

# Working with African Diaspora Families

A supportive  
toolkit for the  
social care  
workforce.



# Promises are the currency of trust



## Acknowledgements

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## Why we have made this resource

In their community work, Passion4Fusion support families from the African Diaspora. They have met families and children who have had experiences with social work that have been confusing, difficult and distressing. They have also met social workers who are passionate about getting support right for these families and young people.

Recognising that support was needed in the conversation between social workers, and the families they are working with; Passion4Fusion saw an opportunity to work with Iriss, and create a toolkit that gives social workers additional tools and knowledge, to support them in their work with African Diaspora families.

## Who we are

### **Passion4Fusion**

Passion4Fusion is dedicated to supporting the equality needs of diverse Black and multi-ethnic young people and families in Edinburgh and the Lothians. The primary beneficiaries of their work are young people aged 6-18 and their families, typically originating from African nations and often holding Refugee/Asylum status in Scotland. These children often face trauma, marginalisation, cultural isolation, and a risk of involvement with the care system.

### **Iriss**

Iriss collaborates with individuals, workers, and organisations in the fields of social work and social care to facilitate the use of knowledge and innovation for positive change. Their support helps explore new methods of working and leveraging knowledge to improve outcomes for individuals, workers, and communities.

### **The Promise Scotland**

The Promise Scotland is an initiative focused on enhancing the lives and outcomes of children and young people who have experience in the care system in Scotland. The initiative emphasises the importance of listening to the voices and experiences of children and young people, aiming to create a culture of continuous improvement through collaboration between government, professionals, and the wider community.

# Introduction

*“The workforce needs support, time and care to develop and maintain relationships. Scotland must hold the hands of those who hold the hand of the child.”*

*The Promise  
Scotland*

This toolkit is for anyone who is part of the social care workforce who wants to deliver best practice to African Diaspora children and families. We have made this resource because workers have told us that they need knowledge and practice ideas to support them in their work. It might be that you are reading this in order to develop your practice, in advance of working with a family. Or, perhaps you have begun the journey with a family and are looking for support. Whatever point you are at, the information and tools in this resource are tailored to the needs of social workers; but there are valuable insights for anyone involved in the support and care of children and young people from African Diaspora backgrounds, or other minoritised groups.

We know from the evidence that children and families of the African Diaspora can encounter racism, prejudice, stereotypes, and cultural misunderstandings (Bernard 2016). These experiences can manifest at individual, institutional, or societal levels and may occur either consciously or unconsciously (NSPCC 2022). We also know that these biases can lead to poor outcomes. Some children becoming more likely to attract the attention of child protection services, while others receive insufficient support (Owen et al. 2009).

*“Promises are the uniquely human way of ordering the future, making it predictable and reliable to the extent that this is humanly possible.”*

*Hannah Arendt,  
Philosopher*

This toolkit explores obstacles faced by African Diaspora families and the workforce, shedding light on potential solutions. Some of the tools are for practitioners to use on their own, or with colleagues. Others can support conversations and relationship building with children, young people and their families.

This resource is rooted in the understanding that social work practitioners are expert in their ability to implement child protection processes, and does not replace or advise child protection guidance and best practise. Your professional practise, alongside Child Protection guidance and best practise, will inform your approach.

Practitioners have told us that they are hopeful for the future and can see ways to improve outcomes for African Diaspora families (Zimunya et al 2023). Families have told us that they would welcome more support, understanding and guidance (Zimunya et al 2023). We hope that this resource supports you in your practise; and empowers you to have the conversations with families, that result in the best support for them.

# How to use this toolkit

You as a practitioner are the expert in enacting child protection policies and processes. This toolkit is not an approach to child protection, but is instead designed to be a practical resource in your navigation of working with children and families of the African Diaspora.

The resources are split into four categories, broadly following a journey of working with a family. In each category you will find some background information alongside some tools that you can use.

Pause Think about cultural safety

Level Build trust with families

Listen Facilitate supportive conversation

Learn Reflect, share and shape the system.



Here Project Director at Passion4Fusion, Helene Rodger, shares what her hopes are for this toolkit; and the practitioners and families in Scotland using it.

*“Really, my hope for the toolkit is that it will be useable. It’s not one of those things that sits in a cupboard collecting dust. It is practical. If I could directly speak to social workers I would ask them to stay open minded. It’s not just about ticking a training box... pick up the toolkit and use it. I have seen social workers thinking outside of the box and I have seen this have positive outcomes for the families we support.”*

*“The families we work with are usually new to the country, and often don’t know systems. Sometimes the families don’t realise that you can work with a social worker to support you to learn about parenting in scotland. We have seen success stories where the social worker is really open minded and works with the family.”*

*Helene, Passion4Fusion*

# National Guidance for Child Protection



The safety and wellbeing of children and young people, including unborn babies is paramount. Our children and young people have the right to be protected from all forms of harm and abuse.

