



Cymru
National Day Nurseries Association

Factsheet

A photograph of two young children, a girl on the left and a boy on the right, playing with colorful blocks. The girl is pointing at a green block. The boy is smiling and looking at the camera. The background is a bright, out-of-focus indoor setting.

Anti-racist Practice - Impact of Racism on Children's Mental Health and Well-Being

Wales

Anti-racist Practice - Impact of Racism on Children's Mental Health and Well-Being

The aim of this factsheet - is to support the childcare, playwork and early years sector to develop through individual professional learning. The content of this top tips, easy read factsheet has been taken from the resource ['Promoting and developing race equity and anti-racist professional practice in our childcare, playwork and early years environment: An introduction resource for early years practitioners in Wales'](#)

Reading and engaging with some of the wider work on anti-racist practice will provide space for reflection, discussion, further research and action for change in everyday practice. This resource considers some tools and approaches for you to explicitly explore race equity and anti-racism within the first steps of your own work whilst also considering your holistic work in equality, diversity and inclusion.

The first five years of life play a vital role in shaping a child's future. Children's emotional well-being influences how they learn, interact with others, manage emotions and develop confidence. By identifying and addressing concerns early, we can support children to thrive and build strong foundations for lifelong well-being.

What are the impacts of racism on the mental health and well-being of young children?

Racism in wider society can take many forms, from name-calling and exclusion to discrimination and violence. In Wales, the Welsh Government has set out a vision to create an Anti-racist Wales by 2030. Research tells us that children notice differences from a very young age. Children begin to develop ideas about identity, belonging and difference through their experiences of family, community and wider society. We also know that family and societal attitudes towards race can influence children's developing views. If children feel that parts of their identity, such as their skin colour, hair, language, family, culture or religion are not valued or respected, this can affect their self-esteem, confidence and sense of self-worth.

Research suggests that racism can affect children both directly and indirectly. This may occur through personal experiences of racism, witnessing racism towards family members, or through wider inequalities that impact families and communities. Experiences of racism can create feelings of stress, anxiety and exclusion and may affect children's emotional well-being.

Repeated exposure to racism can affect:

- Self-esteem and confidence
- Emotional regulation
- Feelings of safety and security
- Sense of identity
- Sense of belonging
- Overall well-being.

Children who experience racism or exclusion may feel different, unwanted or unsupported. Some children may become withdrawn and anxious, whilst others may communicate their distress through frustration, anger or changes in behaviour.

As highlighted throughout our anti-racist practice resources, the principle of **Cynefin** (belonging) sits at the heart of the Curriculum for Wales. All children should develop a strong sense of identity, belonging and pride in who they are. Feeling valued and represented within the setting is an important protective factor for children's well-being.

Understanding adultification bias

Research has identified concerns about **adultification bias**, where global majority children may be perceived as older, more mature, more challenging or less vulnerable than children of the same age.

This can lead to:

- Different expectations being placed on children
- Children's behaviour being interpreted differently
- Harsher responses from adults
- Children feeling unfairly treated or misunderstood.

These experiences may have a negative impact on children's confidence, well-being and self-esteem. As practitioners, it is important that we reflect on our assumptions and ensure that all children are treated fairly, consistently and with compassion.

What might practitioners notice?

Young children may not always have the language to explain how they are feeling. Experiences of racism, bias or exclusion may be communicated through behaviour.

Practitioners may notice that a child:

- Becomes quieter or more withdrawn than usual
- Appears less confident during play
- Avoids certain children or situations
- Becomes upset, frustrated or angry more easily
- Speaks negatively about themselves, their appearance or identity
- Appears anxious or unsettled
- Seems reluctant to attend the setting
- Shows a reduced sense of belonging within the group.

These behaviours may have many causes. However, practitioners should remain sensitive, reflective and curious when considering children's emotional well-being.

Working in partnership with families

- Parents and carers are experts on their own children. Building positive relationships with families helps practitioners better understand children's experiences, strengths and needs
- Getting to know the families who use our settings requires intentional relationship-building. This means taking time to understand family structures, languages spoken at home, cultural traditions and the aspirations families have for their children
- Open dialogue with parents, carers and community members strengthens relationships, trust and well-being for everyone involved and supports a greater sense of inclusion and belonging.

