Children Visible by Colour in Cornwall

Suggestions for parents and carers raising BME (black and minority ethnic) and dual heritage children who are 'visible by colour'

Written by Kowetha in Partnership with Barnardo's

Believe in children
Barnardo's

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Kowetha

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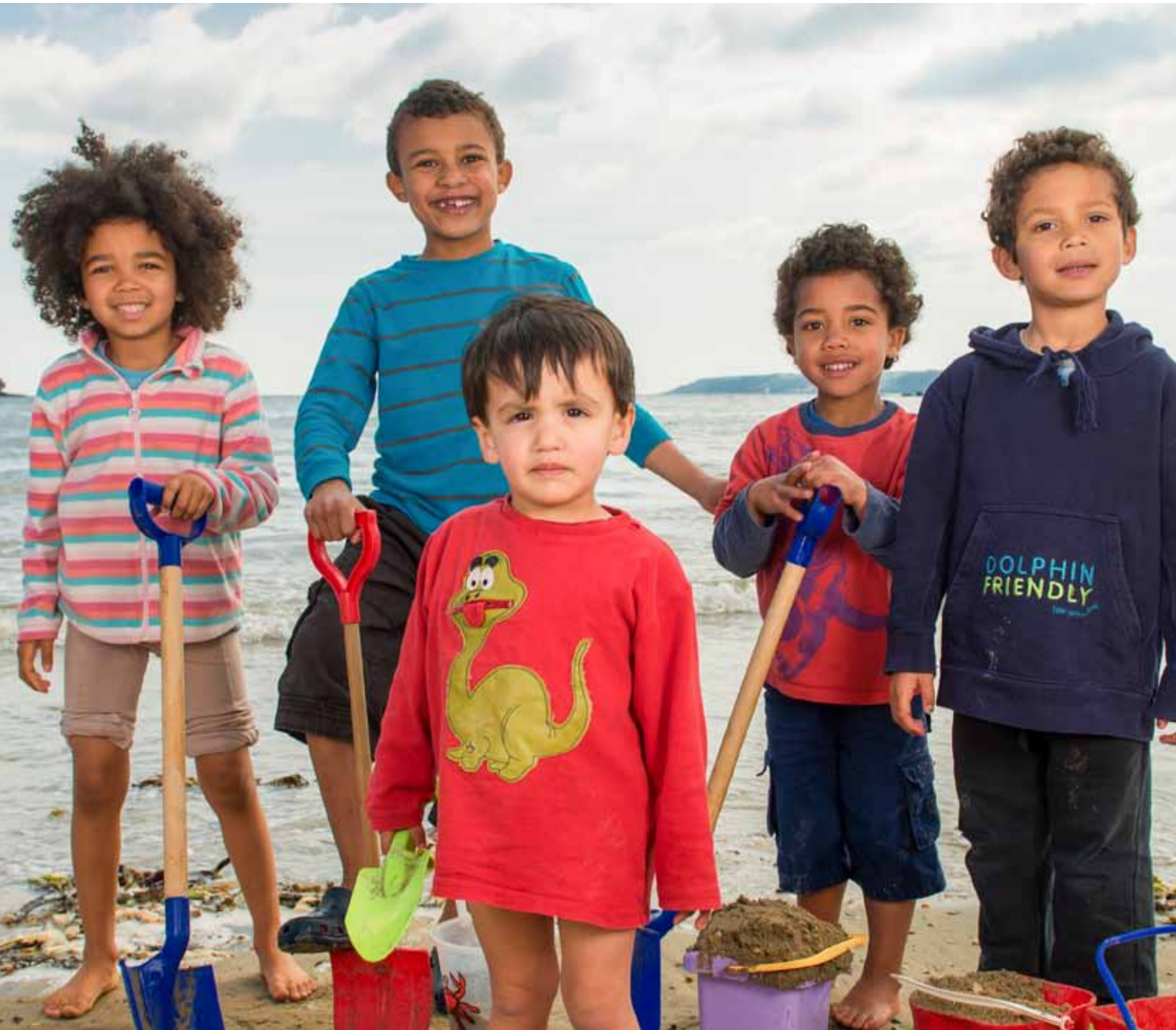

Ginnie Odetayo carried out the background research and wrote this handbook in consultation with other Kowetha parents.

Owen Gill and Jenny Lewis, Barnardo's Midlands and SW, supported the development of this handbook.

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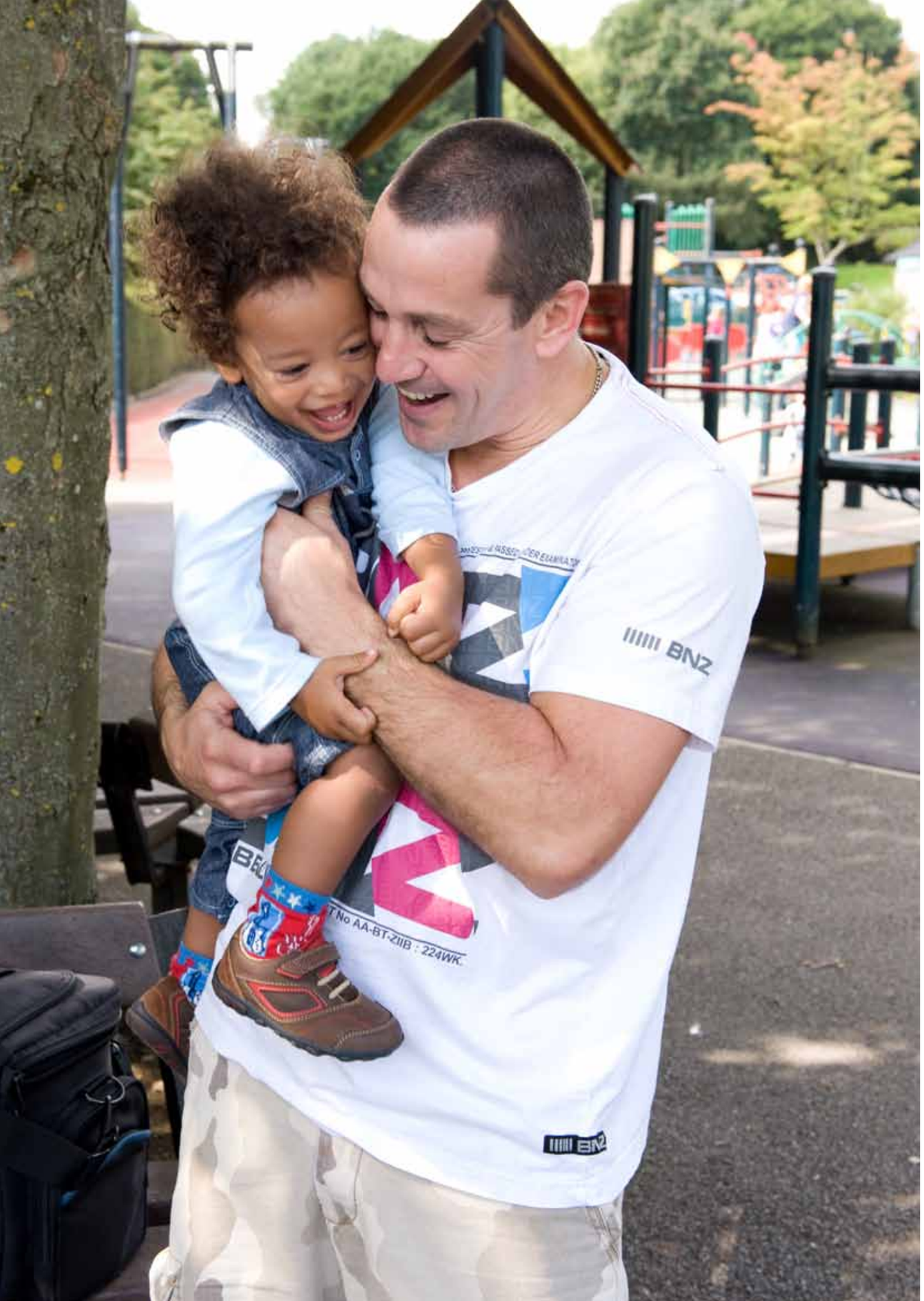


Foreword

I welcome this handbook. Barnardo's is very pleased to be associated with Kowetha and to support them in sharing their experiences with other parents in Cornwall.

We know from our work up and down the UK about the importance of celebrating the lives of BME children who are living in predominantly white areas. The handbook will be an important reference point for parents in Cornwall for talking with their children about racial identity, and supporting their children to grow up firmly believing in their own worth.

The overall message from this handbook is about how well the children are doing in their families and communities. And yet Kowetha also recognizes that sometimes in predominantly white areas such as Cornwall, BME and dual heritage children may face discrimination. The handbook gives practical suggestions about dealing with discrimination if it is encountered

Based on the group's direct experience the handbook also emphasises the value of networking with other families with similar backgrounds.

