

The themes: what practitioners should do to address these and why it is important for the boys?

Trust: Services need to engage and work actively, not just with children, but with their parents or carers, to strengthen family support and promote trust.



So, what should practitioners' do? Recognise the barriers to trust, externally acknowledge these, explore the impact and develop collaborative strategies to overcome these. Accept that it is likely to take continuous effort to build said trust, so be persistent and try different approaches – we know it is not one-size-fits-all.

"My youth worker doesn't put any pressure on me; we have meaningful conversations as he pays attention to the issues I bring to him before giving his opinion and advice, which makes me feel like an equal. I hate people making decisions on my behalf."



Multiple and complex needs: such as (but not exclusively) temporary and permanent exclusions from school, criminal exploitation, racial discrimination, subject to child in need or child protection plans, disabilities.



So, what should practitioners' do? Complex and often overlapping needs can often feel overwhelming, so it is important to instil a sense of hope for the child and their family or carers.

Analyse the underlying causes of offending behaviour and the complex interplay of multiple needs thoroughly and develop sentence plans accordingly, sequenced as appropriate.

"A lot of things he can do, just day-to-day stuff, getting myself organised – you know what I mean? When I came off remand, he helped get stuff sorted out for me and get me back on track... Recently, I moved out of my parents' house, so he helped me with that."



The ethnicity of staff and diversity awareness: Think about diversity in terms of 'intersectionality', a term used to explain how different aspects of our identities (for example, gender, race, class, sexuality, ability, physical appearance, height, and so forth) combine to create unique advantages (often described as 'privilege'), or disadvantages (often described as 'discrimination').

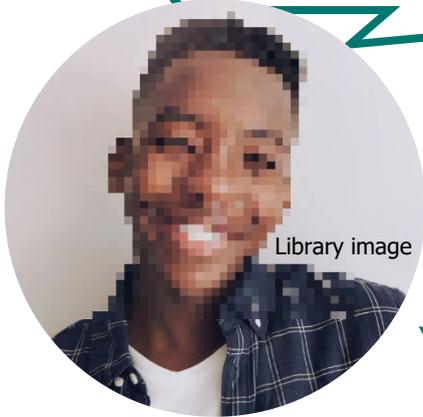


So, what should practitioners' do? In circumstances where practitioners are of, and not of, the same ethnicity, it is important that you explore what it is like being black for the *specific* child, in their *specific* circumstances and within their *specific* landscape, so that you can understand the lived experience of the child.

Openly discuss race issues and ethnic diversity; some of these discussions may well require honesty about how racial identity and cultures drive inequality. Therefore, it will also be important to consider what aspects of the child's identity and/or circumstances will support the strive for justice and

potentially give examples of positive movements in your local area. Recognise and celebrate all elements of diversity to illustrate that you value heritage.

"It's kind of like he tried to relate things to me; he wasn't talking to me in a manner where it's more, like, you've got to be, like, older and more mature. He still kind of talked to me, like he still knew my age and stuff; he talked to me on a good level that I would understand."



"I can tell that he kind of took that [ethnicity] into account as well because he talked to me about Lewis Hamilton because I was talking to him about how I want to get into engineering and vehicle maintenance and stuff when I'm older."

So, he was talking about how Lewis Hamilton has created a programme for young black teenagers to get involved in stuff like that. So, he's understood things from that perspective but it's not like he talked to me awkwardly about it, he talked to me in a nice manner, so in everything he said, there's not one thing he said that made me feel uncomfortable, to be honest."

"I have a really good relationship with my worker... he looks after me and keeps me in line. He is black, so I feel that he knows what I'm going through. He makes sure that I keep making good decisions when I'm out".

Trauma: From the cases we inspected, it was evident that almost all of the boys had experienced loss and significant trauma in their formative years, and experiences of racial discrimination had been a feature of their lives.



So, what should practitioners' do? Understand the importance of an effective relationship in facilitating change and create an environment where the child and their family or carer feel safe to begin to see themselves differently and are equipped to build on these changes.

Practitioners should work in a manner which upholds the core values of trauma-informed practice, including:



Safety – Ensuring the physical and emotional safety of the child and their parent or carer.



Choice – where possible, give opportunity for choices – for example, around appointment times and locations. Provide clear and appropriate messages around rights and responsibilities, and consequences to enable the child and their parent or carer to make informed choices.



Collaboration – maximise opportunities for collaboration and sharing of power – for example, ensuring that they are an active part of their assessment, planning and reviewing/evaluation. As part of implementation and delivery, encourage collaboration with other services and positive role models, supporting the concept of social capital.

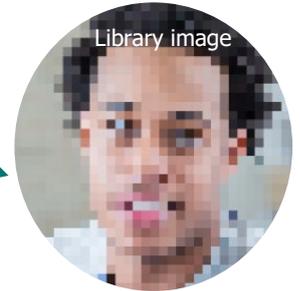


Trustworthiness – make tasks clear and maintain appropriate boundaries, and be respectful and professional. Be consistent and follow through with what you say you are going to do; if you are able to inform the child, or their parent or carer, and explain why.



Empowerment – prioritise empowerment and skill building, provide opportunities to practise the skills developed, so you can bear witness to and acknowledge the progress and positively reinforce it. Promote an increase in personal responsibility and self-belief in ability to change.

One of the boys interviewed described their area as a “*war zone*” and explicitly stated that getting involved in gang culture would lead only to getting killed or sent to prison.



