

1 What is Cultural Competence?

Cultural competence means offering and delivering safeguarding services in an equitable, fair, and non-discriminatory manner. It is a set of cognitive, behavioural and linguistic skills which lead to effective communication with people of other cultures. Practitioners, organisations and systems should understand, communicate and effectively interact with people from all diverse backgrounds, in a way that recognises, supports, and values the worth of individuals, families and communities, and protects and preserves the dignity of children, young people, vulnerable adults and families they work with. Culture can be seen as beliefs, ideologies, customs, world views and values common to a group of people which denotes their individual and social behaviour and has evolved over time. Culture is not the same as ethnicity. Culture is specific to an individual, ethnicity denotes the origin and membership of a group of people linked for example by language or nationality. Oldham safeguarding Children's Partnership and Adults Board have produced [Cultural Competence in Safeguarding - Practice Guidance](#) to support professionals.

6 Culturally Competent Practice and Engagement Tips for Practitioners:

- Valuing people's identity, experience, expertise, and self-determination
- Maintain awareness about national and local ethnic, social, and religious demographics and how these are changing
- Spend some time getting to know the service users, do not rush meetings and interventions
- The service user is the expert of their experience, adopt a position of 'not knowing and be ready to learn'
- Resist tokenism or simple 'box ticking' as a means of evidencing your cultural competence
- Be self-aware – think about the impact of your own personal cultural values and beliefs
- Be flexible, not rigid, particularly when using existing frameworks and tools



2 Why is it important?

Cultural competence builds trust and relationships, challenges stereotypes and biases and offers more personalised care, which can lead to better outcomes. Practitioners and their practice should be person centred, unbiased, accessible to all and legally compliant. Cultural competence does not mean ignoring or excusing practices that are against UK law or could cause or risk causing significant harm to children, young people and adults. By learning about other cultures, we recognize the richness of human diversity and avoid making assumptions based on limited information.

2 Information and Key Learning:

The NSPCC briefing [Culture and faith: learning from case reviews](#) highlights, lack of understanding of religion and cultural context of families can lead professionals to overlooking situations that may put family members at risk, whilst the desire to be culturally sensitive can lead professionals to accept lower standards of care. It is important not to prejudge or second guess people's cultural practices. Instead, it is more beneficial to be professionally curious, ask families about their views, practices and beliefs and talk with colleagues, specialists and a range of cultural groups.

Models:

We can learn from various cultural competence models: Aspects of the Tedam's Mandela learning cycle include: making time, acknowledging needs, differences, educational experiences, life experiences and age. Tedam notes a central strategy for disrupting unconscious bias is taking time to listen, learn and develop knowledge and skills. If timing and duration of meetings are only defined by practitioner schedules, it is likely that the family's priorities, habits and customs are likely to go unrecognised and undervalued.

7 Useful Resources:

[NSPCC - Safeguarding children who come from Black, Asian and minoritised ethnic communities](#)

[NSPCC - Culture and faith: learning from case reviews](#)

["It's Silent": Race, racism and safeguarding children](#)

[Race, racism and safeguarding children](#)

[Summary of the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel's report on race, racism and safeguarding children](#)

5 Safeguarding Practice Reviews:

A recent [Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review](#) into the tragic death of 10-year-old Sara Sharif highlighted several enduring issues in multi-agency safeguarding practice that directly relate to cultural competence, professional curiosity, and effective risk assessment. The Sara Sharif review (November 2025) reinforces the importance of:

- Professional curiosity: actively testing explanations and seeking the full context, rather than making assumptions.
- Robust, multi-agency information sharing: ensuring data is complete, timely, and integrated so that risk is recognised early and appropriately escalated.
- Confidence in cultural competence: understanding cultural context without allowing fear of causing offence to inhibit safeguarding action.
- Consistent follow through on safeguarding processes: timely home visits, accurate records, and clear escalation when risk is suspected.

These lessons should help practitioners translate cultural competency into safe, evidence-based decision-making that centres the child's experience and risk, alongside respect for diversity.