This toolkit aims to complement the information about cultural considerations, and all intersecting child protection concerns, outlined in the National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland 2021 - updated 2023. Practitioners will be familiar with this Guidance, which informs the development of local multi-agency child protection procedures, processes and training. It supports the care and protection of children across Scotland.

We encourage you to review the guidance alongside using this toolkit, as it offers clarity and thoughts about working cross culturally. We have highlighted some relevant aspects of the guidance throughout the toolkit for you to consider.



# What do we know from the evidence?

In 2023, on behalf of Passion4Fusion, Mildred Zimunya conducted surveys and interviews with African families and the workforce. The findings of their research have been shared in their final report, and at workshops and events throughout the creation of this toolkit. Their findings add to a body of work about the experiences of Black and multi-ethnic families and children with social work, and best practice for social workers. This, along with wider literature, and co-production with the workforce, have come together to influence this toolkit.

While this resource cannot tackle all of the issues that people of the African Diaspora face, in supporting the workforce, this resource aims to support better conversations between social workers and the children, young people and families they support. Ultimately, the aim is that this contributes to improved support for families from the African Diaspora.

We know from the evidence that discriminatory decision-making in child protection systems can result in a disproportionate number of families from Black and multi-ethnic communities being subject to investigation and intervention (Bilson et al., 2015; Boyd, 2014; Tibury & Thoburn, 2009). In the UK, there is over-representation of those from African heritage backgrounds and children of mixed race in child protection systems, compared to those from British White families (Bywaters et al. (2017)). In Scotland, there is challenge in the way that data is collected, making it difficult to know the ethnicities of children in the care system; as 7.4% of children in care's ethnicities have not been recorded (SCRA, 2018). Research has found that in situations of ambiguity, child protection

social workers are likely to estimate higher risk for families of African or Asian ethnicity than for White families and evidence points to un-acknowledged or unconscious bias as a reason for this (Enosh and Bayer-Topilsky (2015)). An analysis of Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews involving Black, Asian and minority ethnic families found that a mixture of stereotyping and cultural misconceptions contributed to inadequate child protection responses (Laird & Tedam, 2019).

The workforce are aware of the need for, and dedicated to, anti-racist practice. However, families still share that they experience racism and discrimination in their interactions with services (Laird, 2023). While anti-oppressive and anti-discriminatory practices are taught in social work education, this has not lessened the disproportionate number of children from racial and ethnic minorities entering the British child protection system (Dominelli, 2002; Thompson, 2020).

Alongside anti-racist practise, evidence suggests social workers might use cultural competency to build relationships with families. To be culturally competent and foster trust, social workers can build knowledge and practise approaches that have the ultimate aim of understanding the way in which culture influences how a person thinks, feels and behaves (Laird, 2023).



## New systems

In their work, P4F found that it is important that social services are well explained, and that families have an understanding of what to expect from the people working with them (Zimunya, 2023). In their countries of origin, social work may be practised differently; or there may not be a direct comparison for a Scottish social worker; making it difficult for families to understand the child protection system.

Contemporary research on the role of social work in Africa is included in further reading, for social workers to gain insight into how the profession operates elsewhere. (Tusasiirwe 2023). Parenting in their country of origin, could look different to parenting in Scotland, another challenge for parents and families to negotiate (Afruca, 2018). Parents might not be aware of the cultural parenting norms; the laws against smacking in Scotland; and the protection of children through a children's rights framework. Being part of a new system, that is hard to navigate and has principles and rules that differ from what they are used to, can be disempowering and confusing for parents (Afruca, 2018).

## Language

African Families speak many different languages. Africa is home to over 1000 languages, approximately one-third of the world's languages. There are at least 75 languages in Africa which have more than one million speakers. The rest are spoken by populations ranging from a few hundred to several hundred thousand speakers (Vidali 2023).

Social workers regularly work with individuals, families and groups where



“Families may equate social work with police, or other official roles which they are afraid of” Helene, Passion4Fusion

there is no shared language. Speakers of languages other than English may be discriminated against due to inadequate or absent communication support, inadequate cultural sensitivity, stereotyping and inappropriate provider attitudes. This can prevent or lessen interventions, with disadvantaged service users not accessing the services they need (Lucas, 2020).

Effective interpreting should be part of social workers' commitment to anti-discriminatory and anti-oppressive practice. The Iriss Insight of spoken language interpreters in social work highlight the importance of interpreters in Serious Case Reviews (Lucas, 2020). Translation services are key to supporting people to be understood; as well as to understanding systems and support available to them; as highlighted in The Scottish Translation, Interpreting and Communication Forum Good Practice Guidelines. This guidance forms a part of the tools social workers use in supporting people for whom English is not their first language.