Barnardo's believes that the best results are achieved when we work in partnership with parents and children. This handbook is an excellent example of this approach. By supporting Kowetha in the development of this handbook we are acknowledging our belief that parents and children are the real experts in their lives and if we are to have an impact on those lives we have to acknowledge and support that expertise.

I sincerely hope that the handbook leads to increased confidence on the part of parents and others in Cornwall about how children can be supported and issues of discrimination, if they do occur, can be effectively addressed. And I am also sure that the handbook has many positive lessons for similar families in other predominantly white areas throughout the UK.

Hugh Sherriffe
Regional Director
Barnardo's Midlands and South West

What is this handbook about?

This handbook is written by parents for parents in Cornwall. It is based on our own experiences of bringing up children of BME and dual heritage children who are visible by colour in predominantly white Cornwall.

We celebrate the successes and joys of our children. And yet at the same time we recognize that they may face particular challenges as they grow up.

Our belief is that it is in no-one's interest – least of all our children's – to deny or fail to discuss these possible challenges. So our aim in producing this handbook is to start a conversation among families in Cornwall who are bringing up children with backgrounds similar to ours'.

The handbook covers a number of important areas. These are:

- affirming our children's identity
- looking at the impact of possible racism and supporting our children to handle racism effectively if they encounter it
- supporting our children in their schools and working with our children's schools so that their backgrounds are celebrated
- supporting our families and children in our local communities.

Towards the end of the handbook we share our experiences of setting up the Kowetha community group for families like ours in West Cornwall. Our hope is that this may lead to parents in other parts of the county setting up their own groups.

We also provide a list of useful contacts in Cornwall.

A note on terminology

In this handbook we use the term *BME (black and minority ethnic) visible by colour* to describe the children in our group. This is because our group has been set up for families who have children who 'stand out' because of their colour and are immediately perceived to be different in predominantly white Cornwall.

The term 'visible by colour' is the one which makes most sense to us to describe our families' and children's experiences.

In focussing on children who are 'visible by colour' we do not however want to suggest that other families in Cornwall who are white ethnic minorities such as Gypsies, Travellers and those from non-UK backgrounds do not experience particular challenges and difficulties.

Introduction. We are parents too....

This handbook has been put together by a group of parents living in West Cornwall. We are part of a voluntary community group called Kowetha. We want to share our experiences and suggestions for bringing up children who are 'visible by colour' in Cornwall.

What is Kowetha?

The word Kowetha is derived from the Cornish words Kowethes (companion) or Kowethas (society). Kowetha began in December 2010, when a group of families got together to socialise, share lunch and let our children play together.

In some of our families two parents and their children have the same background. Some of the parents in the group are in mixed couples (for instance a white father with a partner of African or Caribbean heritage or a father of Asian heritage with a white mother) and have dual heritage children. Parents who themselves are dual heritage also come to the group.

Some of the group are from single parent families, others are from step or 'blended' families or from adoptive families. The group has some white parents who are either in a single parent or two parent household are bringing up BME or dual heritage children.

What all of our families have in common is that we are bringing up children who are black or minority ethnic or dual heritage and are 'visible by colour'.

'Visible by Colour' means what exactly? Why get together on that basis?

Our children are wonderfully diverse individuals. Their skin colour is only part of their identity. However, in Cornwall, as in other predominantly white areas in the UK, their colour is more 'visible' and therefore their difference is more obvious than in more multicultural areas. Most of our children represent the only child in their class or even school who are 'visible by colour'.

We started Kowetha, therefore, for two main reasons – firstly for our children to spend time with other children of diverse racial heritage, for them to see that it's perfectly normal to have a different skin colour, and to offer them an environment, where, as one of the Kowetha children said, *'I'm not the only one for a change'.* Secondly, we wanted parents to be able to connect and share experiences and ideas; to provide a sort of informal support forum.

We love Cornwall; many of us and most of our children were born here, either that or we have chosen to move here to raise our families. We embrace the county and culture of Cornwall, our home, and we also celebrate our diversity and, of course like any parents, we want the best for our children.

But we need to acknowledge that children who are 'visible by colour' in Cornwall can sometimes experience challenges and difficulties.

As parents there is of course a natural and at times powerful tendency to want to avoid difficulties or even to deny that difficulties will ever exist. There is perhaps an equally strong pressure not to 'put your head above the parapet' and talk about racial background. But it is by acknowledging who we are and acknowledging difficulties when they arise and attempting to confront them that we most truly support our children.

Producing the handbook

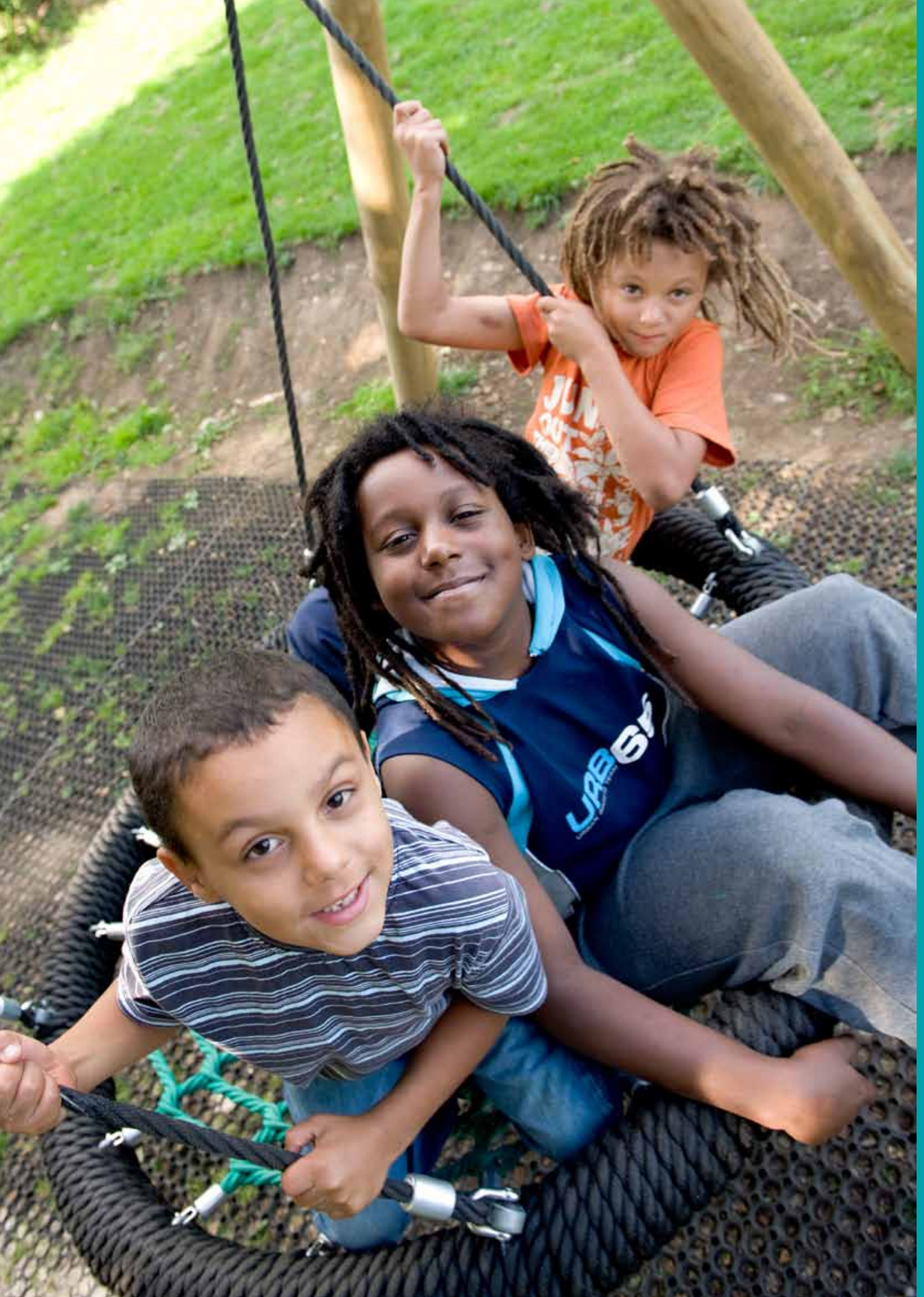
This handbook is a collaborative effort on the part of the Kowetha parents. In total fifteen parents, all members of the group and all of whom are bringing up children in West Cornwall who are visible by colour, took part in preparing the handbook. They have been part of both group and individual discussions and shared their experiences and what has worked for them.

One of the members of the group who has research and writing experience (Ginnie Odetayo) took on the role of coordinating the group/individual discussions and producing a draft of the handbook for comment by group members.

Ginnie also collected the stories and experiences from the group that are used (in green) to illustrate the handbook throughout.

These stories and experiences were copied down in note form, written up and 'signed off' as accurate by the group members involved.

