

## Children's Services

### Cultural Competence in Safeguarding – Statement of Principle and Vision

#### 1. What is cultural competence?

1.1 Cultural competence means offering and delivering our safeguarding services in a way that is fair to everyone. The Equality Act 2010 identifies nine protected characteristics and makes it illegal to discriminate against those who have one or more of these characteristics; it sets out what we must *not* do. Cultural competence is about the positive pathways by which culturally appropriate and equitable practice can become the norm.

1.2 It is important to make clear from the outset that 'culture' does not carry the same meaning as 'ethnicity':

What is culture: These are learned behaviours – thoughts, beliefs, values and customs – that you pick up as you grow up and choose to adopt or leave behind as you get older. You can have cultural elements and influences from various places, and in general, it's your choice.<sup>1</sup>

1.3 'Many relate 'culture' to people from particular ethnicities; however, we all belong to a culture and engage in different cultural practices in our private and professional lives.'<sup>2</sup>

1.4 People who are deaf, LGBTQ+ or older may all have cultural practices that are linked to these characteristics; therefore, culturally competent practice is important for them also.

1.5 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.'<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.shoesoff.net/content/culture-ethnicity-race>, viewed December 2022

<sup>2</sup> Tedam, P (2022) Cultural competence. Practice Guidance. Community Care Inform [online] <https://www.ccinform.co.uk/practice-guidance/cultural-competence/> [accessed: 15 November 2022]

<sup>3</sup> Mayfield, V. (2020), [Cultural Competence Now: 56 exercises to help educators understand and challenge racism, bias and privilege](#), Alexandria Virginia: ASCD, quoted in Tedam, P (2022)

- 1.6 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*<sup>4</sup> 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
- 1.7 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 take action to protect the child against) any attempts to justify harm on cultural grounds.

## **2. Why cultural competence matters**

Cultural competence is a matter of both equity and compliance. Dorset children and their families have a wide range of backgrounds and characteristics; practitioners cannot work effectively with children unless they have the knowledge, skills and awareness to engage sensitively with children and families from across this broad range. The Social Work England Standards moreover make multiple references to the need for culturally sensitive approaches.