It is worth considering that while language is most frequently presented as a barrier to good care provision, some researchers suggest this may be partly due to language difficulties being a relatively easy, and less emotive answer for participants to give in response to interview questions about barriers to services; rather than suggesting that services are culturally inappropriate or of poor quality (Greenwood et al, 2015). The need for interpretation services should be understood as one of the barriers that can exist to people accessing services.



## Lack of Knowledge, Unconscious Bias and Stigma

Having a lack of understanding about the cultures and contexts of families, can impact the relationship between social workers and families. P4F found that in some cases, participants shared they did not always feel that social workers had the necessary knowledge to best support them; and they felt the impact of their culture being misunderstood :

*“Sometimes I feel that more understanding of our background and culture is needed in decision making and planning.” Family respondent*

In their work, P4F have heard about how a lack of cultural understanding can result in decisions being made for children and families that are not suitable for them. Only with a full understanding of a person can appropriate support be given by professionals (Community Care, 2018). This participant’s experience illustrates this:

*“I had no direct contact with the foster carer, my children did not like their food but I could not communicate directly with the foster carer to direct her.” Family Member*

The experience of not having their culture understood and considered, can be disempowering for people. P4F’s research (2023) highlights the need for professionals to recognise and respect culture, beliefs and practices that are important to the people they are working with; and ensuring that these cultural elements are explicitly considered in support plans and other formal processes.

Displaying cultural understanding is an important part of building relationships and trust between social workers and

families. P4F (2023) found there are implications for support when trust between families and workers is weak. As one workforce respondent shared, failing to understand culture and what it means to an individual, can limit the support they provide:

*“Fears of being open to agencies mean an accurate risk assessment is not undertaken” Workforce respondent*

Alongside a lack of knowledge and understanding, wider research finds there can be bias in working with African families, that negatively impacts on decision making. For example, research finds that children from African Diaspora backgrounds can experience being perceived as more mature and less vulnerable than their peers. This process, known as ‘adultification’ can lead to misjudgments and an overlooking of their protection needs. (Davis 2022).

Stigma within the African Diaspora has also been researched. Internalised stigma occurs when people accept prejudice directed towards them as true; and it is characterised by absorbing outside perceptions, causing devaluation, marginalisation, shame and isolation. Internalised stigma is a key risk factor for mental illness, which is common among multi-ethnic groups in the UK, particularly Black Africans (Owuor & Nake, 2015). There is evidence suggesting that stigma can lead to additional negative outcomes such as lowered self-esteem, impaired social adaptation, limited social support and reduced access and use of health and social care services.

It is particularly important to this resource, to recognise that as a result of structural, political and socio-economic factors that position people as marginalised population groups; they may find it difficult to build trust in, and reach out to social work, and other public services (Owuor & Nake, 2015).

# Hearing from the workforce

**This resource aims to fulfil the need for a supported and knowledgeable workforce; as it equips practitioners with tools to reflect, get to know families better and have deeper conversations.**

However, we recognise that this toolkit, and your personal practice, is just one part of keeping the promise to children and families. During our research we spoke to many practitioners about what could help support them in the social care system to be doing effective, culturally safe work, beyond this toolkit. They came up with the following ideas.

## Recruitment and retention

Staff highlighted the challenges in recruiting and retaining skilled staff, as well as fostering a diverse workforce that can address the unique needs of multi-ethnic families. There can be a dependence on the few multi-ethnic workers to address diversity issues, leading to bottle necks and delays in service provision. Staff and volunteers could be recruited from the communities you serve to enhance understanding, trust, and communication.

*“We would like to have an increased number of foster carers from ethnic minority backgrounds. We are about to begin a focussed recruitment campaign reaching out into minority communities.”*

*Workforce respondent*

## Access to resources

Many of the workforce had difficulty accessing interpreters and other resources necessary to effectively communicate with and support multi-ethnic families.

*“Another challenge we are facing is difficulty accessing interpreters, particularly Romanian speaking. We continue to work creatively to facilitate communication, including making use of technology, but we recognise that families are not fully able to communicate their views or needs without skilled interpreting services.”*

*Workforce respondent*

## Education and training

We heard that knowledge and skills developed in educational settings may not be being supported and prioritised when transitioning to practice and employment.

## Risk Assessments

Workers saw the value in developing and reviewing risk assessment process to ensure they are evidence-informed and include considerations related to a child's ethnic or cultural background.

## Support and Mentoring

Staff wanted support for practitioners working with specific communities, they came up with ideas like peer support, or establishing a system for sharing lived experiences with senior leaders to develop anti-discriminatory practices.

