

SAFEGUARDING ADOLESCENTS

STRATEGY GUIDE

Theme: Cultural Competence

Introduction

Culture is an integrated pattern of human behaviour that includes thoughts, communications, actions, customs, beliefs, values and institutions of a racial, ethnic, religious, or social group (Gilbert *et al.*, 2007).

Cultural competence is the ability of professionals to function successfully with people from different cultural backgrounds including, but not limited to, race, ethnicity, culture, class, gender, sexual orientation, religion, physical or mental ability, age, and national origin (Appleby *et al.*, 2001).

Culture and cultural identity are important factors to consider when engaging with children, as they feed into the essence of an individual's sense of self and their place within society. A child's sense of cultural identity may be so important to them that any attempt to engage or intervene without considering potential cultural ramifications has the potential to alienate or further disengage the individual. It is imperative that as professionals, we approach culturally different people with openness and respect, and a willingness to learn. Practitioners should continue to develop their self-awareness and reflect on their own subconscious bias as an important process in the knowledge base of culturally competent practice.

What is the impact on safeguarding adolescents?

It is crucial to recognise that there may be a variety of factors, including cultural identity, which affect the engagement, treatment, and support of children under the safeguarding umbrella. The subconscious bias of practitioners can inadvertently lead to false assumptions regarding, and misinterpretation of significant behaviours of, a potential victim of abuse. There needs to be an acknowledgement that these biases exist and can be further barriers to victims building relationships and accessing genuine support.

A lack of cultural competence when engaging with children can have catastrophic consequences as evidenced in the high-profile case of Victoria Climbié:

“Professionals working with Victoria Climbié misinterpreted her ‘standing to attention’ to mean respect and not fear, and didn’t communicate with her in French, her first language; these are examples of cultural assumptions that were made during professional engagement with her and her family” (Tedam and O'Hagan, 2009).

Further research conducted by Davis in 2019 exploring the impact of cultural competence on safeguarding black adolescent girls highlights some of the barriers caused by subconscious bias in supporting this community:

“Racism may sometimes be overt but participants in my research also spoke a lot about the complexities and nuances when practitioners have good intentions to be inclusive but the way that services present themselves can still act to silence black girls. These include not considering use of language, who is represented in posters and information leaflets, how the space feels and the bias a black girl or woman might have experienced over a lifetime. There is danger that having good intentions means services and individuals do not sufficiently examine how young black women are actually receiving (or not receiving) their service, allowing harmful practice where black girls feel excluded or unheard to continue... we need to retain a critical reflective approach to what biases are shaping personal and service-wide behaviour and try to make the unconscious conscious in order to address it. It is also imperative that we look honestly at whether equality, diversity and inclusion are regarded as an integral part of safeguarding practice, or if they are seen as an ‘add on’.

Other inequalities around class, sexuality or being in care impact on any young person and we need to consider how these might interact with race and gender in terms of abuse being noticed or disclosed.”



Cultural web (Tadam, 2013)

The cultural web, pictured below, provides a useful starting point in reflecting on those aspects of a child's unique cultural identity which impact on their lived experience, relationships with others, perception of self and societal perspectives.



Additional Resources and Information

[Safeguarding Adolescents Strategy Guide: 8: Cultural identity](#)

[Community Care Inform Children](#) - Community Care Inform Children and Community Care Inform Adults provide online resources for social workers and social care professionals. Requires a subscription.

Additional reading

Burnham, J. (2013). 'Developments in Social GRRRAACCEEESSS: Visible-invisible and voiced-unvoiced.'

IB Krause (2018). Culture and Reflexivity in Systemic Psychotherapy: Mutual Perspectives.

Lum, D. (2007). Culturally Competent Practice: A Framework for Understanding Diverse Groups and Justice Issues (edition 3) Brooks/Cole.

[Hoxby's useful guide](#) - A guide to inclusive language across a range of characteristics relating to identity.

References

Appleby, G. A., Colon, E., & Hamilton, J. (2001). Diversity, oppression, and social functioning: Person-in-environment assessment and intervention.

Davis, J. (2019) [Safeguarding Black Girls from Child Sexual Abuse](#). Accessed 22 November 2021.

Gilbert, J., Goode, T. D., & Dunne, C. (2007). [Curricula enhancement module: Cultural awareness](#); in Washington, DC: National Center for Cultural Competence, Georgetown University Center for Child and Human Development.

Tedam, P. (2013). Developing Cultural Competence; In Bartoli, A (ed) Anti-racism in Social Work Practice (Critical Approaches to Social Work).

Tedam, P. and O'Hagan, K. (2009). [Cultural Competence: Lessons from Research](#). Community Care Inform Children.