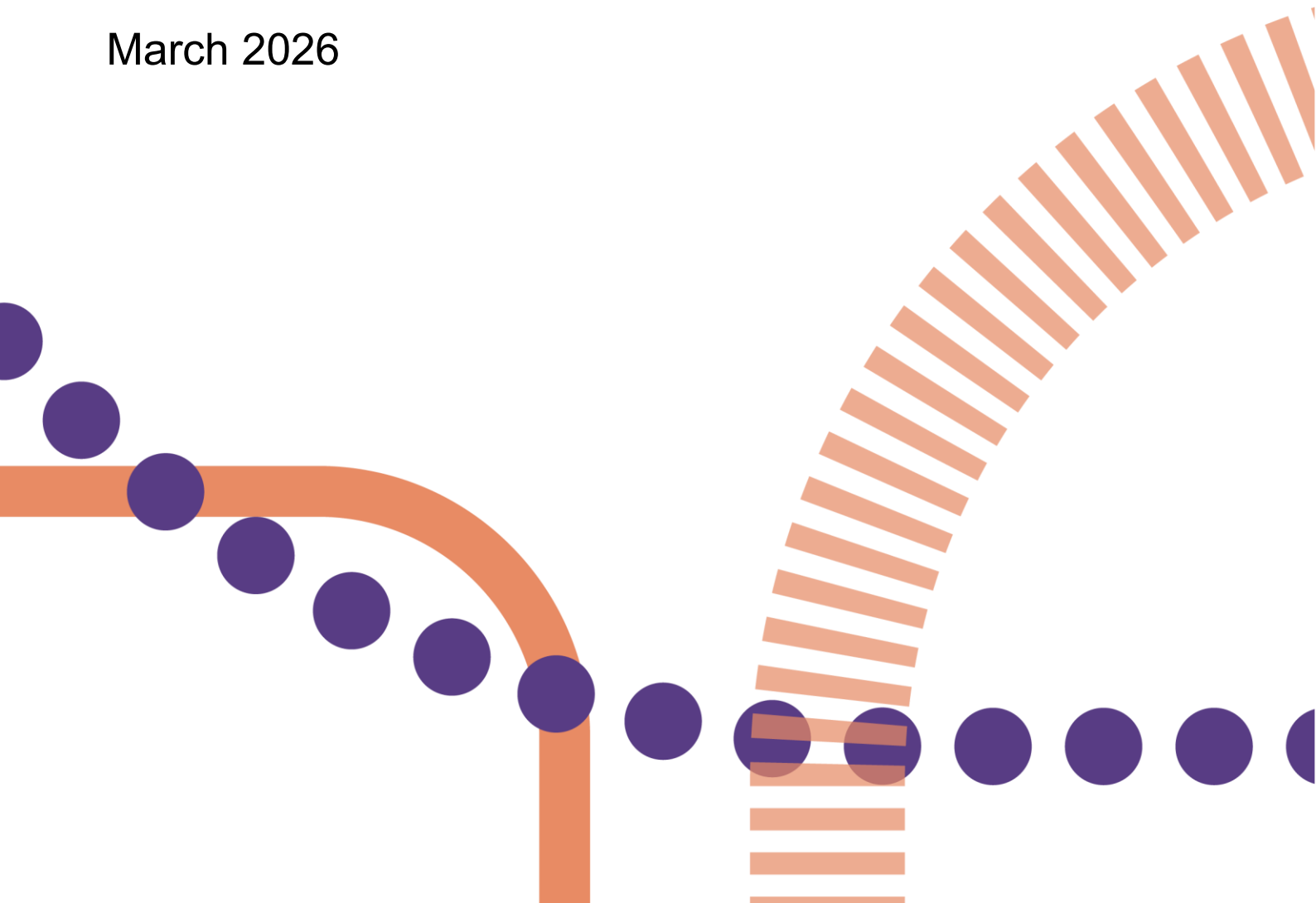


Race, racism and safeguarding children

Hearing children's voices in safeguarding
reviews

March 2026



Introduction

The national Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel published a thematic analysis, 'It's Silent: Race, racism and safeguarding children' in March 2025. The report examines the impact of race, ethnicity and culture on multi-agency practice where children have suffered serious harm or died.

The report identifies a recurring and concerning theme: the voices of children, particularly those from Black, Asian and Mixed Heritage backgrounds, are often absent or insufficiently represented in safeguarding reviews. In many cases, the analysis of rapid reviews and local child safeguarding practice reviews (LCSPRs) showed that children's perspectives were either missing entirely or reduced to minimal statements, failing to capture their lived experiences of racism, cultural identity, and discrimination.

Who is this document for?

