Jill Webb Training

CPD MEMBER
The CPD Certification Service

Cloverleaf Advocacy
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WELCOME!

Unconscious Bias

07808 277525
jill@jillwebbtraining.co.uk
jillwebbtraining.co.uk

- Introductions
- Timing and Structure of the Course
- Virtual platform – mute, if you get knocked out, breakout rooms
- Massive topic - steps on a journey
- Post course materials

Group Rules

- Treat other's contributions with respect
- Participate fully
- Please say when you don't understand something
- Maintaining confidentiality within the group
- Look after yourself – this can be a challenging topic
- Phones – please make sure you are muted

Unconscious Bias

An Overview

This course offers an introduction to unconscious bias, looks at why unconscious bias develops, and how it can affect our thought processes, relationships and decision-making.

This course is interactive and uses real-life scenarios and case studies to consider why unconscious bias is so important in safeguarding.

Unconscious Bias

By the end of the session, participants will be able to:

- Define unconscious bias and recognise it in practice
- Identify how bias impacts adults' outcomes
- Apply legal frameworks (Care Act, MCA, Equality Act)
- Use effective advocacy strategies
- Reflect on their own practice and biases

Getting Started

Activity

Ask:

“What does advocacy mean to you?”

“What makes someone feel heard?”

What Is An Unconscious Bias?

- An **unconscious bias** is a mental shortcut your brain takes without you realising. It's automatic, fast, and often based on patterns your mind has absorbed over time — from culture, media, personal experiences, or repeated messages in your environment.

- You can think of unconscious bias as your brain making a quick judgement before you've had a chance to think things through. It isn't intentional, and it doesn't mean someone is unkind or prejudiced on purpose. It simply means the brain is trying to save effort by using familiar patterns — but those patterns can be inaccurate or unfair.

What is Unconscious Bias?

Automatic assumptions or judgements

Influenced by experience and culture

Can affect decision-making

Often happens without awareness

Another Way of Explaining This

How a person thinks can depend on their life experiences and sometimes they have beliefs and views about other people that might not be right or reasonable.

This is known as 'unconscious bias' and includes when a person thinks:

better of someone because they believe they're alike

less of someone because that person is different to them, for example, they might be of a different race, religion or age

Why Do We Have An Unconscious Bias?

- The brain needs to use short cuts
- We take in messages from our environment from the day we are born – even if we don’t agree with these messages, they become unconscious and shape our automatic responses
- The brain prefers the familiar…humans are wired to feel safer with what feels known or predictable. So, we might interpret things differently depending on who says them.

Why It Matters

- Affects quality of care
- Can lead to inequality
- Impacts safeguarding outcomes
- Undermines person-centred practice

MINI ACTIVITY

“Think of a time you made a quick judgement—what influenced it?”

REMINDER – RELEVANT PRACTICE FRAMEWORKS

Care Act 2014 – wellbeing and voice

Mental Capacity Act – assume capacity

Equality Act 2010 – non-discrimination

Safeguarding principles

What is the first thing you think of when you see this list of people?

Einstein

Churchill

John F Kennedy

Agatha Christie

Richard Branson

In Summary

The human brain can receive many more pieces of information than it can consciously process, so we have to rely on our subconscious to take short cuts.

These short cuts are influenced by a wide range of factors.

We have **unconscious bias** because of the way the human brain is built.

The short version: **your brain is trying to keep you safe and efficient — but sometimes it takes shortcuts that aren’t fair or accurate.**

Assumptions we make…

Remember We All Have Biases

- Unconscious bias is **one type** of cognitive bias
- **Cognitive bias** are *mental shortcuts* that help the brain make quick decisions, but can lead to errors in thinking

A cognitive bias is a systematic error in thinking that occurs when people are processing and interpreting information in the world around them and affects the decisions and judgments that they make ...

Cognitive biases are often a result of your brain's attempt to simplify information processing – we try to make sense of a complex world.

Source: 'Implicit stereotypes and the predictive brain: cognition and culture in "biased" person perception' Perry Hinton

Everyone can think in a way that involves unconscious bias at some point, but it is important to be aware of it and not let it affect behaviour or decisions.

Can you think of some examples of unconscious bias from TV, films, books or your own life?

Some Tools To Help You Think About This Further

You are going to be shown a picture.

