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# An Evaluation of Requisite Parenting – An Optimal Black Parenting Style

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## Disclaimer

The views expressed are those of the author and not necessarily shared by Barnardo's, as is the case with chosen language and terminology.

**This study aims to contribute to the body of knowledge on parenting Black children.**

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# Summary

This work is an evaluation of a parenting style developed from previous research by Okpokiri (2017). That study found, using data from 25 Nigerian parents in Greater London and an online blog with respondents from varied Black backgrounds, that Black parents were predominantly using a parenting style not well understood by non-Black populations, including professionals and policy makers. There was also no known research documenting this *Black parenting style*. From findings of that research, Okpokiri grouped distinct positive Black parenting practices into key principles, to generate a parenting style termed 'requisite parenting'. *Requisite parenting* has six principles: *selfless love, pride, adaptability, resourcefulness, courage, and spirituality* (SPARCS).

The current qualitative research evaluates how principles of *requisite parenting* align with research participants' understandings of good Black parenting. *Requisite parenting* style builds on Baumrind's (1971, 1996) established theory of parenting styles; it acknowledges parents' deep concerns about the profound negative effects of Afrophobia (anti-Black racism) and poverty on their Black children's potential to thrive. Semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions were used to collect data from 34 participants comprising 17 parents, 11 children and young people, and six social workers and child practitioners. Fricker's (2007; 2013) conceptualisation of power as socially situated is applied as theoretical lens. Frame analysis is used to access broader meanings in the data, activating concepts (discourses) used to define Black parenting.

The study highlights the challenges of parenting Black children in spaces with significant structural inequalities, such as multi-racial societies, while evaluating and developing a parenting approach which centres those challenges. As the model resonates with participants' experiences and or expectations of optimal Black parenting, *requisite parenting* style is presented to parents of Black children, social workers and associated professions, and organisations and policy makers as a useful approach for reconceptualising, assessing, and working with Black children and families.

The words *model, approach, and style* are used interchangeably in the study. The word 'Black' refers to a cultural and political term for identifying people of historical African heritage; it does not signify colour. It is applied in the same way as 'African', 'Caribbean' or 'African American'.

**Keywords:** parenting styles, parents, Black children, racism, child welfare.

# Report Structure

This report contains five chapters, beginning with a summary of the project, followed by the aims, and an abridged literature review detailing origins of theorisation of the parenting style up to commencement of this research. Chapter 2 is the methodology, which includes discussions of process of data collection and reflection on data analysis. Principles of *requisite parenting* style being evaluated are introduced, alongside data that speaks to all the six principles, in Chapter 3, where the findings are further analysed, with details about how the model evolved. Key messages from the research and recommendations are presented in the penultimate chapter. Chapter 5 is the conclusion, which includes strengths and limitations of the model. A reference list is appended at the end of the document.

# 1. Aims of the Study

This study is designed to achieve the following:

- To describe and explain what parents of Black children do, with a focus on good parenting practices, from early adolescence when identity issues in children begin to come to the fore.
- To illuminate what underlying concerns drive the thinking and decisions of parents of Black children regarding their children's welfare. To this aim, the study uses plenty of direct quotes from participants to allow a fuller picture of their experiences and understandings come through.
- To highlight how Black parenting practices, which are peculiar to the needs of Black children, might differ from parents whose children are not Black.
- To evaluate principles of a positive Black parenting style – *requisite parenting* – through the lenses of Black children and parents, and social workers and child practitioners who work with them.

**The core focus of the research is the style of parenting, rather than specific parenting practices.**

## 1.2 Theorising the *Requisite Parenting Style*

Research conducted with Black African parents in Greater London (see Okpokiri, 2017; 2021) suggests Black parenting is improperly assessed by social workers and associated professionals who work with children and families, including teachers, the police, and health and care professionals, etc., because of limited understanding of the parents' considerations or the children's needs. Findings from that study (Okpokiri, 2021) indicate certain influences not recognised by child welfare practitioners during assessments and interventions play major roles in the thinking processes, behaviour, decision making, and actions of Black parents and guardians regarding their children's care. A major contributory factor in the ineffectual assessment and intervention processes are the parenting styles used in assessing Black parenting, which are implicated in the classification of Black parenting as harsh and authoritarian (see Baumrind, 1971, 1996; Barn and Kirton, 2016; Cenat et al., 2021; Sternberg et al., 1994). As parenting assessments are based on theories of parenting styles that do not adequately represent Black children's needs or their parents' sense-making, a significant feature of parenting assessments for this population is flawed (Okpokiri, 2021).

The reasons for the inadequate conceptualisations of Black parenting are multi-faceted: firstly, there is scant research with Black parents and children, and research in which they articulate their underlying perspectives of childrearing and child welfare. Secondly, assessments and interventions with Black families are based on demonstrably White Eurocentric norms that have poorly interrogated race, ethnicity, culture, and structures, despite ample evidence showing these factors feature profoundly in the everyday experiences of Black families (see Gonzalez, 2020; Lashley et al., 2014). The third reason is racism, whereby professionals either ignore or minimise the racialised challenges of the parents and their children, or are actively discriminatory and oppressive in their practices (see Berger et al., 2006; Dickens et al., 2023). The fourth reason, and one which connects the others, is structures and practices that negate the importance of exploring Black experiences (Cane and Tadam, 2022), especially if such investigation might question the validity of established Eurocentric norms of parenting. Concepts that work for persons of White European heritage are generally incorrectly presumed as universal and therefore superior to non-European constructs (see Fricker, 2007). This study in a small way is seeking to improve such structures and practices.

In social work, universalised systems and processes such as parenting styles impact on children and families in fundamental ways (see Baumrind, 1996; Nwufu et al., 2022; Sangawi et al., 2015; Thoburn et al., 2000), especially as they are employed as evidence-based tools for measuring and supporting parenting capacity. Therefore, Black parents who experience challenges in providing good parenting because of systemic barriers, and thus adapt their parenting outside accepted White Eurocentric norms to mitigate those issues, tend to breach parenting guidelines recognised within professional social work frameworks (Kelch-Oliver and Smith, 2015). The child welfare interventions do not however consistently improve outcomes for children, as too often, the assessments end in no-further-action, with little support provided to the children or their families (see Bilson et al., 2017), while disempowering the parents.

Baumrind's (1971, 1996) parenting styles is the most widely accepted categorisation of parenting, including in majority Black populations outside Western countries. According to Baumrind (1996) and Maccoby and Martin (1983), parenting usually follows four styles namely: authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and unengaged.



Authoritative parents are both highly demanding and highly responsive, by contrast with authoritarian parents, who are highly demanding but not responsive; permissive parents, who are responsive but not demanding; and unengaged parents, who are neither demanding nor responsive. (Baumrind, 1996, p. 412)

Within any of these recognised parenting styles, two key dimensions are used to assess parenting quality: demandingness (expectations and boundaries) and responsiveness (warmth and support) (see Power, 2013). Several studies (see Pinquart and Kauser, 2017; Shucksmith et al., 1995) show authoritative parenting produces the most positive outcomes for children, even across cultures and ethnicities including in some majority Black populations; the central thesis of this research about *requisite parenting* does not necessarily contest that point. Nonetheless, authoritative parenting, in all its various permutations, does not always properly explain what good Black parenting really is, given the overarching spectre of racism and/or poverty in Black people's lives. Furthermore, some Black parents' practices arguably fall within *authoritarian* variables (Pezzella et al., 2016). Black parents tend to be categorised as *authoritarian* because they are more likely to be found using physical chastisement (see Barn and Kirton, 2016), although it is not the only reason the narrative of *harsh* parenting is ascribed to them (see DiAquo, 2017). The idea of *demandingness* also speaks to parents' ability to set firm boundaries while allowing for children to break some of those boundaries. Black parents report using firmer practices, which, in Baumrind's work was found to represent authoritative parenting for Black parents, but *authoritarian* in White parents (see Baumrind 1971, 1996). Black parents are less inclined to allow their children break certain boundaries, usually because of the likelihood of harsher penalties for their children within a racist society (see Lammy, 2017; Okpokiri, 2021). Power (2013, p. 17) highlights the tensions in these parenting style classifications:

...several studies of low income African-American parents have not found negative effects associated with authoritarian parenting. Baumrind[...] did not include the 16 African American families in her sample when defining her prototypes because they showed different patterns than the rest of her families. In fact, in her study, authoritarian African-American parents had girls who were the most assertive and independent. Whether these findings reflect differences in the validity of parenting assessments across ethnic groups or reflect the differential effects of authoritarian parenting in low-income environments is an issue that has yet to be resolved.