To avoid any possibilities of identification some non essential details have however been altered.



Affirming our children's identity

We start this section with a conversation that a Kowetha parent had after bumping into an old school friend she had not seen for many years. They had gone to the same school in Cornwall together.

My friend had been one of only three black and dual heritage children in our school which had over 1000 students. I'm white, but now that I was raising dual heritage children of my own in Cornwall, I asked her what it had been like for her to grow up here. She went on to describe the awful bullying and verbal abuse that she had been exposed to throughout her childhood years because of her colour. This had happened to her both in our school and in her local community. One of the saddest things was that whilst it was happening, she hadn't felt able to tell her parents. She had felt too ashamed and awkward. She was worried about upsetting them. She told me that the rejection she had suffered, as a result of having a different skin colour in Cornwall, had affected her well into her adult life.

Current research and accounts from young people, shows that this sort of rejection, bullying and exclusion can still affect children and young people who are visible by colour in Cornwall.[1]

Some parents and carers reading this will be all too aware of the trauma of racism and prejudice; others will have no personal knowledge or experience of this. Some parents and carers reading this will already have had to support their children through difficult incidents at school or in the community; whereas others might never have contemplated that their children could be subject to someone else's prejudice.

The fact remains that children who grow up visible by colour in a predominantly white area, very often suffer the negative effects of being 'different'. Many of these children still don't get the support or help they need when experiencing this sort of prejudice. As parents and carers we can work together to change this pattern and ensure that children are protected.

In the rest of this section, we highlight the need to talk to children of all backgrounds about different skin colours in an informed and positive way. We also look at how we can help our children to feel confident and secure about their colour, heritage and identity. Lastly, we turn our thoughts to how we might talk to our children on the challenging topic of racism.

To begin with though, let's answer a question that often gets posed...

Is all of this necessary? Aren't kids colour-blind?

This is something we often hear, and Kowetha parents notice that here in Cornwall, there can be a tendency to avoid talking about race or colour. We understand that it might seem simpler to assume that 'children don't notice', or that 'colour doesn't matter', or that 'we're all the same', but it's not true. Research in the US, equally relevant for the UK, has shown that children not only recognise race from a very young age but also develop racial biases by ages three to five.[2]

We can illustrate this with a local example of our own:

My sister-in-law was visiting us and offered to pick up my child from our village school. She was horrified when a younger white child, around 4 years in age, looked at my black daughter and said 'Dirty girl, dirty girl, look at that dirty girl'. The mother, obviously embarrassed, hushed her daughter and tried to get her into their car as quickly as possible.

This child did indeed notice a colour difference – and whilst his interpretation may have been an innocent mistake – it caused hurt for the girl towards whom the comments were directed and caused concern for his aunt.

By avoiding talking about race and colour with our children, we can inadvertently send them the message that colour is a 'taboo' topic, which shouldn't be spoken about. This can lead them to forming unhealthy conclusions both about themselves and others.

We've often heard it said that talking about race or colour with children, 'puts ideas in their heads' and can create problems that weren't there before. But when you speak to your children about colour difference in a positive and informed way, what you are doing is ensuring that those 'ideas in their head', are good ones! For example:

When our mixed race son was only four, he was looking at himself in the mirror and started talking about how his skin looks 'better', when it gets paler in the winter. We, asked him what he meant by this and we were shocked to hear him say that he wanted to look like the 'other boys' at school. He was the only mixed race child in his class. We had some long chats after this about his skin colour – explaining why it was different to the other boys, and why he was absolutely perfect the way he was. We realised though that we should have given him this reassurance much earlier than we'd thought necessary.

The 'colour blindness' idea, therefore, is not only, untrue; it can be damaging for children for whom being 'visible by colour' is an important part of their life experience.

So – talk about it!

For parents of children of all backgrounds, it's a good idea to start positive discussions about colour difference from an early age – even if the children have not yet mentioned it to you themselves. As one of our group says:

Children are very likely to think about these things, about colour, without saying it. I want to make sure they know it's OK to talk about it, that it's normal and natural. I want them to talk to me, their parent about it, before they get their views or ideas from anyone else.

For some of us, these discussions might feel awkward, particularly if it's a topic that we've avoided or felt uncomfortable discussing until now. But it doesn't have to be anything complicated. This is the experience of one parent from the group;

For a long time I thought it was better not to talk about race with my child. I didn't want to make her feel awkward or uncomfortable by pointing out that her colour was different to other pupils in her class, but it became obvious that she was noticing her difference by herself. She started talking about how she wanted straight 'yellow' hair and lighter skin. She wanted her hair flattened and tied back tightly so her curls didn't show. She was noticing her differences by herself, only in a way that made her feel bad about herself.

I decided to change tack – we started gently, talking about the fact that people have different skin colours and why her heritage is so special. We found a hairdresser who knew how to cut afro hair well, and now she loves wearing her hair down, loves her colour and is more confident about herself.

One of the most important things we can do for our children is to teach them to filter out any negative messages about their colour and to promote good and empowering messages. We need to be our children's cheerleaders and to fill them with good feelings and associations about their colour. As one mum says:

I make sure my kids are very clear about why they are the colour that they are. I explain where mummy and daddy come from, and how special and loved they are. I talk about their beautiful colour in a positive way, so that they can embrace it and love it for themselves.

Another dad says:

My children are of mixed parentage, I always tell them that they are 'the best of both', the best bits of mine and their mum's colour and heritage.

As parents, we can equip our children to feel confident about their skin colour, and we can create a culture in our families where matters of colour and difference can be spoken about positively and freely. In doing so, we also help our children to speak honestly to us should they go through any negative experiences as a result of their colour.

Teaching our children about their heritage...

Teaching our children about their heritage is an important part of helping them to be confident about their colour. It is empowering for a child to be able to speak confidently about their unique background, whatever that may be. Consider this example:

My daughter was born and raised in Cornwall, yet she often has other children assume that she's from Africa. From an early age, she has been able to respond confidently to these comments, explaining that her Mum was born in East Africa, her Dad was born in England, and that she was born in Cornwall. She takes pride in these facts and it empowers her to take ownership of her identity, and also teaches other children that you can be black and Cornish!

There is strength in having a healthy awareness of your cultural heritage, be that as a child of the established Black British community, a child whose parents recently immigrated to the UK or a child who is growing up in a family where no one shares his background (for instance a dual heritage child being brought up by a lone white parent). As one dual heritage father in the group who grew up in an all-white community comments:

When growing up, it was really important for me to know that I was of African descent, it was important for me to know about my roots and strengthen my identity. In my early twenties, I visited Africa for the first time and I actually realised how very English I was! All the same, there is definitely more security in knowing, rather than not knowing where you are from, and what your heritage is.

For some children, links with extended family members who share the same background may still be active. For these children it's very beneficial to make visits either in the UK or abroad to see these family members. For others with less active links, we can use photos, story books and videos to teach our children about their racial heritage.

One parent says:

We started collecting books and stories about Ghana, its history, custom and cultures. Even though my husband hasn't returned to Ghana since he was five years old, we feel it's important to sustain an awareness and a link to the country – we may well all visit together at some point when the children are older.

It's also important to demonstrate to our children that having a different skin colour is, today, a very normal part of British society. As one dad illustrates:

We try to regularly read books set in the UK, which have black children featured as some of the key characters. The books are not talking about diversity or difference or anything, they just feature children of other colours in the stories and adventure. It's another way of ensuring my daughter sees herself reflected back in the images she sees around her.

Whatever our approach, we should teach our children about their heritage and diversity in a way that is celebratory and gives them a series of positive images and facts about their culture which they can draw from. This can be done in many different ways, as one family with dual heritage children describes:

We realised that we didn't have any reference to our children's cultural heritage in our house. We've now hung up some pictures of significant figures from my husband's country of origin – it gets conversation going with the kids, and shows them that this aspect of their heritage is also something that we're proud of.

When children have a point of positive contact and understanding of their heritage, it can reinforce their sense of security and confidence in who they are. For children growing up 'visible by colour', this knowledge can boost their confidence and sense of self. It can also provide strength in the face of any negativity they may come into contact with. One mum puts it this way:

I tell my son, if you know who you are on the inside, the world won't shake you.

The impact of racism; supporting yourself, supporting your child

The feelings that result from an encounter with racism can be very strong and can lead to anger, stress, fear and a sense of powerlessness. Whilst children in particular need support to process and recover from this sort of experience, the same is true of adults – it's wise that we ourselves seek support if affected.

Looking after yourself

If you have been affected by racism, it's important not to deal with it alone, but talk to people who you trust and know will understand, such as your spouse, relatives or friends. You may also wish to seek outside support through a community group, charity or a counsellor who has experience with these issues (see end of handbook for list of support organisations).

The emotional impact of racism left unattended can have knock-on effects on our parenting and family lives. As difficult as it may be, if we ourselves can deal with this sort of painful and stressful experience in an emotionally healthy and restorative way, then we empower our children to do likewise.