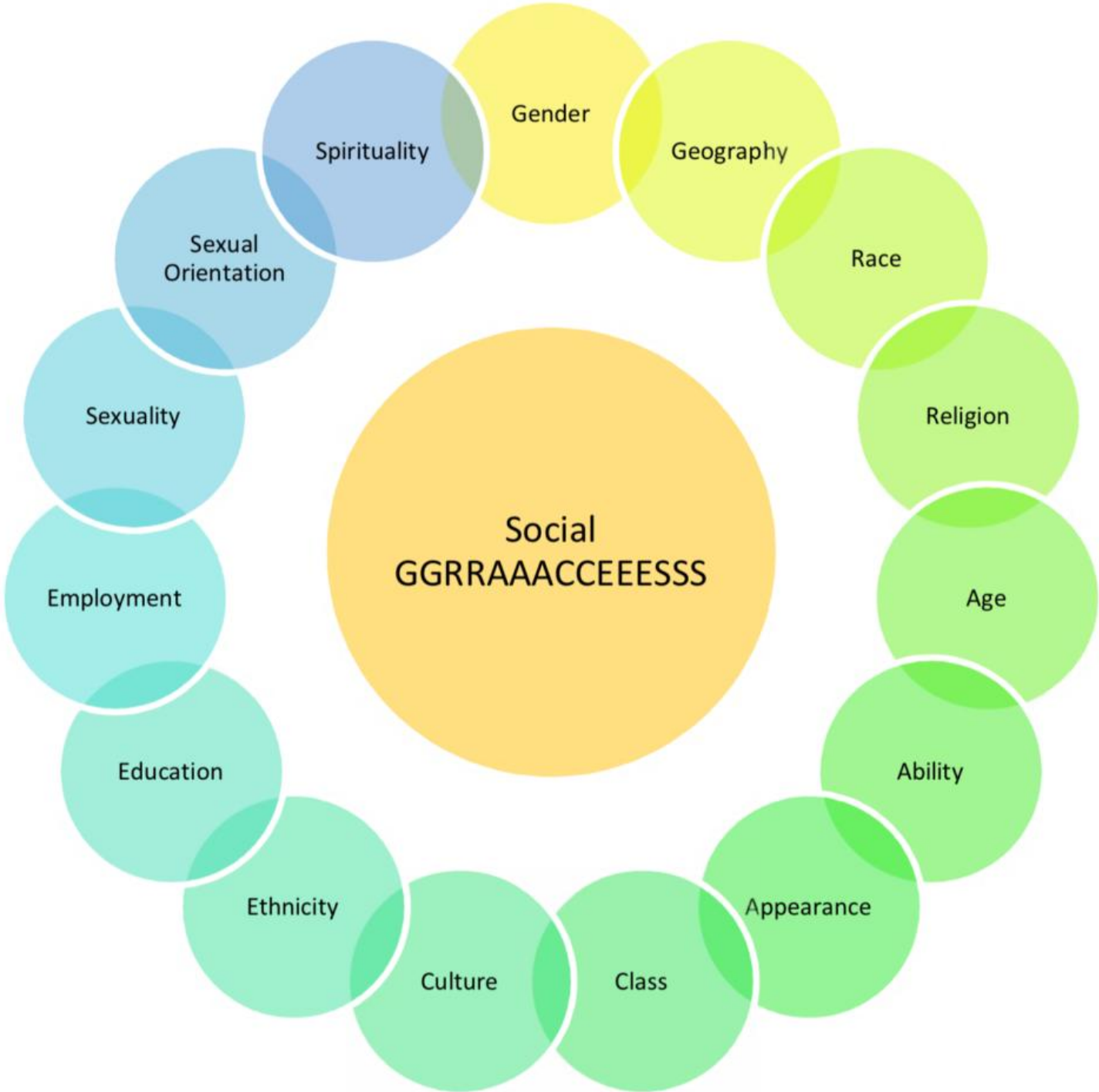
It will only be on screen for 3 – 4 seconds.

Please put in the chat what you see.

The Social Graces

Also known as 'social GGRRAAACCEEESSS' the term is an acronym representing: Gender, Geography, Race, Religion, Age, Ability, Appearance, Culture, Class, Education, Employment, Ethnicity, Spirituality, Sexuality and Sexual orientation.

A brief overview: https://youtu.be/bbN49FrvrYI


Social
GGRRAAACCEEESSS
Gender
Geography
Race
Religion
Age
Ability
Appearance
Class
Culture
Ethnicity
Education
Employment
Sexuality
Sexual Orientation
Spirituality

