

SAFEGUARDING ADOLESCENTS

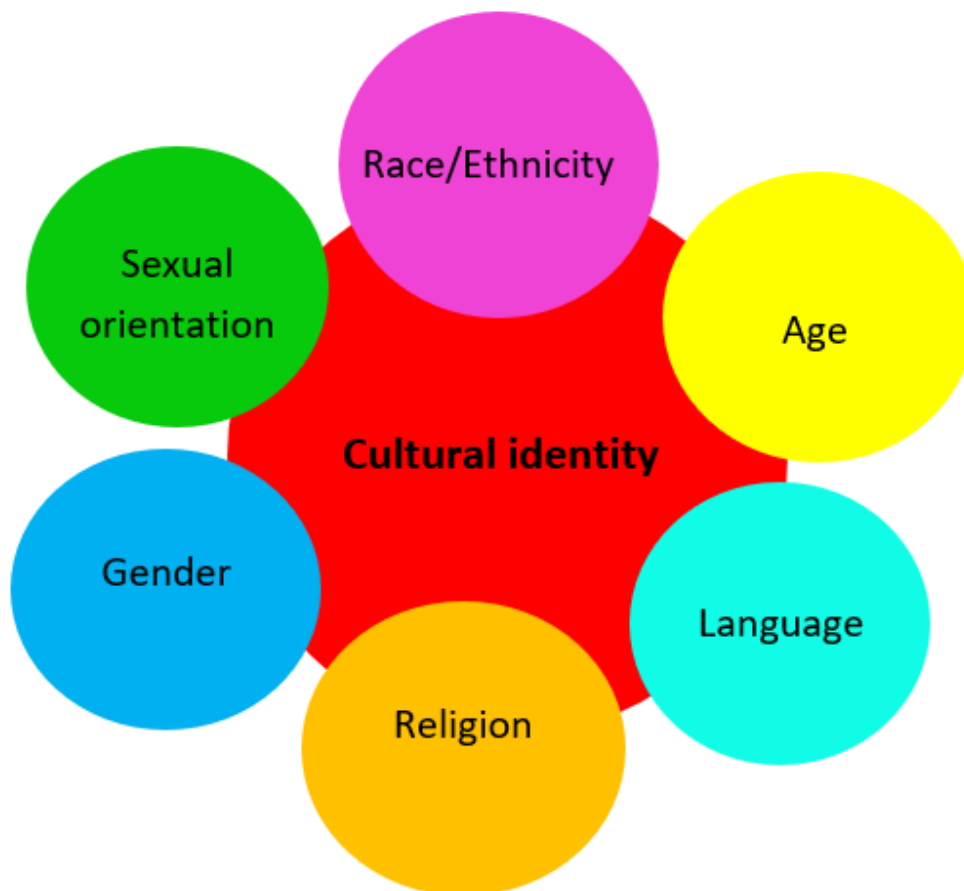
STRATEGY GUIDE

Theme: Cultural Identity

Introduction

Culture is the shared characteristics of a group of people, which encompasses place of birth, religion, language, cuisine, social behaviours, art, literature, and music. Some cultures are widespread and have a large number of people who associate themselves with those particular values, beliefs and origins. Others are relatively small, with only a small number of people who associate themselves with that culture. However, the value of culture cannot be defined by its size (National Geographic Society, 2021).

Cultural identity is not a static principle, and someone can identify with additional cultures and also have their cultural identity change over time (Reference.com, 2020).



What is the impact on safeguarding adolescents?

Cultural identity encompasses many aspects of an individual. Negative responses to a person because of aspects of their cultural identity can come in many forms including but not limited to; racism, sexism, homophobia, ageism, classism and anti-religion.

The responses to a young person's cultural identity from family, friends or the community can have a significant impact on them. Prejudices and discrimination can ultimately create a safeguarding concern. The NSPCC's Learning from case reviews (2014) highlights that professionals sometimes lack the knowledge and confidence to work with families from different cultures and religions. A lack of understanding of the religions and cultural context of families can lead to professionals overlooking situations that may put family members at risk; whilst the desire to be culturally sensitive can result in professionals accepting lower standards of care.

The learning from these reviews highlights that professionals need to take into account families' cultural and religious context when undertaking assessments and offering support. The rights and needs of the child need to remain the focus of interventions at all times, regardless of this context.

As children grow up, they become increasingly concerned with developing a sense of self. This can be particularly challenging for young people growing up in families with a different religious, cultural, or ethnic background to themselves (where for instance, children are from different fathers, or a child is living in foster care or has been adopted). Confusion over self-identity and a feeling of not belonging can lead to low self-esteem and heightened risk of self-harm or risk-taking behaviour. Some young people become involved in gangs to give themselves a sense of belonging (NSPCC, 2014).

Assessment tools should be adapted to ensure cultural sensitivity based on knowledge and understanding. Assessments should explore the impact of a person's culture on their life, including spiritual practices, rites/blessings, beliefs and practices surrounding life events, dietary restrictions, personal care, daily rituals, communication, social customs and attitudes to healthcare and support. (NSPCC, 2014).



Services provided for families should be culturally sensitive. For example, it may be considered culturally inappropriate for a member of the opposite sex to discuss certain issues with service users, and families may feel more comfortable working with professionals from a similar cultural background. If children are taken into care, it is important to take into consideration their cultural and religious needs. This could be through placing children in families where one or both parents share the child's cultural and religious background or housing them in an area where people from a similar background live. This can help in the child's development of a positive cultural identity. However, it is important that common culture or religion does not override other considerations, especially not the child's safety (NSPCC, 2014).

Resources

[Safeguarding Adolescents Strategy Guide 7: Cultural competence](#)

References

National Geographic Society. [Cultural Identity](#). Accessed: 22 November 2021

Reference.com (2020). [What Does "cultural Identity" Mean?](#). Accessed: 22 November 2021.

NSPCC (2014). [Culture and faith: learning from case reviews](#). Accessed: 22 November 2021.