Race, Ethnicity, Culture and Religion

Practice Tool

ESSEX
Safeguarding
Children
BOARD

Race, Ethnicity, Culture and Religion

The Essex Safeguarding Children Board statutory and non-statutory partners agree that a Race, Ethnicity, Culture and Religion Practice Tool would be useful for practitioners to help them feel confident having conversations to explore a child and family's identity.

Using the prompts from this tool will help us gain greater depth of understanding of each child and their family and the core components that underpin a child and family's identity, as an individual member of the family and as a family unit.

It will also inform and enhance the way in which we support individual families that fully takes account of their racial identity, ethnicity, religious beliefs/practices and culture.

We also believe it is crucial for organisations to receive training on the cultural nuances that could be misunderstood. Without cultural awareness, negative conclusions may be drawn and it is vitally important to understand the cultural values of the families we are working with. With the family's agreement, we also encourage involving community groups early in the process of getting to know them.

The developmental stage of the child will impact on how they talk about identity, which may evolve over time.

Race and Ethnicity

A child/young person's race is often associated with physical differences. This typically includes skin colour, eye colour, hair texture, facial features and eye formation. Race and Ethnicity are often used interchangeably. Ethnicity or 'an ethnic group' generally refers to a community which have an extensive, shared history. This relates to the social characteristics that people may have in common, which may include features such as literature, language, religion, regional background, culture, foods and more. For example, 'White British' or 'Black Caribbean' refers to an ethnic group. Within these groups, there are many differences and so it is important to explore what this identification means in terms of how individuals and individual families operate. When people were asked to self-define, 287 distinct ethnic groups were identified (Census 2021) highlighting the importance of asking people how they self-identify.

Culture

Culture is part of a person's self-conception and self-perception. Culture often refers to a set of unspoken and spoken rules that shape values, beliefs, habits, patterns of thinking, behaviours and styles of communication. (e.g. food eaten, clothing, religion, music) and how this shapes their day-to-day behaviours and practices.

We must be careful not to adopt a homogeneous view of culture. Instead, we should frame our observations within the context of the dominant culture that operates in the home. It's also important to remember that "race" is a social construct and should not be viewed as indicative of any character traits or cultural behaviours.

Religious and Spiritual Beliefs

Religion is a specific set of organised beliefs and practices, usually shared by a community or group. Spirituality is more of an individual practice and is to do with having a sense of peace and purpose, which can occur within and outside of religious practices.

Self Awareness

In 1993, John Burnham (Consultant psychotherapist and supervisor) and colleagues developed the acronym 'social graces' to represent aspects of difference in beliefs, power and lifestyle, visible and invisible, voiced and unvoiced based upon specific features unique to each individual. Separating into parts allows people to explore more fully the influence of aspects of their lives that may have a dominant presence or, alternatively, may be invisible or unnoticed.

The 'social graces' have grown since their original development however the primary identity features are set out below:
• Gender, Geography, Gender Identity
• Race, Religion
• Age, Ability, Appearance
• Culture, Class, Colour
• Education, Economics, Employment
• Sexuality, Spirituality, Sexual Orientation

Understanding our own social graces helps us to understand the social graces of others and the impact of our social graces on others. As a practitioner you should consider how your own social graces and lived experience might impact on your interaction with children and families or those you work with. When practitioners reflect on these influences, they become more conscious of their assumptions, better at recognising difference, and more alert to bias and inequality. Consider what steps you can take to ensure this does not become a barrier to achieving best outcomes with families.

We need to consider the language we use and be careful not to create a single narrative, remaining open to multiple hypotheses.

John Burnham – Social Graces

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Creating a safe space

Create trusting and safe spaces where people feel respected, a little bit of discomfort about the topic of conversation is ok. It is important to give proper consideration into the location (whether physical or virtual) of these conversations to ensure that family members will feel safe to share their views. Approaching the conversation in a compassionate manner and allowing yourself to be vulnerable will empower families to share their own experiences and views, which will provide you with more insights.

These conversations can feel uncomfortable but do not shy away from this discomfort. These conversations are essential and beneficial to all in understanding different perspectives and experiences.

