



# Foundational theories and knowledge Working with cultural diversity Practice Paper

## 1. Introduction

This practice paper provides DCP practitioners with an understanding of the principles of working with people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Key concepts and fundamental skills of culturally safe practice as it relates to working with people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds are explored.

This practice paper should be read in conjunction with the [Relationship Based Practice Practice Paper](#) given relationship based practice underpins culturally safe practice. Additionally, DCP practitioners should refer to the [DCP Practice Principles](#), in particular [Cultural safety](#) for further information. Refer also to [Identify and respond to the cultural needs of children and young people who are culturally and linguistically diverse \(CALD\)](#) within the Supporting children and young people in care chapter of the Manual of Practice.

## 2. Diversity in culture and language

The term 'culturally and linguistically diverse' (CALD) is commonly used to describe people who have a cultural heritage different to that of the majority of people from the dominant Anglo-Australian culture. CALD does not include Aboriginal people and DCP practitioners should refer to the [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle Practice Paper](#), [Family Led Decision Making for Aboriginal Families Framework](#) and the [Aboriginal Practice Directorate intranet page](#) for further information about culturally safe practice with Aboriginal children and young people, their families and carers.

Section 10(1)(c) of the *Children and Young People (Safety) Act 2017* outlines that "account should be taken of the culture, disability, language and religion of children or young people and, if relevant, those in whose care children and young people are placed". Cultural safety is essential in all interventions and recognises that culture can contribute positively to children and young people's safety, strengths, development and wellbeing. Through understanding the cultural needs of children and young people, DCP practitioners will be empowered to work effectively to support the best possible outcomes for children and young people.

South Australia is home to people from more than 200 culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds<sup>1</sup>. Statistics from the 2021 Census reflects that around 130,000 households speak a language other than English with the main languages being Mandarin, Italian, Greek, Vietnamese and Punjabi. There is also significant religious diversity within the population, with South Australians reporting affiliation to a variety

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<sup>1</sup> South Australian Government, the Department of the Premier and Cabinet, 2019



of religions including Christianity, Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism, Baha’i, Australian Aboriginal Traditional Religions and Judaism<sup>2</sup>.

The DCP Practice Approach strives to be responsive to the needs of people from a CALD background, respects people’s diversity of culture and promotes cultural safety. It is important to understand that although this practice paper outlines principles and skills related to culturally safe practice, there is no ‘one size fits all’ approach to working with people from a CALD background. There is significant diversity among people from CALD backgrounds and within different families, communities and cultural groups. It is therefore important for DCP practitioners to understand culture on an individual basis rather than generalising across a cultural group.

The below factors may be relevant to explore with individuals including:

