BIAS CHECKLIST

COGNITIVE AND STRUCTURAL BARRIERS THAT SIMULTANEOUSLY MASK AND PERPETUATE BIAS IN YOUTH SERVING SYSTEMS

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Bias in all systems, e.g., education, child welfare and juvenile justice occur incrementally through "micro-actions" that are barely visible and are rarely challenged because they are practiced consistently within society and agencies. It is hard to detect bias in a single act but accumulatively bias can contribute to patterns of disproportionality.

Bias as it results in differences, however slight in the application of policies and procedures can impact outcomes resulting in disproportionality and disparities.

This checklist identifies a few individual and structural ways that bias impacts outcomes.
1. **Cognitive Barriers**: **Role of individual-level thoughts and actions in maintaining structures of inequality.**
2. **Structural Barriers: Influence of history on policies, practice and values perpetuate inequality; K Capatosto, Kirwan Institute.**

COGNITIVE BARRIERS		
	Individual-level bias	Actions
1.Racially coded language passed from one decision point to another. Using words like resistant, hostile, and aggressive can sometimes be shorthand or coded language with racial overtones.	Reports and other forms of documentation that include comments like "refuses" or "denies services" with no explanation are left to interpretation. This makes it easy for stereotypes to fill in the blanks.	Ask clarifying questions, e.g., "what behaviors and actions constitute aggressive"? Be descriptive, not evaluative. Be aware of how stereotypes can guide decision-making.
2. Objectification of clients and their circumstances Referring to clients as "placements", "blowing out of foster care", "damaged kids", "illegitimate children", "broken homes";	Referring to mothers as "crackheads" and fathers as "deadbeat dads" or making disparaging remarks and generalizations about "single parents" can justify negative outcomes.	Discourage comments, jokes or insinuations of this nature. Discard written materials, e.g., magazines, posters or other materials, which might utilize similar forms of objectification and stereotyping.
3. Attitudes can lead to vague definitions or perceptions of neglect. Attitude of mother towards social worker can be used as evidence of risk to child. (D. Roberts)	Ambiguous charges of neglect are highly susceptible to biased evaluations of harm based on the parent's race or class or on cultural differences in child rearing or factors unrelated to safety of the child.	Ambiguous information is misinformation and should not be the basis for decision-making.
4. Stereotypes can act as powerful information systems. Implicit and unexamined assumptions that Black women are aggressive and difficult to work with, that Black men are violent, that Native Americans are "spiritual" or that Mexican men are macho are well-known.	Equally as problematic are assumptions of Asians as "model minorities," and the rarely acknowledged "pro-white" biases.	Individuals should identify their unconscious biases and their potential to influence decision-making.

5. Situations and environments that produce stress. Job tasks such as interviews, performed in certain environments or among individuals with whom you feel uncomfortable can evoke stress and anxiety. This might result in "distancing" and guardedness of clients.	When clients pick up on this, it may well make them a little less friendly. "Such interactions can throw an interview hopelessly off course". ("Blink, The Power of Thinking Without Thinking")	Monitor how certain job assignments, e.g., interviewing, home visits, certain neighborhoods might produce more stress than others. Consider how you might react when performing these tasks under stress.
6. "I'm not a racist"! People think their decisions are race neutral but even names and zip codes can contribute to decision-making.	Modern racism is incremental, and it can mask bias in the interpretation and application of policies and procedures. These practices can persist undetected when individuals fail to acknowledge personal bias.	Help individuals to recognize the scope of modern racism which is not just the act of one individual but the collective acts of many.
7. Inflexible personal values, beliefs and moral convictions. Every individual is entitled to his or her personal belief system. Personal values and beliefs can be treated as the only evidence of good parenting. Values are encoded into laws, policies, and political slogans.	Strong personal convictions about child rearing, e.g., discipline (spanking or whipping, negotiating with children and time-outs), Attitudes about broken homes and biases against extended families can influence assessments of family strengths.	Such biases can be embedded into perceptions of risk and safety of children and even encoded into structured decision-making tools.
STRUCTURAL BARRIERS		
8. "Colorblind" organizational structures is a barrier to equality that suppresses awareness of bias.	Pretenses of colorblindness allow everyday practices of discrimination to go undetected.	Address how "racial proxies", e.g., zip codes, names and racially coded terms, e.g., thugs, can promote biases.
9. Previous marginalization as a predictor for future risk. Bias against circumstances.	Bias against "circumstance", e.g., poverty, poor and dangerous neighborhoods, unemployment, single-parenting in effect becomes non-racial proxies that influence decision-making.	Practices that on the surface seem neutral to race can compound disadvantages.
10. Lack of collaborative systems for problem-solving	Programs that promote collaboration of family and community members strengthen problem solving and solution building, which can provide checks and balances for bias. Such collaborations require more time and resources.	Encourage and promote family and team approaches and collaborative problem-solving that are time and cost effective.
11. Humans encode biases into machines, *(K. Capatosto,)* e.g., Inflexible Computer "Drop-Down" Boxes	Over-reliance on technology can result in rigid and imprecise reports which can institutionalize bias.	Data individuals choose to use reveal what variables are valued. *(KCapatosto, Kirwan Institute)*