





The importance of
language when
writing about care
experienced children
and young
people



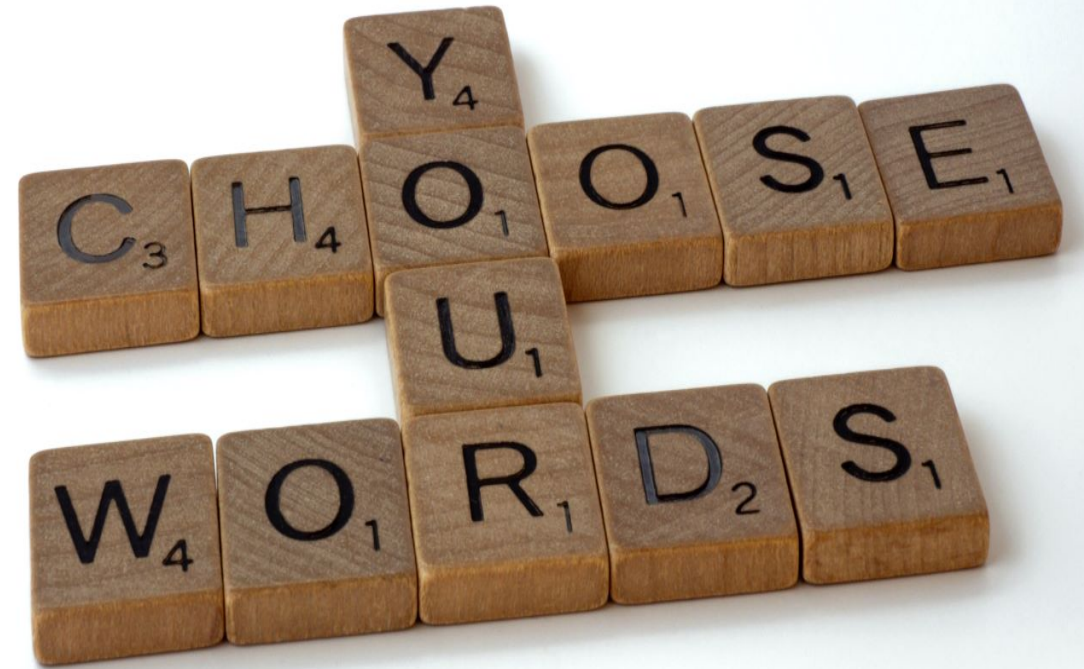
Learning Outcomes

The workshop will explore the critical role language plays in shaping perceptions, experiences and outcomes for care experienced children and young people. It offers practical guidance to writing with empathy, and accuracy while also supporting care experienced children's lifelong identity needs.



Use of language

- Language matters
- Intentional choices that reflect our commitments and values
- Keep the conversation going



Warm up activity

Write down five words that come to mind when you think about children in care. Write down what comes to mind first, don't overthink this.

Share with the person next to you.

Quick share with the room.

Activity source – Bekah Pierre



Key terms & concepts

Anti-oppressive practice

All forms of oppression (e.g. racism, sexism, ableism), tackling structural inequalities and power imbalances to promote equity

Anti-racist practice

Recognises the impact of racism + seeks to dismantle it at all levels (internalised, interpersonal, institutional & structural)

Anti-discriminatory practice

Challenges discrimination based on protected characteristics ensuring compliance with legal standards (e.g. Equality Act 2010)

Active commitment

Self-reflection

Conscious decision-making

Advocacy & allyship

Empowerment

A guide to race and ethnicity terminology and language (The Law Society)

Race	"A categorisation based mainly on physical attributes or traits...rooted in white supremacy and efforts to prove biological superiority and maintain dominance over others." For example, Black or White.
Ethnicity	"Is broader than race and has usually been used to refer to long shared cultural experiences, religious practices, traditions, ancestry, language, dialect or national origins (for example, African-Caribbean, Indian, Irish). Ethnicity can be seen as a more positive identity than one forged from the shared negative experiences of racism."
Minoritised ethnic/ racially minoritised	"Recognises that individuals have been minoritised through social processes of power and domination rather than just existing in distinct statistical minorities. It also better reflects the fact that ethnic groups that are minorities in the UK are majorities in the global population."