This brief is aimed primarily at professionals and leaders within safeguarding partnerships, including:

- People working or volunteering with children and young people, including practitioners in education, health, social care, and community settings.
- Safeguarding professionals and managers who need to understand changes to safeguarding and child protection policy and guidance.
- Organisations and agencies involved in safeguarding partnerships, to help them apply the report's findings and recommendations in practice.

How to use this resource

This resource is designed to support your reflection and practice. Use it to explore the key themes, examples, and reflective questions that highlight how children's voices, particularly those from Black, Asian and Mixed Heritage backgrounds, can be better understood and centred in safeguarding work. You can refer to specific sections when preparing for meetings, supervision, learning events, or reviews, or use the whole document to guide team discussions and strengthen your approach to hearing and representing children's lived experiences. Practitioners are encouraged to use the case studies and prompts to challenge assumptions, deepen their understanding of identity and intersectionality, and consider how these insights apply to the children and families they work with.

Why is it important for children and young people?

Listening to children and understanding their lived experiences is fundamental to keeping them safe. When a child's voice is missing, or only partially understood, professionals risk overlooking crucial information about risk, identity, relationships, culture, or discrimination that may be shaping their daily experiences. This is especially important for children from Black, Asian and Mixed Heritage communities, whose perspectives are often underrepresented in safeguarding reviews. By strengthening our ability to hear, interpret,

and act on what children tell us directly or indirectly, verbally or non-verbal, we ensure that safeguarding decisions truly reflect their needs, protect their rights, and lead to better outcomes for every child and young person.

What is the evidence base?

Source of data: 54 safeguarding reviews (40 rapid reviews and 14 Local Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews).

Selection method: Stratified random sampling to ensure inclusion of cases involving Black, Asian, and Mixed Heritage children and families.

Timeframe covered: Serious incidents occurring between January 2022 and March 2024.

Scope of sample: Reviews represented diverse socio-demographic characteristics and contextual factors, such as:

- Children missing education, employment, or training.
- Varied family structures and living arrangements.
- Mixed age ranges of children in focus through the cases from under one to 17 years old.
- Varying types of intra and familial harm to the children in question.

A thematic qualitative analysis was undertaken on the sample of reviews. The analytical framework was informed by academic literature and the guidance and expertise of the Panel sub-group. There was a dual focus on practice learning themes within reviews and reviewers' approaches to identifying learning.

Key facts and figures

Hearing the child's voice:

Without clearly listening to the child's voice and experiences, there is the risk that the uniqueness and individuality of each child is lost and that their individual lived experience is not appropriately considered.

- Fourteen reviews, across Black, Asian and Mixed Heritage ethnicity groups, provided partial consideration of the child's experience within the review report.
- None of the reports in this sample provided any direct representation of children's voices related to race or ethnicity.
- Six reviews within the sample did not consider the child's voice or experience within the meeting/report at all.

Practitioners' effective communication:

Missed opportunities to effectively incorporate the child's voice or experiences result in practitioners' lacking a good understanding of children's vulnerabilities and risks of harm.

- In nearly half of the reviews, practitioners had fully or partially sought the child's voice and experience, aiming to understand what their lives were like.

- Some reviews were identified where there had been missed opportunities to hear and take account of the voice and experiences of the child.
- Seven reviews explicitly noted that the child's voice and wishes had not been heard by practitioners. This was attributed to an absence of or limited direct professional contact prior to the incident or missed opportunities by practitioners to engage with the child.

Intersectionality and identity:

The term or application of intersectionality was rarely applied in reviews missing the exploration of how race intersects with other factors such as gender, poverty, or neurodiversity.

- In just over half of the reviews, practitioners did not appear to consider the identity of the children and/or their family.
- While 18 reviews did acknowledge different parts of a child's identity, for example their ethnicity, mental health status and/or religious identity, these were generally considered in isolation.
- 8 reviews evidenced that practitioners had applied an intersectional lens, however this was primarily in terms of exploring service engagement and access to services.

Common issues

Inconsistent opportunities to hear the child's voice

Professionals often lacked a clear understanding of children's lived experiences due to limited direct engagement. We recognise that it may not always be possible or appropriate to engage children and young people within the review process itself, however finding alternative means to convey a picture of the child, and their lived experiences, helps to centre them in the process.

Making assumptions

Practitioners may not access the child's voice and instead rely on assumptions without verifying relationships. This is not to suggest that family networks are unsafe; rather, the concern is that when professionals do not listen to children or explore the nature of relationships, they risk missing critical information. In some cultures, terms such as "auntie" or "uncle" are used for close family friends rather than biological relatives. Without curiosity and clarification, these assumptions can lead to gaps in understanding and missed safeguarding opportunities. The case study example illustrates how these issues emerged in an informal kinship arrangement.

