



Mandated Reporting

Implicit Bias and Decision-Making

All people have biases, whether implicit or explicit. Recognizing and addressing our own biases is critical to ensuring fairness and equity in our decision-making and interactions with families.

A bias is a personal and sometimes unreasoned judgment against a person, place, or thing. Biases - including how a person looks, sounds, and even where they live - may influence our decision-making.

As humans, we all have biases, whether implicit or explicit, that affect our beliefs, decisions, and actions.

 An implicit bias is a bias or prejudice that is present but not consciously held or recognized so we are often unaware of it.

 An explicit bias is a personal and unreasoned judgement that we have about a person, place, or thing on a conscious level.

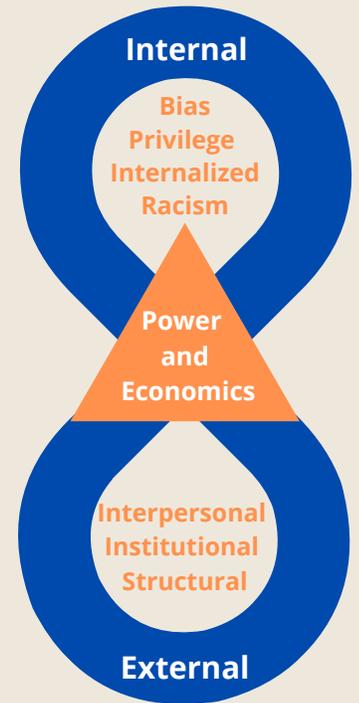
Understanding the Impacts of Bias in Child Welfare

Research has shown that bias frequently impacts decision-making. Individual biases are often deeply entrenched and are born out of a long national history rife with unequal treatment of different social groups, discrimination and oppression, cultural conditioning, and stereotypical portrayals of social groups.

In particular, significant disparities exist throughout the child welfare system. Research has shown that mandated reporters' decisions to report a family to the Statewide Central Register (SCR) is too often influenced by biases and personal beliefs. An implicit bias may even sway you to make a report against one parent/caregiver and not another even when the objective facts and information are the same.

Research also shows that these biases contribute to a disproportionate number of reports being called into the SCR on specific individuals or groups - including communities of color and Black communities in particular - far more than others. This leads to a disproportionate level of Child Protective Services (CPS) involvement in certain communities that can have long-lasting and devastating impacts on families and communities.

Each assessment made by a mandated reporter regarding whether to call the SCR can change the course of the life of a child and all members of a family. It is important to be aware of the propensity for implicit or explicit bias and to be intentional about making decisions based on the objective facts of a situation.



Decisions that are rooted in biases have significant impacts on individuals, social groups, and communities.

Part of this process is to increase our awareness regarding our own beliefs, including those that may be hidden or unconscious.

When assessing information received about a child and their family, instead of making assumptions or jumping to conclusions that a child is being maltreated or abused, we must ask ourselves the right analytical and evaluative questions.

For example, would my decision to call the SCR with a report of suspected child maltreatment or abuse change if any of the following were different?

- race
- gender or gender identity
- sexual orientation or sexual expression
- culture and/or immigration status
- religion
- primary spoken language
- age
- neighborhood where they reside
- presence of a disability
- socioeconomic status of the family

The best tool we have to combat bias is critical thinking. As mandated reporters you must use critical thinking when deciding whether to call in a report. Critical thinking requires you to:

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|  Identify what specifically concerns you about the particular situation |  Recognize the possibility of bias in your personal opinions |
|  Gather adequate information about the current situation |  Temporarily suspend judgement |
|  Analyze that information to separate facts from assumptions |  Develop multiple hypotheses that could explain the situation |
| |  Determine whether you are legally required to call the SCR or whether an alternative option is better |

If you are interested in learning more about what feeds into implicit bias, Harvard University has developed the **Implicit Association Test (IAT)**. The IAT measures attitudes and beliefs that you may be unwilling or unable to report. The IAT may be especially interesting if it shows that you have an implicit attitude that you did not know about.

You can access a variety of IAT tests here: implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html

If you're interested in **additional training on implicit bias**, please visit the Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity: <https://kirwaninstitute.osu.edu/training-resources>

The **Mandated Reporter Hotline** for child abuse and maltreatment reports:
1 (800) 635-1522

For resources and more information:
<http://nysmandatedreporter.org>

If you encounter a child or family who could benefit from support services, but does not meet the criteria for "reasonable cause to suspect," consider referring that family to community-based programs in your area.

**NYS Office of
Children and
Family Services**



The Office of Children and Family Services serves New York's public by promoting the safety, permanency and well-being of our children, families and communities.
For more information about OCFS, please visit our website at: <https://ocfs.ny.gov>