*“...challenges perhaps relate to a concern that learning and teaching developed in the university setting or whilst on placement which is reflective of diversity does not necessarily continue to be prioritised/supported to be maintained when students move on to practice/employment.” Workforce respondent*

## Organisational culture

Staff felt that organisational cultures did not always support inclusivity. For strategic decision-makers, adopting an anti-discriminatory framework is essential to support the workforce to support children from the African Diaspora.



## Carer values and placement availability for young people

Staff identified challenges surrounding carer values and potential reluctance to provide placements for unaccompanied children from multi-ethnic backgrounds.

*“We have a support group for carers of unaccompanied minors which explores issues relating to culture, racism and immigration, alongside other issues such as building relationships, education and employment.” Workforce respondent*

*“The main challenge has been around carer values regarding unaccompanied children and their reasons for not wanting to provide a placement to them.” Workforce respondent*


## Financial support and training

Staff felt there were inadequate financial support and time for training to address the specific backgrounds and needs of multi-ethnic children. They asked to be provided with training specific to the communities they engage with, ideally led by individuals from those communities who understand cultural dynamics and the child protection system.

*“Financial support and training for the backgrounds of the children” Workforce respondent*



## Spotlight on Cultural safety: Beyond cultural competency

 *“Social workers are not always familiar to families, and so for example; we have supported families who have been fearful of signing Voluntary Orders, scared that they are consenting to their children being ‘given away’. This might look like parents being difficult, but it is in fact because they don’t understand what this paperwork is for, and the process surrounding social workers engaging with a family.” Helene, Passion4Fusion*

Building cultural competence can support practitioners to work with African Diaspora families in a positive way. So, we want to turn the spotlight on cultural competency, expanding our understanding to cultural safety.

Cultural competency has been in the lexicon of social work practice and theory since its introduction in the 1980s (Laird 2019). ‘Cultural safety’ is a phrase originally coined by Maori nurses in New Zealand, which extends the ideas of cultural competency (Curtis et al, 2019).

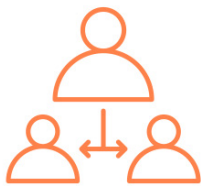
Cultural safety focuses on power dynamics, self-reflection, and systemic change to achieve better outcomes for people. Cultural safety emphasises that organisations should deliver care that is respectful, appropriate, and equitable, regardless of a person’s cultural background (Curtis et al, 2019) .

# What can we do to support cultural safety for people of the African Diaspora?



## On a personal level:

- We can undertake reflective self-assessment to explore and better understand our own culture. By recognising this, we can see more clearly our biases, attitudes, assumptions, stereotypes, and prejudices. This self-awareness is crucial in providing quality care that respects and understands patients' diverse cultural backgrounds.
- By prioritising mutual respect and listening to one another, we could combat issues like unconscious bias, racism, and discrimination.
- We can challenge stereotypes. Understanding that individuals from the same cultural background are not the same, we can treat each person as a unique individual with their own experiences and needs.



## On a relational level:

- By recognising that there can be imbalances in power between services and people accessing them, we can be more aware of the power we have in a particular cultural context
- We can strive to provide person-centered care, where the focus is on the cultural safety of the people practitioners are working with; rather than the culture of the service or staff team.



## On a systems level:

- We can advocate for reform at strategic levels. Working to remove barriers to the overall health, well-being, and safety of people from the African Diaspora.
- We can promote the equity of all the people we work with. The ultimate goal of cultural safety is to achieve equity. Equality means each individual or group of people is given the same resources or opportunities. Equity recognizes that each person has different circumstances and allocates the exact resources and opportunities needed to reach an equal outcome.
- It's essential that individuals, organizations, and systems empower people from the African Diaspora to make decisions, govern, and share resources. This self-determination is particularly vital in designing, delivering, and evaluating services for this community.

# PAUSE: Thinking about culture

*Cultural respect must be a consistent thread through child care and protection. Competence in an unfamiliar cultural context may entail consultation about specific culture and/or faith by which the child and family live their daily life. It will involve development of services that provide advocacy, advice and support attuned to culture and faith.*

*4.478 National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland 2021*



*“Different cultures display anguish, distress and grief differently. Some displays of upset might be perceived as aggressive or non-compliant, but it is because families are scared about what might happen to their children that they love. That’s why it’s important for social workers to understand the culture the family comes from, and importantly who the family are as individuals.”*

*Helene, Passion4Fusion*

Understanding someone’s cultural background and identity is an important concept in person centred care. To provide the best care for an individual, practitioners know they must be aware and alert to the needs or preferences a person might have, rooted in their culture (Marsh & Davis 2020). A key part of being able to understand cultural differences is to be able to fully know yourself and your own culture. Before you meet the family, you can examine what you are thinking about right now, in relation to your work with children and families of the African Diaspora.

