

Bitesize learning: **Adultification**

What is adultification?

“Adultification is a form of bias where children from Black, Asian and minoritised ethnic communities are perceived as being more ‘streetwise’, more ‘grown up’, less innocent and less vulnerable than other children. **This particularly affects Black children, who might be viewed primarily as a threat rather than as a child who needs support.**”

(Davis and Marsh, 2020)

“Children who have been adultified might also be perceived as having more understanding of their actions and the consequences of their actions.”

(Georgetown Law Center on Poverty and Inequality, 2019)

Who does it impact?

Adultification can affect children of all ethnicities and can be associated with other factors such as poverty, homelessness, children in care or children involved in the criminal justice system. However, it is widely accepted that adultification particularly impacts Black children and is a form of racial bias.



Listen: [NPCC Learning – Black girls’ experiences of sexual abuse](#)



Read: [NSPCC Learning - Safeguarding children who come from Black, Asian and minoritised ethnic communities](#)



Read: [The College of Policing - Children and young persons](#)

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Examples

A child is not treated like a child. A level of understanding and communication beyond the child's developmental age might be expected of them. This includes communicating to or referring to the child as if they were an adult.

A Black child is given a criminal sanction through police intervention where White children would be excused from the same actions on the grounds of their age.

Safeguarding and the welfare of the child have not been considered or have not been given appropriate weight.

Considerations for case handlers

It is important that complaint handlers can identify where adultification may have occurred as a form of racism in cases that involve Black, Asian or minority ethnic children.

Children under 18

Children under 18 years of age should be referred to consistently as children – for example where a child's name needs to be anonymised a pseudonym such as 'Child A' should be used.

Checklist for case handlers

Responsibilities of the case handler:

- Has every attempt been made to ensure that the child's voice is heard?
 - Has the case handler offered an Achieving Best Evidence (ABE) interview where appropriate to a complainant who is a child? Has the impact on the child been discussed in the final report or outcome letter?
- Should extra weight be given to the fact that the allegations involve a child?
 - Is this reflected in the severity assessment and case decisions?

Considering the responsibilities of the officers:

- Are there any expectations that officer/s should have made appropriate adjustments when dealing with a child, such as:
 - Allowing for the actions of the child (such as perceived non-compliance) - is this considered in the final report and case decisions?
- Have you considered any specific policies, guidance and law that might apply?
- Have you considered the safeguarding obligations?
 - Was an appropriate adult involved?
 - Was the child held incommunicado?
 - Was follow up safeguarding needed?
 - Was the proportionality and necessity of detention considered?
 - Have appropriate records been made about policing interactions and use of powers?
 - Has the child been expected to act like, or take on responsibilities of, an adult?



Read: [IOPC National recommendation responses - EIP searches of children](#)

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