs. The difference? Belonging. Identity-affirming relationships. Trust.**



## Career Clarity

Young men need mentors who help them see a future with them in it—not a path around them.



## Academic Support

Access alone isn't enough. Culturally responsive support changes who stays and who thrives.



## Self-Efficacy

Belief in ability is built through relationships—not programs. Connection comes before confidence.

# STRATEGIES TO SPARK CHANGE

*You don't have to do everything. Start by doing one of these with intention.*

**01**

## **Get Curious First**

Ask before you assume. Understanding more about their story and how they see the world, opens doors for real connection and trust.

**02**

## **Name What You See**

Tell young men what strengths you observe. Visibility isn't a gift—it's a basic need.

**03**

## **Create Space to Be Seen**

A room isn't a safe space. Relationships, consistency, and awareness/competency build belonging.

**04**

## **Build Peer Networks**

Peer-to-peer connection builds confidence faster than any top-down mentoring structure.

**05**

## **Honor Their Full Identity**

For young men with foster care/adoption stories, identity is complex. Don't reduce them to their background.

**06**

## **Challenge the Narrative**

Actively disrupt stereotypes in your language, policies, and behaviors. Silence is not neutral. And words do matter.

# RESOURCES & NEXT STEPS

## EXPLORE THESE FRAMEWORKS

- Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory
- Tinto's Model of Student Departure
- Adoption-trauma & adoption consciousness model
- Attachment theory
- Identity-affirming mentorship/relationships

## YOUR NEXT STEPS

**1**

### Reflect

Who in your sphere might feel invisible right now?

**2**

### Start one conversation

Ask a young man about his story — and actually listen.

**3**

### Audit your space

Does your environment communicate "you belong here"?

**4**

### Connect with EmpowerMENT

Let's design something intentional together.

*When belief is built  
collectively, success  
becomes sustainable.*



This is the work. And it starts with one decision to see them.

## **LET'S CONNECT**

Ready to design mentoring and learning experiences that move young men  
from uncertainty → belief → success?

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