If a practitioner identifies discriminatory practice/ disclosures of racism it is important to validate their feelings and keep them informed about what you will do next.

Speak to your safeguarding lead, refer to your organisational policy and the <u>SET Safeguarding and Child Protection Procedures</u> (See also <u>Race discrimination | EHRC</u> and the <u>Equality Act 2010</u>)

How to use this practice tool

The practice tool has a list of questions/prompts aimed to support curious conversations with parents/care givers and children to consider the child's lived experience.

The practice tool should support planning for children and families within organisations and networks.

Further resources

- **The Directory of Services for Early Support has sections on community groups/immigration/ refugee support and lots more:** [Find support services for children and their families | Essex County Council](#)
- [Cultural Identity & Mental Health | Family Pressures | YoungMinds](#)
- ["It's silent": Race Racism and Safeguarding- GOV.UK](#)
- [Banardos – Double Discrimination](#)

Names and DOB (include everyone living at the family address and if different from the child, father figures address, indicate who has parental responsibilty)

Genogram – Mapping the family (diagram may be helpful) including cultural information

		Considerations
Names		Children's names have meanings that they cherish. It is important for professionals to make an effort to pronounce their name correctly. Do not shorten the name unless they have said it is OK to do so. If you are struggling with the pronunciation, ask for them to pronounce it for you.
Race and Ethnicity		How would you describe your race/ethnicity? Has your family ever migrated? And what experiences did that bring for you and your children? Have any family member experienced discrimination or racism? How did they manage this? It is important to acknowledge the experiences of racism that families share, including showing greater interest and sensitivity about the impact of racial trauma for the family. A recent audit of cases open to children's social care carried out by Professional Standards and Audit Service, Essex County Council (Dec 24) found that there was a striking correlation between the experienced racial trauma and families labelled as non-engaging, and resistant.
How does the family function/communicate		What language/s is/are spoken in the home. Is an interpreter required? Is there a specific dialect and are there any links to the family. Care should be taken if using family members to interprete. Consult your agency policy around use of interpreters.

Culture	If you are unfamiliar with a family's culture or traditions, ask them to tell you more about their culture such as the foods they enjoy eating or the language they speak. Do the parents have different cultural experience/values to the each other or the children which could cause conflict or add value? How do they show respect and what would be seen as rude within their family/culture.
Religious and spiritual beliefs	What is your family's religion and spiritual beliefs? Are there particular routines or practices that are important in your home? Do family members hold different beliefs, and if so, how does this impact family life? Consider whether there are tensions within the same religious tradition or between differing beliefs, including non-religious or atheist perspectives. As children grow older, they often begin exploring their own spiritual or religious identity, which can sometimes create conflict with other family members.
Wider family	You might hear a child refer to a family friend as an "auntie" or "uncle" because calling older people by their first names can be seen as disrespectful. You might also hear parents refer to their friends as "sister" or "brother". In these instances, you will need to clarify whether the person is their family member or a family friend. Are there members of the family that provide a safe space for the children?
Fathers/Father Figures	Reviews have highlighted that there hasn't been enough focus on fathers and the role they play in childrens lives. It is important especially when fathers do not live in the household that we ask further questions about this including asking the children about their fathers. These conversations need to be age appropriate, sensitive and take into consideration any previous trauma.

		If the father is not present in the home, consider the opportunities to meet with him separately to gain a more balanced perspective on the situation and the support he can provide to the children. (see also [Engaging with Father Figures](#) – Practice Tool)
Role Models		Do the children have contact with both parents? Who do they look up to (teacher/relative/member of the local community etc)? Contact with both parents is particularly important for children of mixed-dual parentage, who often feel they have lost out on one aspect of their background. Lack of contact may intensify feelings of rejection of the birth family and evoke feelings of shame about being of mixed ethnicity. They may have negative perceptions and stereotypes from the media. Self eteem may be impacted if they don't see positive reflections of their heritage in their environment.
Identity		Without exposure to culture, traditions, and community children might feel alienated from their heritage or part of their heritage. This can lead to feelings of isolation and a lack of cultural grounding and sense of belonging. Life can be more difficult to navigate if children do not have a strong sense of their identity.
Date:		