

Children and Families Thinking Tool: Working with Children and Young People who may Experience Racism

This Thinking Tool has been developed solely by young people in care from Black, Asian, Dual-Heritage and other ethnically diverse backgrounds.

The bottom half of the image features several thin, white, curved lines that sweep across the blue background, creating a sense of movement and design.

Children and Families Thinking Tool: Working with Children and Young People who may Experience Racism

This Thinking Tool can support those who work with Children and Young People who might experience racism to understand and improve the support offered, develop practice, and work together to respond in an appropriate and helpful way to racism.

It will help you to:

- See the young person as an individual – understand their life and their hurt
- Be curious – listen to the young person and understand what they want to happen
- Explore the impact on those experiencing racism
- Consider the potential impact on the child, of reporting racism
- Explore your organisations anti-racism policy and ensure it is understood by others
- Be the conduit for responding to racism



Vulnerability

- Potential fragile Emotional Wellbeing & Mental Health due to potential or actual racist abuse
- Ethnically diverse children in care living with white Foster Carers
- Impacts from peer networks/communities for responding to or reporting racism
- Social stereotypes and preconceived judgements
- Adulthoodification of ethnically diverse children
- Fear and intimidation of challenging others, especially adults, over their racist behaviours and values
- Feeling disregarded in relation to a poor response by others to racial abuse
- Feelings of unequal power in relationships, due to race

Risks

- Physical racist attacks
- Poor mental health due to managing implicit and explicit racism on a daily basis
- Cultural, Racial and Ethnic factors for children and families are not always fully considered/sometimes overlooked in service responses
- Impacts from peer networks / communities for responding to or reporting racism
- Social stereotypes and preconceived judgements resulting in negative outcomes
- Adulthoodification of ethnically diverse children
- Isolation from peer groups

Opportunity

- Enable the child to understand their Human Rights
- Support to the young person to respond positively and effectively to direct and indirect racism
- Support the development of a sense of protection, safety, and independence for children and their families where racism has been experienced
- Increase in positive cultural identity
- Increase in positive responses and subsequent impacts for the child
- Educate those in the child's physical/virtual environment through positive challenging



Key reminders

Understand that it is hard to challenge racism as there are often impacts relating to this that are felt by the individual. At times the racism is not dealt with effectively or the response may be considered too abrupt. Remember to understand what the child thinks is an appropriate response. Take time to talk this through and understand the intended and unintended impacts of both the racism and the response.

It is hard to challenge others who are being racist, especially those who are adults and have a role within the child's life. Remember that, at times, people can make the child feel responsible for the racist actions – it has become popular in peer groups to ask ethnically diverse children to allow / excuse racist behaviour.

The shock of experiencing racism as you leave primary age and enter adolescence is huge and additional support needs to be offered to ethnically diverse children. Education needs to be considered as a standard to everyone and should start at a very young age.

Continue to be aware and reflect on how you think and behave. Be mindful of what you say and do and the language that you use. Avoid making assumptions. Ask curious questions, listen and do not pass judgement on what they share. Remember that the impact of racism can be deep and lead to a place where a person returns to feelings of hurt, anger and distress.

Racism can be experienced in different contexts and settings; and can be directed towards ethnically diverse people by peers and adults. It can be played out on social media through direct or subtle messaging.

Think About:

- What the young person is thinking, feeling and why they might be behaving as they are
- Understand how the young person wants racism dealt with
- Respect – speak to the young person in private where racism has been experienced
- Understand the impact of language
- Remember parent/carers may be racist too
- Racism makes people feel unvalued
- Black stereotypes: The impact of stereotypes and how it can be a barrier
- Not allowing shame or fear to stop people talking openly

Think about how you might want to address this and how you feel.

Mind your language and be alert to the language, behaviours and values of others. Be intentional about recognising microaggressions such as “Can I touch your hair?” Remember children in care rarely tell their friends they are in care, however this is harder to explain where they are placed with white families.

It is important that children who have experienced racism are supported within a safe and trusting environment. Give the child or young person the time to reflect and articulate their feelings, experiences and thoughts. It is crucial that the child feels validated; that their feelings are accepted; that they are not minimised, blamed or criticised for their experiences and that the next course of action is led by them.

It is important that the child or young person feels validated and heard. Here are some examples of what you can say:

- “Thank you for sharing this with me”
- “I just want you to know that if anything like this ever does come up again, this is a safe place to talk about it and be supported”
- “That must have been difficult”
- “I can see how upset you are”
- “I completely understand why you must feel that way”
- “I am so sorry that this happened to you”
- “You have every right to feel that way”
- “Is there anything I can do to support you?”
- “It’s okay to feel angry”
- “Racism is not tolerated and I am sorry that you experienced this”

Prompts Questions:

- Are you able to describe what happened?
- Where would you like to start?
- When you experienced the racist abuse, what were your thoughts and feelings?
- Are you able to tell me more about what happened when you experienced the racism?
- Can you tell me what you were thinking and feeling?
- What could I do to support you?
- What would you like to be different?
- What could make this easier for you?
- Who do you normally turn to for support?
- Is there anyone else you’d like me to talk to?
- What is worrying you the most?
- What would the best outcome look like for you?



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