Supporting our children

It's crucial that you stand alongside your child if they are ever affected. Don't ever brush it aside; make sure they know that you care and that you are there for them.

Studies have shown that the effects of racism are lesser when a child is secure about his or her ethnic identity and has strong connections with others who share their heritage.[3]

We need to lovingly help our children through any experiences of racism and give them a 'safe space' to express their feelings and recover. As one parent said:

Hold your child in their pain – don't tell them to 'get over it' or belittle what they are feeling.

Some of our parents, experienced the opposite of this, when they themselves were children:

I used to be subject to all sorts of racist taunting and teasing in the community in which we lived, my mum used to dismiss it as 'sticks and stones', but it went much deeper than that. I felt so lost and alone since my mum just had no idea what it felt like to be treated that way; perhaps because of this, she didn't take it that seriously.

Years ago, my friend and I (both black) were chased and attacked by a gang of white youths. We thought they were going to kill us, and had to run into a stranger's house for protection. Unfortunately, I had to process that experience on my own, as a young teenager. It was very hard.

The impact of racism; supporting yourself, supporting your child

Talking about racism

For some parents reading this, highlighting the need to talk about racism is stating the obvious, for others, it might feel awkward and uncomfortable or even unnecessary.

Racism is difficult to talk about because it's a painful and unpleasant reality and one that we instinctively want to shield our children from. Of course, we hope it never affects any of our children. But, racism is still present in our society, and to leave our children unprepared can result in even more difficult encounters later in their childhoods. One parent summarises it this way:

The worst thing you can do is to ignore racism and then wait for your child to experience it on their own.

It's worth considering the variety of settings in which a child could experience racism, (we cover school life in section 4 and the Community in section 5). Although this is hard to consider, we also need to be alert to the possibility of racist encounters within our own families. This may be important for children in transracial fostering or adoption settings, or dual heritage children being raised solely by the white side of their family. We need to be vigilant and make sure our children know they can talk to us whatever the situation.

It's also important to acknowledge the different forms that racism can take – whilst most would condemn direct hostility such as verbal or physical violence, it's the more subtle judgements, exclusions and differential treatment that can be just as damaging, and most prevalent.

Whichever way racism presents itself, it can impact significantly on a child's wellbeing, particularly if they don't understand what is happening to them or how to counter it. One father in the group who is black himself, spoke of how his father prevented this by having honest conversations with him when he was a boy:

My dad explained to us about racism in a matter of fact way. This wasn't to scare us, but to prepare us in case it happened. When it did happen, it hurt of course, but we weren't shocked and fearful, because Dad had already helped us to understand that there were some people in the world who behaved that way.

Being able to talk about race and heritage with our children in an empowering way lays a good foundation for these discussions. When a child has a positive internalisation of their racial identity, they will have a platform from which to reject racism and also understand that the perpetrator of racism is the one who is at fault, and not them.

My son and I had talked about racism together and we made sure that he knew it wasn't a taboo subject. When he experienced a problem in the classroom, he came to me and we were able to deal with it together.

A key point is that a child who is unsure about his or her racial heritage or who feels any sense of shame about their identity is more likely to internalise negative messages.

Some tips when talking about racism:

Here are some of the thoughts that the Kowetha parents have shared on discussing racism with our children

We should talk about racism in an age appropriate manner at a time when we consider our child is ready to understand the concept.

We should talk about racism calmly and factually, without showing fear or undue emotion. Children will pick up on what we feel.

We can talk about prejudice more generally, explaining how some people treat others badly because they are different to them. These people haven't yet learnt that difference is good and normal, instead they get scared and behave badly towards others.

We should clearly communicate to our children that those who treat others badly because of their difference are the ones who are at fault and not the people that they pick on.

We need to ensure that experiencing racism is nothing to be ashamed of, and that they can always talk to us about it.

We could use age related story books or video clips that address the issue.

We can show them that whilst racism is still a problem in the world, there are many empowering examples of how racism is being stopped and challenged both now and in the past (by both black people and white people).

One parent introduced the issue in this way to her seven year old daughter:

I found a children's book about Martin Luther King, his life and achievements. So I first introduced the concept of racism to her as something that happened in the 'old days', which felt easier because I didn't want to scare her, but then I felt uncomfortable since that was not the whole truth. I did let her know that sadly there are still some people left in the world who think and behave badly like that. I said that if she ever met anyone who was mean or who treated her differently because of her skin colour, then she should tell us straight away.

The impact of racism; supporting yourself, supporting your child

Draw on your experience, but recognise your child's reality will be different to yours…

We need to be aware of how we might inadvertently project our own experiences of racism into our discussions with our children.

For those of us who have not experienced racism ourselves, we can sometimes make the mistake of assuming that because it didn't affect us, then our children won't be affected by it either. Or we could be tempted to succumb to the 'if I don't say anything it won't be an issue' approach, which is not true and sends a message to our children that these things should not be spoken about.

I realised that as a white mum, we need to work that bit harder to carefully consider how our children's experiences will differ from ours and ensure that we have set up good lines of communication with them. I heard someone once describe being a parent as 'having your heart walk around on the outside of you', and in some ways, that connection to my children has meant that I've had to learn (as far as I am able to), what it means to experience the world as a person of different racial heritage, since that is how my children experience it.

For those of us who have experienced the pain of racism ourselves, it is still not an easy subject to talk about, as it can bring back painful memories. Yet for us, we're also in the position of being able to relate to and empathise with our children about racism. One mum in our group who is black herself says:

Showing your child that you have been hurt in this way also lets you child know that what they are feeling is a valid and normal response and lets them know that you know exactly how they feel. Children can identify with this and feel that the advice that you give them is valid and will work when confronted with a situation.

Throughout our discussions about racism, parents stressed the importance of striking a calm tone; as one dad said:

Don't 'under-talk' the race issue, but don't 'over-talk' it either. Be informed yet relaxed when talking about this. It's nothing to be ashamed of, but nothing to get over the top about either! They'll pick up on what you feel about race and racism, so stay calm, relaxed and positive.

Should your child experience racism…

If your child lets you know about an issue that they have faced.

Thank them for letting you know and reassure them that it was the right thing to do.

Listen very carefully, take them seriously and never try to minimise their experience or encourage them to 'brush it off'. If they can't take their feelings and pain to you, then they will feel very isolated.

Don't over-react either – if they believe that telling you is causing you pain or going to make the situation worse, they'll stop confiding.

To help your child feel heard, you can use a technique called 'active listening', where you gently repeating back to your child what they have said, e.g. 'so the boy said he wouldn't play with you because you're brown? And that made you feel sad?'.

Make sure you discuss the incident in a way that fully transfers the problem to the perpetrator, and not your child.

Think through possible solutions together. This empowers your child to respond and take action, rather than keeping them in the position of 'victim'.

If further action needs to be taken by you as their parent, talk through the options with your child and get their permission, so they that feel empowered and included.

Have a follow up conversation with them after action has been taken, to let them know what is happening, check in on how they are feeling and see if they think that anything else need to be done.

Help them to come up with some strategies that they can use if it ever happens again (e.g. never retaliating, preparing some short, firm responses that don't invite debate e.g. 'what you just about me is wrong' and removing themselves quickly from the situation).

Be positive…

Underlying all of this is being positive and confident about our children's background. As one of our mums said;

