



National Centre for Excellence in Residential Child Care

Creating and sustaining safer spaces for black children in care

This practice document comes with great thanks to Barnardos for their report <https://weareseen.org.uk/projects/safer-spaces-for-black-children-in-care-in-england>

The aim of this blog is for Residential Child Care settings to evaluate their current and to create new practice (there's a lot of references and resources to follow up!). You might use this blog as basis for a training day?

An invitation to brave space by Micky Scott Bey Jones



Introduction

Being informed leading to initiating safe spaces where children and young people can feel heard.

- Children who are Black and mixed heritage are overrepresented in the care system compared with the general under-18 population.
- Where disproportionate representation exists, it is likely the result of the compounded effects of poverty, discrimination, and racism (NSPCC 2021; Bywaters et al. 2019; Children’s Commissioner for England 2017; Kirton 2016).

- Evidence consistently shows that Black children in care face a range of additional challenges, including higher rates of placement instability, educational underachievement, homelessness and other issues, which are shaped by structural inequalities and systemic racism.
- Research also indicates increased exposure to behaviours labelled as ‘risky’, although these are best understood as contextual responses to instability, trauma and exclusion, rather than individual deficits (DfE 2025; Selwyn et al. 2008; Lammy 2017; Bywaters 2014).

Part one

Reflection

Thinking about black identity

Encourage	Think	Practice
<p>Actively broaden perspectives on and understanding of Blackness, Black heritage and Black identity. Recognise them as dynamic and multi-dimensional, rather than a single category or fixed.</p>	<p>Think critically about Black identity by moving away from rigid, simplified or static categories and instead acknowledging that Black identity is shaped by intersectional histories, migration, embodied differences, language, faith, spirituality, culture, relational social positioning and everyday experiences of racial hierarchies.</p>	<p>Practice should be rooted in cultural safety, and relational identity-safety. Also, practise direct engagement with young people – asking, listening and learning from the identity practices and norms that are meaningful to them, and adapting routines, resources and responses accordingly.</p>

Exploration and reflection

How would your home answer the following questions

- What is preventing Black children and young people from feeling safe in care placements? What can we do to change this?
- What represents a ‘safe space’ for Black children and young people in care placements?
- How can we support Black children and young people in care placements when it comes to understanding their identity and feeling connected to their culture and community?
- How can we support Black children and young people in care placements to feel empowered and informed when it comes to using their voices?

We recommend setting some time to read and absorb the report – maybe with others as a home, as an organisation, with others RIs, RMs, RCCWs.

<https://weareseen.org.uk/projects/safer-spaces-for-black-children-in-care-in-england>

Part two

Safe spaces

Learning for change

‘Safe Spaces’ = environments, relationships, support systems, and transitions that offer the best possible experiences and outcomes for children and young people who may not be able to live permanently with their own families.

The research reinforces that creating truly safe environments requires more than policy or procedure; it demands relational trust, cultural awareness, cultural safety, and active anti-racist practice.

What makes safe spaces (page 22 onwards)?

1. Physical Safety: feeling protected through structure, appropriate monitoring and a calm, predictable atmosphere that offers security and stability.
2. Identity and Expression: being free to express and represent oneself authentically and visibly without fear, judgement, violation or discrimination.
3. Cultural Safety: having one’s heritage, cultural identity and everyday practices recognised, respected and embedded within daily life in care.
4. Emotional Safety: feeling heard, understood and cared for by empathetic, attuned adults who provide consistent support, where love alone is not enough.

What makes a space unsafe? (page 28 onwards)

1. Lack access to their history and heritage, with no role models, mentors or trusted adults who share aspects of their lived experiences, or to resources where they can learn about Black identity.
2. Encounter experiences of racism that are not validated or challenged.
3. Live with racism and prejudice, without knowing what mechanisms exist to challenge discrimination or where to seek protection.
4. Cannot express their Black identity on their own terms, instead feeling compelled to mask, code-switch or endure accusations of being ‘whitewashed’.
5. Experience relational instability, with frequent placement changes and absence of consistent, trusted relationships to explore and negotiate identity.

Part three – taking your learning to your development plan

With what you have read you might use this as part of your development plan?

Recommendations for Children’s Social Care Policy (including in your home)

Do you have a policy and practice document that includes how you do these things?

- 1: Promote nuanced understandings of Black identity as complex**, socio-historically shaped, intersectional and informed by the voices and lived experiences of children and young people
- 2: Embed cultural humility** by developing a working environment that encourages professionals to approach cultures, identities and lived experiences.
- 3: Embrace Anti-racist practice** through proactive challenging of discrimination including implementation of processes for reporting, addressing bias and monitoring disproportionality.
- 4: Promote identity-sensitive placement decisions** with clear guidance on the importance of matching children with carers who can meet their cultural, racial, ethnic, religious and other identity needs.
- 5: Strengthen cross-sector collaboration to identify and dismantle systemic bias** across all areas that impact care-experienced Black children’s lives including schools, community services and social care.
- 6: Provide targeted training and resources for carers and professionals** to give them the knowledge they need and confidence to support children’s intersectional identity needs.

Recommendations for Social Work Leadership & Frontline Practice (includes Residential Child Care!!!)

- 1: Embed cultural safety in everyday social work practice** by understanding Black identity as complex, socio-historically determined, intersectional and child-led.
- 2: Build trust through authentic engagement** by listening to children and involving them in decision making and care planning.
- 3: Create and maintain safe spaces – physical, cultural and emotional**, which allow for cultural expression and development, and which are free from discrimination, stereotypes and essentialised labels.
- 4: Prioritise peer networks and mentorship**, as well as targeted social integration programmes for Black Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children as part of an integrated safeguarding approach.

5: Strengthen advocacy and participation through structured mechanisms where children can raise concerns safely, including peer support groups and cultural networks.

6: Deliver responsive, trauma and oppression informed and healing-centred training including on cultural competence, anti-racist practice and intersectionality.

7: Recruitment processes that assess attitudes and beliefs around cultural humility and anti-racism.

8: Ensure relational consistency by minimising placement moves and reduce staff turnover where possible. Children in all care settings should have access to key workers

9: Monitor and evaluate practice that introduces accountability measures for cultural safety in care settings, and which directly listen to children.