

Practitioner Reflection – working with a Travelling Community

How do we professionally work inclusively with families when you may personally disagree with aspects of their lifestyle?

It depends what aspects doesn't it.

Maybe establish the relationship first.

I think you need to develop the trusting relationship and build connections first.

...It depends what you're finding difficult, is it on a personal level or, is it ... I mean I'll just say that personally I don't like boxing for example, which is a very big part [of life] for some traditional traveller children and parents, and I've had quite a few discussions [with them] about that but I certainly wouldn't have had those conversations when I was first meeting a family, I'd have them later...

The thing is [to have] a discussion about your opinions rather than what you think and how they should change.

Yes, otherwise you're being – you patronize people don't you, you've got to be honest with people, you can't say, I just think all your culture's brilliant, because I mean, in the same way I've had conversations with traveller families who say, well I just think a lot of you gorgers, which is a term for non-travellers, which is a bit of an overgeneralization, but a lot of gorgers, say why are your families so spread out, why aren't you with your families, where are your parents? why do they live up there and you live down here? how do you see each other? how do you connect when you live so far away?

We had [the traveller family] grandma [visit], and we were able to sit and have a great conversation with her, she sat with us for ages and gave us some real insights, and one of the things she said was I never thought that I would allow my babies to come to a nursery and be looked after by someone who wasn't family, and she said, I just don't understand that culture, and she said, I'm loving it and it's great, but she said, I never thought that would happen because we look after our own...

it must be very hard if they arrive and, you have to have a difficult conversation on the first day, but sometimes, if it's not about opinions about lifestyles when the relationship's further down the line that sometimes might come up, but if it's, dealing with something like safeguarding and – but sometimes actually, not always, but sometimes actually, if it's dealt with honestly and in...

...in a supportive way, as non-judgemental as you can possibly be, then actually you can be stronger because the relationship's more honest afterwards isn't it.

And I think this is where you can lean on your policies and procedures, that's where you have that transparency...

Yeah, this is sort of like, this isn't about me as a person and you as a person, this is about me as a setting and responding to you as a parent, carer or whatever your relationship with the child is.

I think you have to be forgiving as well, I know when I've suddenly reacted to something and then wished that I hadn't or I've been shocked by something and then thought, well I shouldn't, I wish I hadn't presented like that, so you need to – which is hard as well, particularly if it's you who feels the brunt of that, but actually to be forgiving of people because sometimes people react and then go away and think about it and wish they'd behaved differently...