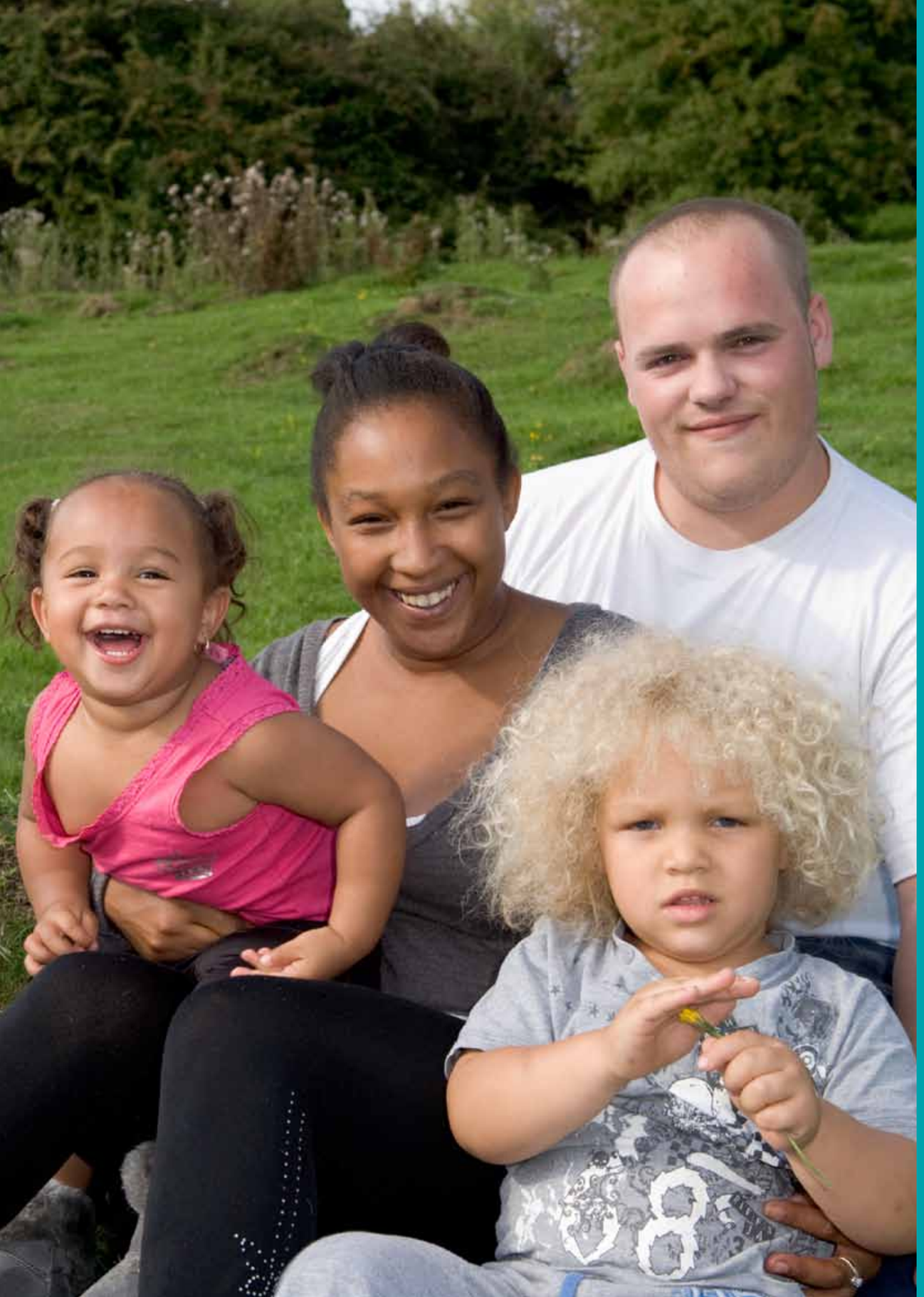
Be positive about race as a family. It's important to set a culture of coping and dealing quickly and confidently with any issues – be positive because children will copy what you do.

The impact of racism; supporting yourself, supporting your child

But we know it's not easy….

Responding well to injustice is never an easy thing to do – we're asking our children to display a level of emotional maturity that can be challenging for any adult. And yet, it's necessary. One parent summarises this with the bittersweet advice she has always repeated to her son:

"Never ever become what they are expecting you to be"



Supporting our children at school

School is an important part of childhood and we all want our children's experience of school to be a happy one. Whilst all schools are expected to teach their pupils to value equality and diversity and create an environment in which these principles are practiced as well as taught, it's fair to say that some schools do an excellent job in this regard and others still have some way to go.

It's also fair to say that our schools do not exist in a vacuum, and it's possible that our children may come into contact with racist views and opinions held by some families of school peers.

Sadly in the UK, there has been a long-standing problem with some predominantly white schools not appropriately dealing with the issue of racism when it affects their Black and Minority Ethnic pupils.[4] Cornwall is not immune from this, and unfortunately, underreporting of racial harassment in Cornish schools means that the issue has not always been given proper consideration.

Racist bullying

Some people who have not experienced racism themselves often consider that being bullied or teased on the basis of skin colour, does not differ from a child who is teased for being overweight, tall, small, or wearing glasses etc. Whilst it's true that all forms of bullying are hurtful and wrong, the view that racial bullying is no different and that it's "just kids being kids" is flawed.

That sort of view also undermines the real need to respond with anti-racist education, which is vital for all children being raised in Cornwall, so that they are properly prepared and equipped for life and work in a modern globalised era.

Racist bullying is a form of prejudice-related bullying because racism not only rejects our child, but it rejects them as a member of a particular group of people.

Racism can disrupt our child's sense of belonging through the message that "you're not one of us", and undermines their rights to an attachment to place i.e. "you don't belong here". This form of bullying cuts to the core of who they are.

My daughter has always talked about her brown skin and the fact she is mixed race with genuine pride. It breaks my heart that at the age of five, she could begin to associate the colour of her skin with negativity. For other children to exclude her and tease her, using rhymes based on her skin colour, can only damage her positive feelings about her identity. At such a young age, creating an association between her racial/cultural identity and being excluded can only be damaging.

Any sort of offense that targets our child's racial heritage should therefore, be taken seriously in order that it can be addressed in a timely and pro-active way by the school. Often, this requires us as parents to bring it to the school's attention.

This isn't always easy or comfortable, but if we as parents or carers don't take appropriate steps to challenge racism in a school once detected, we become part of the culture that permits its presence in the first place.

Some steps for dealing with racial bullying at school

Here are a few ideas we came up with, based upon our experiences as a group of parents and discussions with educators. Before reading this, it's important to be aware that in legal terms, race is one of the 'protected characteristics' that is defended by law. Any serious incidents of physical or verbal racist abuse are 'hate crimes' and you should report these to the police or a third party reporting centre (for further details, see Chapter 4).

1) Ensure your child knows that it's important to tell you straight away

It's worth repeating the point that we made earlier – your child needs to feel positive and comfortable in talking with you about their racial heritage. This means that if anyone is ever rude, abusive or excludes them at school because of their skin colour, they will be comfortable in letting you know.

It's very important for your child to tell you straight away. For example:

A white child told my mixed race daughter "you can't play with us because you're brown." She let my husband know the day this happened. We took this to the school and they dealt with the situation the next day. We were very pleased that our daughter came to us on the first instance of this happening, since the school responded effectively, and we were able to nip this sort of colour-based rejection in the bud, before any longer term problems embedded.

Whatever the incident, thank your child for telling you and reassure them it was the right thing to do. It's a good idea to make a note about what happened and how it made them feel. If they are letting you know about a more prolonged experience of bullying, work with them gently so that you can record a timeline of incidents from when it began.

2) Get support from friends who understand

Dealing with incidents of racial bullying or exclusion can be challenging and emotional. This is particularly the case if you're bringing this sort of thing to the attention of the school for the first time; you may even be the first parent to have ever spoken about matters of racial bullying or prejudice with your school. As one parent explained:

I found it so hard, when race and colour can be such a taboo topic, and when teachers aren't used to talking about it, you almost feel like you're not being believed. Turning my 'gut instinct' about the prejudice my daughter was experiencing into a language that they understood, was very difficult.

Talking to other trusted parents/carers who have understanding and experience of the issue, can help reduce the sense isolation you might feel, and also help you to clarify your thoughts and feelings.

When my son was rejected by other children on the basis of his skin colour, I was unprepared for the emotions it raised. I knew in my mind what I needed to do to address the problem, but speaking with other friends first (who also had dual heritage children), helped so much to process my own painful feelings about the matter. This helped me to approach the school in a calmer and more clear-headed way.

3) Speak to your child's class teacher and alert the head teacher

It's important to let your child's teacher and head teacher know about any race-related incident straight away. This gives the teachers the opportunity to respond to the matter immediately, and prevent it from worsening.

Be as clear and calm as you can when explaining what happened and also speak about what outcomes you would like to see for your child as the issue is resolved. Ask the teachers to tell you what the next steps will be in dealing with this, and when you can expect them to feed back to you. Ensure you take notes during this initial discussion and ask the teacher to log your conversation.

It's useful to know that research has highlighted a range of responses in predominantly white schools to the issue of racial bullying and prejudice.[5] The best of these is a restorative response. We thought it might be helpful to outline the other responses the research revealed.

Response	What it looks like
Restorative	This response is proactive and preventative. It addresses the problem of racial bullying through diversity education on a 'whole school' basis. It integrates diversity and anti-racist teaching throughout the curriculum, enabling all children (including bullies and bystanders) to value diversity and learn why bullying and prejudice on racial grounds is wrong. The perpetrator apologises, with understanding, to the child affected.
Corrective	This is when a teacher tries to present the counter-argument to the things that were said or done (e.g. black people are not...). The key downside to this approach is that it can lead to classroom debates in which further racist views can be openly expressed, therefore worsening the situation.
Punitive	This is when a child is punished for having behaved or spoken in a racist way. Punishment without education can have short term and limited effect, since it can lead to bitterness and a resolve that next time they will not be found out. The child does not learn why his actions were wrong.
Dismissive	A dismissive approach is when the issue is either ignored, minimised or denied by the school. This allows those who carried out the racial bullying to believe that what they did was acceptable.

We hope that more often than not, your child's teacher will have a good understanding of the issues at stake and you'll leave the meeting feeling reassured that the incident will be dealt with appropriately.