**Use our Cultural Safety self reflection tool to explore your own relationship with culture. You can use this alone or in conversation with colleagues.**

The process for African Diaspora families interacting with services involves multiple stages and approaches, depending on the family’s needs, the service, and the location. A referral may have come from the family or other agencies and may involve voluntary or compulsory involvement, often with the assistance of throughcare or aftercare workers. Before you meet with a family, you should consider what you know already, and what you still need to find out, about their culture and background.

**When preparing to meet children and families from a different country or cultural background, it is important to understand your own cultural background. Use our culture map to explore your own culture and support culturally safe work with families.**

The National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland 2021 makes it clear that cultural sensitivity must not blur the recognition of harm or clarity about the line that has been drawn by Equal Protection. Cultural awareness is crucial to identifying and understanding risks to children’s safety, but excessive focus on community-specific risks can lead to neglect of other forms of abuse and neglect (Laming 2003). Practitioners must strike a balance.

# Cultural Safety Self-Reflection Tool

Use this tool to reflect on your understanding of your own culture, and to think about how you approach cultures that are not your own. Being aware of how your culture influences your needs, wants and aspirations; will support you to understand other peoples' cultural context. You will consider key topics that will strengthen your work with children and families that have a culture that is different to your own. This will support you to practise in a culturally safe way.

What words would you use to describe your culture? What parts of your culture do you relate to? Which parts don't you like as much?

What is a part of your culture that feels ordinary to you, but that might stand out to other people?

How does understanding your own culture support you to understand other people and their context?

How do you feel when you encounter difference? This could be difference in race, culture, religion, sexual orientation, age, language, and ethnicity.

Can you name an assumption you have about another culture? On reflection, what do you think about this assumption?

People's cultural perspective influences their judgement about what is the 'right way to do things.' It influences judgement about 'appropriate,' or 'normal,' behaviours, values, and communication styles. Can you think of any times you have noticed this in your life?

What do you think about power dynamics in your work with families?

Are you conscious about areas where there are gaps in your cultural knowledge with children and families you are working with?

How do you respond when you observe racist or discriminatory behaviour?

We communicate with one another in many ways. Other than speaking, what skills do you have to communicate with children and families in your work?

How comfortable do you feel with making mistakes in your work? How do you find out about these mistakes?

Can you relate to the idea that in cross-cultural situations there can be uncertainty and that uncertainty can make you anxious? What could you do to support yourself in that situation?

# Culture Map

Use this tool to reflect on your own culture, or use the questions as prompts to explore with somebody else.



What cultural background or heritage do you identify with?



Can you share some traditions or customs that are important in your culture?



Are there specific religious practices or beliefs that are significant to you?

Are there specific holidays or celebrations that hold significance for you and your family?



What languages are spoken in your family or community?  
Are there any unique idioms or expressions?



What are some common social norms or etiquettes in your cultural context?



How is food important in your culture?  
Are there specific dishes or meals that have cultural significance?





How do you typically express emotions in your culture, and how are emotions generally viewed?



How do people in your culture typically approach decision-making or conflict resolution?



How is education valued in your culture, and what expectations are there regarding academic or professional achievements?



Are there specific art forms, music, or dance that are unique to your cultural heritage?



What is the role of gender in your culture, and how are gender roles traditionally defined?



Can you describe the role of family in your culture? How are family relationships typically structured?

## LEVEL: Build trust with families

*“Statutory services will seek to ensure children’s hearings and child protection processes respond equally well in all areas and communities. Recent research highlights challenges for ethnic minority families in contact with the children’s hearings (Henderson et al 2017). These challenges include: isolation; language difference; poor translation; concerns about confidentiality; family reluctance to raise concerns and accept support; lack of awareness of services and how the law operates in Scotland; and fear of service intervention.”*

4.487  
National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland 2021

The Promise articulates that ‘Scotland must place trust in its workforce to develop and nurture relationships, enable their capacity to care and love and provide support to make this part of daily life.’ (The Promise, 2021). Once we are working with a family, we need to think carefully about how to build this trust. Maintaining trust in social care services is crucial to ensuring that people feel confident in accessing the care they require. Passion4Fusion’s research also told us that families feel the impact of being misunderstood.

**When learning about someone else’s culture, there is a balance to be struck between knowing facts about where they are from and not assuming things about them. Use the Cultural Context tool To explore ideas about things you could research before you meet a family, or ask them about.**

**Use our ‘Trust wall’ building blocks of trust to think about how you can build a positive relationship with children and families.**

Child protection procedures should promote consistency and co-ordinated action. However, families may still find it hard to understand what is happening. Partnership can only evolve if processes and choices are understood. (1.112 National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland 2021)

Navigating an unfamiliar system can be challenging for families. By demonstrating a deep understanding of the unique needs and challenges faced by African Diaspora, practitioners could make a real difference (Laird 2019). During our workshops with Passion4Fusion, we heard from practitioners who felt that they needed support in explaining the role of social work to new families they were working with. This was echoed in the needs of families who lack knowledge about how this system works in Scotland.