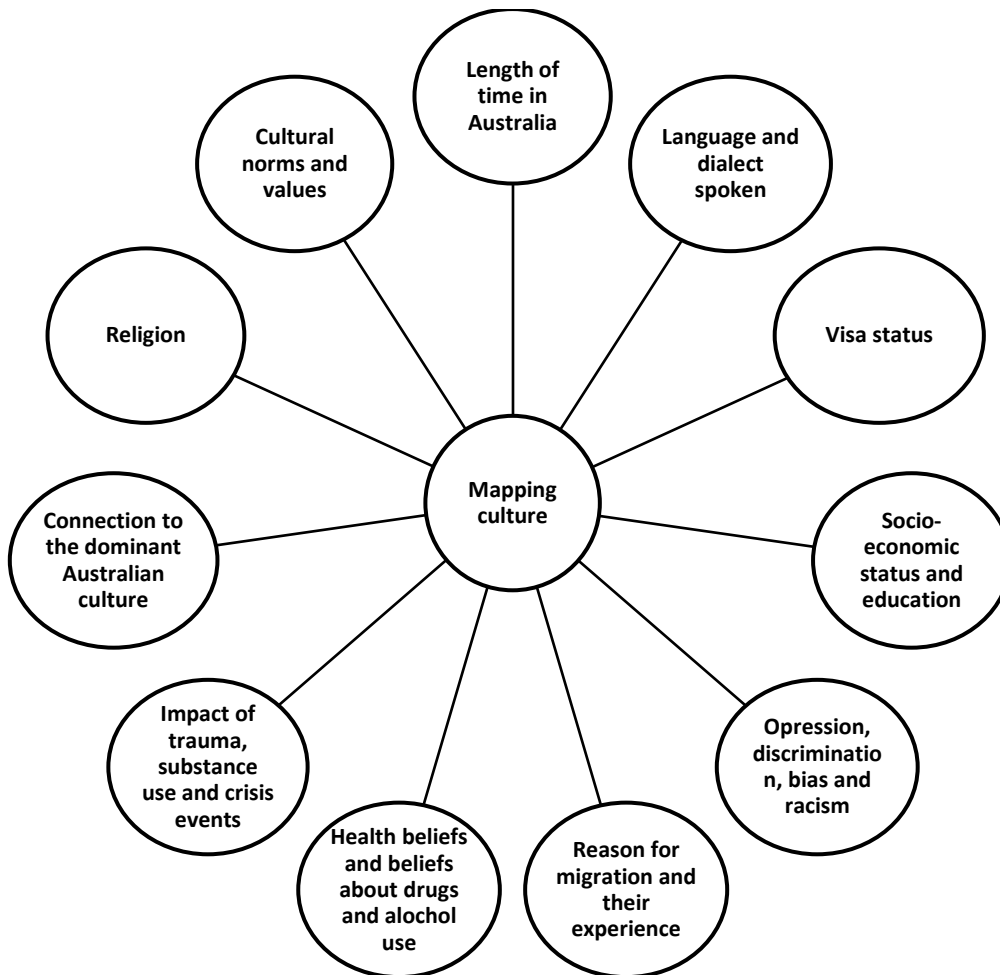


Image adapted from the Culturagram developed by Dr Elaine Congress

<sup>2</sup> South Australia 2021 Census All person QuickStats, Australian Bureau of Statistics, <https://www.abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/quickstats/2021/4>



### 3. Understanding migration and settlement experiences

The migration and settlement experiences of people from CALD backgrounds can be very different. Settlement experiences can be influenced by a range of factors including the reason for leaving one's place of origin, the nature of the migration journey and the level of support received on arrival to Australia.

When exploring migration and settlement experiences, it is important to understand the term 'new and emerging communities' (NEC). NEC refers to any community that has experienced a significant percentage increase in the number of people arriving in Australia in recent times. People from NEC may require additional supports in the settlement process.

Some children and young people from CALD backgrounds and their families may have sought asylum or have been refugees. This may mean that they have experienced living with hardship, war, violence and persecution, and may be living with the impacts of trauma. Other experiences may also include human rights violations, forced dislocation, political repression, loss or separation from family members and experiences in refugee camps. Children, young people and families who have spent time in refugee camps may have experienced significant disruption to their education or employment, limited access to healthcare and prolonged periods of uncertainty, in addition to traumatic experiences within the refugee camp. It is also important to understand that refugees may have had to leave their country of origin with little or no planning. See the [Trauma Practice Paper](#) and [Trauma Lens Practice Paper](#) for further information about working with people who have experienced trauma.

The impact of settling in Australia may have been extremely difficult for some people. This may have involved learning a new language and navigating new systems, lifestyles and social norms. Many people new to Australia will experience feelings of loneliness and isolation in addition to grief and loss related to leaving their former country, disconnection from family and associated worry about family and community members who may be in unsafe or uncertain situations. There also may be stress related to employment or education challenges, such as difficulties finding employment when experience or qualifications from other countries are not recognised.

The impact of trauma experiences can be significant and contribute to fear of the child protection system. Some people may have experienced corruption and poor treatment by government services or have no experiences or poor experiences of child protection services in their country of origin. A person's history and the impact of these experiences should be explored sensitively to ensure a positive working relationship is developed and maintained.

