

Intercultural communication

Children's Services

Quick Reference

The purpose of this guide is to increase awareness of some of the issues that make up the ethnic and religious diversity of communities in West Sussex.

Whilst the north of the county has traditionally been seen as the more culturally diverse area of the county, there are many diverse ethnic communities throughout the county. Polish – rather than Gujarati, Urdu, Tamil or Filipino/Tagalog – is, for example, the dominant non-English language spoken across the county.

This is **not** an exhaustive guide. It gives **general** information to help practitioners and managers understand and respect difference. It has drawn on '*Faith and culture in the community: respecting and understanding a multi-cultural society*' jointly published by East Sussex and West Sussex Fire and Rescue Services. The initial draft of this quick reference guide was also reviewed by the Children's Services Minority and Ethnic Communities Working Group and various amendments incorporated as a result.



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➤ **Why does understanding diversity matter?**

As part of our commitment to equality and diversity, and in line with the requirements of the Equality Act 2010, Children's Services – and West Sussex County Council overall – is committed to ensuring that all customers of our services are treated with fairness, dignity and respect irrespective of any of the following protected characteristics: age, race, gender, disability, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, marriage or civil partnership status, pregnancy/maternity status, religion, and belief.

Race, religion and belief are different and not interchangeable. From the same race can come different religions and from the same religion can come different beliefs.

➤ **What do we mean by 'diversity'?**

The UK has been home to communities of different backgrounds for centuries. It is not a phenomena that is only associated with the free movement of labour in the European Union.

Diversity characterises and shapes human experience and is critical to the formation of identity. As a consequence of difference, a person's life experience may include oppression, marginalisation and alienation - as well as privilege, power and acclaim.

➤ **What do we mean by 'religious diversity'?**

We are all individuals and whilst we live in a 'Christian' country, we vary widely as citizens in our religious or faith backgrounds. Some people have no religious or faith background at all but draw strength from their experience of spirituality.

Irrespective of any religious or faith background (or none), individuals who are in contact with Children's Services expect to receive sound and up-to-date care and support. They also expect attention to be given to their needs as whole human beings, to their dignity, culture and identity, and to their lives outside the confines of the health and social care system.

➤ **What does this mean in terms of West Sussex as a county?**

The 2011 Census showed that non-'White British' groups made up around 12.4% of the West Sussex population, an increase of 6.6% from 2001. Within the Crawley Borough Council area, 20.3% of the residents were born outside the UK. The Arun District Council area by contrast has the lowest proportion of non-White residents. In the county overall the 'White British' group makes up 88.9% of the population, with 'White Non-British' the next largest group (4.8%) followed by Asian (3.5%). For comparison, the South East regional averages are 85.2%, 5.4% and 5.2% respectively.

Chichester has the highest percentage of White British residents, with 93.0% of people. Crawley has the lowest at 72.1% of people. From the 2011 Census,

the top ten countries outside the UK by place of birth for West Sussex residents are: Poland (6,750), India (6,323), Ireland (5,033), Germany (4,078), South Africa (4,054), Pakistan (2,567), Philippines (2,494), Zimbabwe (2,025), USA (1,988), and Italy (1,814).

Nearly 62% of the county's population classified themselves as 'Christian' in terms of religion, whilst 3.7% adhered to other religions – primarily Muslim, Hindu, and Buddhist.

In Arun the dominant non-English languages are Polish, Lithuanian and Portuguese whilst in Adur they are Bengali and Polish. In Crawley the dominant non-English languages are Polish, Gujarati, Urdu and Tamil, whilst in Mid-Sussex, Horsham and Worthing they are Polish and Filipino/Tagalog. In Chichester the dominant non-English languages are Polish and French.

➤ **Tips for intercultural communication**

Intercultural communication (also referred to as cross-cultural communication) is the term used to help understand how people from differing cultural backgrounds communicate with each other.

Social care staff should be aware of the following:

- ✓ **Do** be careful how you use gestures or body language as your actions may be interpreted as offensive or insensitive – you can shake hands but offering other contact should be avoided;
 - ✓ **Do** be aware though that handshaking is not always appropriate in some communities - particularly among women;
 - ✓ **Do** be aware that in some communities a woman will not feel comfortable being alone with a man – who is not a relative - in the same room;
 - ✓ **Do** be aware that when visiting a Muslim home children are usually on door duty and can relay messages - a good time for a woman to visit a Muslim woman is early afternoon;
 - ✓ **Do** be patient and reassuring when language hinders communication;
 - ✓ **Do** consider whether the presence of an interpreter would help communication issues;
 - ✓ **Do** be aware that whilst an act of comfort such as putting your arm around an individual may seem OK to you it may in fact cause offence or embarrassment to someone else;
 - ✓ **Do** remember that many people remove their shoes when entering some rooms at home as well as at a place of worship such as at a mosque and some temples – if in doubt, ask;
 - ✓ **Do** put on a head-covering if requested to do so when entering a Sikh temple or other building where the host asks you to;
 - ✓ **Do** seek advice wherever possible if there is something you are not sure of.
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- **Don't** ask for a 'Christian' name, but ask for a 'first' and 'second' name instead – for many it will be a 'personal' and a 'family' name;

- **Don't** enter a room unless invited to do so - it may be a prayer room where important customs should be respected;
- **Don't** refuse the offer of refreshments such as tea, coffee, juice or fruit as these may be offered to you shortly after arrival by way of an extended greeting into the house;
- **Don't** compliment an object on show in a Muslim home as this may be taken as an indication of your desire to have it;
- **Don't** assume that just because your question has been answered in English that the person providing it fully understands what is being said;
- **Don't** assume references to day or time have the same interpretation as your own;
- **Don't** compliment an object on show in a Muslim home as this may be taken as an indication of your desire to have it;
- **Don't** assume a lack of eye contact during conversation is a mark of disrespect – in some communities it means the exact opposite;
- **Don't** underestimate how your own cultural background may affect your perception and behaviour towards others;
- **Don't** assume that just because an individual is raising their voice that they are losing control or becoming aggressive;
- **Don't** assume that all individuals from a particular country have identical cultural backgrounds or beliefs;
- **Don't** make generalisations about groups or individuals;
- **Don't** use slang, jargon or acronyms in your conversation;
- **Don't** assume that an individual's first language is the same as their country of origin.

➤ **Sources of additional information**

The following websites are likely to be of particular relevance:

shapworkingparty.org.uk (for information about a calendar of religious festivals);

bbc.co.uk/religion/religions (for more detailed information about the world's religions, and a calendar of holy days by faith);

westsussex.gov.uk/westsussexlife (for information about the demographics of the county including ethnicity, religion, sexuality and gender);

westsussex.gov.uk/localaccount (for information about the annual performance of Children's Services);

ons.gov.uk/census2011 (to access detailed information reports arising from the 2011 Census for England and Wales).

nationalarchives.gov.uk/pathways/blackhistory/intro (for information about the history of Africans and Asians in Britain).

The County Council provides a range of **training courses** on diversity including an e-learning course on the Council's 'Treating People as Individuals' policy. These are accessible to staff in Children's Services through the in-house Learning and Development Gateway.