*“Sometimes because their role is important for safety of the vulnerable, children, young people and families in the society. That being said, we the minority ethnic group are losing confidence in the process due to bias and non-consideration to cultural differences.” Family respondent*



*“Families might find it difficult to question people they perceive to be authority figures, and might see these people as knowing what’s best for the family. As a result, some families might agree to actions that they don’t fully understand; or that have results they weren’t expecting. Clear communication can help to overcome this.”*

*Helene, Passion4Fusion*



**Use our ‘Who I am and why I am here’ tool to explain who social workers are. Social work as a profession and a system may be unfamiliar to families, and may not always have a counterpart in the family’s country of origin. It can be difficult for people to understand the role of social work, and the role that social workers have in their lives. Use this tool to explain to families, who you are and to place social work in the wider context of people that have helping roles in Scottish communities.**

When there is not a shared language between families and social workers, there is the potential for families to think they understand what they are being told, when in fact they are understanding something different; or misunderstanding. Practitioners should be mindful of this, making sure to check that families have an accurate understanding of events. To avoid the distress that misunderstandings can cause for families, practitioners should take steps to build shared understanding, such as considering actions from a families perspective, and enlisting an advocate for support to make sure there is shared understanding of actions taken and next steps.



*“Jargon can be really confusing for parents, who might already be struggling to understand social work and child protection processes. Interagency Referral Discussions, Section 22, Voluntary Orders... these processes need to be clearly explained to families to support them to understand, and proactively engage with social workers.”*

*Helene, Passion4Fusion*

# Cultural context

When learning about someone else's culture, there is a balance to be struck between knowing facts about where they are from and not assuming things about them. These prompts offers ideas about things you could research before you meet a family, or ask them about.

## Cultural Norms and Values

- What are the predominant cultural norms and values in their country of origin?
- How are family, community, and individual roles defined in their culture?
- What are the common customs and traditions?

## Language

- What is the primary language(s) spoken in their country of origin?
- Are there regional dialects?

## Religion and Spirituality

- What are the major religions or belief systems in their culture?
- Are there specific religious practices or rituals that might be relevant?

## Family Dynamics

- What is the typical family structure in their culture?
- How are decisions made within the family, and what roles do different family members play?
- How do children and adults relate to one another?

## Education

- What is education like in their country of origin? What age do people start and finish school?
- Are there any barriers or challenges they might have faced in accessing education?

## Healthcare

- How is healthcare traditionally approached in their culture?
- Are there cultural beliefs or practices related to health and wellness?

## Politics

- What is the current political climate
- Is there any conflict between groups to be aware of?

## Cultural Celebrations

- What are the significant cultural celebrations and holidays in their country of origin? How are these observed?

## History and Context

- What is the historical and political context of their country of origin?
- Are there any ongoing events that could relate to the family, and their experiences?

## Challenges

- Are there particular forms of discrimination that people from their country of origin commonly face?
- What are the common stereotypes or misconceptions about their culture?

## Immigration and Resettlement

- What do you know about why the family have immigrated to Scotland?
- What challenges might they have encountered during the resettlement process?

## Legal and Documentation Status

- What is their legal status and documentation, including visas or residency permits?
- Are there any legal issues or concerns they might be facing?

## Community Resources:

- Are there community organizations or support networks specific to people from their country of origin in the local area?
- What resources are available for cultural integration and support?

# Trust wall

Use our 'Trust wall' building blocks of trust to think about how you can build a positive relationship with children and families.

What could you do to demonstrate that you are listening to the parents and children?

How could you use body language to build trust?

How can you demonstrate patience?

How can you show the family that you are adaptable to different communication styles?

What can you do to demonstrate that you follow up on commitments?

Is there opportunity to take responsibility for errors and strengthen trust?

What other ideas do you have to strengthen trust?

# Who I am and why I am here

**I am a social worker. Social workers work with people of all ages, at times in their life when they need support, care and protection.**

- My job is to work with children and families to make sure they are safe and well cared for.
- I work with children and their families when there is a worry a child has been hurt, is not being looked after or does not feel safe.
- My job is to talk to children and the people that know and love them to find out what has happened.
- I want to help change the situation, and make things get better at home.
- I work as part of a team that can include police, teachers, health workers, the courts and others.

About me

My name and contact details

How to contact my team

Where else you can get support

**Social workers help the community. There are other community helpers like teachers, police, health care workers, bus drivers, librarians.**



Other community helpers who are important to us:

Draw or write out a timeline of events that have happened so far.

