



Cultural Competence in Birmingham Children's Trust

Introduction

This guidance is for social workers and family support workers undertaking assessments, family plans and care planning for children and families we are working with, including children in need and where there are child protection concerns. It is also relevant for children in care, taking into account their cultural needs in placement and care planning, and for staff in fostering and adoption.

Advice, information and training about issues of culture, ethnicity, religion, and related factors are available (see resource links at end of document).

Definitions

Culture is evidenced in human behaviour and relates to thoughts, communication, actions, customs, beliefs, values and institutions of a racial, ethnic, religious or social group.

Competence means having the capacity to practice effectively when working with families from any ethnic, religious or cultural background.

Culturally competent practice acknowledges and incorporates:

1. The importance of every family's culture
2. The need for each worker to develop their cultural knowledge and
3. The development of services to meet culturally specific needs

Cultural competence is a set of behaviours, attitudes and policies that come together in:

1. Our policy and practice in children's social care
2. Our practice in our team
3. Our practice with other agencies and services

Cultural Competence in Practice

There are five essential elements that promote cultural competence in social work practice. These include the ability to:

1. Value diversity and difference
2. Be able to recognise how our own cultural identity impacts on others
3. Be conscious of how cultures interact and the significance of this in statutory childcare practice
4. Develop cultural knowledge and understanding
5. Contribute to the development of practice in our service that reflects an understanding of diversity between and within cultures

Practice points around these elements

- Social workers and other practitioners should be aware of their cultural values and biases and how they impact on the helping relationship (*this should be explored through supervision, team meetings and ongoing training and development*)
- A culturally competent social worker should understand the worldview and culture of a family. They should have specific knowledge of the cultural diversity of Birmingham together with knowledge of relevant historical influences (e.g. the impact of war and social unrest in the country of origin). They should also recognise that different families from the same cultural/ religious group may have different beliefs and values. It is always important to ask children and family members what matters to them and not to make assumptions.
- Social workers should have specific skills and intervention techniques to provide an effective assessment and intervention service which recognises cultural factors in all families. This requires knowledge and understanding of families' cultural norms, how these influence attitudes to children and whether these accord with statutory child protection principles.
- The Children Act 1989 requires that the welfare of the child is paramount and, whilst an understanding of the cultural context is necessary, this should not get in the way of measures to protect the child from significant harm.
- People of different cultures live and work together. When seeking services and placements to support a child, the ability to meet the child's needs in the round, including cultural needs, should be the primary driver, rather than the need for a cultural, religious or ethnic match.

Cultural competence should include the ability to:

- Work with all the cultural differences in Birmingham and understand and have basic knowledge of individual cultures from around the world.
- Explore the meaning of culture and belief for families and how this impacts on safeguarding needs.
- Maintain curiosity to explore the meaning of culture and belief for families who appear to share a similar cultural background as the social worker.
- Ask about family beliefs, relationships and values to build a detailed and sensitive picture. The more information and knowledge gained, the more accurate the assessment and analysis of strengths, needs and risks.
- Develop interviewing styles that reflect an understanding of the role of language in a family's culture. This means developing knowledge of the role of language, speech patterns and communication styles in different cultures.
- Consider strengths as well as areas of need in families and avoid the labelling or pathologising of problems.
- Develop knowledge of the help-seeking behaviours of families which will vary from culture to culture. This entails asking about the family's preferred support systems; for example religious and spiritual leaders and community support groups.
- Develop knowledge of the history, values, traditions and family systems of cultural groups in Birmingham

- Develop knowledge of the impact of class, poverty, disadvantage, religious belief and ethnicity on behaviour, attitudes and values.
- Avoid preconceived notions, negative or stereotypical beliefs which risk closing off the search for positive outcomes.
- Explore and analyse the significance of a family's culture even when the family are from white British culture background.
- Acknowledge that ethnicity and culture affect the way a family communicate, express emotion and shape roles and expectations in their relationships.
- Record the impact of cultural issues, beliefs and values in the assessment and apply it when developing any plan of intervention.

A culturally competent social worker/ family worker should have:

- Practice qualities that reflect genuineness, empathy and warmth.
- A personal commitment to address discrimination and disadvantage.
- An acceptance and openness to differences among people.
- A willingness to work with children and families, and workers, of different backgrounds.
- An ability to function within the values, ethics and standards of their profession.
- A commitment to develop specialised knowledge and understanding of the history, religions, traditions, values, family systems and languages represented in Birmingham.
- Knowledge about the services within communities and be able to make appropriate connections with these resources.

Child Protection and Cultural Difference

Significant harm to a child physically, emotionally, sexually or through neglect is wrong in any culture.

Cultural difference in the way families rear their children should be acknowledged and respected. However, it is not acceptable in any culture to allow a child to suffer significant harm. Where there is a cultural explanation given in relation to significant harm, the social worker should discuss this with their Team Manager.

Thoughts to consider:

1. Some cultures use a system of multiple caregivers throughout the first years of a child's life
2. Sleeping arrangements influence early parent-child relationships and may reflect cultural beliefs about infant social development
3. Cultures have different ways of dealing with the need for dependence and independence. Socialisation methods differ across cultures.
4. Assumptions and stereotypes associated with any ethnic or religious group must be reviewed. Asking questions, listening and observing are the basis of all assessments. Each person and family is unique.

Questions to help locate a family's cultural position

- To what extent is the presenting behaviour and problems related to issues of social transition such as migration, lack of extended family support, discrimination etc?
- Are any behaviours linked to child protection concerns considered “acceptable” within the family's own culture?
- To what extent are any difficulties in the family a result of lack of access to or knowledge of appropriate resources?
- To what extent is the problem related to cultural conflict within the family around identity, values or relationships of individual members?

Assessing child protection concerns where cultural issues may be a reason/ excuse (e.g. *physical chastisement justified through beliefs about child rearing*)

- Do the adults in the family see the concerns as a cultural norm?
- Do they want change?
- Does the child see the concerns as a cultural norm?
- Does the child want things to change?
- Does the community see the concerns as an acceptable cultural norm?
- Are there organisations/ people in the community trying to affect change in the family?
- Is there evidence that the concerns will cause significant harm to the child?
- Is there evidence that the concerns are illegal or outside of UK legal parameters?

All family assessments, intervention plans and contacts should include:

- Identification and analysis of a family's cultural identity and belief systems.
- An analysis of how this impacts on the family's ability to safeguard their children.
- An explicit link between the family's cultural beliefs and any child protection concerns. This requires analysis of the family's view of the concerns and whether these accord with wider cultural/ religious values about child up-bringing the family might have.
- An analysis of the family's engagement with children's social care and the degree of recognition of our concerns taking in to consideration gender and cultural factors.
- Identification of resources or approaches which are required to assess and respond to the safeguarding concerns in their cultural context. This might include the use of an interpreter, the involvement of a gender specific practitioner or the input from a representative of the family's cultural community.

Resources

www.equalityhumanrights.com

<http://www.ccinform.co.uk/country-profiles/default.aspx>