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PSDP—Resources and Tools: Exploring diversity in supervision


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Funded by the Department for Education

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Introduction

Learning from Serious Case Reviews highlights that there is insufficient focus on the impact of race, culture, ethnicity, asylum seeking status, faith (and its meaning for that specific child or family), as well as disability or poverty when working with children and families. This suggests that families' lived experiences of social and structural inequality, culture, ethnicity and diversity may not be sufficiently understood or acknowledged by social workers.

This reflective audit tool considers how you can explore these issues in supervision and support social workers to address the cumulative and intersecting inequality related to race, ethnicity, religion and other marginalised identities that many of the children and families who come to the attention of child welfare services encounter. It is designed to be used in one-to-one supervision.

The following prompt questions are designed to help you explore the significance of race, culture, ethnicity, asylum seeking status and faith when talking about children and families in supervision.

The questions draw on evidence from research into Serious Case Reviews involving the deaths of black, Asian and minority ethnic children (Bernard and Harris 2019), which highlights the frequent absence of accurate demographic information and lack of confidence amongst practitioners in navigating the complexities of decision-making about what constitutes harm within a multicultural, multi-faith context.

Understanding the lived experience of black, Asian and minority ethnic children and young people

To what extent has direct communication with the child or young person informed your assessment and planning?

How much time has been spent in direct observation or contact with the child or young person, including time spent with them on their own?

- > What has assisted your engagement and direct work with the child or young person? Have you made use of toys and materials that represent a diversity of backgrounds (e.g. dolls with a range of different skin tones and hair textures)?
- > What might be getting in the way of your engagement with the child or young person?
- > Is the child or young person able to communicate in English? If not, is an interpreter required?
- > Is there evidence of a learning disability, developmental delay or sensory impairment? What specialist equipment e.g. assistive or augmentative technology, might be needed to communicate directly and obtain the child's views?
- > Has the child worked with social workers before and, if so, what was that experience like? Did they feel seen and heard? Were their concerns taken seriously?

Is information about the child or young person's age, race, culture, ethnicity, sexual orientation, asylum status, beliefs, and language(s) spoken available?

- > How has this information been obtained? Is it accurate? Is it coming from the child or the parent (self-defined), or based on professional assumptions?
- > What meaning does the child attach to the different aspects of their identity? What is the relationship between their identity and their self-esteem?
- > What meaning do the parents ascribe to the child's identity (if there are differences this could be a source of conflict in the family)?

Is detailed, nuanced information available about the background and everyday life of the child?

- > What does the child or young person value about their family? Who are they closest to and who do they confide in?
- > What do they think needs to change to ensure their safety and wellbeing?
- > What stressors related to discrimination on the basis of racial, ethnic, religious, cultural or sexual identity might the child or young person be dealing with? Are there resources available within or outside of the family that could help to mitigate this stress?
- > Have cultural beliefs, or culturally-specific practices, that could increase the risk of harm been considered (eg beliefs about spirit possession)?

How has awareness of vulnerabilities specific to black, Asian and minority ethnic young people informed your assessment and planning?

Have familial risk factors been considered? Could the young person be at risk of domestic servitude, female genital mutilation, honour-based violence, or enforced marriage?

Might the young person be exposed to extra-familial risk related to living in a gang-affiliated neighbourhood, going missing and / or being excluded from school?

If an alternative placement is required, what weight has been given to aspects of identity (e.g. race, religion, languages spoken, culture, sexual orientation, etc.)? Have these considerations been discussed openly with the young person concerned? Have their views been taken into account?

Understanding the lived experience of black, Asian and minority ethnic children parents and families

How has communication with parents (regarding race, culture, ethnicity, asylum seeking status and religion) influenced assessment and planning?

A co-produced 'cultural genogram' (a three-generation family tree, developed in collaboration with the family, that shows its history and relationships) is recommended as a medium through which the social worker can explore the family's religious and cultural background, and address the following questions (you can watch a film and download a learning tool about genograms in the 'Understanding the lived experience of children and families' section of this website):

Is a detailed, nuanced picture of the parent(s) and family available? Does it include accurate demographic information?

