



Asking About Race

In this period of civil rights awareness and sensitivity to racial and ethnic identity, agents and secretaries in Extension sometimes ponder out loud, is it *polite* or even *legal* to ask people their race in an evaluation or needs assessment?

The answer to both questions is **YES**, but you may wish to consider two things.

The **first consideration** is how you frame the question. To be sensitive to the feelings and cultural perspective of others, consider adopting the wording used by the U.S. Census Bureau. It is gracious and succinct.

How would you describe yourself?

1. *BLACK/AFRICAN-AMERICAN*
2. *HISPANIC*
3. *WHITE (NON HISPANIC)*
4. *OTHER (please specify) _____*

The **second consideration** is the direction you provide for completing that question. Most researchers in the past have said, "circle number" or "circle answer," the assumption being that a single answer (one race/ethnic group) is acceptable. But, today many persons want to identify themselves as belonging to two or more races. Thus, you should adopt the direction given in the 2000 census, "circle all that apply."

When tallying the data, consider ahead of time, the extra codes you will need to enter racial combinations on the computer.

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