In various USA studies following Baumrind's, authoritarian style has further shown better outcomes for Black children, including in reducing incidences of suicide, fostering better adjustment, self-esteem, and educational outcomes (Garcia et al., 2019; Greening et al., 2010; Gunnoe and Mariner, 1997; Steinberg et al., 1994). Nonetheless, the harmful impact of physical chastisement as a regular means of discipline, other negative notions in the authoritarian parenting style, including labelling and deficit discourse, make authoritarian parenting undesirable to be recommended for Black children. The resultant ambiguity leaves Black parents feeling misunderstood and misrecognised, and is also harmful to Black children, who experience poorer outcomes from ineffectual parenting assessments, interventions, and support (Okpokiri 2021). The scant research and literature available on the subject (see Pezzella et al., 2016) indicate Black parents in Britain largely feel disempowered about raising their children because their parenting style is not recognised. Young people are more likely to grow out-of-parental-control where parental disempowerment exists, with implications of potential school exclusion and involvement in youth criminal justice system (see Ali, 2008; Clarke et al., 2017; Lashley et al., 2014). As such, identifying a suitable parenting style for understanding and assessing Black parenting is necessary.

### 1.3 Why is Optimal Black Parenting ‘Requisite’?

Fricker (2007, p. 13) defines power as ‘socially situated capacity to control others’ actions’, thinking processes and behaviours. Such power might be structural and so without direct agents or, enforced by others. The social situatedness of power is how deficit discourses arise against particular groups. Dehumanizing language and labels about immigrants and specifically Black immigrants, and Black people in general, remain abundant in public and academic discourses in Britain and other White majority countries (see Ehlers, 2012). The *missing Black father* is a frame used in lazy deconstruction of the involvement of Black boys in anti-social behaviours or the criminal justice system. Simplistic explanations of why some Black fathers do not live with or raise their children contribute to a narrative of negative Black family practices (see Carmichael-Murphy, 2023).

Historical oppressions and other complex global capitalist influences have sustained poorer outcomes for Black peoples across various socio-economic parameters (Gould, 1999; Staples, 1975). However, the very existence of these facts provides avenues for racist judgements and discourses in Western political and public domains about the nature and culture of Black peoples (Iheme, 2022). In the English child protection system, Black families are most represented in the category of physical abuse (see Arouh et al., 2022; Gov.UK, 2023). While physical abuse is used to label or group Black parents as practising *authoritarian* parenting style, parents of other races and ethnicities where neglect or sexual abuse are prevalent are not generally characterised as neglectful, for instance. These double standards accentuate how power is situated in the injustice of classification.

Control is exercised through three ways – observation (surveillance), categorization, and normalisation (see Foucault, 1977). Categorisation, the process through which labels are created and attached to things, ideas, and groups (see Garcia, 2001) is most relevant here, as it pertains to divesting good Black parenting of the deficit label of authoritarian parenting. However, simply merging relevant principles of authoritative and authoritarian parenting styles is not enough to articulate optimal Black parenting. It is therefore important to illustrate the process by which optimal Black parenting is named ‘requisite parenting’. Participants in the initial research (Okpokiri, 2017) and potentially many other Black parents, already knew and were practising *requisite parenting* without naming the term. Those participants shared concerns about being judged negatively for raising their children in ways that would ensure the children survived structural inequalities. What they were doing had not been defined and classified within social power structures (see Fricker, 2007). Their practice did not have a name. As Black parents were not formally drawing on their realities of parenting, that knowledge – here termed *requisite parenting* – stayed an *underground discourse*, and part of the colonial resistance nomenclature. Conversations about ‘the talk’ for instance remained an open secret within Black circles for a long time, and friends, family members and even acquaintances often asked others if they had had ‘the talk’ yet, especially when certain issues arise regarding a child’s exposure to racist elements in society (Gonzalez, 2020).

Works by Lansford et al. (2018) and Rothenberg et al. (2021) demonstrate that parenting styles are effective when parental practices are received as appropriate by individuals and groups within the system. This means that definitions of good parenting depend on accepted systems and practices of a given society, that is, *normalization* in Foucault’s (1977) theorisation. Deeper understanding of how racism intertwines with poverty to impact Black people’s lives is still limited, but for Black people in England, racism is an overarching issue because of its relation to power. Practices like ‘the talk’, where parents explain to their Black children that society will probably be harder on them because

of their racialised physical features, are harsh, and painful, for children as well as parents (Anderson et al., 2021). To misunderstand the need to *hold Black children tightly to save them from an oppressive society* is to profoundly underestimate the damage of Afrophobia and the challenges of being Black in a multi-racial society (DiAquoi, 2017; Iheme, 2022). In responding with ‘fear and anger’ against the injustice of racist oppression, some Black children and young people begin to develop adversarial social identities including pro-delinquency personas (Pezzella et al., 2016, p. 449). When these identities solidify, pro-social dispositions are damaged, and parents as well as society struggle to connect with the children and young people (see Radke-Yarrow et al., 1983).

Requisite parenting approach extends Baumrind’s (1996) existing parenting framework to better capture the realities of Black children and their parents – foregrounding the model as being necessary, and essential for the survival of Black children. From the previous study (Okpokiri, 2017), six parenting principles which correlate to Black children’s needs are used in theorising requisite parenting, namely, *Sacrificial love, Pride, Adaptability, Resourcefulness, Courage, Spirituality* (SPARCS). In addition to new variables based on the specific needs of Black children, requisite parenting incorporates relevant positive values of both authoritative and authoritarian styles, which are applied with nuance in acknowledgement of Afrophobia and/or poverty. Black parenting is *situated* within a set of unique structural challenges that significantly complicate childrearing. These structural inequalities – racism and poverty – account for the dimension of ‘situatedness’, and are what distinguish requisite parenting from other established parenting styles. The following figure depicts requisite parenting alongside known parenting styles. It shows that while other parenting styles can be understood from two dimensions, requisite parenting is three dimensional.

**Figure 1 – Parenting Typology Incorporating \*Requisite Parenting Style.**

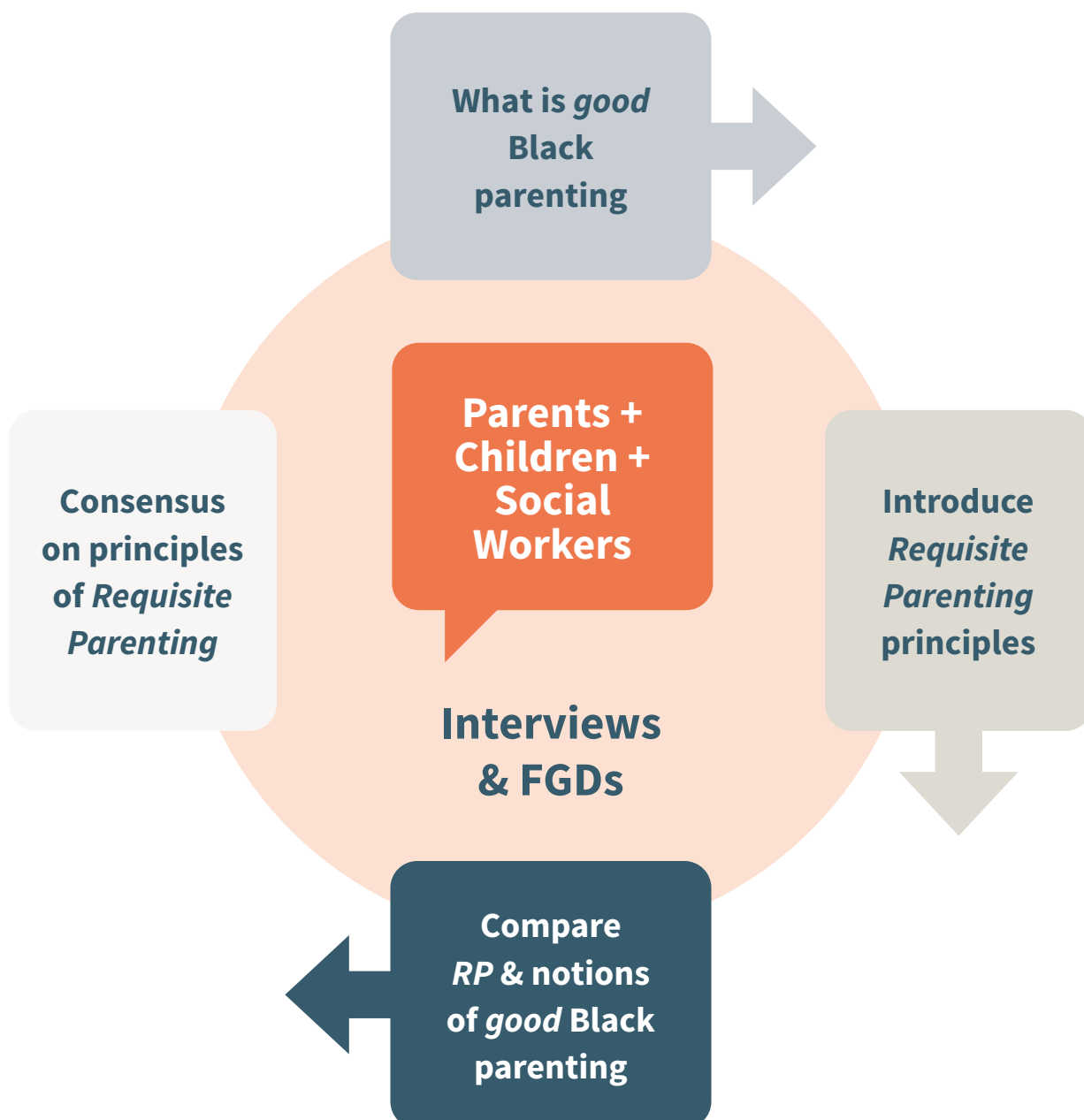
Parenting Styles & their Dimensions	
High demandingness & responsiveness <b>Authoritative Parenting</b>	High demandingness, responsiveness & <b>situatedness</b> <b>*Requisite Parenting</b>
High demandingness & low responsiveness <b>Authoritarian Parenting</b>	
Low demandingness & high responsiveness <b>Permissive Parenting</b>	
Low demandingness & low responsiveness <b>Unengaged parenting</b>	

