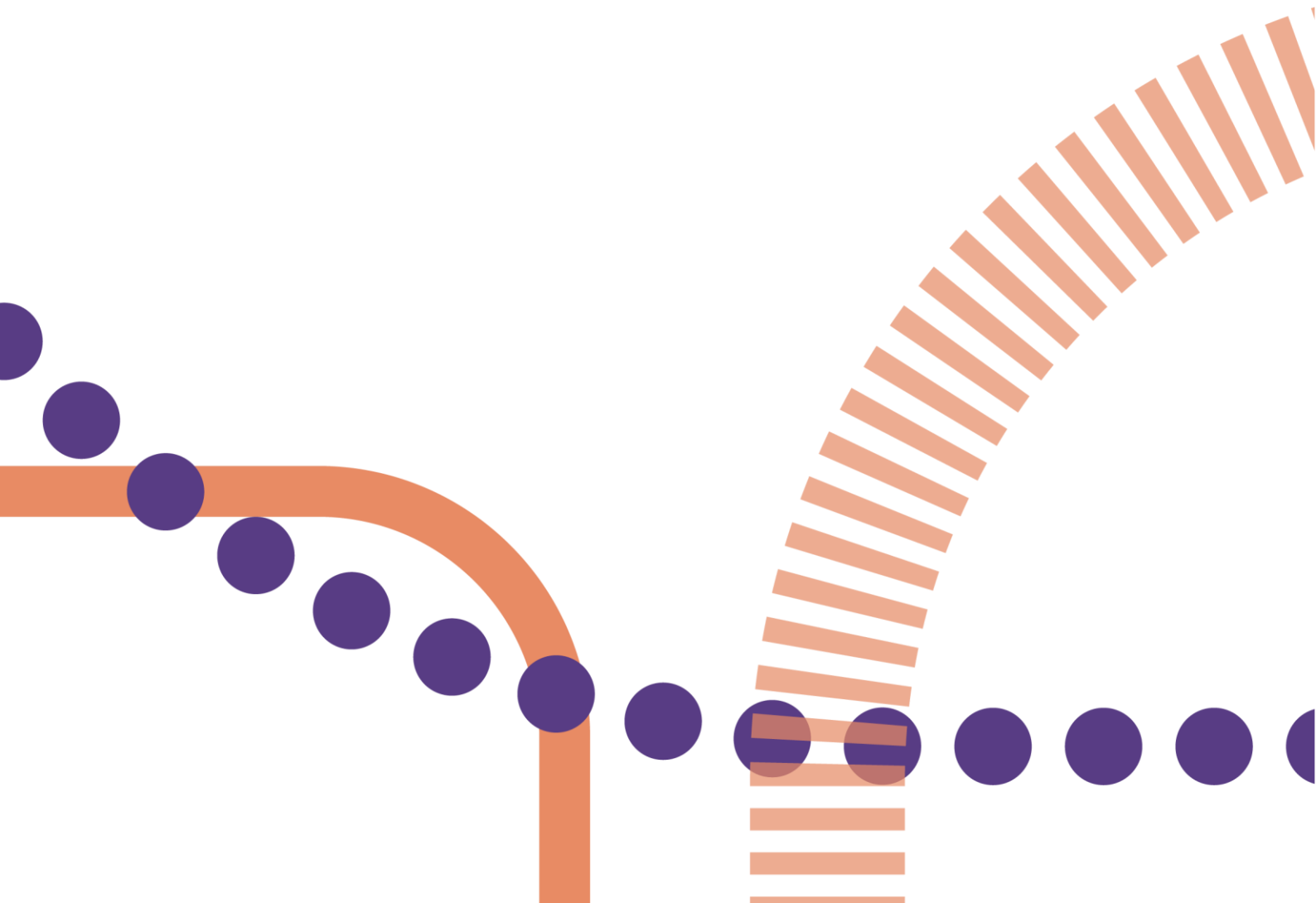


Child sexual abuse

Responding to child sexual abuse where
race and ethnicity is a factor

March 2026



Introduction

The national Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel (the Panel) published a [national review](#) into child sexual abuse within the family environment in November 2024. One of the key findings was that practitioners working with children and families have not been equipped with the knowledge, skills and practical guidance to identify and respond confidently when there are concerns of child sexual abuse in the family environment.

This briefing paper focuses on the impact of race and ethnicity and specifically aims to set out useful information and background context for multi-agency practitioners, managers and front-line professionals when working with children and families where child sexual abuse within the family has occurred or is suspected to have occurred and where race and ethnicity may be a factor (both in terms of identifying and responding to the abuse).

Who is this document for?

Multi-agency practitioners, managers and front-line professionals working in universal services such as schools, health services, police and early years settings, and practitioners in specialist safeguarding and child protection roles (including fostering and adoption).

How to use this resource

This resource is designed to help you reflect on how race, ethnicity and culture may shape a child's experience of sexual abuse and the support they receive. You can use it to guide conversations in team meetings, supervision, or multi-agency discussions, and to think more deeply about how you recognise, understand and respond to children's lived experiences. The key messages, examples and reflective questions offer practical prompts to help you consider bias, build cultural awareness, and strengthen your response to children and families.