An encouraging example of a school's restorative response to a racist incident experienced by a Kowetha child is described below:

Our child was excluded from games and called names because of his colour. After approaching the school about the issue, they responded so helpfully. My wife and I were invited to speak to the school staff, to present some ideas around teaching on racial diversity. We put together a list of topic suggestions and resources which we presented at a staff meeting. The teachers then developed our ideas and put on a whole week of classroom activities to develop children's learning and appreciation of racial diversity. The Olympics were being held at the time, so the representation of Great Britain by such a racially diverse team of individuals provided a great example of our country's diversity. Older students learnt about challenging prejudice and racism. The younger juniors learnt about Black British and British Asian identity and the infants learnt about valuing and understanding racial difference. The work was presented to parents at a school assembly, and they now repeat this work annually. It was a really encouraging experience to be involved with.

There are times however, where parents are confronted with a more dismissive response to their concerns. Should this happen to you, be in no doubt that this is not acceptable.

Being made to feel that you're "making a fuss about nothing" is not uncommon in situations where you are communicating a minority reality to people who have no personal experience and little understanding of the impact of racism themselves.

Do not let this deter you. Any form of racial bullying, prejudice or exclusion needs to be taken very seriously – you have the law, Ofsted, and the School's own Equality and Diversity Policies to back you up on this.

I knew that my daughter was being racially bullied, but the teachers kept trying to minimise it and dismiss it. I had never handled anything like this before and didn't know what our rights were, but I trusted my instinct and kept going. It was a battle to be heard, but I'm glad that I trusted my gut feeling and kept going. My daughter would have suffered much more had I not pursued this.

4) Speak to the school Governors, check the school policies

If you make no headway with the school's teachers, you should approach the governing body, both in writing and in person. All schools are accountable to their governing bodies, and governing bodies in turn are accountable to parents and the community.

Governors are there to ensure the school performs well and makes decisions which are in the best interests of the children and young people. Matters of equality and diversity are something that a school has a statutory duty to take seriously and which they also know Ofsted inspectors are very interested in.

It's also worth asking the school what training the governors and teachers have had on the subject of equality and diversity – this will highlight to them that responding appropriately to the issue is actually a matter of professional competence.

Finally, all schools should also have Racial Equality and Anti-bullying policies, which should include a specific section on racial bullying. They should be on your school's website, if not, you can ask for a copy and and flag up the relevant sections with the governors.

A Kowetha parent was able to influence a successful outcome, following an incident of racial bullying, through her position of school governor:

Some incidents of racial taunting came to my attention, and I felt that they needed a more comprehensive response to racially motivated taunting and bullying. As a governor, I was able to highlight to the school leadership, that whilst we had a Racial Equality policy, it needed to be re-worded into something that was more meaningful in practice and application. The topic of racism, can be a tricky one – it's easy for teachers and other staff to feel 'accused' when you bring it up; but really, discussing the topic is an invitation for us all to learn and improve things for the school as a whole. I tackled this by taking an open approach – explaining that as a white individual myself, racism was as new to me, as it was to them, but that was not a reason to diminish its existence or its impact on children in the school. We are now in the process of developing a 'provision map' which will enable teachers to see areas in which they can incorporate the theme of 'celebrating difference' into the everyday curriculum. This is a great outcome for the whole school.

5) You can ask for a report to be made to the Schools, Children and Family Equality and Diversity Service

All schools should have copies of a 'Racist Incident Report Form' (which is filled out by the school) and the 'Self Report form' (which you or your child can fill out). These should be sent to the Children, Schools and Families Equality and Diversity Service in Cornwall Council who are tasked with monitoring and responding to such incidents. (See end of handbook for contact details)

Eventually we got support from the Cornwall Council, and they helped the school to become more receptive to listening to and dealing with issues around race.

6) If you're still not heard, contact Ofsted

If the school governors do not succeed in requiring the school to respond appropriately, you can contact Ofsted. They have recently released a document called 'Inspecting Equalities' (January 2014), which sets out a school's 'Public Sector Equality Duties'[6]. The document has lots of useful information about a school's duty, which includes the need to "Ensure pupils are free from bullying in all its manifestations including all types of prejudice-based bullying".

The school culture

Supporting our children at school is about much more than making sure the school responds effectively to any incidents of racism. It is about being alive to the whole culture of diversity of the school and if necessary trying to influence that culture.

One of the most important things to stress when tackling prejudice or racism in schools is that it's much more than 'protecting' BME students from racism, but recognising the need to educate and support the children who behave in a racist or prejudiced manner.

A child who grows up with prejudiced and racist views, will be disadvantaged as they enter life, work and citizenship in an ethnically diverse world. We do them and all pupils a disservice, if we don't invite them to understand the richness that diversity brings, and teach them new ways of thinking about themselves and those who differ from them.

The following points may be helpful for parents when considering how they might encourage their school to meet the needs of children who are visible by colour (with regards to positive reinforcement of identity), and also for developing a school culture that is supportive of diversity.

- Education needs to move beyond 'tokenistic' diversity education (e.g. "we're all the same but different"), towards anti-racist education that actively seeks to challenge and change prejudiced mind-sets and actions, throughout the curriculum and school structures. It's about delivering a range of activities that doesn't simply teach students about 'others', but also about 'themselves' (and within this how they respond to others).

- Schools need to be aware of the racial imagery in the school – for example are there pictures of successful Black and Asian British and Black and Asian international figures in displays as well as white personalities?

- Does the school library have a good representation of authors from ethnically diverse backgrounds?

- If the school has a policy of sponsoring disadvantaged children in different parts of the world have they considered supporting a child in need who is of white ethnicity as well as those of Black or Asian ethnicity? This helps to give children a more balanced perspective.

- When teaching about racial and cultural diversity, does the school teach about diversity within the UK and Cornwall itself? Approaching this topic solely through the lens of international case studies or third world development, can actually serve to reinforce prejudiced mind-sets.

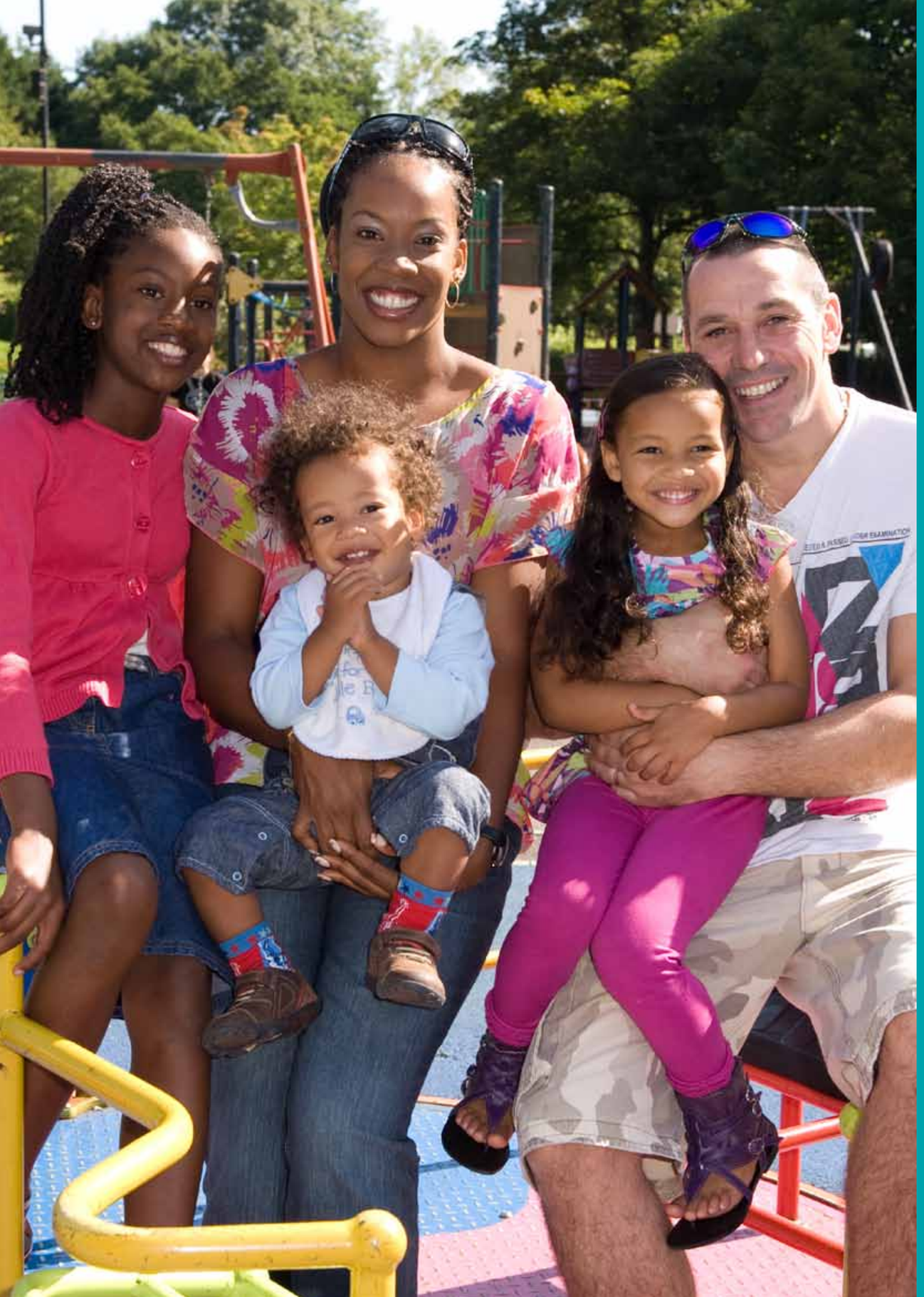
- Does the national and global history taught in the school adopt only a deficit approach? For example, black history did not begin and end with slavery, but rather with the great African civilisations that preceded slavery and colonialism, and the many important black figures and societies that have played key roles in local and global history since then.