**\*Requisite parenting**® (Okpokiri 2024) develops parenting typology of Baumrind (1996) & Maccoby & Martin (1983)

## 2. Methodology

Participants were invited to evaluate requisite parenting style to see if it corresponds to their understanding of positive Black parenting. They were also explicitly encouraged to explore any ideas they might have about how to improve the model. The methodology therefore incorporates elements of developmental evaluation research (Patton, 2015, p. 289), which include principles of purposivity and utility of the model, co-production, innovation, complexity of the perspective, rigour of process, among others. The co-creation of ideas with participants for further developing the model also drew from participatory inquiry (see Chevalier and Buckles, 2019). Both methodological approaches were integrated into a new purpose-designed one, *evaluative participatory inquiry*, as depicted in the matters explored with participants in Figure 2.

Figure 2 – Evaluative Participatory Inquiry



## 2.1 Superdiversity Sampling

A superdiversity approach was employed for data collection, to capture a varied range of Black peoples and their diverse characteristics (Álvarez-Pérez et al., 2022). Despite targeted efforts to recruit fathers, except for three men, all participating parents were mothers. The main inclusion criterion for parents and children was that they should be of any Black heritage. Findings from the original research (Okpokiri, 2017) show Black parents experienced increased challenges as children grew towards adolescence. So, this current study included only children from the ages of seven to 17, with capacity to understand the issues and express their views – parenting practices covering those years were likewise relevant. Parents or children with current involvement with child protection services were excluded. A smaller number of social workers and child practitioners were recruited, to gain their professional perspectives of the model. A combination of Black, Asian, and White European social workers and child practitioners were invited – the rationale for the varied racial categories in the practitioner group was to see whether race influences how professionals understand and apply the requisite parenting approach. For the professionals, the main inclusion criterion was that they had recent experience of working with Black children and families.

The research targeted different regions in England – East England, Midlands, and Greater London. In total, 34 individuals were recruited, comprising 17 parents, 11 children and young people, and six professionals. Key demographic characteristics collected from parents include employment status, age, gender, education and qualification, which religion if they have any, number and ages of children, and ethnicity, namely African, Caribbean, Black British, Other Black, or mixed or multiple Black heritage (in line with ONS, 2021 ethnic categories). These characteristics were applied in the analysis in respect of their impact on parental attitudes and response to social and structural barriers in society (see Shucksmith et al., 1995).

## 2.2 Participants' Demographic Characteristics

**Race and ethnicity:** Four parents were of Black Caribbean heritage, 12 were of Black African, and one was of White British; four children were of Black Caribbean background, six children were of Black African, and one was dual heritage Black African and White British. Two children did not have their parents participating in the study. Two social workers were Black Caribbean, two were White British, one was Black African, one was dual heritage Black Caribbean and White British.

**Region:** Five parents were based in East England, nine in the Midlands, and three in Greater London. Four children resided in East England, five in the Midlands, and two in Greater London. Two social workers respectively were located in East England, the Midlands and Greater London.

**Gender:** There were 14 mothers, three fathers, seven girls, four boys, six female social workers/child practitioners.

**Religion:** All the parents had religion – 16 Christians and one Muslim. Likewise, all the children had religion – nine Christians and two Muslims.

**Education:** Among parents, one had secondary education, two had some college and further education, and the remaining had higher education. Three professionals were registered social workers, and three were child practitioners.

**Ages:** Parents were aged between 35-55 years. The children's ages ranged from 9-15 years including two 9-years-old girls who were the youngest participants, and two males aged 14 and 15 years who were the oldest.

**Employment:** Three parents (mothers) were homemakers not employed outside the home, and the remainder were in full time work outside the home.

## 2.3 Data Collection

Some participants were accessed through targeted charity networks and subsequently via snowball techniques, with some individuals recommending others to join (see Parker et al., 2019). Social workers and child practitioners were recruited through similar non-random sampling processes using online leaflets advertising the study to organisations supporting children and families. Data was collected using semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs), with purpose-designed interview schedules. Focus group discussions were used to enhance participants' engagement with the issues and provide further material for triangulation. Two of the three regions had one each of the children and young people's and parents' FGDs. In total, there were 34 individual interviews, two children's and two parents' FGDs. Logistical challenges prevented any of the FGDs taking place for the Greater London cohort. Tailored, child-friendly interview techniques were developed for the children and young persons and made specifically relevant to Black children's experiences. Ethics clearance was obtained for the project from a UK higher education institution. All ethical processes including informed consent, parental consent, sensitivity and reflexivity in interviews, safeguarding protocols, preservation of privacy and anonymity were followed robustly, and rigour applied to the entire process.

## 2.4 Culture-led Data Collection

Choosing the research team was also a culturally sensitive process. All interviews and FGDs were conducted by research assistants and I, as the principal investigator. The research assistants were selected for their capacity to understand and manage nuances of race, ethnicity, and culture with regards to Black people's experiences; it was necessary to do so, since the previous study (Okpokiri, 2017) demonstrated that Black parents felt essentially misunderstood. I am a British woman of Black African heritage, while the two research assistants were of Black African and South Asian backgrounds respectively. The interviews and FGDs were often emotionally charged, and many participants cried either during their individual interviews or at the FGDs. The research team preplanned how to manage these emotions, which we did in open and confident ways – we were empathetic and allowed ourselves to shed a few tears with tearful participants whenever we vicariously felt their pain strongly. After each interview, the research team met to debrief and resolve some of the difficult emotions and thoughts. Each interviewee also received debrief sessions from the interviewer who also offered signposting information, to help manage any psychological and emotional aftermath – participants said they appreciated the debrief sessions.

Food enhances social interaction. Black people especially, partake in collective feeding to reinforce shared connections. *Soul food*, a term coined by African Americans, represents a cross-national practice of food as fostering Black interactions and relationships (Carter, 2021). Food and drinks were provided during the four focus group discussions with Black children and parents, and everyone enjoyed the fare, including the research team.

## 2.5 Child-centred Interviews

Lego dolls depicting Black people in numerous professions, skills and roles, including, doctors, builders, lawyers, firemen/firewomen, lab technicians, nurses, teachers, police officers, etc., were used during interviews and focus group discussions with the children and young people. Each child was allowed to choose one during their individual interview and FGD respectively, which they kept afterwards. The children and young people were excited about the dolls and used them as concentration points during interviews. Interviews with children were done with sensitivity – the research team shared training and reflections prior to and after each child’s interview. Most of the children were emotional at certain points during the discussions, and each child was offered space to pause or stop the interview and provided emotional support. All the children were provided further psychological guidance tailored to their response to the interviews afterwards.

## 2.6 Interviews and Focus Group Discussions

The evaluation also draws on principles of participatory inquiry, where in an iterative process (see Chevalier and Buckles, 2019), parents and children were asked to share their views on the core phenomenon under investigation, that is, ‘what is optimal Black parenting?’. Parents and children, and subsequently social workers/child practitioners, were then presented with the six principles of *requisite parenting* – each principle was explained to participants. A card showing a picture and few sentences explaining each principle was handed to each participant for reference during interviews – all participants were supported to compare the principles with their original views of positive Black parenting. Participants were finally guided to analyse the fit between their perspectives of good Black parenting and *requisite parenting*, to decide on the best and ultimate principles of *requisite parenting*.


More structured questions were considered for the interviews, since evaluation requires examining the effectiveness of an issue (Patton et al., 2015). Beginning with structured questions about the strengths of requisite parenting model would have entailed asking participants leading questions about the model. Therefore, a more spontaneous way of seeing how participants’ understandings of positive Black parenting aligned or not with the model was deemed more rigorous. So, rather than ask parents whether they disciplined their children with ‘confidence and compassion’, which are core notions in the courage principle of the requisite parenting model, they were asked how they raised their children and how they managed challenging behaviour; and likewise for children, who were asked how they responded to their parents’ guidance. Thereafter, participants were presented with each principle of requisite parenting to obtain answers that would either support or refute the principles. This process made it possible to also deduce underlying messages that participants may not have ordinarily connected to the idea of discipline, for example. Accordingly, information provided by parents about an ordinary day in the life of their children was triangulated with their responses to the principle of *sacrificial love* in the requisite parenting model.