What happened	Why I am here
What I will do	What will happen next

# LISTEN: Create supportive conversation

*“The child’s experience, views and needs are central within child protection processes. Talking with and listening to children means attention not only to their words, but also to their experience, needs, wishes and feelings. Listening includes attention to non-verbal communication, and to physical and behavioural responses to their care and environment. Understanding communication involves consideration of the timing and context of expressed words and feelings.”*

1.104

*National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland 2021*

When working with African Diaspora families, we need to be aware of communication challenges. Listening must go beyond what we hear, and it must also incorporate an understanding of our bias. Paying attention to what children and families tell us requires an understanding of both where the family comes from, and the position they are in now. At this point, supportive conversations will continue to support greater knowledge about the people you’re working with; and where the voice of the child and the context of the family can be more deeply understood, and centred.

## **Use the Two houses tool to learn more about the families context and the child’s experience**

It is important that children and families are listened to by services. Open communication can be challenging for all children, but there are specific, and additional barriers that might exist for children and adults from African Diaspora communities (NSPCC 2022). Across the literature there is evidence that children and families can feel unseen, unheard and misunderstood as a result of bias (Davis 2022).

## **Use the bias iceberg tool to review your conversations with families and think about areas you may have mis-interpreted, or need more information about.**







## An excerpt from the National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland 2021: Practice Insight 9

### The 'Two Houses'

Amma Anane-Agyei (2013) developed the 'Two Houses' model based on her experience as the Coordinator of the African Families Service at London Borough of Tower Hamlets. The concept symbolises the country of origin (namely the 1st house) and the current residence of the family concerned (the 2nd house). This model allows practitioners to accurately locate the country of origin (1st house) and ascertain the contents of the house, and how this defines the family's views and is present in the 2nd house.

The contents of the 1st house includes the historical, spiritual, social, economic, cultural, formal, and informal societal systems of that particular country. It should also include a narrative account of the particular country as the family sees it and their experiences in the house, whether in the past or in the present.

In the 2nd house, the various places of residence should be noted down and the reason for the moves or transitions explored. This should include the family's understanding of the statutory systems, their role, and responsibilities in the 2nd house.

The two houses are not separate because the 1st house exercises a strong influence on the 2nd. The degree to which the parents try to recreate the 1st house while coping with the differences they find in the 2nd house may be an important indication of any stress they might be suffering. The impact of the 1st house on the 2nd house should not be minimised particularly as it may affect the parenting of the children.

- What was the experience of family members within the first house?
- What shaped the family when they were living there including relationships, family and cultural history, values, beliefs, community connections?
- How much does the family identify with the first house and how much does this influence their present house?

The impact of the 1st house on the 2nd house should not be minimised - nor should it be assumed that the family has adopted the cultural and societal norms of the 2nd house. This becomes more complex when we consider children who have been born into the 2nd house and who identify with this house as their 1st house.

*"Language barriers can make it really hard for families to understand what they are being told. They might say that they understand something, only to find out later that they hadn't. Social workers might too think the family has understood, and make decisions about them based on that. Advocates and translators can help bring a shared understanding between families and social workers."*

*Helene,  
Passion4Fusion*

# Two Houses



- What was the experience of family members within the first house?
- What shaped the family when they were living there including relationships, family and cultural history, values, beliefs, community connections?
- How much does the family identify with the first house and how much does this influence their present house?



- Memories of moving; reasons for moves?
- What is the family's understanding of the social, economic, cultural, formal and informal societal systems of this house?
- Experience of/access to help from social work services, health, education, police etc.?
- How much influence does the first house have today on the second house?

# Bias iceberg

Use this to reflect on your feelings about working with a family. The aim is to explore what could be underneath these feelings, which will then allow you to see if there is any bias that you can notice influencing your feelings.

In the top of your iceberg write what you feel about the situation.

Then note down what the most obvious things are that are making you feel this way. This could be what you are seeing and hearing.

Underneath start exploring the deeper structures. This could be your values, beliefs, fears, and misunderstandings. This is a space to ask yourself what are the other interpretations of this situation? If there is anything that remains unclear, ie. *a type of body language*, you could spend some time researching this.

# LEARN and shape the system.

*“There may be some variation in personal, family, community or cultural attitudes to parenting, for example in relation to reasonable discipline. Sensitivity is essential alongside practitioners’ central focus on a child’s needs for protection from harm; and the needs of a family for support to reduce stress and associated risk.”*

4.150  
*National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland 2021  
Cultural competence.*

After you have worked with a family from the African Diaspora, or even just worked through this toolkit and carried out some self-reflection, you are in a position to begin sharing your learning and reflecting on your progress. You’re now in a position to be an advocate for creating culturally safe, supportive environments for children of the African Diaspora. This could influence a number of different areas of your organisation and practice.