Intersectional perspectives not considered (ethnicity, gender identity and neurodiversity)

The report highlights a lack of robust consideration of intersectionality in reviews. Understanding intersectionality can provide a framework and tool to support practitioners to better comprehend the lived experiences of children and families from Black and other minoritised ethnic groups.

Hallmarks of promising practice

None of the review reports provided any direct representation of the child's voice as it relates to their race or ethnicity. There were significant missed opportunities to include the child's own words within review reports. To ensure the child has a voice:

For safeguarding partnerships

- Partnerships should consider how the children's voices and experiences will be heard and considered within the review process.
- Create conditions that empower practitioners to have conversations with children and families about race and identity. This includes building skills and confidence and ensuring there are safe opportunities for self-reflection within teams and in supervision to acknowledge their own biases.
- Child Safeguarding Partnerships should review their local strategies and approaches to addressing race, racism, and racial bias in their work with Black, Asian, and Mixed Heritage children
- Where relevant, local reviews should explicitly name racism and bias and should avoid neutral phrasing where racism or discrimination is clearly evident. Reviews should clearly identify these issues rather than remaining silent or vague.

For multi-agency practitioners

- Practitioners must ensure they are taking every opportunity to explore the views and experience of the children and their wishes.
- Maintain clear records and documentation for each child's voice and experiences.
- Are encouraged to feel empowered to discuss race and identity and they should be supported by senior leaders to examine personal biases.
- Provide detailed consideration of the implications of race, ethnicity and culture and how they intersect with other aspects of a child's identity.
- Record key learning points and recommendations that focus on practice learning, improvement and innovative approaches to supporting and protecting children from Black, Asian and Mixed Heritage backgrounds.
- Where suitable ensure children have private, trusted opportunities to speak without family members present.
- Seek to verify information rather than accept parental accounts at face value.

Reflective questions and discussion points

These reflective questions and discussion points can be used by multi-agency practitioners and leaders in team meetings or supervisions.

- How do you know the child feels listened to and safe when discussing race, culture, or identity in safeguarding conversations?
- What do you do to create space for children to share experiences of racism or cultural identity in a way that feels empowering?

- How do you ensure safeguarding decisions reflect the child’s cultural identity and lived experience, rather than assumptions or stereotypes?
- What strengths do you notice in children and families when they talk about identity, and how do you build on these in your safeguarding work?
- How do you reflect on your own biases and assumptions, so they do not affect how you listen to or safeguard children from Black, Asian and Mixed Heritage backgrounds?

Questions for leaders

- How do you create the conditions that empower practitioners to have confident, respectful conversations about race and identity with children and families?
- How do you ensure practitioners have the skills and confidence to consider all aspects of a child’s identity and how these intersect when assessing vulnerability?
- How do you ensure local reviews demonstrate that children’s voices about race, culture, and identity are heard and understood?
- How are you addressing barriers like interpreter shortages to make sure children and families can fully express their views and experiences?
- How do you create safe routes for children and families to raise concerns about racism or cultural bias in safeguarding processes?

Case studies

Inconsistent opportunities to hear the child’s voice:

Professionals repeatedly met with a child only in the presence of family members, never seeing them alone. This prevented the child from speaking openly about neglect and abuse. Combined with challenges in addressing parental resistance to access, practitioners failed to gain an accurate picture of the child’s circumstances and risk of harm.

Making assumptions:

During a safeguarding review, practitioners encountered challenges when children and families used cultural terms such as “auntie” and “uncle” for individuals who were not biologically related. In this case, a child was placed with someone referred to as “auntie” under a kinship (or informal fostering) arrangement. Practitioners assumed the

individual was a relative and did not verify their identity. This assumption meant that professionals lacked a full understanding of the child's circumstances and did not adequately assess the suitability of the placement.

Intersectional perspectives not considered (ethnicity, gender diversity and neurodiversity):

A male child of mixed white and Asian heritage and Muslim faith was admitted to hospital after a life-threatening crisis. Neurodiverse and non-enrolled in school, he was under his mother's care after relocating to a less culturally diverse area due to domestic abuse concerns. Professionals focused on his behavioural issues rather than exploring underlying causes. Opportunities to consider the impact of his race, culture, gender, neurodiversity, and domestic abuse environment on his situation were missed. His social isolation, linked to cultural differences and absence from school, was insufficiently addressed.

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

Other resources include:

- Listen Up, [Pushing Forward: Testing learning on Adultification in Child Safeguarding Practices in England](#)
- NSPCC, [How can we Hear and Facilitate the Voice of the Child](#)