The focus group discussions were used mainly to explore any marked differences among grouped participants in their interpretations of optimal Black parenting, and to gain consensus on what best constitutes *requisite parenting*.

Figure 3 – Requisite parenting cards


## SACRIFICE



**FATHER**

- ⬇ How do parents show love and care for children?
- ⬇ Emotional, financial, educational/training, shared personal time and space, practical – food, clothing, personal care.
- ⬇ Making and keeping appointments, attending events for and with children.
- ⬇ Balance work within and outside the home with dedicated space and time to really 'see' and 'hear' children.

## PRIDE




- ⬇ How do parents promote children's self-esteem?
- ⬇ Recognise children's efforts – praise them when they accomplish something and share with others.
- ⬇ Support children's negrescence – Black identity and culture.
- ⬇ Parents seek out materials and spaces to support their and children's understanding of Black experiences, developmental needs, and self-care including hair and body.

## ADAPTABILITY




- ⬇ How do parents adapt to the environment and children's development?
- ⬇ Actively learn about the environment and circumstances where children are growing.
- ⬇ Acclimatise and be willing to evolve with children and situations.
- ⬇ Be nimble and mobile in outlook and on issues affecting children.
- ⬇ Seek to understand and work with children's reality, which may differ from parents. Parents may never fully understand children's experiences outside the home but should try.

## RESOURCEFULNESS



- ⬇ How do parents access support?
- ⬇ Seek & connect with social systems – extended family/friends, community, formal systems like school, GP, etc. – to support children's development.
- ⬇ Be alert to available opportunities/facilities & new developments in the community and how they can impact on children.
- ⬇ Seek and access new information and materials to help children.

## COURAGE



- ⬇ How do parents address sensitive/difficult issues? Practice 'the talk' (race/ poverty) age-appropriately
- ⬇ Engage effectively with, and challenge children, professionals, authorities, and systems on sensitive/difficult issues, including on racism, poverty, gender etc.
- ⬇ Discipline children with confidence and compassion, taking time to explain why.
- ⬇ Accept reality of certain insurmountable situations. Work with what is available.
- ⬇ Staying the course – never giving up on children, helping children persist and or persisting with children.

## SPIRITUALITY



- ⬇ How do parents support spiritual development of children?
- ⬇ Help children develop values that transcend power & self/instant-gratification such as forgiveness, healing, redemption, restoration, restitution, hope, inner peace, & non-judgemental acceptance of limitations in oneself, others, and society.
- ⬇ Faith – religious or non-religious belief in an inner or transcendental strength that surpasses children's present challenges.
- ⬇ Walk alongside children in small steps towards inner healing.



## 2.7 Data Management & Frame Analysis

Microsoft Teams software was used for recording all interviews and focus group discussions, and for the initial data transcription. A Teams meeting was created for each interview or FGD and the interviewer *starts* the meeting online while physically present with the participant/s at the beginning of the interview, and clicks *record*, with transcription. Subsequently, each recording was manually retranscribed in Word document for accuracy. Initial coding of the data was done in Word document. Participants' words have been kept as close to exact as could be, to ensure the *voices* are heard as directly as possible. Frame analysis, in which symbolic and cognitive structures and codes of meanings compete, was used to obtain meanings from the data (Hertog & McLeod, 2001). Words and phrases with meanings beyond their literal terms were extracted to 'support broader cultural templates of understanding' (Cornelissen, 2014, p. 183). Those *code* words and phrases which generate or sustain discourses about Black parenting were grouped into *frames*. The initial frames were entered into Excel sheets, where secondary level coding was done, to develop higher order frames. Each frame either spoke to or refuted one of the six principles of requisite parenting. A *refuting frame* was highlighted, for example, from the meaning embedded in the word 'sacrifice' in the principle of *sacrificial love*, since a few participants saw *sacrifice* as not fitting the discourse regarding how Black parents spoke or thought about the task of caring for their children.

### 3. Principles of Requisite Parenting

Optimal Black parenting, which in this study is named requisite parenting, comprises six principles, namely *Sacrificial love, Pride, Adaptability, Resourcefulness, Courage, Spirituality* (SPARCS). The principles were derived directly from findings of a previous study with Black parents in Britain (Okpokiri, 2017). Principles of positive parenting have been collated from that study using three dimensions of parenting, namely: *demandingness, responsiveness and situatedness*. Participants' responses in this present study are captured within this framework, as shown in figure 4 below. Any differences between ideas in the requisite parenting model and participants' interpretations of the principles are addressed at the end of this chapter, to show transparency in how the approach evolved.

Figure 4 – Principles of Requisite Parenting

#### Principles of Requisite Parenting

**Selfless love:** selfless love, intense personal labour from parents. Investment in children, including financial, time, educational, emotional, and practical care.

**Pride:** affirmation that whatever the child attains is against the odds; identity fostering, and nigrescence (pride in Black identity and features), physical care of Black body and hair, psychological care of self-esteem, rejection of deficit narratives regarding Black people, promotion of positive Black image.

**Adaptability:** being nimble, mobile in outlook and approach, acculturation (spatial and interpersonal), astute, and able to evolve with the situation/circumstance/environment.

**Resourcefulness:** being open to finding and using new information, opportunities, and materials to help the child develop against adversity.

**Courage:** ability to explain harsh realities to children of varied ages in age-appropriate ways – 'the talk'; to take a stance. Discipline with courage and compassion. Strength to persevere for and with children in the face of damaging systemic social injury such as racism and/or poverty.

**Spirituality:** hope and belief for and with children, that against substantial odds, the children can grow, thrive, and/or excel. Faith – religious or non-religious faith, that innate or supernatural powers can help children overcome incredible obstacles; the notion of superhuman strength of the soul. Tapping into transcendental forces within and around children to support their uniqueness.

## 3.1 Sacrificial Love

### Parental Application of Sacrificial Love

#### How do parents show love and care for children?

Emotional, financial, educational/training, shared personal time and space, practical – food, clothing, personal care. Making and keeping appointments, attending events for and with children. Balance work within and outside the home with dedicated space and time to really ‘see’ and ‘hear’ children – problem solving.

Systematic review of Local Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews in England (Dickens et al., 2022) found that professionals did not always seek to gain understanding of what constitutes an ordinary day in the lives of children they worked with. Hence, these synopses of a typical day in the lives of parents and their Black children, which show the intense labour required to provide good care to children, starting with the mother of a nine-year-old child:

So, I wake up earlier, maybe between half six to seven. And then I wake her up. I get her ready. Breakfast. Yeah, all along we’re chatting. How was your night? Drop her off at school. Then I go to work and then work until when I have to pick up at 3 O’clock. We go home, and I’m wanting to know how her day was, what has happened at school. We eat dinner, have a little reading time or whatever she wants to do, coloring and then get ready for bed, which is bath time, bedtime stories, you know, never ending. (Bina, mother)

They have an alarm that they set for themselves, they wake at 7. I’m trying to train them to be a bit independent. And then we have breakfast, we pray together, and we all leave. I go to work and they go to school. They will do a bit of the cleaning, as I’m cleaning as well. They will do a bit of their own personal cleaning, clean their rooms. And then we go shopping. They will plan on what to make [cook]. If you make a choice, then you’re the lead to cook. (Eunice, mother)

So, the weekdays start with a shower, everyone gets a shower around 7:00, then some breakfast, then it’s off to school for the children and off to work for me. And after school, the boys have some extracurricular activities. Sometimes it’s football, swimming, gymnastics. Every day they generally have one hour of extra school activities and then sometimes homework, spellings and the rest. And there’s always church on Sundays. On Saturdays, they always have football and for that we have to travel to different villages around. (Katie, mother)

So, in the morning, 7’0 clock, my mom comes to my room and wakes me up for school and my dad goes downstairs and starts making breakfast for everyone. I come back and my dad will make me fruits. I mean they do most of the things in the house like wash the clothes, dishes, basically they provide everything. I do some things like vacuum the house, clean the bathroom, sometimes hang up clothes, but they do most of the other stuff. (Evan, boy)

When invited to something at school, make sure you go there, so you understand, and it also makes a child happy. Hear them out also when they complain. As Africans, when a child is doing well, we are so proud. Education is important because she is going to grow up. She is going to be somebody and she will have to help herself. And they say education is the key to success. Give them examples of other kids who have done well like Usain Bolt. Tell them, show them. (Amara, mother)

My son got an award... When your child is doing well you are very proud, African parents will do a lot. When you see that child, working hard you see your effort is not going in vain. ...this summer I didn't get anything [for myself], but I made sure I got somethings for them. Yesterday they went for a birthday party. He wore one of his best clothes because that makes them feel proud, somehow looking clean. Yeah, because of who they are, as Black children if they look dirty as well it diminishes them more. (Allana, mother)

Sharon apparently invests plenty of time and energy into providing care for her children, but still doubted whether she was a good parent. Her pride and self-confidence in her abilities as a parent increased visibly as she read the cards (principles of requisite parent) and realised how much she was doing:

Ah Lord Jesus, that is me! [reading the *sacrifice* card]. The only time you rest is when you are asleep, first job, the boys' mother, do you think this is good enough parenting? (Sharon, mother).