Why is it important for children and young people?

Understanding how race, ethnicity and racism affect children's experiences is vital to keeping them safe. Some children may face additional barriers to speaking out, may not feel understood by professionals, or may experience discrimination that makes it harder to ask for help. By using this resource, practitioners can better recognise these challenges, respond in a culturally sensitive way, and ensure that every child feels heard, protected and supported, regardless of their background.

What is the evidence base?

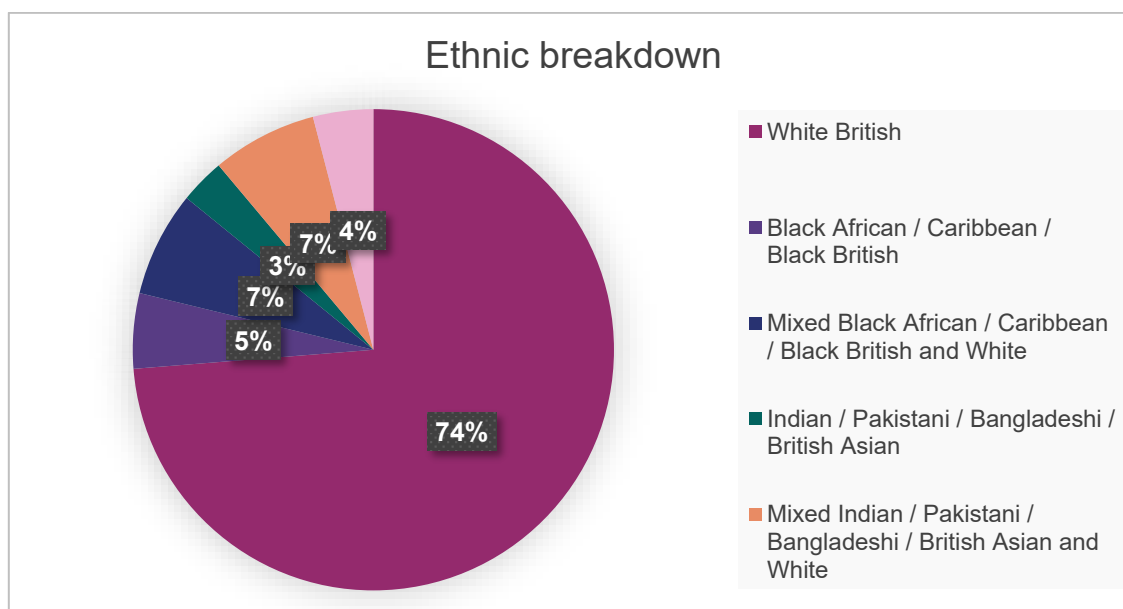
The Panel's national review included:

- Analysis of 136 rapid reviews, 40 related SCRs and LCSPRs, and one thematic review relating to child sexual abuse in the family environment received by the Panel between June 2018 and November 2023.
- 10 online reflective group discussions with 107 practitioners in 9 local safeguarding partnerships who had been involved in 10 of these reviews.
- One-to-one interviews with 2 of the children at the heart of these reviews and 5 people who had been convicted for sexually abusing children in these reviews.
- Reflective discussions involving experts by experience, practitioners and senior leaders from a range of agencies including policing, probation, children's social care, universal health and specialist health services.
- A review of recent research and practice guidance, summarising what is known about child sexual abuse in the family environment and the response to it.

Many of the issues identified have been highlighted in national studies and inspections over a number of years, as well as in our reflective discussions with stakeholders.

Key facts and figures

The review's analysis looked at 193 children who had been sexually abused. Information was available on the ethnicity of 151 children (but missing for 42 children). Nearly three quarters of these children were White British, with 27% from Black and other minoritised communities.



Of the six children (4%) from other White ethnicities, 2 were from other mixed ethnic groups, 1 was from a Gypsy/Irish Traveller ethnicity and 2 were from another ethnic group.

Common issues

Overwhelmingly, the thematic review found that although over a quarter of the children in the reviews were from Black and other minoritised communities, in only 13 of these reviews was there any specific reference to children's race, ethnicity or culture and how this had been taken into account in responding to children.

In some reviews, there was a conclusion that while practitioners had discussed a child's ethnicity or culture, they had not taken this into account sufficiently in their actions to understand the lived experience of the child.

Practitioners did not usually consider and respond to parents' needs in relation to their race, ethnicity and culture. This meant that the impact of racism and discrimination in a family's life was not always considered resulting in relationships where there was little trust.

Hallmarks of promising practice

The review's analysis and fieldwork did, however, identify some occasions where practitioners had considered children's needs relating to their race, ethnicity or culture.

For example, in one review, practitioners found that a child of Black African heritage with a history of trauma and abuse was pregnant. They recognised that this particular child might be at risk of 'honour based' violence or ostracization and recommended appropriate support.

