# Working Together: What Does it Mean to do Anti-Racist Practice?

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# What Does it Mean to do Anti-Racist Practice?

key areas addressed in this presentation:

- An overview of some of the key issues.
- Key messages for cultivating anti-racist practice for attitudinal and behavioural changes.

# Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026

- A stronger focus on anti-racist, anti-discriminatory and culturally informed practice.
- Strengthened expectations for anti-racist and anti-discriminatory practice, recognising how racism and past experiences influence relationships.
- ”recognise how trauma, racism, discrimination, and past experiences with services affect relationships and adapt practice accordingly, respecting the importance of different cultural models of parenting and family life” Page 52, **Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026**

# What are some of the key issues?

The diversity of racially minoritised children's cultural Heritage

As racially minoritised children come from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds the safeguarding issues arising for them take very complex forms (Bernard 2018).

Abuse linked to faith, culture, tradition or belief; e.g. FGM, honour-based violence and forced marriage.

Abuse linked to beliefs about witchcraft or spirit possession.

Extra-familial harms: serious youth violence - criminal and sexual exploitation.

Human trafficking and modern slavery.

Unaccompanied minors at risk of human rights violations.

# What are some of the key issues?

***The need to engage critically with some key issues:***

- Black children and young people are hyper-visible to punitive practices and under-served in terms of their welfare needs ***(Davis, 2022; Firmin et al 2021).***
- Adultification – The subtle and unconscious race-based bias that contributes to the treatment of black children in the child welfare and justice systems ***(Bernard, 2019; Davis & Marsh, 2020 ).***
- Safeguarding strategies and practices can pathologise; criminalise and harm children from racially minoritised communities ***(Firmin, 2017; Johnston & Akay, 2022)***

# What are some of the key issues?

- A recurrent theme in Local Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews (LCSPRs) involving Black, Asian and mixed heritage children fail to acknowledge the role that race, racial bias and racism played in the responses to these children's safety and welfare needs (Bernard and Harris, 2019; Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel, 2025).
- *"It's Silent": Race, Racism, and Safeguarding Children* report identified systemic and. institutional racism as deeply embedded in safeguarding structures *Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel* (2025). Department for Education. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/race-racism-and-safeguarding-children

# What are some of the key issues?

- Anxieties about engaging with questions concerning race and racism.
- **Silence Around Race and Racism -** Professionals avoid discussing race and racism, creating a gap in understanding how these factors impact child safeguarding.
- A lack of professional curiosity in understanding the lived experiences of children and families.
- Bold conversations about race and racism are often avoided, because it will give rise to strong feelings and difficult emotions: shame, hurt, anger, guilt and anxiety.

# What are some of the key issues?

- Protecting children from involvement in violence – Understanding harm and criminality
- Local Children's Safeguarding Partnerships – Different legal and policy frameworks.
- Response to Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE)  & Extra-Familial Harm (EFH)
- Children's services have a statutory duty to providing a safeguarding response to CCE & EFH have a statutory duty to provide a safeguarding response to EFH and CCE

# What are some of the key issues?

***Facilitating welfare approaches***

- The impact of EFH - blurred victim-perpetrator role not easily responded to by services (Firmin et al. 2023).
- Serious youth violence which  come under the mandate of the Home Office and youth justice agencies (Lloyd et al. 2023).
- The need for safeguarding strategies and practices that avoid pathologizing and criminalising Black children and thus take a more welfare-oriented approach in interventions.

# What Does it Mean to Do Anti-Racist Practice?

- Recognising the crucial roles that race and racism play in safeguarding practices involving Black and racially minoritised children.
- To address disproportionality and racial disparity, a strategic vision and sustained commitment is critical if system leaders want to make impactful improvements.
- We can only create change when we are fully committed to understanding how systemic racism manifest in the organisations of the different multi-agency partners.

# What Does it Mean to Do Anti-Racist Practice?

*To meaningfully provide an anti-racist service to racially minoritised children and their families:*

- Practitioners must be able to identify and examine their own racial biases to understand of how this might impact their interventions with racialised groups.
- Practitioners must be critically reflexive, understand intersectional discrimination, and be able to engage in conversations about racialised experiences.

# What Does it  it Mean to do Anti-Racist Practice?

- Bold conversations about race are  often avoided, because it will give rise to strong feelings and difficult emotions: shame, hurt, anger, guilt and anxiety.

- In practical terms, this can only happen if senior leaders in children and youth services move beyond a performative recognition of racism, and proactively champion the changes that are necessary for developing anti-racist practice that can effectively support racially minoritised children and families.

# What does it mean to do Anti-Racist Practice?

- As strategic leaders in the multi-agency partnerships you need to be engaging in reflective discussion about your shared approach if you are to drive systemic change in the delivery of your services.
- The values and behaviours of senior leaders in the multi-agency partnerships will shape and inform the culture that pervades multi-agency working.

***Reflective Question***

***How do senior leaders in the  Eastern Region how do you step into the space to strategically foster the culture of your organisations for doing anti-racist practice?***

# What Does it Mean to Do Anti-Racist Practice?

How do you enable bold conversations about anti-racism – to address:

- How institutional whiteness and structural racism shape safeguarding practices.
- How you engage with communities to lessen mistrust
- How you understand racial dynamics in the context of complex systems

We cannot afford be afraid embrace discomfort to grapple with the complexities

# What Does it Mean to Do Anti-Racist Practice?

- Intersectionality provides a useful connection between theory and practice and offers a way of thinking more critically about the complex circumstances of children and families.
- An intersectional understanding could influence the questions practitioners ask, the information they seek and influence the decisions they make about support and intervention.
- Intersectionality can inform our understanding of children's lived experiences, family relationships and safeguarding concerns.
- Develop critical and conscious awareness of the institutional cultures and organisational systems of safeguarding.

# What Does it Mean to Do Anti-Racist Practice?

**At Strategic and operational levels:**

- Is there a desire to create change?
- How are you utilizing your data to measure change?
- How are you holding yourself to account?
- How are you holding your multi-agency partners to account?

# What Does it Mean to Do Anti-Racist Practice?

***Lots of moving parts presently – The Children's Social Care Reform***

- Families First Partnership (FFP) programme - (particularly the shift towards early help and support)
- Multi-Agency Child Protection Teams – summer 2027
- Regional Care Cooperatives
- Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026 (will be updated in 2027)

***Reflective Question***

***As you work to turn policy into practice, how can an anti-racist approach help you develop services that ensures that racially minoritised children and their families get the help that they need?***

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