It is difficult, you go through a lot, but you have to go to work, prepare for their school as well, food. So, it is kind of a lot, and pressure as well. I tried so many things while she was small, for me to be independent, go to work when she goes to nursery. (Ketanna, mother).

Children and young people clearly understood the level of effort put in by their parents:

My mum attends, and my dad has come on a few school trips with me. When we go and come back from school, my mummy will give us hugs. It takes a lot, the class for my maths is like £60 a lesson, so it is very expensive. (Weni, girl)

Oh my mum does the cooking; my father does the cooking too. They get me ready for school. When I need something, they will try their best to get it for me. They always ask me if there are nice clubs at school. (David, boy)

There was a time when she had to juggle work and managed to get me and my brother into a private school. (Laban, boy)

My parents take me to carnivals, school community and then sometimes they take me to street parties that happen in [location] Park. (Kelly, girl)

My mum and my dad ask about my day when I get back from school. My parents know that sometimes the teachers treat me differently to White children, and sometimes White children are picked for plays when I am better than them. My mum says I should ignore it. My dad tells me to just wait, and not talk to them and just mind my business. (Dinah, girl)

She [mother] already understands, when I'm quiet, she knows something is wrong because I am usually very talkative. When I am quiet, she will ask me what's wrong, and I will say nothing, and she will ask me again, and I will say I don't want to talk about it and she will understand. And then the next day she will ask me again, and at that time I can tell her. My mum will need to talk to me about something. If she knows it is sensitive, she will go slowly, with consideration (Nimana, girl).

A mother said the principle portrays how she cares for her children but that it also exemplifies what every good parent would do, irrespective of race or ethnicity, and that many White parents go even further.

Sometimes they [White parents] do have more going on, like athletics clubs and things like that. And I'm like, wow, my child doesn't have an afternoon club every day and Saturday, Sunday activities every day. Am I doing less, should I do more? But then I listen to my child. If she wanna do it, we'll give it a try. If she doesn't wanna do it, like, OK. I don't push it. But I think the parents say no, they do sacrifice for theirs, White parents. (Lulu, mother)

The statement above highlights that many parenting practices are universal – the starting ethos and 'rule of optimism' (Dingwall 1983) is that all peoples and cultures love their children, and some principles in requisite parenting style more so than others will be applicable across all populations. It also confirms research which demonstrate Black parenting practices are likewise located across the spectrum of established parenting styles (see LeCuyer & Swanson, 2017):

Some practices in this principle were common across parents and children, such as having a bath and praying each day – sometimes doing both twice daily. Supporting children develop independence and resilience underpinned most parents' practices. Time, or not having enough time was the most important but elusive element that would enable parents properly apply this principle. Making time for children is perhaps harder for Black parents who are more than four times less well off than their White British counterparts in England and more likely to be in low paid employment, working longer and irregular hours (see ONS, 2021). While one participant said the principle is not unique to Black parenting, all other parents and children said it certainly represents key aspects of their parenting.

## 3.2 Pride

### Parental Application of Pride

#### How do parents promote children's self-esteem?

Recognise children's efforts – praise them when they accomplish something and share with others.

Support children's nigrescence – Black identity and culture. Parents seek out materials and spaces to support their and children's understanding of Black experiences, developmental needs, personal care including body, hair, and skin.

The principle of *pride* is seen by some parents as embodying group-affirmation, motivations to be better persons and for rising above difficult circumstances:

So I think this is something that Black people, Nigerians do very well. OK, I don't know if it's pride or motivation and Nigerians are very good at saying, 'well, you know you're a Nigeria and you should be the top, you should do this'. But I don't know if that's pride or more trying to instil a sense of motivation for the children to do more. It also speaks to pride. (Allana, mother).

'm quite big on the pride. I think any culture can do it, but no one could do it and with the same meaning and powers... so I'm probably thinking this is definitely a big, big thing to identify us. It's powerful to me, like the head nod. If someone does that, feel like, you know, other people they're not put up in the same way as us. The self-esteem thing for Black people. I think it's kind of gone backwards. So that's one thing that we all share and if there's Black people regardless of where we're we from, we're all from Africa. (Barry, father)

A major point raised frequently on this principle relates to Black hair, what it evokes in people of all races, and how to manage it. Participants shared how Black hair creates connections between Black people, and other advantages:

I've got Black friends where you can go over and they'll be like mum, grandma, aunt, braiding each other's hair, older ones creaming the younger ones. I was thinking of myself, that the only times I had my mother to myself completely were when she was on my head. And that's a big deal for Black people, the hair is supposed to be the bonding space. And in fact, there's a phrase we used to use, 'you sit between your mother's thighs.' When you're doing someone's hair, they're sitting between your thighs. We're now in contemporary times, that's what the barbershop evokes. It's a very psychological interaction. When someone's on your hair you find yourself telling them all, but I don't see the Western world understanding why and I think Black people haven't then owned it and gone out and put it out there, like, 'look, we're not too worried about our hair'. What our hair does for us is, it connects us to other Black people. Like you go to Los Angeles for six months. The first thing you do is go find another Black person because you need that person to do your hair. So, the hair itself forces Black people to connect to other Black people, to go and look for other Black people. (Amara, mother)

So it's a lot of talk talking therapy with the young ones. The fact that you know we're all different and we've got different hair. And the fact that you've got nappy hair doesn't make that hair inferior. In fact, there's lots of things you can do with nappy hair that you cannot do with other types of hair. And so it's trying to help them to appreciate, OK, this is what you've got and you can't really change it. You can style it in different ways, and that's the best that we can do and hopefully they buy that message and they agree. But it's a long journey because it's one thing to talk about it, but it's also different thing for them to internalise and accept what you're saying. So, they hear you, but like you know, they're questioning, 'is mom right on this - is mom telling us the truth about this?' So, they're not quite believing that their hair is good or even better. (Nenengi, mother)

Whether in rural England or urban areas with larger Black populations, Black children shared identical experiences of being treated unfavourably because of their Black features:

It is important to hear it than experience it, that some people just see your skin tone first.  
(Laban, boy)

I worry if I am not pretty enough, when I am with my White friends probably, not when I am with my Black friends. My mum, my friends and my dad, my friends tell me to look in the mirror and say I am beautiful. My dad says if they call me a name that I am not that name, I always know that I'm pretty. My mum tells me that I am beautiful and it gives me confidence. My friend who tells me to look in the mirror is nine years old. (Nanaya, girl)

My parents tell me not to be embarrassed and to be proud. Hair can be embarrassing, when I go with my natural hair, my friends ask. I like explaining it, so they can know more.  
(Chandra, girl)

It is a very big thing, I have been going to [a young Black boys' association] since secondary school. Black culture is something we have to know and not neglect. (Evan, boy)

Parents did not ignore these difficult experiences but found ways to discuss and affirm their children's Afrocentric beauty. Some parents were proactive in discussing these issues in age-appropriate ways and provided guidance to children following negative experiences; although others were frustrated by the oppressive practices on their children:

I am really hooked onto this one, she is dark skinned, and she thinks she is ugly, but she is not. I reinforce that she is beautiful. It is a journey. She likes Beyonce's song – dark skinned girl (Lulu, mother)

She was told when she started school, oh you look like poop, you look like mud. And she was like, mum, this person says this. So, what does it mean? Am I dirty? And she started saying, I want straight, light, coloured hair, blonde hair, brown hair, or I want to look like so and so. And she was probably 4-5. OK, we have to bring our culture back, not just follow because we're here, we can do our own African things here. So we'll speak our native language, try to tell her, this is where you come from. We booked a trip. We went to Africa and, you know, introducing her, 'this is where we live, this is where you come from'. (Amara, mother).