A guide to race and ethnicity terminology and language (The Law Society)

BME & BAME	<p>"Acronyms used to refer to people of non-white ethnicities who are minoritised in the UK...Use of the term 'BAME' has been increasingly criticised...More recently, UK broadcasters (the BBC, ITV, Channel 4 and Channel 5) have committed to avoid using the acronym wherever possible."</p>
People of colour	<p>"Primarily used in the USA...Some perceive it as a more positive term than 'BAME' or 'BME'. However, others see it as similarly problematic, in that it groups together people of great ethnic diversity and different shared experiences and identities."</p>

A guide to race and ethnicity terminology and language (The Law Society)

White privilege	"The innate advantage White people have within society solely based on their race. The term does not discount the challenges White people have faced but describes the reality that, although White people and people of all races can have similar negative and disadvantageous experiences, White people will not suffer the biases of race in addition."
Microaggressions	"Verbal, behavioural or environmental insults or exclusions that are frequent, seemingly ordinary, and can be intentional or unintentional...Micro-aggressions appear insidiously in conversations through inappropriate questions, body language, actions and decisions. Despite often being small gestures, which alone are hurtful, they contribute to a larger and more persistent culture of exclusion." (D&Ictionary The Law Society)

Ethnic disparities in society

Stop & Search

Black children accounted for 18% of stop & searches, despite representing only 4% of the 10-17 year-old population

*22/23 YJ statistics

School Exclusion

Black Caribbean and Mixed White and Black Caribbean children have been consistently overrepresented in school exclusions rates.

Prison

As of 2020, 32% of children in prison were Black despite Black prisoners accounting for 13% of prison population.

*Ethnicity & CJS, 20

Detention under the MHA

In the year to March 2023, Black people were 3.5 times as likely as White people to be detained under the Mental Health Act.

“It’s Silent”: Race, racism and safeguarding children

Panel Briefing 4

March 2025

Findings

- Race is silent
- Multi-agency safeguarding practice must address and respond to issues of race, racism and racial bias

Recommendations

- Create conditions that empower practitioners to have conversations with children and families about race and identity, building skill and confidence
- Review local strategies and approach to addressing race, racism and racial bias in work with Black, Asian and Mixed Heritage children,
- Ensure appropriate internal structures are in place to support practitioners to recognise, discuss and challenge internal and institutional racism.

Lived experience – parents

(Waddell et al, 2022)

- “There were clear disparities. There were clear differences in the way that my family were treated, my son in particular, and there were racial overtones that were clearly defined.”
- “I feel racism affects how Black children accessing services are seen and dealt with. Bias within professionals means that families are pathologised.”
- “When we had a problem with racism at school, when we reported it, the school ended up making it ten times worse than it was.”
- “It’s because the lady who was counselling my daughter and counselled me is Muslim, so she can understand the context and give me back insightful indicators or phrases from the Koran that gave my heart to ease.”
- "We struggled to be understood. There was lack of cultural sensitivity, lack of understanding from a cultural religious perspective, and the family dynamics were not understood.”

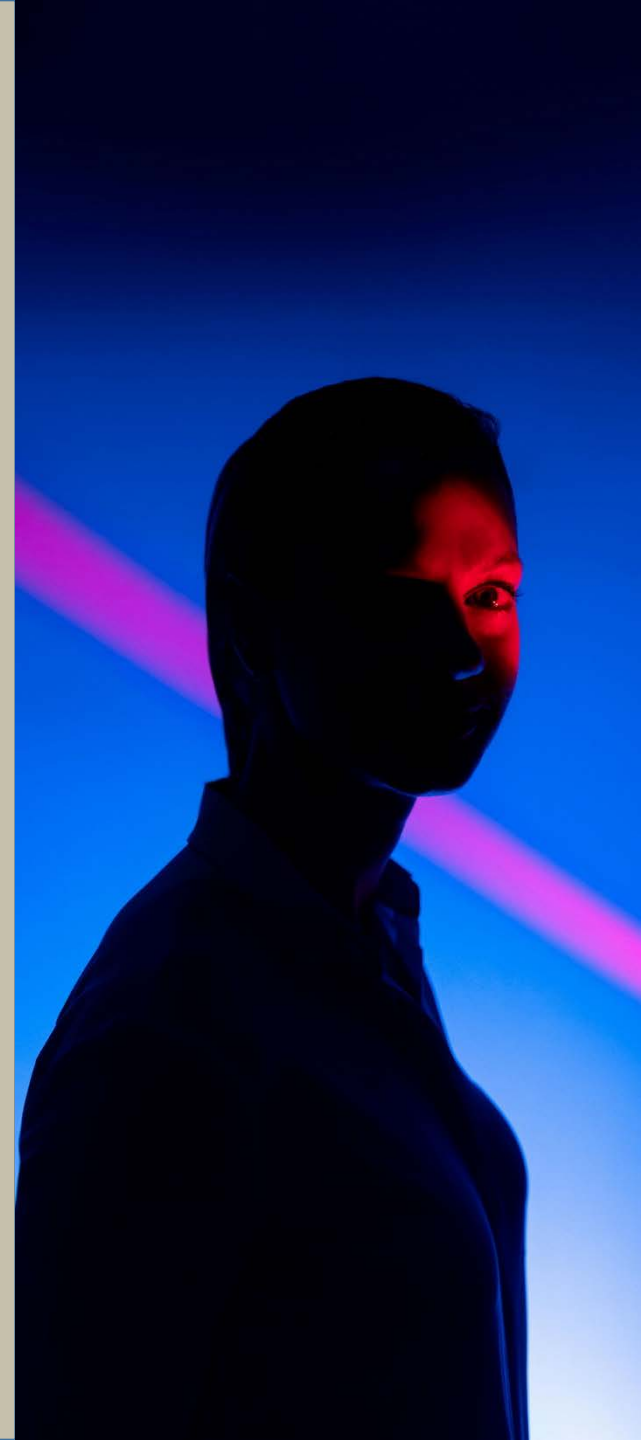
Importance of exploring and recording cultural identity