**Use our Group supervision discussion tool with your colleagues in a group or pairs setting, to think about what you’ve learned or noticed in your work with families.**

Revisit the tools you have completed, and use these to think about what has worked well for you in this process. It’s likely you have used a range of resources, skills, practise insights and advice from your community of practice. Think about what has worked for you, or how you’ve tried something different; and share these learning points and perspectives with your team.



# Group Supervision Discussion

Group supervision sessions are valuable opportunities for professionals to reflect on their work, share experiences, and learn from one another. When exploring learning from working with a family, consider the following suggested structure for a group supervision session, along with a list of reflective questions:

## Structure for Group Supervision Session:

### Opening:

- Welcome and introduction
- Establishing ground rules for the session
- Brief check-in

### Case Presentation:

- One participant presents a case involving their work with a family.
- Provide a brief overview of the situation, timeline and process
- Encourage the presenter to share their thoughts, feelings, and challenges encountered during the process.

### Group Discussion:

- Open the floor for group members to share their insights and experiences related to the presented case.
- Encourage participants to explore different perspectives
- Discuss any ethical dilemmas or cultural considerations that emerged in the case.

### Skill Development:

- Identify specific skills or competencies relevant to the presented case.
- Discuss strategies for building the skills of your team and share resources that may be helpful.

## Reflective Question Ideas

- What were the strengths and challenges in working with this family?
- How did your own values and assumptions influence your interactions with the family?
- Were there moments of personal bias that impacted your work?
- How did the family's cultural background influence the dynamics and interventions?
- What did you learn about yourself as a professional during this experience?
- How did you manage any ethical considerations that arose?
- What were the significant moments or turning points in your work with the family?
- How did the family's responses or reactions impact your interventions and decision-making?
- In what ways did you collaborate with other professionals or agencies in this case?
- What emotions did you experience during the interactions with the family, and how did you manage them?
- Were there any surprises or unexpected outcomes in your work with the family?
- How did you maintain and manage boundaries with the family while building rapport?
- In hindsight, is there anything you would do differently in your approach?

## Further reading

### **National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland 2021: Practice Insights**

You can find valuable insights about cultural competence in cases involving physical abuse of children in this guidance. It's available at [www.gov.scot](http://www.gov.scot). (Check out insight 9.)

### **The Promise Scotland**

Scotland's commitment to care-experienced children and young people is clear: "You will grow up loved, safe, and respected." The goal is to ensure that this promise is fully realized by 2030.

### **NSPCC learning: Establishing anti-racist and anti-discriminatory practices in social work**

A great online resource aimed at practitioners, but is also helpful for anyone working or volunteering with children and young people from Black, Asian and multi-ethnic communities. NSPCC also have further anti-racist training.

### **Family Group Conferencing with BME Families in Scotland**

Ever wondered how family group conferencing (FGC) benefits children and families from black and multi-ethnic backgrounds in Scotland? Have a read.

### **An Exploration of Ethnic Minority Communities' Understanding and Awareness of Child Protection and the Children's Hearings System in Scotland - Henderson**

This research dives deep into understanding how multi-ethnic communities in Scotland perceive child protection and the Children's Hearings System. You'll find insights from agencies and third sector bodies working with these communities.

### **The New Scottish Interview Model**

This resource promotes a person-centered and strengths-based approach. It's all about collaboration, empowerment, and holistic assessment to effectively support individuals and families.

### **AFRUCA - Africans Unite Against Child Abuse Promoting the Rights and Welfare of Black and African Children**

Africans Unite against Child Abuse (AFRUCA) is a platform advocating for the rights and welfare of Black and African children. It's been going strong since 2001. They have a range of great resources including a hard copy book to help you explain the role of Child Protection to families. Well worth a look.

### **A Perspective from Black Australia: 'Cultural Safety' for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children, Young People, and Communities**

Get a unique perspective from Black Australia, delving into the concept of 'Cultural Safety' within Child Protection policy and practice. It goes beyond 'cultural competency' and strongly advocates for the involvement of Black families, communities, and their organisations in systems and assessments.

### **Decolonising and Reimagining Social Work in Africa Alternative Epistemologies and Practice Models**

This book explores contemporary debates on decolonisation and indigenisation of social work in Africa and provides readers with alternative models, values, and epistemologies for reimagining social work practice and education that can be applicable to a wide range of countries struggling with similar concerns. It examines how indigenisation without decolonisation is just tokenistic since it is concerned with adapting, modifying Western models to fit local contexts or generating local models to integrate into the already predominantly contextually irrelevant and culturally inappropriate mainstream Western social work in Africa.

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Iriss is a Scottish charity dedicated to working with individuals, social workers, and organisations in the area of social work and social care. Since our inception in 2008, we have been steadfast in our mission to facilitate positive change through the application of knowledge and innovation.

We want to keep you up to date with all our work to support social services in Scotland. Let us know if you want us to keep you informed via our mailing list.

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