Like my child, he's been in the playground. People have made fun of his hair and he's upset coming into class. So, if you take a Black child and White and the and the White Caucasian child and say they all come into the class after break and both are upset. You're assuming the things making the White child upset would be exactly the same problems making my Black child upset, but my Black child is having to deal with whatever that White child had to deal with and more. So, there's an added trigger for him. You cannot address the issues in the same way. You've got to be, 'Ok, what else is happening with this Black child that I need to take into consideration in the way I handle this?' I get a call and say, 'your child has been disruptive, come and pick up the child'. Then he tells you, 'I was being bullied on the playground because I'm Black'. In that instance, should that child have been sent home, or should the underlying cause have been dealt with? (Lara, mother)

...the kids are playing in the park and, like they said to her, her hair was fake and she didn't like that. And you know, it was the tugging and the pulling and at that point. Well, she was still very young [5 years old] and she didn't know what to do and she was shouting at them: 'stop, stop! This is not good!' (Bina, mother)

For one participant, Black identity was not necessarily seen as something to be celebrated because it might hinder their desire to assimilate into the society; while another parent was reluctant to confirm the realities of racism to her children, to preserve the children's innocence:

In terms of pride and Black identity and culture, there's a lot of room for improvement in my life because with the desire to integrate into my new community, I think that sometimes we just need to hide our Blackness. Like, we don't need to be so Black the way that you talk, the way that you dress. Let's try to be more of what the community looks like rather than trying to identify and say, well, we're Black and we're proudly Black. There's lots of room for improvements in my life. And in terms of Black identity and culture, and I don't think we do quite enough to support Black children's identity in terms of knowing being Black. Essentially, this is an interesting one because I do not seek out materials to support my children's understanding of Black experiences. In fact, I hide some of the Black experiences from them, and I think I wanna protect them. (Karlene, mother)

I agree with it, but I have a question about practising 'the talk' age -appropriately. As I mentioned earlier, I tried to avoid that question ['the talk'] for as long as I could get away with it. How do I have the conversation and still maintain some level of innocence just so they can enjoy life a little bit better, rather than having the burden of that message. I'm trying to find the balance. (Parent during FGD)

Parents and children were most animated on this principle – some children cried while discussing it, and the interviews were paused at such moments. During the parents' focus group discussions, most parents were tearful, and the interviewers were not immune to the pain, including the South Asian research assistant. Interviewers drew on their prior training and experience to provide culturally sensitive positive reassurance to participants afterwards, particularly with the children and young persons. The interviews and FGDs accentuate the high level of trauma Black people experience from having different physical looks to other races. Meanwhile, even parents who struggled with implementing aspects of this principle, as noted in a couple of the responses, said it most undoubtedly embodies positive strategies in Black parenting.



### 3.3 Adaptability

#### Parental Application of Adaptability

##### How do parents adapt to the environment and children's development?

Actively learn about the environment and circumstances where children are growing.

Acclimatise and be willing to evolve with children and situations. Foster independence in children.

Be nimble and mobile in outlook on issues affecting children.

Seek to understand and work with the children's reality, which may differ from parents', while recognising that access to knowledge is partial – parents may never fully obtain/understand children's experiences of life outside the home, but should try.

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Some parents' responses emphasise that co-operation rather than competition fosters emotional security between children and parents, including developing children's independence (see Trommsdorff and Kornadt, 2003, p. 285):

Based on my experience, I think being open a bit more to hearing the children's lived experiences and how they're dealing with that. If the child will talk to you about it because you know they don't always, being open to that and working with them, not from a position of judgment. 'Things are different with you, but I'll walk with you. I'll learn from what you're seeing and hopefully we can integrate what my experience is and what your experience is and come up with a good solution.' I think that's a parenting style that I would like to see more of in my house. But there are many elements of the Black culture that I think are really good and could be reemphasized, so not doing away with everything that makes us Black or the parenting styles. (Lara, mother)

There is a lot of difference in disciplining and difference in culture anyway. Chores – I say to them. 'if you don't do anything that is fine. If you don't season the meat, it won't get cooked, if you have money on your card, order UberEATS. If you don't cook, it's not gonna cook itself. I am not gonna cook if you cannot wash your clothes, Hoover upstairs, you are not toddlers. If you starve, it's not going to be my business.' That's the kind of message I give them. They don't get hit, but will get reprimanded. (Jamal, father)

What I think that they really do well is promoting the independence of the children and that is what I really admire about Black parents. It's that they will support their children to be independent, to dress themselves, to make their own food, to help with chores, to clean, mow the garden or whatever it is, that is life skills which we don't have enough of in our general education as it is. (Bina, mother)

Western societies' hostile psychosocial environments regarding Black children, and Black boys to a higher degree, warrant some Black parents to keep their children on a *tight leash*, to ensure children stay alive and thrive. Such practices are perceived as controlling from non-Black perspectives, and thus, authoritarian parenting:

I tend to ask about the lessons they had, 'what have they learnt - did anything happen at school that I need to be aware of, would I get a call from school, or a teacher?' Normally, I get the call by the time I get home, but I like them to say, 'oh by the way this is what happened today'. The little one [15 years old] will say, 'don't know if you already know this'. It's when they don't say what's happened and I get a call a couple of days later, and I ask when this happened, and I am told Monday and its now Thursday, then I become upset that they are not communicating as they should be. The message is, I should know before I hear it from the school. I don't care what you have done (I do care what you have done) let me know what you have done, so I can help you, if you don't tell me I cannot help you, and it will be a bit too late. (Sharon, mother)

The older one was assaulted back in [date]. He rang the ambulance, took himself to the hospital with his friend. Police had called me that they had had a distressed call from him. I always tell him, 'don't walk on the outside of the road', but I did not expect that there would be someone random running past that would come and punch him. He was with his friend just walking, not far from the house. They may have had a riff, he had a cut very close to his eye, he was so scared, he said 'am I going to lose my eye?'. He was really quite changed by that. He is now more worried about the community, it was Sunday, broad daylight, they were not doing anything and he was randomly assaulted, he thought the person might have been Eastern European. (Katie, mother)

I think what we're most conscious of is our son, now he's a teenager and he's wearing a hoodie and he keeps putting his hood up or goes off with his mates to [location]. But then recently, there was a Black boy in [location] who was stabbed. And whether it was a racial attack or just kids having an argument, it happened that one of them was stabbed, and was Black. And we keep saying to him, 'just be conscious that you do look different to your friends'. And some people are really stupid and they might come around and make a comment or they would just target you for no reason. But it's hard because you don't want them to be afraid but at the same time you want them to be safe, however. So, he is aware, he understands that there are issues. You try not to make them afraid, but you really do want them to realise that all friends are not equal. (Edith, mother)

Some parents were glad to do things differently from how they were raised, to evolve towards their children's lifeworlds. These parents were aware that the situation is different from how they grew up and were willing to make difficult choices to ensure they worked with their children's realities:

I will go to the park with him. It is something I really want to do for my child. Growing up, my parents didn't even ask how I was feeling, or anything about depression. I want to attend events, appointments and will sacrifice to do that. (Nenengi, mother)

Stand by them if there's an issue. I don't give up on any child. I say I'm here for them. I have to make sure I'm listening. I'm talking to them to understand that life is not like that. You help yourself for your own sake. I won't be here forever. (Amanda, mother)

I adapted different relationship dynamics because me and their dad separated. It also depends on how emotionally strong you are. If you are broken, they are broken too. When I was better, they were better too. I changed their environment by that. And also, I have changed how to discipline them compared to how I grew up. (Eunice, mother)

Some parents struggled with adapting to some contemporary social developments within their children's environment, while some thought adapting was not always a good thing:

Sometimes you have to adapt for your kids. Now my kids have changed me. They are teaching children about transgender. When it comes to my kids, I tell my truth, that it is not true. I will let them know that is not the life for them. There was a woman who told her child this, and the next thing, she was having a social worker asking why she had done this. (Amanda, mother)

When I used to be back in the Caribbean, we didn't used to have computer games and all that type of stuff. But just by being outside, you could play in the trees. You could play in the Bush. You could play in the dirt, but you use your imagination. This is being taken away from children now, this ability to have imagination. But as the generation that gave into this Westernized world, we're losing touch with the land, because we are further away from it. They need to hone that skill and adapt better, because although I know that we as parents would want to instill what we've learned down to our children and pass it on. The environments are different, and we can't be ignorant about that. (Barry, father).

I find some parts of it hardest to accept, because of all the social changes that are happening and it's not particularly what I would agree with. And so, it's difficult to say, 'okay, this is how the world looks at gender issues right now for example and I'm okay with it and I'm willing to accept that with you and how you feel about that'. That one is hard because I don't think I'm at the place yet where I accept society's views of some of those social changes. So how do I navigate this world with my child who is now being exposed to all of this and being told this is the norm now, when my perception is different. So, it's hard for me. (Parent at FGD)

Every parent in the study understood and supported this principle as fostering partnership between Black children and parents, as children are encouraged to share experiences of their lifeworld outside the home with their parents. Parents were largely open to adapting their outlook and practices to the social, political and cultural environments children are growing up, except for a couple who were uncomfortable about certain contemporary gender developments.

## 3.4 Resourcefulness

### Parental Application of Resourcefulness

#### How do parents access support?

Seek and connect with social systems (extended family/friends, community associations, formal systems – school, GP, etc.) to support children's development.

Be alert to available opportunities/facilities & new developments in the community and how they can impact on children.

Seek and access new information and materials to help children.

