



Practitioner Briefing Cultural Competency

Welcome to this briefing aims to help practitioners and their managers understand Cultural Competency and its importance/impact for children and their families. The messages in this briefing are just as important for those practitioners working with adults who are parents.

Learning from local and national reviews has highlighted that practitioners could do more to try to fully understand the impact of cultural identity on the daily lived experience of children. Findings identified that racial, ethnic, and other cultural identities are often central factors in the daily lives of children and families, particularly from minoritised communities, and should therefore be given proper weight when exploring the lives in practice and in reviews.

What is cultural competency? Competence means having the capacity to practice effectively when working with children and families from any ethnic, religious, or cultural background. **Cultural Competence** is being responsive to the beliefs, practices and cultural and linguistic needs of children and their families. **Culturally Competent practice** acknowledges and aims to understand the meaning of cultural identity within the life of each child and their family. It requires that all organisations and practitioners develop cultural knowledge so that the design and provisions of services respond to culturally specific needs. It also necessitates exploration of whether any behaviours linked to safeguard concerns that maybe considered 'acceptable' within the family's own culture. Practitioners can make use of supervision and reflective spaces to consider their approach to the child and family. Cultural competency enables practitioners to become more attuned with and sensitive to children, families and group specific needs, values, beliefs, and attitudes to provide more culturally competent interventions.

Understanding Cultural Identity - Being 'culturally conscious' means having the knowledge and skills to be aware of one's own cultural values and those of others and the implications of these in making respectful, reflective, and reasoned choices. The Social Graces Framework, also known as 'social GRRRAACCEESSS' is an acronym representing: Gender, Geography, Race, Religion, Age, Ability, Appearance, Culture, Class, Education, Employment, Ethnicity, Spirituality, Sexuality, and Sexual orientation. It describes aspects of personal and social identity which afford people different levels of power and privilege (Partridge, 2019)



Understanding Cultural Identity – Practitioners (and children and families they work with) need to be able to identify and reflect on their own personal prejudices and that of others, individual privilege and how these impact on their practice, judgements and day to day lives. This applies to individual behaviours but also organisational systems, processes, and cultures. Being 'culturally conscious' means having the knowledge and skills to be aware of one's own cultural values and those of others and the implications of these in making respectful, reflective, and reasoned choices. Frameworks and approaches to develop cultural consciousness ensure that the needs of all people and communities are met in a responsive and respectful way.

Practitioners need to ask themselves the following statements and questions:

- Can I turn on the TV or social media and see people like me be positively (or widely) represented?
- Can I easily access medical advice and care?
- Have I ever had to explain 'where you're really from?'
- Can I pretty much travel safely to any part of the country or world and be accepted?
- Can I go out on my own and not have to worry about my safety.

Culturally Competent practitioners understand

- Strengths and challenges within the child and family's lived experience related or attributed to their culture and/or faith and community they live in which might increase or decrease the risk of abuse and neglect.
- The cultural diversity of their local area and the knowledge of the impact of relevant historical; influences on the child and family's lives they support e.g. the impact of war/social unrest in their country of origin.
- That different families from the same geographical area, cultural or religious groups may have different language, beliefs, and values.
- The importance of asking the child and their family about their experiences and what matters to them – not making assumptions on their behalf.
- That assessments explore both the strengths and challenges that faith and culture, nationality, language, and history may have on family functioning and child welfare.

All practitioners working with children and their families whose faith, culture, nationality, or recent history differs significantly from that of the majority culture must take personal responsibility for informing their work with sufficient knowledge of the relevant faith and/or culture to be able to effectively protect the child(ren) and promote their welfare.

Effectively engaging with children and families is the ability to communicate and interact respectfully with people regardless of difference on an individualised basis. We must recognise that what meets the needs of one family living in Bury Park, Luton may differ from that of a family living in Biggleswade. Similarly, just because we have successfully worked with one Jewish family does not make us an expert in working with all Jewish families.

Culturally conscious practice - Value diversity and difference on an individual level. Remember the child is the expert of their own lived experience, adopt a position of 'not knowing', be professionally curious and be ready and willing to learn. Avoid making assumptions about children, families, and communities because you perceive that they have similar aspects of cultural identity to another family or someone you know. To promote the best interests of children practitioners should **Be fully aware of their prejudices and cultural influences** - **Avoid class and racial generalisations and stereotypes** - **Be aware of the impact discrimination has on an individual's life experience** - **Recognise that the basis of good practice is the same with all families** - **Have an understanding of a family's background, which is an important element of ensuring good and effective intervention** - **Acknowledge that racial abuse damages children both physically and emotionally and as such warrants professional intervention to address the effects of this form of abuse, whether it comes from within or outside the family.**

Culturally conscious assessment should include:

- Acknowledgement and understanding of the intersectional aspects, such as how language, cultural identity and belief systems impact on the children and adults within the family.
- Analysis of how cultural, personal, and social identity impacts on the family's ability to safeguard their children.
- Explicit links between the family's cultural beliefs and the safeguarding concerns.

Please access the [Pan Bedfordshire Child Protection Procedures](#) and register for updates and our guide to [Becoming Culturally Competent](#).