

What do we mean by culture?

Culture can be seen as customs, beliefs, ideology, world-view, and values common to a group of people, which guide their individual and social behaviour. More specifically, it is based on the values, ideas, perceptions, and meanings which have evolved over time. They derive from:

- Physical environment of birth and upbringing – Language – Institutions (Religious/non-religious) – Family and social relationships – Education – Systems of belief – Religion – Dress and diet etc.

Culture embraces all of these, and the individual may regard each of them, or any number of them, as culturally significant.

Culture is not the same as 'ethnicity'. Ethnicity denotes the origin and membership of a group of people linked for example by language or nationality. This may or may not correspond with a particular culture. Culture is specific to the person, culture embraces diversity in its broadest sense and includes differences and similarities due to age, gender, ethnicity, religion and belief, sexual orientation, and disability.

What is cultural competence?

Like competence in general, cultural competence is the responsibility of both the individual and the organisation. This is the process by which individuals and systems respond respectfully and effectively to people of all cultures, classes, races, ethnic backgrounds, religions, and other diversity factors in a manner that recognises, affirms and values the worth of individuals, families and communities, and protects and preserves the dignity of each young person and family we work with.

Ethnocentrism describes the way in which we may evaluate other cultures according to preconceptions originating from our own culture, this could lead to failures in exploring the reasons behind someone's behaviour which in turn could lead to inappropriate and ineffective practice and interactions. Stereotyping operates when assumptions are made about someone based on their culture, ethnicity, or other factors, ignoring variations that exist within and between cultures.

Understanding your own culture and the underpinning values and beliefs that contribute to this is the starting point for acquiring cultural competence. A culturally competent person recognises and responds to individual needs and adapts their practice accordingly. An individual's view upon family life and what is best for their family will be based on their culture and values, and they will interact and respond accordingly.

There are several widely used definitions of cultural competence. A particularly helpful one is that given by Mayfield: 'The ability to use critical thinking skills to interpret how cultural values and beliefs influence conscious and unconscious behaviour; the understanding of how inequity can be and has been perpetuated through socialised behaviours and the knowledge and determined disposition to disrupt inequitable practices to achieve greater personal and professional success.'

Why is cultural competency important?

Cultural competency allows you to practice effectively. You and your practice must be: Person-centred, non-discriminatory, accessible to all and legally compliant.

Cultural competence does not mean ignoring or excusing practices that are against UK law, or that cause or risk causing significant harm to children and young people. The NSPCC briefing Culture and faith: learning from case reviews makes clear that cultural factors may be the source of risk in some cases. Examples include:

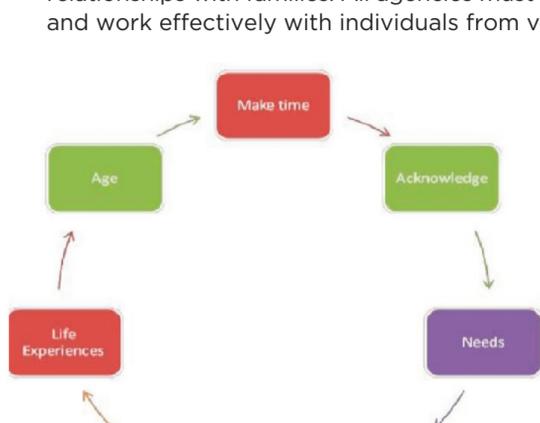
- Where someone marries outside of their birth culture or faith, they may face isolation or ostracism. In extreme cases, they may be subject to honour-based violence
- Beliefs about honour or shame may stop people from seeking help when they are being mistreated or abused
- Parents may try to deflect child protection concerns with assurances that their childcare practices are endorsed by their culture or their faith; they may accuse professionals of discrimination when they pursue their concerns
- Some people who have mental health problems become obsessed by religious belief; they can present their belief as a rationale for obsessive or harmful behaviours

It is essential that practitioners remain focused on the safety, wellbeing and interests of the child in all such situations, and challenge (and if necessary act to protect the child against) any attempts to justify harm on cultural grounds.

How we can be more culturally competent when working with families?

It is important not to prejudge or second guess peoples' cultural practices. Instead ask families about their views, beliefs, and practices, talk with colleagues, discuss with specialists and a range of cultural groups.

When working with families it is imperative to take into consideration language, cultural variations, and different approaches when developing effective and engaging relationships with families. All agencies must therefore be able to understand, respect, and work effectively with individuals from various cultural backgrounds.



We recognise that there are several established models of cultural competence, and we will seek to learn from all of them. One of the models for consideration is the Mandela model which can be adapted for use by all practitioners in front line practice with Children and families as well as a tool that can be used in supervision to critically reflect on practice;

Tedam's MANDELA learning cycle may be summarised as follows:

Make time - Tedam notes that 'One of the key strategies for disrupting unconscious bias is to take time

to listen, learn and develop our knowledge and skills.' If the timing and duration of the meeting are defined only by the practitioner's needs and schedule, the priorities, habits and customs of the child and their family are likely to go unrecognised and unvalued.

Acknowledge strengths and needs - How do children and families describe their strengths and the challenges they face? How do they understand the impact of these strengths and difficulties on their lives?

Differences It is important that practitioners identify and understand the distinct cultural characteristics of those they work with, and how these are a source of strength and identity. The Social GRRRAACCEEESSS and LUUUUTT model learning tool introduces a number of exercises and activities you can use to explore the social GRRRAACCEEESSS with your team as a whole and in supervision discussions. The activities are designed to help your team to understand how we all have different experiences of power or powerlessness, and that our views can be influenced by the social GRRRAACCEEESSS. Given this, we need to think about and be aware of how the social GRRRAACCEEESSS impact our understanding of and approach to children and families.

For information relating to how cultural competency is discussed during supervision: [Social-GRRRAACCEEESSS-and-the-LUUUTT-model.pdf](#) ([rip.org.uk](#))

Educational experiences - Education may bring diverse cultural experiences and expectations into focus. Parents may have high expectations of educational achievement that their children may not share; or the family as a whole may distrust places of education because of experiences of discrimination or exclusion.

Life experiences - How the child and their family respond to, and are shaped by, life experiences such as birth, bereavement, marriage and migration will reflect cultural factors; there is no one 'normal' way to be affected by these experiences.

Age - Older people may be treated with profound respect in some cultures, whilst indirectly being viewed as of lesser worth in others. Expectations of children and young people at various stages of their development may differ too.



Culturally Competent Practice and Engagement Tips for Practitioners:

- Valuing people's identity, experience, expertise, and self-determination
- Maintain awareness about national and local ethnic, social, and religious demographics and how these are changing
- Spend some time getting to know the service users, do not rush meetings and interventions
- The service user is the expert of their experience, adopt a position of 'not knowing and be ready to learn'
- Resist tokenism or simple 'box ticking' as a means of evidencing your cultural competence
- Be self-aware – think about the impact of your own personal cultural values and beliefs
- Be flexible, not rigid, particularly when using existing frameworks and tools