Parents and children recognised the value of seeking and accessing external support regarding their children's welfare, and majority of parents knew where to find such resources:

We have organisations that meet our own needs, so we are part of that. Dressing the same, eating the same, and where we gossip and feel able to challenge. (Tमितुतु, mother)

I ask for nutrition advice, call and have discussions with GP, Doctors, and about school... It can be a lot because some things I don't understand, so I need people to speak to me for me to get it. Sometimes, I come here [organisation] ...they have been very supportive to us. (Ketanna, mother)

You can have support through the internet. You can find out all these things to support your kids. I don't really have a community here... (Jamal, father)

Be educated and being aware of stuff. It is not just about you, but your children have to go into the big wide world and navigate. I went to workshops on Black county-lines, new drugs paraphernalia, mental health for children first aider, its more about upskilling yourself as a parent coz there is no manual. I also tell him there are people carrying guns, knives, but I don't want him feeling like he can't walk around the streets, you should be in a planned activity. (Sharon, mother)

My mum definitely does that, I remember when I was in school, she would buy GCSE books, always making contact with my form tutor - she does it a lot. She has been doing it since primary school. (Laban, boy)

My mum is looking at some websites to see what best activities to do with their children. My mum makes me go swimming even when I don't want to because she tells me it is a good skill. My mum is always aware of what is happening around the village. (Evan, boy)

Parents and children valued spaces where they could be heard and understood, and treated in a non-judgmental way:

Being in different clubs that help, it is a nice to have a club of people somewhere who are just like you (other Black children) because they understand things that happen. Sometimes school don't always understand it. It makes me feel relaxed. For example, when I say something that is African, some will say, what, what does it mean? Why does it sound weird? But other Black children will understand. (Chandra, girl)

Because we're not sure what the resources are or where they are, then sometimes I do feel that, even when we speak out and say this is what we need, we're not often heard. And then even if we are, we're easily dismissed. And so, sometimes it can be difficult finding support. We can connect with social systems, yes, that's true in the sense that when we work with communities like the religious society or friends or the Black friends that we have, those are avenues for us to develop some social connections and get some support. But I don't know if it's always used because they're very busy as well. Those systems you know, can't always support you the way that you one would like. (Jamal, father)

Other parents did not know how to access resources, even though they recognised it was important, and some who did felt excluded from parenting groups because of their race. Some struggled to ask for support because of traditional values of independence and privacy; while others felt helpless because some basic resources such as safe but unstructured play areas which would have improved their children's wellbeing were not available or accessible:

I am not sure how to get support, especially for my child. Some interventions are good as early as possible, but sometimes some things are hard to know when is the right time [sic]. (Lulu, mother)

you will be told to join this group for moms, to build support. And then you go to get it. I don't feel connected to that, going out there and you will be given a different look like, 'what's happening, who's this, why is this person here?'. But I think it helps when you look for it and you connect with other Black parents. Or you use your own group to help each other, whether it is for baby-sitting or chat groups and things like that. But you have to do it, and look, more than usual. It sometimes doesn't work for Black children or Black parents. (Lara, mother)

...here we cannot let her play out on the street because of the socio-economic reality. There is a poor neighbourhood in [town], it has a one-way system, and the kids play out all the time, it is beautiful to see. We are in lower middle class terraced house, but kids don't play out, busy jobs, busy roads – it is sad. She is adapting. ...it can be tiring to go through challenges. I think it is worth getting a parents' group here at the organisation, we could have done with a cup of tea with our pastors, but they were not available. (Kobe, father)

We're very proud of not talking about our business and I think that has affected our resourcefulness as well because we might need the help. And because we don't wanna talk our business outside of the home, we could be struggling but don't ask for help. That means we can't learn how to be resourceful in the ways that we need to, that could benefit us. And the only people that may know the struggles would be maybe your close family friends, and that's if they could even help. And a lot of time, you know, a family could all be in the same circumstance. (Barry, father)

There was no disagreement about the importance of the principle of *resourcefulness* in Black parenting, despite some of the challenges in accessing support. Some participants, including children, did not always feel understood or included in some spaces and would welcome self-help groups or spaces where they could feel more accepted and be more comfortable in their Black identity.

## 3.5 Courage

### Parental Application of Courage

#### How do parents address sensitive/difficult issues?

Engage effectively with and challenge children, professionals, authorities and systems on sensitive/difficult issues, including on racism – ‘the talk’, poverty, sexism, sexuality, etc.

Discipline children with confidence and compassion, taking time to explain why and offering the child ways to amend or make restitution for their behaviour.

Staying the course – never giving up on children, helping children persist and or persisting with children.

Talking with children about difficult subjects were done in innovative ways:

I use humour, there is no topic in my house that cannot be discussed. I bring up topics, let them flow and then bring them back. We have spoken about sex, importance is knowing that you are open. I normalise talks and I make sure that all the children are part of this. We also do a lot of stories, songs from our culture, and then I also explain meanings. (Eunice, mother)

Discipline required some new skills and techniques, but some parents were still drawing on practices like physical chastisement on occasion. Although the latter parents used other negotiation skills, their rationalisation of physical chastisement as being within the law also raises questions about their strategies if (or when) smacking is banned in England, as it is in Scotland:

...it is not every time you have to shout; they have to be disciplined in a nice way. Even when they are wrong, you let them know as well. I let them know when they are doing good or wrong things. (Tमितुतु, mother)

Parents can explain something to me when I have done something wrong, and I want my parents to explain to me why it is wrong instead of shouting. (Chandra, girl)

My dad disciplines me by taking my Xbox, so I can't always have the same behaviour. My mum is always helping me. If I don't do something, my mum will keep asking me to do it until I do it. (Ibrahim, boy)

The parent needs to show respect for themselves, mirroring good modelling behaviour what they see is what they learn. Be aware of your own self and know that you are teaching them to be kind, courteous, empathetic and a level of respect for authority. We have open discussions as well, so they actually learn important of talking and communicating, learning so they have a voice. Be open, honest and transparent, I might not like what you have to say, but I would rather they tell me first, and the truth. (Sharon, parent)

We really have to teach our kids that if we don't have, we don't have. It just means right now we don't have, one day we will have it. Not everything they ask for you give, there are things you can do and can't do, definitely can't afford. ...everywhere you go they experience racism, I just, it is about making them feel loved and that they are needed. (Eunice, mother)

I don't slack on that point [discipline]. I tell them exactly. We read the laws together and say you see, the law accepts certain levels of discipline and these are the conditions and this is what's allowed. And this is not what's allowed. In the end, we agree, OK, and so if they step out, I make them step back in. I guess they've got to the age now where I tell them if you're doing this thing. You're gonna get whooped. After a few more times, I'm like, your roof is getting shorter and shorter, the next time you do something, you're gonna get it, you know, and eventually they might get it. And sometimes they don't, but they understand it. If they do get disciplined, whether they get smacked or whatever, they understand why it's happening and it's always accompanied by conversation, so they know, this is what happened. And this is why this happened, and it's legal. And then they said Oh mum, I wish we lived in Scotland. Yeah, but you don't. So this is where we are. (Ketanna, mother)

My husband has one philosophy in our house. He says he will discipline his children in the way he sees fit, so they become responsible adults. And that as long as he's doing that within the confines of the law, no one has any right to question his methods. So, he tells the kids, 'you could go out and tell your teachers or whatever, but I'm your father, they're not your parents. I have to live with you and deal with you for the rest of your life. So, if anything happens to you, it's going to be on me, not on your teachers, not on the police. So, as long as you understand that, then that's all that matters.' (Parent during FGD)

The idea that Black children are treated less favourably than others, including being wrongly blamed for incidents, was shared by parents and children. How parents navigated or challenged some of the perceived injustices, while staying focused on their children's welfare, is relevant:

Last Thursday there was an incident where he slapped another child. Yeah, you know I told him that he broke our heart. They didn't see that. The boy denied that he punched my son first and other kids around denied it. It was when I insisted to the head teacher, to investigate and find out. I know that my son is not violent. That's when they came back the next day and they apologised, that my son was hit first. So, do you see? Yeah. Then they go through all these things. Then you're constantly like walking on glass. Some other child can get away with this, but they [Black children] will not get away with it. So they know it's not easy, but we have to continue pushing. Yeah, and telling them. Being strong always in front of them. (Allana, mother)

So, he was given a book to read from school. It was the school reading material, and that material contained sensitive information. It was talking about slavery and using the N word, statements in the book saying, 'but all Black people were born to be slaves and all that they're good for is for picking cotton'. It was very graphic, there was a whole page of this novel. Ohh my goodness! My son read that it and he just started crying. I said 'what's going on?' and he tells me, 'look at this, look at this'. I said, 'why don't you stop reading this book?' And he goes, 'but well, it was reading material that was given to me from school'. And so this, from his teacher who is in the position of authority, position of power. I had to escalate it to the head teacher and eventually go to the local authority. So yeah, there are additional challenges to raising Black children, in addition to all of the other stuff that they have to deal with, there's the issue of race and colour and top of all that. (Amanda, mother)



