

PRACTICE TIPS – DIVERSITY

WHAT IS DIVERSITY? (NOT the Dance Troup!)

It is the individuality and uniqueness of a person. It is their own identity. It incorporates an individual’s personal experiences and life events and how they shape them.

“The years of infancy and childhood provide us with some of the most important raw material for our lives” (McAdams, 1993)

Working with Diversity is understanding the uniqueness of individuals and their differences. These may be race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, identity, age, physical and/or mental ability, religious belief, culture, customs, heritage and lifestyles. Anything that makes us unique.

WHY THINK ABOUT DIVERSITY?

Respecting diversity is the cornerstone to intervention with people. Valuing and recognising difference, demonstrates cultural awareness and sensitivity. This enables intervention to be people focused, reflective of their needs and experiences. It is about respect and honesty.

Because we all live by a different set of internal rules it is important to never make assumptions about people and the way they organise their lives. Understanding these differences helps us to make an informed assessment that reflects the child’s experience, cultural expectations and the child’s perceptions of this. Making ‘typical’ assumptions can lead to incomplete assessments of need. For example to say a child who is non-verbal cannot express their views may be an assumption and we need to get creative to enable them to express their views.

Practitioners do not need to be experts on every aspect of diversity, they do however need to be respectful, open-minded and willing to learn. SCR’s highlight in child deaths and serious injuries how cultural norms were often not talked about or challenged. Working with respect and professional curiosity should be part of our framework when working with families.

* An assumption was made about the interaction observed between Victoria Climbie and her aunt. The assumption was that the quiet reserved nature observed in Victoria was as a result of cultural respect for elders. Sadly this assumption meant that the right type of questions were not asked, Victoria was not seen on her own, and as a result intervention was not provided and the abuse continued.

In some cultures male children are viewed more favourably, they may be given more freedom and choice and encouraged to engage in learning, social activities and society in general. Assumptions about experience can lead to valuable information being missed within the assessment.

Assessments need to reflect the individual, there is a risk when working with siblings that they become a group within the same assessment and care plan. We must remember that each child has a position within that family, whether it is the first, middle or last born child. They will have experienced different expectations from the parents based on their age and gender. Their experience of the world will vary depending on their age, responsibility within the family and how they are perceived. Individual voices must be sought, heard and reflected upon if we are to understand the impact that life experiences has had on each child.

Family culture and heritage shapes how a family functions.

* A family with a long heritage of criminal activity and anti-social behaviour may not perceive school attendance and shop lifting as important. Curiosity around values, attitudes and priorities would need to be explored within the assessment in order to understand the impact on the child.
* Families where education, employment and social status as a family is important, may find it difficult to accept and manage truanting, boredom and disengagement. Difficult conversations about ‘what if…’ will need to take place in order to understand the child’s identity and sense of belonging within that family, and whether the experience for the child can be changed.
* Families who hold a strong belief system may struggle to understand behaviours that are experimenting and outside of the cultural norms. Curiosity and questions will need to unpick the influences in the child’s life, and where they feel they fit in terms of family, culture, society, friendship, etc.

TOP TIPS

Assessments must include information about a family’s culture and how this influences them and their children.

Assessments must be informed by family history, views, values and individual voices.

Acknowledgement of diversity should flow through a child’s file. It is not a ‘tick box’ question at the end of an assessment.

Professional curiosity must be demonstrated at different stages of the assessment; practice asking difficult questions and be honest about wanting to avoid making assumptions.

Cultural assumptions can predetermine the outcome of assessments, be open-minded and reflect on what the information means for this specific family at this specific point in time.

Families want to be respected and involved in processes. Therefore talk to them, ask them to explain how things work in their family, and what they think would be helpful, or make a difference.

Seek to understand values, attitudes and beliefs, particularly in terms of what their expectations and what they perceive as ok and not so ok.

You must spend time with the child and explore what a day in their life is like. This will help in understanding and reflecting upon that child’s lived experience and how it compares to that of other children within the family and /or community.

Use analysis to help to explain everyday life and remember the ‘So What?’ approach

* What? (What is the story?)
* So what? (What does it mean and what is the impact on the child?)
* Now what? (What do we need to do about it?)

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