Understanding the migration and settlement experience of people is critical to ensure they receive culturally responsive supports. People of refugee and migrant background who have arrived on certain Visa Subclasses are eligible for settlement services within their first five years of arrival. For more information regarding refugee and humanitarian visas, please see [Department of Home Affairs](#). Those eligible for settlement services are considered more vulnerable due to their limited time in Australia, lack of understanding of systems and possible trauma experiences. DCP practitioners should seek information about how long families have been in Australia. If people have only recently arrived, additional time will be required to explain the child protection system in South Australia and what is expected of families engaged with DCP (possibly including acceptable child rearing practices – see Section 4 below).



DCP practitioners should also seek to understand the migration status of their clients. Migration status can create additional concern and complexity for children and young people and their families, particularly if their migration status is unclear or if visa conditions are contributing to people's stress or the complexity of the matter. Migration status can also affect access to basic services (for example Medicare funded services). DCP practitioners should seek to clarify migration status so they can best offer support and services that will be accessible for the family. A lack of understanding about a person's current circumstances can contribute to re-traumatisation.

In addition to the challenges that may have been experienced as a result of migration and settlement, people from CALD backgrounds may have experienced racism and discrimination. These experiences can contribute further to stress and trauma. Racism can negatively impact a person's socioeconomic status (for example through limiting employment opportunities), access to services and participation in society. Further, self-esteem, wellbeing, health, identity and mental health can all be adversely impacted by racism and discrimination. Developing an understanding of a person's experiences of racism and discrimination will support the working relationship and enable the DCP practitioner to ensure referral pathways and support services are responsive to individual needs.

## 4. Differences in child rearing practices

Approaches to parenting may vary between cultural groups. For many families culture contributes positively to the safety of children and young people. While cultural differences may impact on parenting, the safety of children and young people needs to be the paramount consideration and DCP practitioners must be clear about what is considered harmful parenting and poses unacceptable risks to children and young people. DCP practitioners should refer to the [Assessment Framework](#) for further information. Safe differences in parenting, such as those that contribute to strong cultural connections or wellbeing, should be recognised and celebrated.

It is important to understand how parenting roles and responsibilities impact on attachment development for children and young people. Some families parent in a collectivist way where care is provided by a network of caregivers, while other groups may have clearly identified primary caregivers. This highlights the need to understand the unique practices of particular cultures and families. Refer to the [Attachment Practice Paper](#) for further information.

When working with families from a CALD background it may be helpful to separate the parenting intent from the action. By understanding the intent of the behaviour, DCP practitioners may be able to offer alternate parenting strategies that meet the intent without causing harm. It may also be helpful to seek cultural advice from DCP Multicultural Services to ascertain whether the parenting practice is considered a cultural practice. Some cultural practices may be considered harmful and even illegal in South Australia, even if they were not intended by the parent to harm the child or young person.

## 5. Culturally safe practice in action

Culturally safe practice is important in all aspects of child protection intervention with families, including assessment, family preservation, placement decisions and placement support, case planning for children and young people in care, and transitioning from care. The Manual of Practice includes guidance for working with children and families from CALD backgrounds. For further information see Engagement



considerations in the [Engage with the family](#) section of the Intake, investigation and assessment chapter of the Manual of Practice, and the Gather information to inform assessment drop down in the [Gather information, assess and prepare to develop the case plan](#) Case planning, review and annual review chapter of the Manual of Practice.

DCP practitioners can seek support from DCP Multicultural Services at any stage of work with children and young people, their families and carers. Refer to the [Multicultural Services](#) intranet page for more information regarding requesting support from DCP Multicultural Services.

The key to good outcomes for children and young people from a CALD background is the quality of the relationship between the DCP practitioner and the child or young person and their support system (including families and carers). Refer to the [Relationship Based Practice Practice Paper](#) for further information. Developing relationships across cultures requires a respectful approach underpinned by good communication and flexibility. DCP practitioners should critically reflect on their personal beliefs, values, views to understand how this may impact engagement (refer to the [Bias in Child Protection Practice - Practice Paper](#) for further information). Supervision has a critical role in this type of reflective practice. Refer to [Professional Supervision](#) for further information.