- > How has information about race, culture, ethnicity, asylum status, beliefs, etc. been obtained, and what meaning do family members attach to these factors?
- > Can the parent speak, read and write in English and, if not, what arrangements for engaging the services of a suitable interpreter have been made?
- > Would the parent or family benefit from the services of an independent advocate?

What are the strengths of the family?

- > Is there a religious or community network that can be drawn upon as a source of support?
- > Could the presence of a close-knit community act as a barrier to engagement by engendering shame about social work involvement?

How is this family affected by stresses linked to factors like racism, poverty, and immigration status? Do these affect the parents' ability to parent well? Has this been openly discussed?

- > How might cumulative and multiple identities be coalescing to pose a particular risk for the different members of the family?
- > What measures are in place to ensure the safety and wellbeing of newly-arrived young people who have no recourse to public funds?

How might culturally-specific practices that are harmful to children be challenged without pathologising all aspects of parental caregiving?

- > How do we ensure black, Asian and minority ethnic children are protected and that we are not being hampered in our assessment of need and risk by a 'cultural smokescreen'?

Building trust and meaningful relationships with black, Asian and minority ethnic families

What is the quality of the relationship between the social worker and the black, Asian and minority ethnic family?

- > Is the practitioner willing to move outside of their comfort zone to question deep-seated beliefs and assumptions about certain 'races' and cultures?
- > If there is a cultural similarity between the worker and the family, is this helpful, or is there a chance of over-identification?
- > When working cross-culturally, could beliefs, stereotypes and unconscious bias be inhibiting professional curiosity?
- > Is a 'cultural deficit' approach, or a different threshold of concern, being applied to this black, Asian and minority ethnic child or young person?

What has the social worker done to promote trust and engagement?

- > Has emphasis been placed on good timekeeping, transparency and shared understanding?
- > What use has been made of personal disclosure in terms of race, culture, ethnicity or, for example, being the parent of a dual heritage child?
- > In organising meetings, conferences and home visits, is sensitivity shown in respect of cultural and religious calendars?

Do members of the family have a clear understanding of the role of the social worker?

- > Has the reason for the current social work involvement been made clear? Has discussion of the family's experience of previous social work involvement taken place?
- > What efforts have been made to convey social empathy (e.g. understanding the impact of multiple and intersecting inequalities and discriminations)?
- > How is the social worker getting feedback about their work?

How responsive is the team / service to the cultural needs of the locality?

- > What preventative services exist in localities with high numbers of black, Asian and minority ethnic and immigrant families?
- > What steps have been taken to ensure the quality and availability of interpreters?
- > Is there evidence of bias or stereotyping in terms of recording and report writing?
- > How is intelligence about the cultural needs of the communities served captured and communicated to senior management to inform service planning?

Other ways you can use this tool

It is important for social workers to examine their own social location relative to the children and families they work with, and the extent to which cultural assumptions, beliefs and biases influence their professional curiosity, as well as the social and personal empathy they bring to their work with families from black, Asian and minority ethnic social groups.

The questions in this tool can be adapted and used by social workers as a basis for self-reflection, to inform assessment, to assist in preparing for supervision, and to enhance effectiveness in meeting the diverse and changing needs of the communities served. The questions can also be used to guide group supervision or discussion.



We want to hear more about your experiences of using PSDP resources and tools. Connect via Twitter using #PSDP to share your ideas and hear how other practice supervisors use the resources.

Further reading

Bernard C and Harris P (2019) 'Serious case reviews: The Lived Experience of Black Children'. *Child & Family Social Work* 24 (2) 256-263.


Bernard C (2018) 'Working with Cultural and Religious Diversity' in Howarth and Platt D (eds) *The Child's World* (3rd edn, pp 649-666). London: Jessica Kingsley.

Bernard C and Harris C (2016) *Safeguarding Black Children: Good Practice in Child Protection Work*. London: Jessica Kingsley.

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The Dartington Hall Trust which is a company
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Company No. 1485560 Charity No. 279756
VAT No. 402196875

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