- If the school is discussing the slave trade, is reference made to the topic of slave resistance to their oppressors, and also, to the many white allies who supported the struggle against slavery? This gives students the opportunity to identify with more positive role models than 'black victim' and 'white oppressor'. The same can be done when discussing the Civil Rights movement in the US or the overthrow of apartheid in South Africa.

- Does the school actively work to avoid children being singled out when teaching around diversity and black history? If a teacher has a BME or Dual Heritage child in the class and they are embarking on teaching around diversity or black history, does the teacher speak with minority students first to develop strategies that avoid them being 'singled out'. For younger students, do teaching staff contact parents, to give them the opportunity of discussing the issue with their children first, if they have not already done so.

We were doing slavery in our history class, I was the only mixed race student in the room, and the other students kept turning around and looking at me. It felt horrible.

- Does the school help white students to become aware that they too have a race, culture and ethnicity? Does the school invite students to reflect on what this might mean and the benefits or disadvantages that their background may confer to them?



Supporting our families in the community

As we stated at the beginning of the handbook, Cornwall is in lots of ways a wonderful place to be bringing up children. The beauty of the natural environment is never far away, even in our more built up areas. Also Cornish communities are often strong and there can be lots of activities for children. Our local communities can be the source of caring and enduring friendships for our children.

But sometimes children who are 'visible by colour' can have bad experiences in their local communities and it is important that we know how to respond.

Racial abuse and prejudice is still a problem in our County. According to figures from 2011/12 there were 155 reported hate crimes (see definition of hate crime below) in Cornwall and 90% of these were motivated by race.[7]

This section talks about supporting the family as a whole, since it considers some of our options, should we or our children ever experience racism in public settings, for example, in our local neighbourhood, housing estate, park, or pubs.

A racist act, is against the law and is known as a 'hate crime' or a 'hate incident'.

There are laws in place to protect our families from being targeted or harassed by others because of our race or ethnicity. The Equality Act 2010 has created nine key aspects of a person's identity, which it is refers to as 'protected characteristics'. The home office has identified five of these protected characteristics that the Police must record as hate crimes or hate incidents when it is reported to them, they are:

- Race and Ethnicity
- Religion and belief
- Sexual Orientation
- Disability
- Gender Reassignment

Under the law therefore, it's an offence if someone targets you or your family on the basis of your race or ethnicity. The criminal justice system refers to this as either a 'hate incident' or a 'hate crime'.

A man tried to intimidate my husband (who is black), into leaving the local pub he had just walked into. He had never met my husband before; he was acting purely on prejudice. What the man didn't realise was, that in doing this he was committing an offence – the police are following it up with him now.

The term 'hate' crime refers to the perpetrator's motives; that is the prejudice that leads them to commit a hate crime or a hate incident in the first place. The difference between 'incident' and 'crime' is explained below.

A **hate incident** is any kind of behaviour from another person or group of people that causes you or your children to feel fear, alarm or distress, as a result of being targeted because of your skin colour and/or ethnic heritage. This can include being insulted, pestered or ridiculed in a public place; being ignored and/or treated with impatience, frustration or intolerance because of this aspect of your personal identity.[8] It's important to know that a hate incident, is identified through the perceptions of the victim or any other person. The official definition of a hate incident is as follows:

Hate Incident: Any incident, which may or may not constitute a criminal offence, perceived by the victim or any other person as being motivated by prejudice or hate.

A **hate crime**, refers to those cases where a hate incident constitutes a criminal offence. Its definition is as follows:

Hate Crime: Any hate incident, which constitutes a criminal offence, perceived by the victim or any other person as being motivated by prejudice or hate.

A hate crime differs in that it is identified as being a crime by the Police, as some hate incidents do not constitute a criminal offence and remain as hate incidents. Examples of hate crime can include damage to property, verbal abuse, offensive graffiti, harassment and violence. It may be targeted at one person or at a group of people.

Reasons to report a race-related hate incident or crime.

Sadly, many hate crimes and incidents go unreported in Cornwall. This may be because some of us aren't aware of our rights, some of us think that reporting won't make any difference, and for some of us, the prospect of reporting can be daunting (more on this in the next section).

"The man who was talking to us in the street, made a racist comments in front of my (Asian) children.... I didn't know what to do or how to react"

"Once a car drove past and the men inside threw things at myself and my children, shouting racist abuse. There was nothing we felt that we could do – they drove off".

Experiencing these sorts of incidents can be a very disturbing, particularly if we don't have access to support or friends who understand. It's important to know that reporting what happened to you, is not only about acting on your legal right to protection, but it can also be a means of accessing support. Reasons for choosing to report include the following:

- If you choose to report, a clear message is sent to the perpetrator(s) that such behaviour is not acceptable in Cornwall.
- If you choose to report, you'll be helping other members of the Black and Minority Ethnic Community in Cornwall, since reporting helps to build statistics and gives the police and local authorities in Cornwall a clearer picture of what is going on, and who/where the perpetrators are.
- If you chose to report, it can offer you the opportunity to get connected with people and organisations who can help you to recover from your experience.

Ways to report – you have a choice!

If you or your children are ever a victim of a hate crime or a hate incident, you should make careful notes about what happened, when and where it took place, and how it made you or your children feel.

You then have a choice about how to use this information. The most common approach is to contact your local police officers. However, if you prefer not to communicate with the police directly, other reporting options are available. These include something known as 'Third Party Reporting' (speaking to an intermediary organisation such as a charity or volunteer organisation) or submitting a report online. These choices are explained below.

1. **Police** The police will investigate the incident or crime and depending on the circumstances, may take a detailed statement from you about what happened to you or your family. In Devon & Cornwall, there is a 'Diverse Communities Team' which is headed up by 3 Sergeants across the Devon and Cornwall Police service.[9] These Officers are specialist diversity police officers, who have been trained extensively in matters concerning equality and diversity. They will liaise with the investigating officers and advise them accordingly. Once you have spoken to a police officer, your case will be highlighted to one of these specialist officers, who will have some oversight of your case to ensure it is dealt with correctly. They will also ensure that the investigating officer has details of any support contacts that may be of assistance to you.

My neighbour began to hurl racist abuse at my family and me one day. It came from nowhere, he was very aggressive. Another neighbour called the police on my behalf which ultimately led to a court appearance for him. I was quite shaken up but the police were really supportive, both immediately after the incident and for some months afterwards. The police put me in touch with Victim Support and also checked in with me several times over the next few months to see if I was OK or needed any further help.

2. **Third Party Reporting** Cornwall has recently launched a series of 'Third Party Reporting Centres'[10] which are intermediary organisations, such as charities or volunteer organisations, through whom you can make your report in total confidence. The report is then submitted to the police on your behalf, ensuring that the reporting centre remains the single point of contact for the police if that is what you are comfortable with. Pentreath[11] (a well-established Cornish charity, see end of handbook for contact details) is currently the third party reporting centre for racial hate incidents and crimes. The project is staffed by Community Development Workers, who understand what you've experienced. They can listen and give advice as needed in total confidence, and also provide information about next steps in the process and any further support options you may require.

3. **Submit a report yourself online** 'True vision'[12] is a police website that gives information about hate crimes and allows you to write down your experience and submit a report, anonymously if preferred. Police will then use your information to decide whether a crime has been committed and take it further if necessary.

Connecting with other families: The Kowetha idea

You may have found the preceding chapters to be a bit challenging at times (to be honest, they were quite challenging to write!). We want to say clearly now, that whilst an understanding of these issues underpins the rationale for Kowetha, what we actually do in practice is very different! In fact if you and your family ever walked into one of our monthly meet ups, you'd be likely to find the following:

It's a Saturday afternoon and a local school hall is filled with children - some are making a racket running and around at top speed, some are sat more quietly at the arts and craft table. Groups of parents are stood holding cups of tea and coffee, attempting to catch up with each other in between the usual interruptions by the kids! Around 1230 we come together for our bring-and-share lunch, with all of us clustered around a table full of delicious food. Following lunch, the children and some of the parents return to the hall for a workshop – this could be anything from circus skills to football to singing. The other parents kindly clean up after lunch for us (although these are usually the parents who get to finish their conversations!). Around 1430, we all head home. That's it – a standard Kowetha meet up!