In another positive example, practitioners reviewing the circumstances of an 11-year-old Asian girl of Pakistani heritage who had become pregnant as a result of sexual abuse by her much older brother recognised that she might receive a negative response from others within her community and would need additional support if this occurred.

Moving forward, examples of good practice would see practitioners and safeguarding partnerships:

- Recording ethnicity in practice with children and families including in serious incident notifications and rapid reviews.
- Exploring the impact of race, racism, ethnicity and culture in interactions with children and families.
- Examining these issues in depth in rapid reviews and LCSPRs.
- Considering when interacting with children and families, if additional support from a relevant community or organisation would be of benefit.
- Assessing how intrafamilial child sexual abuse and practice to prevent it, is influenced by factors specific to families from particular communities or backgrounds (including race and ethnicity).

Reflective questions and discussion points

These questions and discussion points can be used by multi-agency practitioners to reflect on in team meetings, or to use as a checklist, when responding to incidents of child sexual abuse.

- Consider how intrafamilial child sexual abuse, and practice to prevent it, is influenced by factors specific to families from different communities or backgrounds (including different race, ethnicity and faith backgrounds).
(For discussion in team meetings)
- Multi-agency working should include applying an intersectional lens to consider the way in which inequalities linked to issues including race are intertwined facets of some children's lives and can create a context of increased levels of risk for some children.
(In team meetings, consider discussion of current or previous safeguarding practice examples to see if this lens was applied).
- Strategy discussions should include someone who knows the child and how best to communicate with them, taking account of disability, ethnicity, race and racism, language and culture.
(Consider if this happens routinely in your local area).
- Do you as practitioners recognise the impact of racism, including bias and wider systemic experiences of discrimination on how children and families perceive and experience barriers to disclosing and reporting child sexual abuse.
(Consider cases where this might have happened and how you can learn from it).
- Do you feel confident in exploring and understanding children's ethnic and cultural contexts, including family structures, and how these may impact the harm they have suffered and their help seeking.
(Consider how confidence in this area would enable you to provide a considered and culturally sensitive response, taking account of other vulnerabilities or contexts that intersect with children's ethnicity or culture.)
- At a strategic level, do safeguarding partners consider that all practitioners in their area (including foster carers) understand and are confident in talking directly to children, and families, about concerns about sexual abuse, taking due account of ethnicity and race.
- How is intrafamilial child sexual abuse, and practice to prevent it, influenced by factors specific to families from different communities or backgrounds (including race, ethnicity and faith backgrounds)

Questions for leaders

- How confident am I that our practitioners routinely consider a child's race, ethnicity, culture and identity when assessing risk, understanding lived experience, and planning support?
- Do our local reviews and assessments explicitly name racism, discrimination or cultural factors where they have impacted a child or family, rather than describing these influences in neutral or vague terms?
- How do I assure myself that practitioners understand how racism, mistrust of services, or community stigma might affect a child's ability or willingness to disclose abuse within their family?
- Are practitioners supported to explore cultural dynamics, family expectations, language barriers and potential community responses that may influence risk or a child's safety plan?
- Do we provide our workforce with training that builds confidence in discussing race, racism and identity with families, and do leaders model this openness themselves?
- How confident am I that records, reviews and strategy discussions avoid stereotypes (e.g., "hard to engage," "uncooperative") and instead explore structural or racialised barriers affecting a family's engagement?
- Do we ensure that children and families who may need culturally matched or specialist support (language, community-based organisations, interpreters) can access it quickly and consistently?
- Are we confident that practitioners consider the intersection of race with other factors, such as gender, disability, trauma, poverty or neurodiversity, rather than treating identity factors in isolation?
- Do I have assurance that ethnicity is consistently, accurately, and meaningfully recorded in casework, incident notifications and rapid reviews, and that this data is analysed to identify trends or disparities?
- How do I know that children from Black, Asian and other minoritised communities are experiencing equitable safeguarding responses, including being heard, believed and protected, regardless of cultural or racial biases?

Case study

One review described how practitioners had not recognised or explored the potential impact of a child's Indian heritage and how this may have silenced her and left her without support when reporting her abuse. It was suggested that the child might have benefitted from support from culturally matched practitioners who understood her cultural, community and family dynamics.

Where can I find out more?

Find more information on the Panel's new learning hub, www.childsafeguarding.independent-panel.uk, where you can access videos, webinars, podcasts and other content, including the full report: "[I wanted them all to notice](#)".

- Visit [the Centre of expertise on child sexual abuse](#) (the lead reviewers on the national review) on behalf of the Panel) for a research [study](#) on improving responses to the sexual abuse of Black, Asian and minority ethnic children and a [guide](#) on using supervision and team meetings to improve responses to child sexual abuse.
- The CSA Centre's Response Pathway has information on [respecting children's individual characteristics, experiences and backgrounds when responding to child sexual abuse](#).
- For more information on working with parents who have strong faith or cultural beliefs, see the NSPCC's [Summary of risk factors and learning for improved practice around culture and faith](#). NCFE has produced a [webinar](#) on child abuse linked to faith and belief.