- Record incomplete without it – only an oversimplified representation of information or partial information about a person if it doesn't contain cultural identity
- If not recorded, can lead to misconceptions or biases that may affect services delivered or support received
- Enables data analysis that can reveal or highlight disparities
- Highlights intersectionality
- Can support identification of causes of disparities
- Enables identification of groups of families or children with shared characteristics to provide bespoke services or supports
- Enables identification of groups of families or children to amplify marginalised voices

Exploring identity with children and young people

Sariya Cheruvallil-Contractor et al University of Coventry:
Expressions of Self

- Importance of listening to children and young people – avoid imposing your own perceptions of culture, ethnicity and faith
- In-flux identities – identities are layered and constantly changing, not simple or static
- Reflects individual's lived experience, avoids over-simplification, encourages open dialogue, and helps prepare for challenges that children or young people may face





Language

- Descriptions of people need to be respectful and balanced
- Avoid jargon, acronyms and professional terminologies that the people being written about may not understand
- Sensitive information should be collected and recorded in appropriate and trauma-informed ways to avoid creating unintended harm
- Importance of using terms that children and family's favour

‘Perhaps you saw the screen in front of you as the final destination. It was not; your words, written about, but without me, would not remain hidden forever.’

(Rebekah Pierre, 2023)

Bias: unconscious & conscious

[D&Ictionary | The
Law Society](#)

- Bias exists in all of us!
- Unconscious/implicit: informs decisions without awareness, may contradict beliefs or values
- Conscious/explicit: intentional, can be overt (e.g., harassment or bullying) or subtle (e.g., exclusion or microaggression)
- Impact: influences decisions, behaviors. Often incorrect, discriminatory, and perpetuates inequality
- Awareness helps dismantle stereotypes
- Undoing bias takes time, just as it took time to develop

Cultural compass cards



Cultural Compass cards a tool created by the Black Foster Carers Alliance - [Cultural Compass Cards - Black Foster Carers Alliance](#)

- Cards can be used as an interactive safe way to explore learning and apply inclusive and diverse practices to promote a sense of 'Belonging'
- Practical tool for fostering discussions and activities that promote cultural sensitivity - can equip assessing and supervising social workers to confidently have these discussions with foster carers, kinship carers and adopters

Example – Scenario Card – Handling Stereotypes

"You witness a colleague or another foster carer making culturally insensitive remarks or assumptions about a child. How do you address this situation professionally and educate them about cultural sensitivity."

Cultural compass cards – group 1 & 2

SCENARIO CARD



Naming and Identity

A young person prefers to be called by a name that's different from their legal name because of cultural or personal reasons. How do you handle this request respectfully?

ROLE PLAY CARD



Healthcare Decision-Making

You need to make a healthcare decision for a child, but the family's cultural beliefs influence their preferences. Role-play a discussion with the child, family, and healthcare provider to make a culturally sensitive decision.

Cultural compass cards – group 3 & 4

CULTURAL SENSITIVITY



Respect Dietary Restrictions

Be aware of dietary restrictions or preferences related to cultural or religious beliefs. Make accommodations when necessary to ensure a child's dietary needs are met.

SCENARIO CARD



Language Barriers

You are working/caring for a child who speaks a language you are not familiar with, and there is a language barrier. How do you ensure effective communication and understanding?

Small group activity

Four groups

Each group selects one cultural compass card and considers how they would respond to the scenario/ example.

What would you need in your practice to support your interaction?

What do you already use that supports working in this way?

Share three key learning points with the wider group.

Ensure every member of the group contributes and select a volunteer to feedback.