



Supporting children from different ethnic, faith and cultural backgrounds

Why is this important?

Child sexual abuse happens in all communities, regardless of culture, faith or ethnicity. However, children from some backgrounds may face additional barriers to telling someone what is happening to them, and to accessing support when abuse is identified.

These barriers can include language difficulties, concepts of honour and shame, fear of bringing stigma to the family, lack of culturally appropriate services, and concerns about how professionals will respond. Professionals may also make assumptions about the likelihood of abuse in particular communities, or about a family's willingness to engage with support.

Effective safeguarding requires you to understand these barriers and to adapt your practice so that all children receive the same quality of response.

1. What barriers may children face?

Language: A child may not have the words in their first language to describe sexual abuse. Some languages have no direct translation for terms like 'rape' or 'sexual assault', or the available words may be considered obscene or taboo. A child who appears fluent in English may still find it easier to talk about difficult experiences in their first language.

Honour and shame: In some communities, sexual abuse may be seen as bringing shame on the family or damaging family honour. Children may fear that they will be blamed, ostracised or punished if they tell. They may also want to protect their family from perceived shame.

Family and community pressure: Children may face pressure to stay silent in order to protect their family's reputation or avoid the involvement of authorities, or because speaking out is seen as disloyal. This pressure may be explicit or unspoken.

Distrust of services: Families from some communities may have had negative experiences of statutory services, or may fear discrimination, cultural insensitivity or consequences for their immigration status. This can affect whether children, and their families, feel able to seek help.

2. Working across languages

- Establish early what language the child prefers for discussing personal or difficult issues.
- Always use a professional interpreter for safeguarding conversations; never use family members, neighbours or other children.
- Brief the interpreter beforehand about the sensitive nature of the conversation and the possibility that certain words may not have direct translations.

- Be aware that the child may say "yes" to questions about understanding even when they have not fully understood. Ask the child to explain back to you what they think you have said.
- For informal communication, translation technology can help, but it is not a substitute for professional interpretation in safeguarding contexts.

3. Avoid making assumptions

- **Don't** assume that child sexual abuse is more or less likely in particular communities.
- **Don't** assume that a family's culture or faith means they will not engage with support.
- **Don't** assume that cultural practices explain a child's behaviour or presentation – it's vital to explore other possibilities.
- **Don't** assume that a child's reluctance to speak is a result of cultural norms – consider whether they may have been threatened or silenced in other ways.
- **Don't** assume that you understand a family's beliefs or values based on their (apparent) background.

4. Important reminders

- Child sexual abuse is never acceptable in any culture, faith or community. Cultural context helps us understand barriers, but it does not change what is harmful.
- Children from all ethnic, faith and cultural communities deserve the same curiosity, concern and quality of response.
- Concepts of honour and shame can be challenged sensitively. Focusing on the impact of abuse on the child's health and wellbeing can sometimes help families engage without feeling judged.
- Building trust takes time. Families who have experienced discrimination may need additional reassurance that you are there to help.
- **If you have concerns, act on them.** Do not let uncertainty about culture prevent you from safeguarding a child.