Introduction
ISCB completed a Serious Case Review (SCR) into the deaths of two siblings, aged 10 & 8. There had been a history of domestic violence. One of the areas of learning from the SCR was that staff did not evaluate the impact of ethnicity, cultural norms and religion when assessing and managing risks arising from domestic violence. This guidance has been developed to assist staff in exploring the impact of families’ ethnicity, cultural norms and religion in relation to domestic violence. Organisations will decide who is most appropriate to explore these areas.


How to better assess risks from domestic violence
It is useful to have some knowledge of the family’s culture, ethnicity and religion and positive examples of practice within their culture, ethnicity and religion.

It is important for professionals to be able to explore with families how their unique and community characteristics impact on their views, experience and the risk of domestic violence. To find this out professionals need to maintain their professional curiosity.

While it is important to be respectful of a service user’s culture, ethnicity and religion it is equally important to be very clear that when there is a harmful practice it is not acceptable to blame this on culture, ethnicity or religion; these are excuses and not reasons for their actions.

Some guidance:
- Do not make assumptions that all people from that country / faith / culture do things the same way
- People from the same country / faith / culture do not necessarily have any common understanding about anything in relation to family life
- Professionals need a broad understanding of some of the concerns that might occur from some parts of the world
- Be appropriately questioning
- Some people use culture as their excuse for their actions and assume that workers will not question their description of their faith, culture and ethnicity for fear of being discriminatory
- This is not discriminatory but protective of children
Some questions to ask the adults:

- Ask open questions
- Tell me about the way your family practices your religion / culture?
- Tell me about how you deal with domestic violence in your family?
- How is domestic violence handled in your country of origin?
- What does marriage mean to you?
- Did you choose your partner?
- How did you meet your partner?
- How did you decide to marry your partner?
- What does being with your partner mean to you?
- What does marriage mean to your family?
- Tell me what you think about keeping your family together?
- Tell me what you think about separation in marriage?
- How would your community look at you if your marriage ended?
- What does your religious leader say about separation in marriage?
- What do you think about following court orders?
- What do you think about what agencies expect of you?

Don’t be afraid to seek details or to explain that the law in this country is different or we understand things differently.

Some areas to explore with children / young people:

- Their cultural and religious practices, how they observe their culture / ethnicity / religion
- What their culture, ethnicity, religion means to them, what it means to them to be part of a particular cultural, ethnic group / practice a particular religion

Some questions to ask the children:

- Tell me about what you and your family do to observe your religion / culture?
- What do you like about being *(name ethnicity / religion)*?
- What don’t you like about being *(name ethnicity / religion)*?
- How did your parents decide to get married?
- Who makes the decision to get married in your culture / family?
- Do you feel like you act like two different people at home and outside of home? If yes, what are the differences?

This will give you a better understanding of how the child / young person has interpreted their culture, ethnicity, religion and how it impacts upon them.

If you would like further information about the impact of cultural / religious practices in relation to domestic violence you can liaise with specialist Black Minority Ethnic Refugee (BMER) services. A list of specialist BMER services is available from Islington’s Family Information Service: www.islington.gov.uk/fis