

Adultification 7 Minute Briefing

1. Background

National and local reviews have highlighted incidents where it appears some young people have been treated differently from their peers by professionals and the criminal justice system. As defined in statutory guidance, [Working Together to Safeguard Children](#), the term 'child' refers to anyone under the age of 18. Adultification is a type of bias which skews the perception of certain children leading to professionals viewing them as more grown up than their peers which can lead to lapses in safeguarding and unfair treatment.

2. Contexts for adultification

There are various contexts in which adultification occurs, all of which relate to a child's personal characteristics, socio-economic influences and/or lived experiences, for example - transphobia, homelessness, young carers, domestic abuse, poverty, being a Cared For or Care Experienced child. [Research](#) has shown that black children are more likely to experience adultification, where professionals think about black children differently from their peers and do not recognise their own discrimination and bias. [Child Q's](#) review where a young black girl was strip searched inappropriately is an example of adultification.

3. Intersectionality

Intersectionality plays a part in this concept. Age, gender, ethnicity and sexuality all affect how children are viewed by professionals. Black girls can be seen stereotypically as innately hypersexual, and this can impact on how they are identified as victims of Child Sexual Abuse (CSA). Another stereotype is that black children are seen as resilient and strong. Find out more in this [NSPCC learning resource](#).

4. Impact on children

The effects of adultification on children can be devastating: They are left unprotected, vulnerable to abuse and exploitation, no longer turning to agencies for help due to lack of trust. They can receive harsher treatment in the criminal justice system, being held responsible for crimes as if they are adults, rather than exploited and abused children. They have worse outcomes educationally and it affects self-esteem and mental health.

5. Curiosity

[Professional curiosity](#) is always key when safeguarding children. Do not assume, ask questions and seek to understand who the child is first.

Professionals need to be actively anti-racist and be aware of the issues facing black children and other disadvantaged groups. They should be educated and informed, challenging their own bias. Professionals should seek to protect all children.

6. Reflective practice

Professionals need to step away from thinking in stereotypes and to think more reflectively and critically about their own practice in supervision and collectively in multi-agency settings.

Language used about children needs to be considered. Rather than “streetwise” “resilient” “angry” and “aggressive” we need to be saying “traumatised” and “needing protection”. Strengths based anti-racist training is key.

7. Challenge

Equality, diversity and inclusion [training](#) must be integral to all professionals safeguarding children to challenge their bias and to reflect critically on these issues.

No child should be “treated less favourably” and all professionals should read the SSCP [Cultural Consciousness guidance](#) and [7MB](#) and put it into practice.

All professionals to have a responsibility to challenge each other.

Read more: [Adultification Q&A Adultification bias within child protection and safeguarding](#),
[What is adultification](#)

Additional Information

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Published: November 2024
