



YCS Effective Practice Briefing: A Practical Guide to Supporting Children and Young People who are Black, Asian or Have Specific Cultural or Religious Needs

YCS Effective Practice Briefings are produced by the YCS Quality Development Team and are based on up to date evidence and engagement with children, staff and key stakeholders. They provide concise and easily accessible advice and guidance for front-line staff and will be reviewed as further information becomes available.

1. Supporting Children and Young People who are Black, Asian or with Specific Cultural or Religious Needs.*

The following information provides a practical guide on useful things to consider and address to make sure children from Black, Asian and other minority backgrounds have what they need to take care of themselves and to maintain their cultural identity.

When thinking about the needs of children and young people from Black, Asian, and other minority groups, or specific cultural or religious groups, it is important to consider the 'whole' child or young person. This includes practical matters, such as providing the right foods and skin or hair care, along with support to enable children and young people from these groups to embrace their identities, cultures and beliefs. Key things to consider include:

- understanding how children and young people from Black, Asian, and other minority backgrounds and young people's personal care needs differ to those who are White.
- encouraging children and young people to talk about and share their cultures and belief, or through story boards, murals, poetry or music.
- looking at the social and emotional needs of children and young people from Black, Asian, and other minority backgrounds, including self-awareness, the need for respect and a sense of identity.
- looking at the social and emotional needs of children and young people from different cultures and religious backgrounds, including support to maintain their cultural or religious beliefs.
- actively taking part in community activities and cultural events that happen in your setting to understand more about different cultures and beliefs.

2. Body Language

Body language makes up a large part of our communication with others e.g. eye contact, gestures and facial expressions, but there can be substantial cultural differences in how this is used to communicate. Some of these differences are obvious, whilst others can be more subtle: For example, although a handshake is considered a normal form of greeting, how this is delivered varies from culture to culture. Western cultures perceive a strong handshake as authoritative or confident, whereas in cultures from the far east this is considered aggressive and it is usual to bow instead. Men in Islamic countries never shake the hands of women outside of their family, and it can be seen as offensive for male Hindu's to shake the hands of females. Female Muslims are also likely to refrain from handshaking and potentially greet by a slight nod or verbal greeting only.

Hand gestures are used to emphasis a point and illustrate what we are saying. Children and young people from Black backgrounds can be very expressive in their use of hand gestures when talking, or explaining their frustrations, in a similar manner to those who come from Italian heritage. It is important to recognise these gestures as a form of body language and not to confuse them with aggression.

Making eye contact is a sign of confidence and attentiveness in most western countries and assumptions are made that those who look away while we are talking are being rude or not listening. In other cultures, such as Asian and Middle Eastern, eye contact is considered aggressive or confrontational and not making eye contact is seen as a sign of respect, especially to elders. In the teachings of Islam, it is recommended for men to look down in the presence of women as a sign of respect and to preserve dignity. For these reasons, some children and young people may be reluctant to make eye contact with adults. It is also important to understand that in many cultures prolonged eye contact between males and females is not condoned, or even at all, as it is seen as showing sexual interest.

If you notice that children and young people's body language is not like you own, try to consider their cultural background in order to understand why this might be. If you are unaware of what their cultural practices are, you can research this or discuss these with them. This will help the children and young people feel more confident with you and help build stronger relationships.

3. Hair Care

Taking care of your hair is important in **all** cultures. For young teenager's appearance matters, as this often affects the way they are seen by others. BAME children and young people in the YCS estate have specific needs in this area and it's important that they are able to access appropriate hair products and are encouraged to take good care of their hair.

How to support Black children and young people to look after their hair:

- The textured hair that Black people have needs to be treated with care: unlike other types of hair it can become very dehydrated if it is left to dry naturally and can break.
- Make sure there is access to hair products appropriate for their hair type, in the case of textured hair it is advised that shampoo is not used only conditioner as shampoo can dehydrate the scalp.
- If their hair type requires specific hair creams just check that they are aware this should be applied after cleaning but before they dry their hair, and that it is left in their hair to look after it when drying.
- Ensure they are encouraged to comb their hair only when wet with a wide toothed comb after ensuring it is covered in conditioner; this helps ensure knots don't build up which are difficult to remove other than cutting.
- Check that they know that when they dry their hair after showering not to over dry it as this can cause the hair to become brittle and break.
- Be aware that getting their hair wet is problematic as children and young people will need to put hair cream on before it dries, or it will become brittle and be prone to breaking.

Be aware that styling the hair of Black children, such as braiding, can take up to 4 hours and may not be able to be completed in one sitting. It is important to support this hair care as it promotes self-identity and children and young people to feel happy in their appearance. Children and young people may also need to use a du-rag, also called a wave cap to look after their braided hair when sleeping as it stops the wave pattern shifting. The only time any other person's hair should be touched is if you are braiding it, it is rude to touch someone's hair or ask to because it is different and, as well as being disrespectful, you may cause damage to brittle hair.