The whole purpose of Kowetha is simply being together. Most of our children represent the only child in their class or even school who are 'visible by colour'. We bring our families together in order for our children to play and interact with other children of BME or Dual Heritage (visible by colour) backgrounds, and thereby offer them a 'break' from the minority experience. We don't point this out or make a big deal about it with them, we just let them play. The company and familiarity of being with other children who "look more like me" does the talking.

What the children say…

We asked the children what they enjoy about Kowetha, and they described it in these ways:

Kowetha is like going to a birthday party every month! I also like it because it's a place where I'm not the only one.

I like going to Kowetha because it's our own special place where we have lots of fun. I like the food, I like the games and I like seeing all the people. I really like the chicken at lunchtime!

I like the arts and crafts, playing with the children and all the toys

What the parents/carers say…

Here are some of the comments made by the parents/carers who attend:

We like the "naturalness" of Kowetha! From this we can socialise and chat and have natural discussions/support one another. Kowetha has given me much more confidence and knowledge as a parent. My child's confidence in her identity has grown too.

I was initially nervous about joining a dual-heritage, diversity group with my family for fear of 'putting our heads above the parapet' and making ourselves conspicuous in some way. I am now really glad that we did so that the children can see others like themselves on a regular basis and know that they are not alone. Kowetha is a really sociable, friendly and supportive group (and the food is great!).

I like the relaxed family-friendly atmosphere

There is nothing better than walking into a room full of people I have come to respect and care about, and seeing my children so relaxed and happy to be with their friends. We are safe in the knowledge that, if ever there is an issue surrounding their racial identity, we'd know exactly who to come to.

Parent/Carer forums

Although Kowetha is aimed primarily at supporting the children, our relationships with each other as parents/carers have proven to be a key part of that. Over time, we've been able to support each other in our parenting and offer solidarity to each other should the more 'serious stuff' raise its head.

I felt very empowered and supported after talking through a tricky issue with other parents who understood. Sometimes the issues can be complicated, and sometimes quite painful, so it helps to think things through with others, rather than in isolation.

One of the things we trialled last year were parents' forums – a chance to sit and talk (without the children present) in order to share experiences, ideas and issues that can arise with being a family of diverse racial origin in a predominantly white area. These meetings are held only two or three times a year, but seem to yield great rewards in understanding, sharing solutions and getting to know each other better.

Would you consider starting a community group yourself?

We strongly believe that experiencing a positive, fun, racially diverse space on a regular basis helps to affirm our children's identity and in many ways represents a 'preventative measure' in supporting good self-esteem for children who grow up as a racial minority in a predominantly white area.

We would love to see similar groups begin to grow in other parts of Cornwall. If on reading this, you and some friends felt inspired to start your own community group, we'd be happy to talk and share our experiences with you. (Contact details at end of handbook)

Naturally your group would take its own shape to suit your local area and the families that you attract. However, we thought it might be useful to share some principles which we think have helped to make Kowetha work, along with a short list of things you'll need to get started.

Some principles to make your group work...

Keep it parent-led. In this way, you retain ownership and direction and it gives the group a much more natural and relaxed feel, as opposed to having a statutory organisation or charity 'do it for you'.

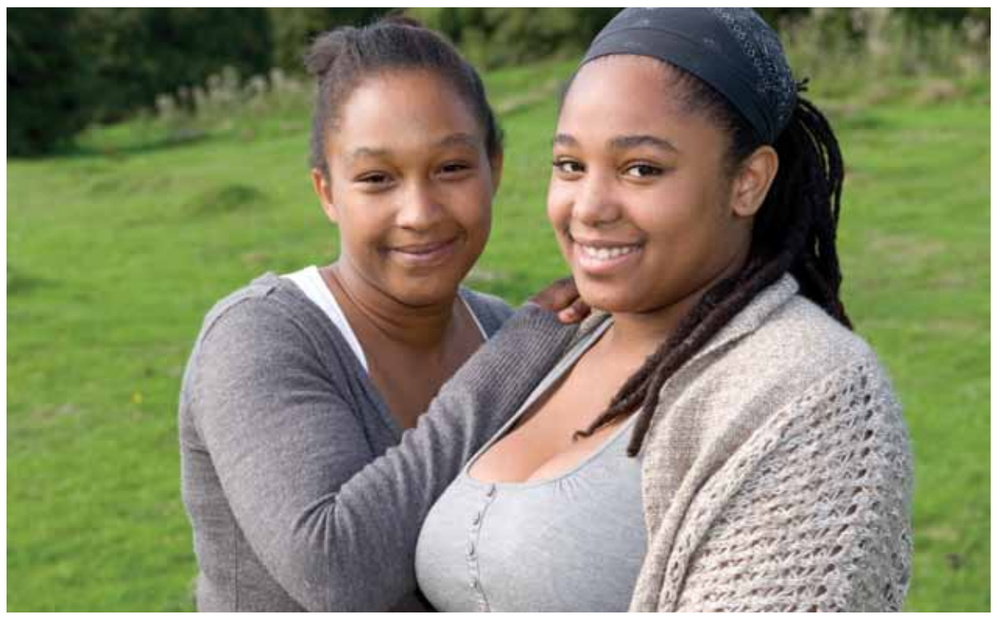
Keep it simple. As parents, you'll be running this in your 'spare' time (ha ha!), which means that adopting an easy format that can be handed over to others to lead on when necessary, makes it more manageable and sustainable.

Keep it informal and fun – families always stress that this is a really important feature for them at Kowetha.

Be positive and confident about why you're doing starting your group – it's quite possible you'll encounter those who don't understand the need for the group – so be ready to politely explain the rationale.

Keep it welcoming – we make it a principle to always have an eye on the door and be ready to give a warm welcome to new families and make introductions. It can be daunting to walk into a new social setting!

Eat together! This really is such an important part of our meet ups – there is something special and uniting about sharing a meal together.



Things you'll need to get going:

A space – this could be for example, a school hall, community centre or children's centre.

Families! We encourage you to be bold and invite people you know as well as approaching families who you don't know. This can feel a bit awkward, but several families have come along to Kowetha as a result of conversations initiated 'by the swings in the park' for example!

Toys/games/activity workshops – this is really down to your preference as a group and the age range of your children. One thing that has really helped us has been to partner with our local children's centre – they have provided a lovely play worker to help out with our arts and craft sessions.

A small pot of funding to cover costs – try Cornwall Community Foundation Trust, or your local Councillor's 'Community Chest'. If you have a local community development team – ask them for guidance.(see contacts section at end of handbook)

Publicity – create a simple flier that can be sent out through local community/ statutory networks to let people know you're up and running.

Indemnity Insurance – you can check with the management of the premises you use, but it's advisable to take out cover for your group.

A Constitution – this is a document that sets out the principles by which you will govern the group (you can get templates online). You don't need to do this straight away – but it's sometimes needed for funding applications.

Final word...

We stated in the first chapter that we hoped this booklet would spark a conversation. We've covered a lot of ground, and we hope that you've found something in here that is beneficial to your family. All the quotes and experiences we've included in this booklet are from families who live right here in Cornwall – we'd love to know if what they say is similar or different from your experience. Do give us your thoughts and feedback. Growing community and the connections between us, can only be a good thing!

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9 http://safercornwall.co.uk//hate-crime/ (www.safercornwall.co.uk/hatecrime)

10 http://safercornwall.co.uk/what-we-do/hate-crime/third-party-reporting-centres/

11 http://www.pentreath.co.uk/

12 http://www.report-it.org.uk/home

Contacts

Kowetha

Children Schools and Families Equality and Diversity Service
You can contact this team on ncsf.equalityanddiversity@cornwall.gov.uk and 01872 327529 for more information on reporting and accessing the services that they offer

Pentreath (Community Development Worker Team)

Inspiring Women's Network

ABC

Colourful Women

Young People Cornwall

Kowetha

A Social Group for Dual Heritage, Black and Asian families in West Cornwall.

Delicious bring and share lunch

Activities for the children

Celebrating our diversity

Monthly gatherings

Arts & Crafts

We meet on the 3rd Saturday of the month from 11.30am - 2.30pm
at Marazion School, School Lane, Marazion, TR17 0DG

Children Visible by Colour in Cornwall

Suggestions for parents and carers raising BME (black and minority ethnic) and dual heritage children who are 'visible by colour'

Written by Kowetha in Partnership with Barnardo's

Believe in children
Barnardo's

www.barnardos.org.uk

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Barnardo's Registered Charity Nos.
216250 and SC037605 16030nc0414