Cultural Competency in Safeguarding Practice

Introduction

Cultural competence is essential to effective safeguarding. Without it, there is a risk that children's lived experiences, needs, and risks are misunderstood or minimised. Practitioners need to be confident and comfortable in asking open, curious, and respectful questions to better understand culture, identity, family experiences, and lived realities.

This briefing outlines why cultural competence matters, highlights key challenges, and sets out expectations for applying it within day-to-day safeguarding practice.



Further Information

- NSPCC: Safeguarding children who come from Black, Asian and minoritised ethnic communities
- National Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel Learning Hub – Black, Asian & Mixed Heritage Children

What is Cultural Competency

Cultural competence is the ability to work effectively and respectfully with children, families, and colleagues from diverse backgrounds. It involves recognising how culture influences beliefs, behaviours, and experiences, and adapting practice accordingly.
It requires professionals to: Value diversity and promote equality, reflect on their own beliefs, values, and biases and remain open to learning from children, families, and communities.

Reflective Questions to Support Practice

When working with children and families from diverse backgrounds, ask yourself:

- What assumptions or biases may be influencing my thinking?
- How have I tested my understanding with the child and family?
- How is this reflected in my assessment, analysis, and decision-making?

What Cultural Competency is Not

Cultural competence is not about knowing everything about every culture. Instead, it is an ongoing process of reflection, learning, and adapting practice to provide inclusive and equitable support to meet the needs of children and families. In safeguarding, culture should be approached with curiosity, and respect but must never be used to minimise risk or justify harm.

Practice Expectations

Practitioners **must** apply cultural competence across all aspects of safeguarding practice, including:

- Assessment and decision-making
- Communication and engagement
- Planning, intervention and risk management
- Multi-agency working

This should be clearly reflected in case recording, supervision, and discussions.

Why it Matters in Safeguarding

Cultural competence is **critical to safeguarding** because without it:

- Risks and needs may be misunderstood or underestimated, leading to poor safeguarding responses
- Thresholds for intervention may not be met, delaying support
- Bias can affect judgement and understanding, impacting decisions and outcomes
- Children and families may not access support equally, limiting trust and engagement.

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