Acknowledgement of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs): Linked to trauma, we should pay increased attention to understanding the impact of ACEs.



So, what should practitioners’ do? Understand the impact of trauma and ACEs. They can ‘rewire’ brain structure through conditioning (McCartan, 2020; Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, 2019; Metzler et al., 2017), resulting in a permanent state of arousal – that is, fight, flight, freeze and so on. Be aware:

“The psychological and emotional impact of the trauma, including ACEs, may emerge at different times in a person’s life; therefore, not necessarily directly after the traumatic experience but possibly months, years or decades later”.

~McCartan, 2020

Therefore, it is important to abide by the core values above, connect with the child, understand the functionality of any behaviour that they are displaying, as it may not be connected to current external triggers. Show care and consistency and, where possible, provide “*holistic, supportive, and appropriate social-emotional interventions*” (McCartan, 2020).



“Yeah, yeah, literally, that’s what came to my mind – it’s more like therapy, to be fair... we were talking about things that affect me... so that was beneficial to me. It made me understand more things that I didn’t really like to think about, different aspects. I actually realise some things were kind of important that I kind of brush off but it was good to talk about it because it kind of made me see things that were beneficial.”

Deprivation: A striking feature, across eight of the nine YOSs, was that children grounded their offending in their environment and the influence of their peer group, which was an ongoing challenge and cause of stress.



So, what should practitioners’ do? Understand their families are affected by the issues linked to social disadvantage and the limitations this can have on their lives. Inter-generational racism is part of their lived experience, and the impact of this cannot be ignored by workers trying to form relationships with children and families. Any hesitancy in relation to engagement should be considered in this context in the first instance.

Engage in open discussions around the factors which have contributed to their offending behaviour. In addition, discuss culture, history and their experiences when trying to understand their current identity and the identity they desire to have.

Increase the visibility of successful young black and mixed heritage men, in discussions, examples used in interventions and posters in your premises. Seek a wide range of examples – not just those engaged in sport and music.

You should empower children and their parents or carers to have aspirations and high expectations of themselves.

Experiences of discrimination: A number of boys highlighted that they felt stereotyped by the criminal justice system, based on their ethnicity, and that this led to them being treated unfairly. Experiences of discrimination were not limited to the criminal justice system; one child spoke of racism he had experienced at college, which had forced him to drop out of his course as he had feared for his safety.



So, what should practitioners' do? Openly discuss it, agree that this is not good enough, challenge where you see it.

Educate and empower children and their parents or carers to challenge discrimination and advocate on their behalf.

Celebrate diversity and promote a sense of belonging.



"I think, on paper, I'm not that bad, but once people see me, all the assumptions follow: big, black and bearded".

"It has an effect on me, how society views it, as if you're black you act in a certain type of way... you're just thinking how come I get profiled because of the colour of my skin?"

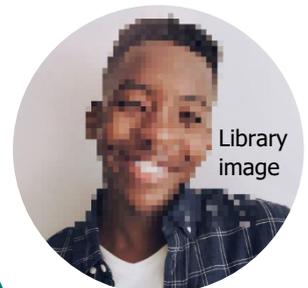
Relationships with the police: The boys spoke extensively about their experiences with the police. They felt that they were targeted and profiled, in a way which did not happen to their white friends. The boys demonstrated a degree of acceptance that they are often treated differently based on their ethnicity.



So, what should practitioners' do? Openly discuss it, agree this is not good enough, challenge where you see it.

Educate and empower children and their parents or carers to challenge discrimination and advocate on their behalf.

"I'm ready for it. I'm a young black boy, so it's normal. It's not a good thing because I'm targeted but I'm used to it".



"It happens all the time when I'm with my white friends; the police don't really go for the white boys, and if they do, they just pat them down. With us, they make sure they search us proper and always try to pull something off. Now, in Nottingham, I have not been stopped once... I feel that I get treated better up here because they have no preconception of me – in London, they were always trying to harass me to get a response".

Programmes and interventions: Boys need to understand the purpose of interventions.



So, what should practitioners do? Actively engage the child, and their parent or carer in the assessment and planning stages, so the interventions are tailored to the individual and to ensure that they understand the purpose.

Be attentive to all that the child is saying, verbally and through their non-verbal communication.

Be alert to any barriers to engagement and progression and collaborate with the child and their parent or carer regarding how you will overcome these. For instance, failure to respond could be linked to painful or shameful memories rather than a disregard of the content of the intervention. This links with the themes above, around trauma and ACEs; practitioners require a high level of skill, support and reflection to ensure that they are attending to the underlying issues.

Provide the right balance of support within interventions delivered. The children need challenge in the interventions – this was recognised by the boys we spoke to; some described their YOS interventions as 'tick box' or a 'check-in', but where workers invested in getting to know them and in carefully challenging them, the boys were more likely to engage and benefit. There was a sense that the boys did not know what it was that they needed until they received it.

Have persistent high aspirations for this group of children; the persistence is important, as it is often difficult for them to have these for themselves, especially when seen in the context of the disproportionality highlighted within the thematic inspection.



"She's more than a YOT worker, like, I wouldn't expect, like, she goes over the top. She gives really good advice. Say, I want to do construction or coaching, she'll break it down to me, she helps me with a plan... They told me about what I could sign up for realistically and they helped me get a training mentor thing with Tottenham."