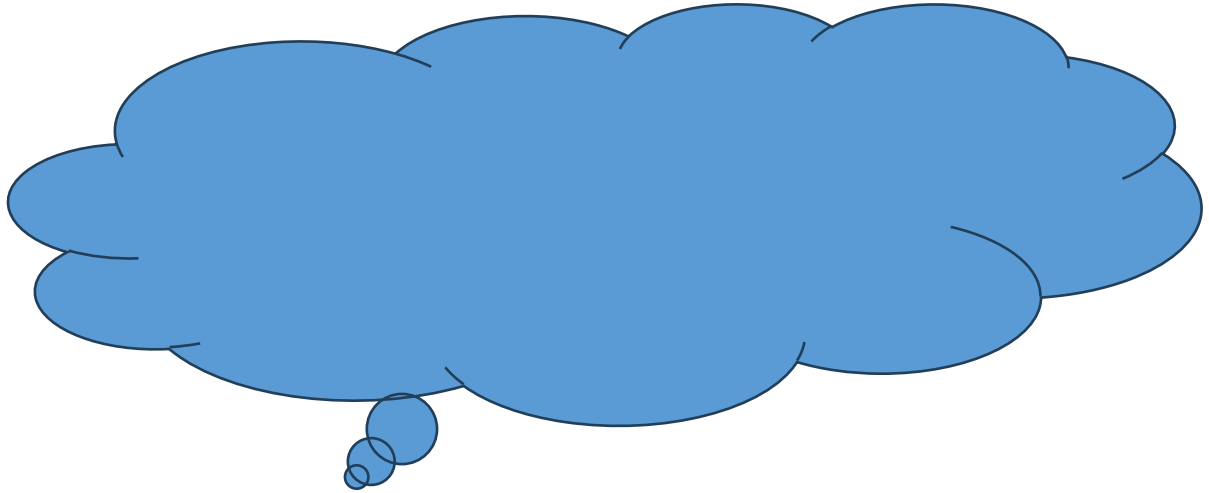
Finally, Some Quick Tools in the Moment

1. **Pause & Check**
   - What assumption am I making?
   - What else could be true?
   - What evidence do I have?
2. **Flip the Lens**
   - Would I interpret this the same way if it came from someone else?
3. **Name the Narrative**
   - Notice the story your brain is telling
   - Ask where it came from
   - Choose a more neutral story
4. **Behaviour → Interpretation → Action**
   - Spot where bias might be shaping the meaning you give to behaviour.

Pause to Reflect…

We have looked at several tools linked to unconscious bias

Take a moment to think about how these could be used in your day-to-day practice



Looking At This Another Way

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TlOUnOWfw3M

Types of Bias in Practice *Not an Exclusive List*

- **Common biases:**
  - Confirmation bias
  - Ability bias
  - Age bias
  - Anchoring
  - Availability
  - Regency
  - Halo/Horns
  - Diagnostic overshadowing
  - Communication bias
  - Attrition

Examples of Bias in Practice

Use your phone to check you understand what your given bias is.

Think of an example of this bias which might relate to your work.

How might this bias stop you working effectively with a client?

The Impact of Unconscious Bias in Society

Some ideas …

Impact in the workforce

Impact in institutions

Stephen Lawrence

An inquiry into Stephen's killing and the police investigation that was held in 1999, the Macpherson report found the Metropolitan Police were institutionally racist.

The report found that racism was an important factor in the failure of the Metropolitan Police investigation into Stephen Lawrence's murder.

Henry Nowak

- Digwa told police Mr Nowak had racially abused him, a claim which Justice Mousley branded as "wicked lies".
- In the footage of Mr Nowak being handcuffed as he told police he had been stabbed, an officer can be heard replying: "Don't think you have, mate".

In The Workplace

Gender bias may affect recruitment practices and relationship dynamics within a company.

An example of this bias during hiring is if the hiring panel favors male candidates over female candidates even though they have similar skills and job experience.

Another well-known *example* is the gender pay gap.

As of 2021, the average median salary for men was about 18% higher than women's.

The gender bias may reduce job and career advancement opportunities for certain populations.

Being Aware of Bias Can Be Very Useful In Life

Why is it important to be aware of our unconscious bias in a role such as yours?

Supporting People Fairly, Consistently, and Without Assumptions

1. Advocacy must reflect *their* voice — not our assumptions
    - It prevents certain voices being unintentionally sidelined

2. It builds trust and psychological safety
    - It reduces power imbalances

3. It improves the accuracy and quality of advocacy

This Can Translate Into How We Work

We may perceive others differently because they:

- are from another race, culture, religion and/or class
- have English as a second language
- are non-verbal
- have additional emotional and social needs
- display behaviour that is viewed as difficult or challenging
- have a disability
- do not conform to what is perceived as the norm
- are male or female or express their sexuality in a different way

Learning From A Safeguarding Review

This review was into the death of a baby.

At the time of the baby’s death, the family were living in a caravan on a traveller's site.

The Situation

All six children and their parents lived in the caravan which had three bedrooms, a small shower area, a toilet and a lounge/kitchen area.

The three male children shared a room which had two single beds and the two female children shared another room with two single beds.

Baby N was reported by the parents to have been sleeping in a Moses basket in their bedroom.

The Learning

The children's need for adequate beds, bedding, space to play, heating, food, clean water and clothing and readiness for school were not identified and as a result they were not offered the enhanced levels of service which would have been more aligned to the family's levels of need.