Black children and young people should be encouraged to be proud of their hair. To support this, it is important that they are able to find positive role models with similar haircuts in the media. Be aware that some children from different BAME backgrounds, for example Rastafarians and Sikhs, will not want their hair cut for religious reasons.

How to support Sikh children and young people to look after their hair:

- In Sikhism, kesh (sometimes 'kes') is the practice of allowing the hair to grow naturally as a mark of respect to God. This practice is one of The Five Kakaars, which are outward displayed symbols professing the Sikh faith.
- The hair is combed twice daily with a kanga, another of the five Ks, and tied into a simple knot known as a jooora or rishi knot. It is important that you allow Sikh children and young people to have the time to comb their hair and tie it up.

It is not acceptable for a Sikh to be asked to remove their head covering. This includes staff and visitors, as well as children and young people.

4. Food

Children and young people across the secure estate represent many different cultures and religious beliefs, both of which can require differing dietary needs. It is important that these different dietary needs are supported, and that children and young people are allowed to adhere to any relevant practices. For example, it will be important to find out whether the child or young person is a vegetarian, and if they do eat meat, which meat they cannot eat: Muslims, Jews and Rastafarians do not eat pork, Sikhs don't eat beef and many Hindu's don't eat meat at all. For some religions the type of meat is also important, Muslims only eat Halal meat and Jewish people only eat Kosher meat. It also important to recognise individual choice as well as religious requirements, many children and young people are now supporting vegetarianism and veganism, denying these dietary requirements is just as discriminatory as denying a religious requirement.

When there are special events across the year it is good practice to ask children and young people from relevant backgrounds to help to decide the specialist menus to celebrate the event, such as Gypsy Roma & Traveller (GRT) History month, Ramadan, Black history month etc.

5. Clothing

The way **we all** dress reflects our own personal identity, culture, and associations with particular groups or a fashion trends. Children and young people often feel the need to express themselves through dress and may sometimes also feel pressured to follow the latest street fashions.

Children and young people from minority communities may choose to wear particular clothing which identifies them with the culture of their community, or wear western clothes, which reflects their identity in other ways e.g. with music and sport etc. Those who choose to keep to the dress in the code of their culture may cover their head or not be able to show their legs and bare arms.

Islam advises both men and women to dress modestly which includes wearing longer, looser clothing. The teaching is extended for Muslim women, who are advised to cover their hair and chest when they are in the presence of men whom they are not related to, thus many Muslim women wear a hijab. Others may choose to wear a niqab, which covers the face but leaves the eyes uncovered. Additionally, many males wear a **Taqiyah**, a small rounded skull cap, to cover their head and loose clothing to cover themselves.

Children from Sikh backgrounds may wear a **Patka**, this is a preferred alternative to the turban which is a requirement for all adult males to wear, and many females are also opting to follow this requirement. This covering allows the hair to avoid contact with pollutants and keeps it tidy. Where ever possible children and young people should be allowed, and supported to wear, clothing that enables them to express their cultural or religious identity.

6. Events

Cultural events can play a significant part in reinforcing and celebrating young people's identities and helping them to feel accepted within a Secure Setting. They are also a helpful way of educating both staff and young people on cultures different to their own.

Having a multi-cultural events calendar visible for all to see is a great way to stimulate interesting, building up anticipation for those who wish to attend and helping to stimulate queries and discussions on relevant areas.

During specialist events, such as Black History Month, it is important to make efforts to ensure that all relevant groups e.g. Caribbean, Northern Africa, Southern Africa, American etc, are represented and avoid a focus on one particular group.

Set an example by re-enforcing the importance of such events and encouraging all children and young people to participate and learn about others from different backgrounds. It is useful to acknowledge that much of what is shared during these events are not necessarily taught as standard in the school curriculum so could be new to most of the children and young people in your setting.

7. Support the Education and Awareness of Other Children and Young People

It is likely that children and young people will question what could be perceived as different ways of supporting those who are different to them. This provides a helpful opportunity to raise awareness that different needs require different types of support e.g. the differences in types of hair outlined above.

When there is a special event or meal taking place, take the time to discuss its significance and meaning with all children and to outline what they can learn from taking part. If children and young people from Black, Asian and other minority backgrounds feel confident to do so encourage open discussions about the traditions of their families. Whilst doing this it is important to make sure that children and young people who are not yet this confident or prefer to remain private about their identity are not inappropriately put under pressure.

Other suggestions to support learning and awareness include:

- Displaying posters of multicultural role models,
- Having equality representatives and ally's promoting inclusive behaviour
- Creating a resource library- seek help from parents, teachers to build upon information to share
- Using activity-based learning and quizzes

Finally, strive to create a culture and environment where there is a clear understanding of inappropriate behaviours and how these should be handled. Keep in mind that as a member of YCS staff you are a role model and your response to these matters sets an example to those around you.

*** For Support Specific to the GRT Children and Young People Please Read the YCS Effective Practice Briefing: Working with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Communities.**