Supporting young children from global majority backgrounds' to maintain positive mental health and well-being

- Make parents and carers from diverse backgrounds feel welcomed, included and valued within the setting
- Build trusting relationships with families and create opportunities for regular communication
- Recognise that young children may find it difficult to express emotions verbally and may communicate distress through behaviour
- Create opportunities for children to explore feelings through play, stories, conversations and creative experiences

- Ensure children see themselves positively represented through books, displays, resources and learning experiences
- Use stories, role play and discussion to promote empathy, inclusion and respect for differences
- Support children to develop pride in their identity, culture, language and heritage
- The more we normalise talking about race and diversity, the less race becomes a taboo subject
- Challenge stereotypes, exclusion and discriminatory behaviour when it occurs and in line with your policies and procedures
- Reflect on personal assumptions, unconscious bias and professional practice.

Children's well-being is influenced not only by individual interactions but also by the culture, values and everyday experiences provided throughout the whole setting.

Reflective Questions

- How can you ensure that all experiences, activities and interactions promote children's self-esteem, confidence and sense of belonging?
- How effectively do your resources and learning experiences reflect the diversity of Wales and the wider world?
- How confident are you in recognising when racism, bias or exclusion may be affecting a child's well-being?
- How do you help children develop positive feelings about their identity, culture, language and family background?
- How do your relationships with families support children's emotional well-being?
- How do your own values, assumptions and experiences influence the way you respond to children and families?

Reflections and commitment to practice

Learning about the impact of racism on children's mental health and well-being reinforces the importance of creating inclusive, anti-racist environments where every child feels valued, respected and included.

The early years are crucial in shaping children's confidence, identity and sense of belonging. By creating environments where children see themselves positively represented, where diversity is celebrated and where discrimination is challenged, practitioners can support positive emotional well-being for all children.

Building strong relationships with families, reflecting on our own practice and engaging in ongoing professional learning are important steps in developing anti-racist practice and supporting every child to thrive.

Further support and reading

- Promoting and Developing Race Equity and Anti-racist Professional Practice in our Childcare, Playwork and Early Years Environment: An Introduction Resource for Early Years Practitioners in Wales <https://ndna.org.uk/RaceEquity&Anti-RacistFS>
- NDNA Cymru Embedding Anti-racist Practice online course <https://ndna.org.uk/Anti-RacistPractice>
- NDNA Cymru free resources and sharing good practice <https://ndna.org.uk/Anti-Racist>
- NDNA Cymru case studies <https://ndna.org.uk/Anti-RacistCaseStudies>
- DARPL professional learning for Childcare, Play and Early Years <https://rebrand.ly/DARPLCPEY>
- Creating an Anti-racist Culture in Settings Toolkit <https://rebrand.ly/DARPLAnti-RacistGuide>
- Welsh Government Anti-racist Wales Action Plan <https://rebrand.ly/WelshGovAnti-Racist>
- Curriculum for Funded Non-maintained Nursery Settings <https://rebrand.ly/Non-MaintainedSettings>
- Curriculum for Wales <https://hwb.gov.wales/curriculum-for-wales>
- The Colour of Us: Using Books and Stories to Explore Diversity and Inclusion <https://ndna.org.uk/anti-racist-practice-in-wales/>

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National Day Nurseries Association

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for early years

Factsheet

Our factsheets are written by early years experts for the early years workforce. Most NDNA factsheets are free to our members.

NDNA is the national charity and membership association representing children's nurseries across the UK. We are a charity that believes in quality and sustainability, so we put our members' businesses at the very heart of ours.

We are the voice of the 21,000-strong nursery sector, an integral part of the lives of more than a million young children and their families. We provide information, training and advice to support nurseries and the 250,000 people who work in them to deliver world-class early learning and childcare.

See the full range of NDNA factsheets at www.ndna.org.uk/factsheets

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