Genograms and ecomaps can be a useful tool in navigating kinship and support systems for people with a CALD background. By developing an understanding of family and important relationships, DCP practitioners can identify support and safety factors for families as well as any additional support needs. The use of genograms and ecomaps can also assist DCP practitioners to understand any cultural factors or practices that may influence relationships, roles and service engagement. For example, cultural beliefs may heavily influence the types of medical treatment that some families will be willing to use. It is critical that DCP practitioners complete ecomaps with a cultural lens applied (see Consider the specific placement needs of the child or young person, and Scope for kinship carers in the [Gather and assess information to identify placement pathways](#) section of the Place a child or young person in care chapter of the Manual of Practice). Further, DCP Multicultural Services can provide advice and information to best navigate the impact of cultural issues on a person's network, relationships and support systems. Refer to the [Multicultural Services](#) intranet page for further information.

A person's experience of trauma in addition to particular cultural beliefs and values may impact on their engagement with DCP practitioners and other service providers. Developing trust between the person and DCP practitioner will take time. The DCP practitioner is responsible for developing and maintaining effective working relationships and must understand the importance of trust. Demonstrating curiosity about people's culture and cultural practices, empathy and compassion regarding a person's unique experiences, and respect and appreciation regarding cultural differences greatly assist to form and maintain positive relationships.

#### Key considerations:

There are a number of considerations for DCP practitioners to maximise their engagement with people from a CALD background including:

- use appropriate terminology and avoid stereotyping
- develop cultural awareness and acquire knowledge about other cultures, including demonstrating a genuine interest in learning from the family about their culture



- develop cross-cultural communication skills, including determining whether an interpreter is required and how the interpreter will provide their services (for example via telephone or in person; please refer to the [Interpreting and Translating Procedure for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse \(CALD\) Families](#) for further information)
- explore whether gender issues need to be considered (for example, consider if it is appropriate for a female or male worker to attend the home visit)
- collect and record accurate information about cultural, linguistic and religious identity (refer to the [C3MS Life Domains User Guide](#) for further information)
- determine the most culturally appropriate referral pathway.

## 6. Placement of children and young people in care from a CALD background

Appropriate cultural placement matching of children and young people provides natural opportunities for carers to promote the child or young person's cultural connection through daily activities, and promotes a sense of belonging to community and cultural safety. When attempting to identify suitable placement options for children and young people, consideration must be given to the [Culturally and linguistically diverse child placement Policy](#) and consultation with [DCP Multicultural Services](#) is recommended.

## 7. Culturally safe case planning for children and young people

Case planning must be a collaborative and culturally safe process. It is critically important that all children and young people from a CALD background are supported to have strong connections to their culture and that this is reflected in the case plan. This will positively support their development, wellbeing and identity. For children and young people in care, it is critical that DCP practitioners complete the Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Identity Support Tool (CALDIST) as part of the case plan, in collaboration with the child or young person's care team including involving the [DCP Multicultural Services](#) team as required. For children and young people who identify as being from CALD communities **and** as being Aboriginal, then both the CALDIST and the Aboriginal Cultural Identity Support Tool (ACIST) will need to be completed. Refer to the [Develop the case plan](#) in the Case planning, review and annual review chapter of the Manual of Practice for further information.

## 8. Reflective practice

DCP practitioners are better able to develop their skills when they engage in reflective practice. DCP practitioners are encouraged to seek feedback about their practice with regard to working with CALD people, and to reflect on and discuss this feedback in supervision.

Think about a family, child or young person you have worked with from a CALD background:

- What factors may have been impacting on their circumstances or situation (consider factors in section 2)?
- How you took steps to educate yourself about the culture of the family?
- How you demonstrated that the child or young person's cultural identity was valued and respected?



- How you engaged and consulted to develop the CALD IST?

DCP practitioners are encouraged to refer to the [DCP Practice Principles - Cultural Safety](#) for further reflective practice opportunities.

## Document control

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