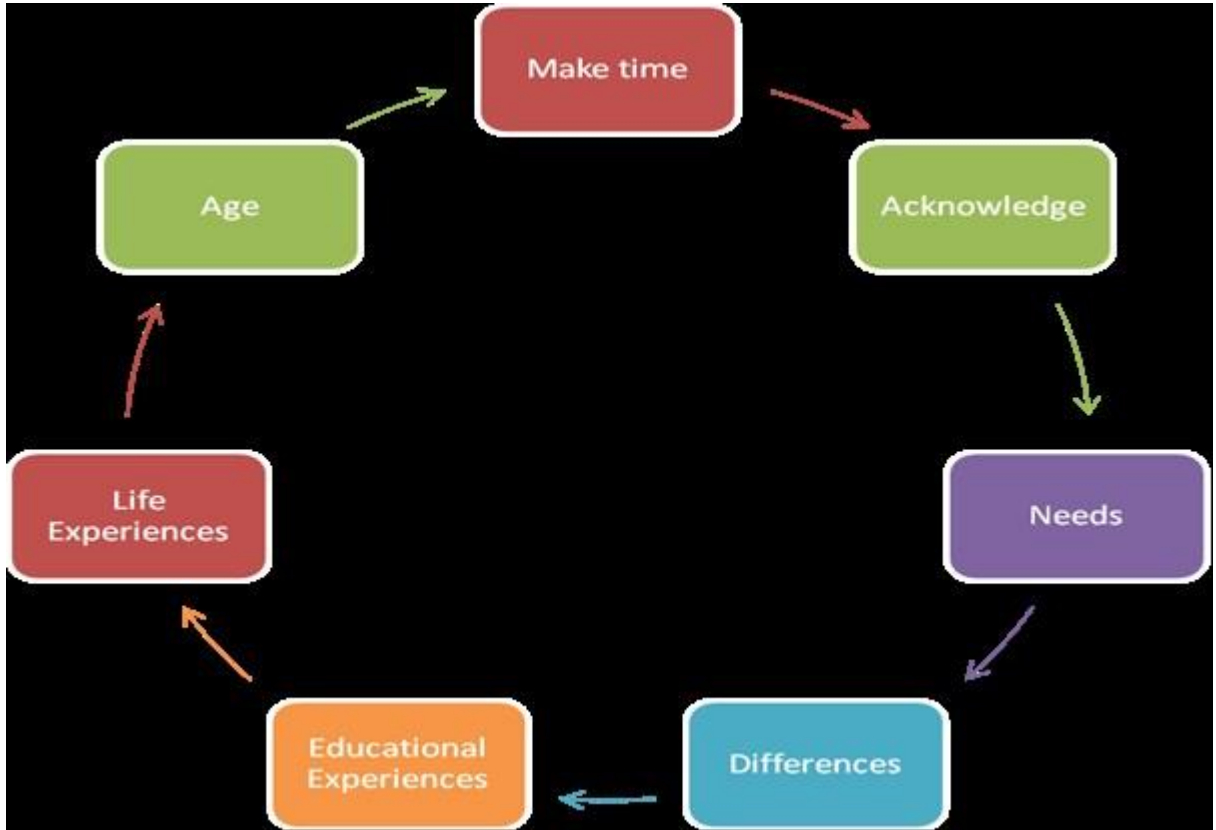
## **3. Our Statement of Principle**

- 3.1 The practice model of Dorset Children's Services is child-centred and strengths-based. Its commitment to culturally competent safeguarding practice follows from a recognition that this model must embody cultural awareness, learning, dialogue and reflection if it is to serve all children and families effectively.

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<sup>4</sup> [Learning from case reviews briefing: culture and faith \(nspcc.org.uk\)](https://www.nspcc.org.uk/learning-and-research/briefings/culture-and-faith/), viewed Dec 2022

- 3.2 We recognise that there are several established models of cultural competence, and we will seek to learn from all of them. Our core approach will be founded on the MANDELA model <sup>5</sup>:



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

### 3.3 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.' It may be helpful for practitioners to ask themselves 'Who owns the time for this meeting?' 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.

### 3.4 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 assets and difficulties on their lives?

### 3.5 Differences

<sup>5</sup> Tedam, P. (2012), 'The MANDELA Model of Practice Learning: An old present in new wrapping?' *Journal of Practice Teaching and Learning*. Volume 11 (2) pp.19-34, quoted in Tedam, P (2022)

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.

### **3.6 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.

### **3.7 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.

### **3.8 Age**

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

## **4. Tips for culturally competent practice**

Tedam's article concludes with the following suggestions:

- Prioritise getting to know individuals; avoid rushed meetings as much as possible
- Keep social work values in mind
- Be self-aware – think about the impact of your own personal cultural values and beliefs
- Remember people are the experts of their experience; adopt a position of 'not knowing' and be ready to learn
- Do not make assumptions about people you're working with because you perceive that they come from a similar background to someone else
- Resist tokenism or simple 'box ticking' as a means of evidencing your cultural competence
- Be flexible, not rigid, particularly when using existing frameworks and tools

## **5. How the principle will inform our practice**

Dorset Children's Services will embed culturally competent practice in our work through actions in the following areas:

## **5.1 Recruitment**

We shall require evidence of appropriate levels of cultural competence be demonstrated by applicants to all posts with designated safeguarding responsibilities in Children's Services. We shall achieve this by ensuring that person specifications reflect this requirement and that selection panels form a view of each shortlisted candidate's cultural competence for the role in scope.

## **5.2 Training**

We shall ensure that cultural competence is introduced to all new employees in safeguarding roles during their induction. We shall identify those posts that require specific cultural competence training and commission training that meets this need.

## **5.3 Practice oversight and supervision**

Practice supervisors will ensure that casework supervision of work with children and/or families that have protected characteristics will include reflection, support and challenge in respect of cultural competence.

Team Managers will ensure that cultural competence is discussed and examined within team meetings, and areas for development identified.

## **5.4 Governance**

We shall ensure that our safeguarding procedures consistently convey the requirement for culturally competent practice.

## **5.5 Quality Assurance and Monitoring**

We shall ensure that feedback sought from children and families includes one or more questions relating to cultural competence. We shall monitor child outcomes to ascertain whether protected characteristics in children or their families has an adverse impact on these outcomes. Where feedback or monitoring indicate potential weaknesses, we shall implement actions plans for improvement.

## **5.6 Resources and Partnerships**

Our safeguarding toolkits will all include links to resources that promote culturally competent practice, and details of user-led and voluntary sector organisations that can help us better understand the experiences of local people with a wide range of cultural experiences.