

Check your thinking: anti-racist practice in children's safeguarding

This short resource paper forms part of the 'check your thinking' anti-racist practice resources (see www.checkyourthinking.org), commissioned by the Welsh Government to strengthen children's safeguarding in Wales.

Building on existing 'check your thinking' approaches to support safeguarding practice with children, young people and families, the resources are designed as reflective tools to help you 'check your thinking' about racism, biases and how you can actively engage in anti-racist practice in children's safeguarding across Wales.

This briefing provides additional information about the evidence-base informing the resources. It details the anti-racist concepts raised in the 'check your thinking' resources and signposts to other materials that you may want to explore. It has been developed with all ethnic minoritized populations in mind and invites you to check your thinking about your potential assumptions and biases. For further reflection and consideration, check out the resource set of cards on the website.

Key concepts to consider

Anti-racist practice in children's safeguarding – your responsibilities

Simply put, the term 'anti-racist practice' means that there is an explicit acknowledgement that racism exists and, as such, requires an approach to actively counter and prevent it. Anti-racist practice ensures that all children and young people receive good support and care, regardless of their race and ethnicity. It is therefore a core element of child protection and safeguarding practice.

Professionals have a legal obligation to work within an equitable framework, as per the *Children s Act 1989, Equality Act 2010 and Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014*, meaning that being actively anti-racist is not only considered to be an ethical responsibility, but also a legal requirement. If such an approach is not supported by individuals and organisations, it is a dereliction of safeguarding duty.

This diagram illustrates the relationship between the legal, ethical, and professional responsibilities we hold to embed Anti-racist practice.



To be anti-racist requires a persistent commitment from all levels of leadership to frontline professionals, including carers, to continuously challenge and learn about racism, and promote equity for ethnic minoritized children, young people, and their families ([Community Care, 2020](#)). This requires professionals and carers to first be willing to acknowledge the existence of racism; and consider the ways in which racism influences the service provided to Black and minoritized children and families. Social work practice and policies are not void of racism (See, Davis and Marsh, 2022). An anti-racist approach requires professionals and carers to engage in potentially uncomfortable conversations to reflect, question, and consider the role of bias in safeguarding decision making.

'Anti-racism is usually structured around conscious efforts and deliberate actions to provide equitable opportunities for all people, on an individual, organisational and systemic level. It requires individuals to scrutinise the stereotypes they and others hold, and to understand how their actions may impact on people of different races and ethnicities (pg.2 Anti-Racist Wales Plan)

The introduction of the new [Anti-Racist Wales Plan](#) is a clear commitment to acknowledge the existence of racism in Wales and is a marker of solidarity to challenge and strengthen community cohesion. Everyone has a duty to challenge racism, however, this it must first start with you. This means getting comfortable with uncomfortable conversations ([See Anti Racist Social Work](#)) This includes being open and reflective about your own biases by taking into consideration if and what perceptions you hold of people, communities and cultures which differ from your own.

Challenging Stereotypes

Exploring individual biases creates opportunities to critically question how such biases can shape and re-produce stereotypes about children and families. For example, Black boys are more likely to be stereotyped as being aggressive, angry and a risk to others ([Goff et al, 2014](#); [Davis and Marsh, 2020](#)), and therefore, more likely to experience over-surveillance ([Wroe and Lloyd, 2020](#)).

Racial stereotypes may be based on several varying factors: including our own social environments, the extent to which diversity is present in our professional and personal spaces, and what learning has been accessed to develop and explore bias. An anti-racist approach means acknowledging that, regardless of the conditions which form the stereotypes associated with ethnic-minoritized children and young people, racism is the underlying influence, whether direct or indirect, intentional, or unintentional.

An example of an emerging stereotype present in child protection and safeguarding is 'adultification' bias ([Davis, 2019](#); [Davis and Marsh, 2020](#); [Farrer, 2022](#)). Adultification, occurs when children are perceived to be more adult like. This means, some children may not be afforded the same protection, care, and curiosity as their peers). This form of discrimination is based on racialised stereotypes about ethnic minoritized children and young people, with Black children more likely to experience this form of bias (ibid). It is important that all professionals commit to actively reflect, acknowledge, and address their biases and prejudices. This includes holding **courageous conversations** and embedding equity, diversity, and inclusion as an underpinning area of all service provision.

Exploring stereotypes and pre-conceived ideas about race and ethnicity provides opportunities to explore how minoritized children and young people experience the social world. To appreciate these lived experiences professionals must see the whole child. This requires an intersectional lens.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality is an emerging concept in the child protection and safeguarding arena. However, its origins are rooted in Black feminism, particularly in violence against women and girls' literature and service provision, ([Crenshaw, 1989](#)). It means that individuals have various social identities, and these intersect to create unique experiences.

