

Information leaflet

Supporting a Child's Cultural Heritage

Children of minority heritage need active support from their special guardians to ensure they have a strong and positive relationship with their cultural identity. Through understanding their child's cultural heritage, a special guardian can help them sustain a sense of continuity with their past and their place in the world. In addition, supporting a child to have a sense of pride in their heritage will help them deal with any discrimination that may take place within their lives

If a special guardian does not share their child's heritage, they should try to make connections with others who do and who can provide them with relevant information and insight. This in turn will help the special guardian to understand how best to support the child.

Children's sense of who they are and who they can be develops from the world around them and the people and relationships they have in their lives.

If a special guardian does not share the child's heritage they should try and develop relevant knowledge and insight and be sensitive to any racism the child might experience. It is important to acknowledge that discrimination can take place and help the child develop ways of coping with the challenges they might face as a result of their heritage.

Relationships and role models

Children's relationship with their culture and heritage will be strengthened and developed by contact with other people who share, identify with or support the same culture and heritage.

Children need positive role models or mentors and regular contact with people who share their background. If possible special guardians should be encouraged to try and grow a network of people around them who reflect the child's cultural background.

If there are no existing links between the child and their culture, a special guardian can develop them through local community organizations and events run by people who share the child's background or faith group.

Family and daily life

- It is important that children feel they are in an environment where their culture and traditions are part of their lives and are respected and understood. Professionals should encourage special guardians to do the following:
 - Learn about the history and culture of the child's birth family.

- Remember that practical things such as food, hair care, social activities, language, clothes, film and music are important when forming a child's identity.
- Keep up traditions such as meals, festivals, dress, community and religious events which are important aspects of the child's heritage.
- Find opportunities to immerse a child within their culture and reinforce this with a visit to their country of origin if that is possible. Such experiences can provide a child with a stronger sense of belonging. Hearing first hand accounts of life lived in their culture from relatives such as aunts, uncles, grandparents or family friends will also inspire them and inform their understanding of their own history.
- Remember how important food is to all of us. Foods should be familiar in appearance and taste to the child wherever possible and should be prepared in line with their religious beliefs.
- Accept that all children are different and embrace their cultural identity in different ways. Special guardians should listen to the child and support them in their choices.

Practical tips for professionals to pass on to special guardians

- Special guardians should work with their child to develop the skills they may need when faced with hostility or discrimination directed at them as a result of their heritage.
- When special guardians are finding pictures for life story work they should ensure they include photos from both sides of the child's birth family.
- If a special guardian wants to take their child to a religious ceremony, they should let their social worker know and if possible discuss the plans with the child's parents. Changing a child's religion is something that special guardians cannot do without the birth parents' or court's permission.
- Special guardians should try and choose books, toys and music that represents and respects children's backgrounds and highlights diversity.
- Newspapers such as Asian Times and The Voice can be a familiar sight to a child and can help them stay up-to-date with developments and stories within their community.

Key points

- If a special guardian does not share the child's heritage encourage them to try to make connections with others who do so and who can provide them with information and insight into how the child may be feeling and how to best support them.
- Children's sense of who they are and who they can be develops from the world around them and the people and relationships they have in their lives.
- Children's relationship with their culture will be strengthened and developed by contact with other people who share, identify with or support their heritage.
- It is important that children feel they are in an environment where their culture and traditions are part of their lives and are respected and understood.



Useful links

Black History Month 365

www.blackhistorymonth.org.uk

Black History Month 365 website with news and resources for Black families throughout the year

Race Equality Foundation

www.raceequalityfoundation.org.uk

The Race Equality Foundation promotes race equality for communities and professionals.

'Strengthening Families, Strengthening Communities' is an inclusive evidence-based parenting programme designed to promote protective factors which are associated with good parenting and better outcomes for children.

The Institute of Race Relations

www.irr.org.uk

The Institute, independent educational charity, has produced a series of key print and multi-media publications on aspects of racism including black British history which are suitable for use in formal and informal educational settings. Some of these are available to purchase, others are produced as free downloads from this site.

The Voice online

<http://www.voice-online.co.uk/>

The Voice offers news, lifestyle, faith, food, and culture updates aimed at the black community.

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