The barrier to this appears to be the risk assessment which recommended the use of a local health centre rather than visiting children on the site.

Another barrier was a sense of unconscious bias about the perceived risks on the site, due to it being predominately populated by members of the travelling community.

Learning From An Adult Safeguarding Review

Harvey

- Harvey was a 21-year-old man living in supported housing and receiving care from a specialist mental health team. On 21 January 2017, he was fatally stabbed by another resident and later died in hospital.

- Harvey had been known to statutory services throughout his life. As a child he received support from CAMHS, lived in a secure unit, and spent time in a Young Offenders Institution. He had a diagnosis of ADHD and significant learning and educational needs.

One of the Comments Made

“There appears to be a general acceptance of poor mental health and substance misuse among the population of individuals living in supported housing projects…there is a risk that such unconscious bias among the professional group may result in a lack of response to incidence of interpersonal abuse, and among the service user group that a level of conflict is to be expected and therefore tolerated.”

These cases highlight it is vital to be aware of unconscious bias in safeguarding.

Being aware of **unconscious bias** is central to good safeguarding practice because safeguarding relies on **clear thinking, fair decision-making, and seeing risk without assumptions getting in the way**.

When bias goes unnoticed, it can quietly distort how we interpret situations, how we respond to children or adults, and how we judge levels of risk.

Read in Full

- *https://www.buckssafeguarding.org.uk/childrenpartnership/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2021/01/Publication-FINAL-BSCP-Baby-N-2021.pdf*

- *https://nationalnetwork.org.uk/2020/safeguarding_adult_review_harvey.pdf*

Case Study: Unconscious Bias in Advocacy for Adults

Exploring hidden biases impacting adult advocacy efforts

Case Study Overview

- Sarah, 52, mild learning disability
- Attends GP with fatigue and weight loss
- Support worker present
- Concerns dismissed initially

- What assumptions might the GP have made due to unconscious biases?
- How might these impact Sarah?

Bias in the Case Study

- Ability bias: assumptions about communication
- Diagnostic overshadowing
- Communication bias: speaking to worker
- Passive bias from support worker

Impact on the Individual

- Voice not heard
- Delayed diagnosis
- Emotional impact
- Reduced trust in professionals

Good News! Advocacy in Action

- Re-centred Sarah’s voice
- Challenged decisions professionally
- Requested further investigation
- Escalated concerns

Outcome

- Underlying condition identified
- Improved experience
- Better health outcomes
- Learning for professionals

Reflection Activity

- Have you seen similar situations?
- What assumptions were made?
- How could it be challenged?
- What would you do differently?

Some More Useful Resources …

https://safeguardingchildren.salford.gov.uk/media/1911/sscp-cultural-consciousness-guidance-july-2023.pdf

Impact of language

https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/uncomfortable-truth-our-role-bias-stigmatisation-childrens-searle-l8mge/

The Journey Of A 1000 Miles

Begins with a single step.

What step are you going to take today to make this training real?

Individual Reflection

- One bias I may hold: _____
- One change I will make: _____
- How I will advocate better: _____

Practical Tips

- Speak directly to the adult
- Allow time and accessible communication
- Question assumptions
- Use professional curiosity

Key Messages

- Bias is common but manageable
- Advocacy is essential
- Always prioritise the person’s voice
- Reflect and improve practice

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And so to End…

Please follow the QR code to fill in your details for your course certificate

Thank you for attending!

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If we have time…

Exercise

Imagine that you are boarding a train, about to make a three hour journey.

The train is crowded with only a few seats unoccupied and no chance of sitting on your own.

On the next slide, there are a number of thumb nail sketches of the other passengers on the train.

You have 3 minutes to decide which seat you will choose.

1. A seat opposite a mother and her young daughter (you think she's about 4 years old). From the books, tablet and sketchpad on the table it is clear the child has plenty to keep her occupied. At the moment her mother is reading her a story
2. A seat next to a young man who is wearing a ripped tee shirt and a large pair of headphones
3. The window seat of a pair. The aisle seat is taken by a plump elderly woman who is chatting to the man sitting across from her. On the table in front of her is a thermos flask, sandwich box, copy of the Daily Mail and pair of glasses
4. A seat next to a middle-aged man in a business suit with a laptop on the table in front of him. He is on the phone and speaking quite loudly
5. A seat next to another that is currently unoccupied except for a coat. On the table in front of it is can of lager with another empty one scrunched next to it. You notice the 'occupied' light for the toilet is on
6. A seat at a table. On one side of a table sits a someone in uniform with someone else handcuffed to them

Who did you choose to sit next to and why?

Can you see any unconscious bias in your decision making?

Based on an exercise from the Equality Challenge Unit

Equality Challenge Unit