The term was developed by Crenshaw (1989), who argued that Black and minoritized women and girls' experiences of discrimination were often overlooked in policy and practice, due to a lack of interrogation of how inequities such as racism and sexism interact with each other (ibid). Consequently, this further marginalises individuals and communities who experience intersecting oppressions.

The idea of intersectionality provides professionals, parents, and carers with a way to explore how children and young people experience the world, including the services they encounter and the individuals who interact with them ([Community Care, 2020](#); [Bernard, 2022](#)). Intersectionality provides a framework that appreciates that interactions between individuals and the world around them are not solely based on one aspect of their identity. Instead, they are layered and multifaceted, where racism, sexism, ableism, classism, homophobia, and other forms of oppression are experienced simultaneously to inform unique experiences of oppression ([Listen Up Research, 2020](#)).

Applying intersectionality to practice, requires a commitment from all professionals and organisations. A commitment to **being curious** about the unique lives and experiences of all

children and young people. This means exploring how multiple oppressions experienced by children, young people and families connect and compound with one another, rather than focusing on them as individual and siloed experiences.

Over to you!

Checking your thinking is one step further to being anti-racist. The commitment to anti-racist practice needs to be long term and will at times feel challenging. However, the focus must be on ensuring all children and young people receive the support and care they deserve, regardless of their identity.

Authors

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If you would like to learn more about anti-racist practice and how to further develop understanding, check out the following resources:

¹ <https://www.listenupresearch.org>

Indicative reading list:

Scourfield, J. and Davies, A., 2005. Children's accounts of Wales as racialized and inclusive. *Ethnicities*, 5(1), pp.83-107.

Scourfield, J., Dicks, B., Drakeford, M. and Davies, A., 2006. *Children, place, and identity: Nation and locality in middle childhood*. Routledge.

Murphy, A., 2018. Charting the emergence of national identity in children in Wales. *Children & Society*, 32(4), pp.301-313.

Kaczmarek-Day, A., 2013. *Polish children in Wales: negotiating identities in school, church, and neighbourhood* (Doctoral dissertation, Cardiff University).

Thompson, N., 2017. *Promoting equality: Working with diversity and difference*. Macmillan International Higher Education.

Thompson, N., 2017. *Promoting equality: Challenging discrimination and oppression*. Macmillan International Higher Education.

Overview	Topic	Website
Thompson, N, 2021	Anti-Racism for Beginners Practice Manual	https://humansolutions.org.uk/product-category/b-books-training-resources/avenue-media-solutions-publications/
Racism in Wales Publication	Show Racism the Red Card	https://www.theredcard.org/publications
Useful publications focus on anti-racism, including a manifesto	Race Alliance Wales	https://racealliance.wales/research/
A Swansea based organisation providing culturally sensitive and holistic support to children and young people in Wales	Ethnic Youth Support Team	https://eyst.org.uk/

Further information about the Welsh Government commitment to Anti-racist practice	Welsh Government	https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/consultations/2021-03/race-equality-action-plan-an-anti-racist-wales_2.pdf
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<p>Hear from Director of RiP Dez Holmes and BASW (British Association of Social Workers) Wayne Reid discuss Anti-racist practice</p>	<p>Research in Practice</p>	<p>https://www.researchinpractice.org.uk/all/content-pages/videos/promoting-anti-racism-in-social-work/</p>
<p>The Harvard Implicit Association Test to explore your implicit associations</p> <p>There are multiple tests available within this resource. These activities may confirm what we think we know about ourselves, or they might highlight associations we did not know we held</p>	<p>Harvard</p>	<p>https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html</p>

<p>Hear from Jahnine and Nick (Listen Up) discussing intersectionality with the NSPCC (National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children)</p>	<p>Listen Up</p>	<p>https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/news/2021/august/podcast-intersectionality-in-social-work-practice</p>
<p>A list of resources and reports focused on safeguarding Black, Asian and Minoritized Ethnic children, and young people</p>	<p>NSPCC</p>	<p>https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/safeguarding-child-protection/children-from-black-asian-minoritised-ethnic-communities</p>

<p>This activity can be completed as a group session.</p> <p>Professor Kimberlie Crenshaw shares why the concept of intersectionality is so urgent.</p> <p>Reflections may include the relatedness of Dr Kimberlie Crenshaw’s talk to the context of the UK (United Kingdom).</p> <p>Reflections may also include the exploration of your team member's experiences and knowledge of intersectionality as the concept relates to work practices</p>	<p>Ted Talks – The Urgency of Intersectionality</p> <p>* This video may be triggering. Please provide a safer space to explore the topics of violence against topics of violence against</p>	<p>https://www.ted.com/talks/kimberle_crenshaw_the_urgency_of_intersectionality?language=en</p>
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