I was out with my friends and it was a cold day. It was raining outside. And I had my hood up after we were out because I hadn't had my coat on and we're outside. And all of my friends had their hoods up as well. And then we were getting some stuff in the shop. And I got told to put my hood down but no one else with me in the shop was told to put their hood down. I wasn't too concerned about it but it made me think 'why is he only picking me instead of everyone else?' (Evan, boy)

It is going to be challenging, it is challenging even as adults, you know. 'Why am I not White so that I can be treated with respect?'. It's like you are a threat to the community, you have to be careful of what you do. Make them be proud of who they are, that is you. But there are certain situations like if a parent says to their children don't play with the Black child – what do you do as a parent? (Nenengi, mother)

There are times when things are not going well with either parent or school, challenges with racism – you have to tell them that we are the same, so don't be talked down [mocked or insulted]. If they are talked down, they lose confidence, they don't do well in school. They really really need encouragement. I have to show courage too, they see how I do and how I respond, and that I push too. (Amara, mother)

So, I asked him, 'what were the people saying to you?' And some of the comments were racist. So, I said 'And what did you do?' He said, "I just left. You always tell me if anything like that happens, I shouldn't argue back. I should just walk away and leave the situation." My youngest child would come back with comments about her hair. She more conscious of being different. So, I spoke to the teachers in nursery school, and they were like, 'oh we do a lot about learning about different cultures and all of that'. Even I as a White woman know they're all White British women and I don't think they have a deeper understanding about it. (Edith, mother)

Some children and parents felt they got very little respect from people in the community because of their race. Some children were often treated unfairly and picked on by their peers, and sometimes, adults they encountered in public spaces. Even though this principle – *courage* – focuses on parents' ability to manage difficult situations regarding their children's welfare, the children were apparently drawing on their parents' *courage* to help navigate those challenges for themselves. So, children were learning how to *stay strong* and be resilient from their parents' attitude and guidance. There was full support from every parent and child that the *courage* principle is vital to Black parenting.



## 3.6 Spirituality

### Parental Application of Spirituality

#### How do parents support spiritual development of children?

Help children develop values that transcend power, self, and instant-gratification, such as, forgiveness, healing, redemption, restoration, restitution, perseverance, hope, inner peace, and non-judgemental acceptance of limitations in oneself, others, and society.

Parents, take grace for oneself and children: that parents are enough and doing enough, and that their children are enough and good enough.

Faith – religious or non-religious belief in an inner or transcendental strength that surpasses children’s present challenges. Walking alongside children.

Spirituality was seen from various perspectives – it was a coping mechanism, used for managing pain, was about faith, community and support, moral guide, including forgiveness, developing patience, resilience, and teaching children that parents have needs too:

[Faith] is a big one in my house. I think faith is an important component. It’s a mechanism for, coping. So, we use it and Black parents use it first of all to help guide our children in the path that we want them to go. We hope that we can grow in that community such that we are forming the right friends that will keep us on the straight and narrow, and then also when we do get stressed, when things do happen that we feel are out of our control, whether it’s how we’re treated in community and how differently that’s happening. The fact that we can come back to our faith, we can use that to explain away what people have done and other times they just offload, feeling rubbish and I’m feeling whatever, sort of like a release. So, we do hope the kids would be heavily involved in faith and spirituality to manage their pain, because some of the principles of my religion, I’m sure a lot of other religions have similar principles. But you know, the forgiveness, and somehow you work that into conversations you have as well, right? You know they’ve had a bad day. Someone said something or they’ve experienced something and your response to that is, ‘let’s forgive them because that’s what God will do. It’s ok’. (Bina, mother)

This is a significant one, so many people are looking for instant gratification, taking but don’t want to give. So, I like this. I can’t think of any Biblical verse, but even nature says what is up must come down, without toughs you can’t make it, it is part of life...but with patience, and faith things will come round. Most parenting I have done, is with my second daughter. When I couldn’t give her what she wanted, it is okay. I knew sometimes that that disappointment would help her because that is the nature of life. (Kobe, father)

I incorporate this [spirituality] in my parenting. For me, because of age, I just pray for her. When she grows up, I plan on teaching her, and going with her to church. It is important for them to know there is someone above. (Ketanna, mother)

Sometimes my daughter will remind me to pray. (Tamitutu, mother)

We believe in prayer, yeah, so much. Any behaviour that I cannot deal with, I always pray to God. Because I had my grandmum praying over me saying, 'God train this child for me'. We are just a caretaker. Yeah. God is the owner of every child, every person. He owns the child. Your duty is to guide the child the way you can and let God do the rest. (Allana, mother).

A lot of Black parents in my circle might want to ensure their kids are going to church and engaging in religious and spiritual activities as a way of getting them to grow up well. Another thing I think happens is there's a desire for Black parents and children to interact together. To foster a communal feeling. Some of the experiences are shared and it's helpful to know that you are not alone, especially for the children as well. And so, if you have friends, then you know they might help each other navigate some of the challenges with being Black in the predominantly White environment. (Lulu, mother)

In all of the activities, what I do consider is this supporting them mentally, physically, spiritually, and also, is this helping the family to become more cohesive? There are certain things I want, I wish I did more of, but I think that's the natural feeling that comes with motherhood. Now I try not to obsess about those things because I do the best that I can. It's accepting the things you know you cannot change and also bearing in mind that for the family to be balanced, you cannot sacrifice one person for the others. And so, I have to do certain things that would make me feel fulfilled. And if I don't have that satisfaction, then it's hard for me to drive them towards a life of satisfaction. So, it's important they see that I'm happy and satisfied in the choices I make for myself, and it's not always 100 percent about them. (Katie, mother)

Connecting with and supporting children spiritually involves some form of therapeutic conversations within families. Parents thought it necessary to undertake this task but did not always feel equipped with answers. Perhaps that is an essential part of spirituality – the answers (and reasons for painful experiences) are not always clear, so parents and children found ways to be at peace despite uncertainties:

When she came to me, she cried, that they are ignoring her. I said, 'focus on the ones that want to talk to you, don't worry about the ones that don't want to'. I have told her that 'if they don't want to talk to you, then don't talk to them'. But I really don't know how to advise her because they are in the same class. Sometimes as a parent, I also don't know what to say, I have to come up with something. (Karlene, mother)

It's horrible what every Black parent has to do with their children. We had this with Pippa once when she was in the park playing with a White girl, and the mum was there. And at some point that girl said to Pippa, 'I don't want to play with you, you are Black'. I said, 'OK, how do you feel about it?' She said, 'I feel really sad because I like playing with her'. So, I said, 'do you want to tell her this?' She went straight back and told her and they started playing again. And I remember thinking, wow, my daughter's awesome. But I was really sad. Maybe her parents, there is racism somewhere existing around this girl. It was a negative comment she heard. I spoke to people at work, Black colleagues of mine who have lived in the UK for many years, and they were like yeah, that's what we all experience a lot. You know, that's a type of thing that's really horrible. (Edith, mother)

Spiritual concepts like forgiveness required trying to untangle moral arguments with children:

They keep asking, are you going to forgive dad, I keep telling them I have nothing against their dad but forgiving doesn't mean he moves back, to them forgiveness is also forgetting, so that is a lesson we are learning. When they tell me they have fallen out with friends, I ask what did you learn, why don't you want to play with her? And help them to put things into context. (Eunice, mother)

When I come home feeling like crying, I will give my dad a hug and just talk and it was enough. I haven't forgiven a friend, and I don't think I will forgive her. When I remember what happened, it still hurts a bit. (Maryam, girl)

We used to go to church, but now we don't do it that much. My mum helps me develop things I can't learn in school like having an open mind. My dad was talking to me when he was forgiving me for what I did and returning my Xbox. (David, boy)

I used to go to church, but I don't anymore. I want my mum to tell me about being non-judgemental. I would like my mum to encourage me more. (Dinah, girl)

We are Christian, because it's like 21st century, there are parts like that are different when it comes to religion. My mum works with a lot of variety people, people who do drugs, come from the rough places, coz you can't really like, practice your faith with them., but then again you can't impose. She doesn't directly say, but she is very aware. Even in my school, how we have assemblies, I have to be conscious of what I talk about, you have to know what to say and when to say it (Nimana, girl)

Every parent supported the principle of *spirituality* but not every child understood or welcomed the idea of religious spirituality, despite accepting the importance of values like forgiveness and hope.

Our whole family is like, Christian. Sometimes I don't like it, we have a church group, and sometimes I think it is boring, sometimes I just don't want to have any religion. But my mum says if we don't go to church, we will lose the faith. I have not had anything really bad happen to me where I have needed healing. If we don't go to church, we will do a prayer at home, but I don't like that. I have told my mum, and she said to give it a year and see how it goes. (Weni, girl)

The principle of spirituality meant many things for individual participants, and except for one young person, everyone found it useful in relation to Black family experiences.

### 3.7 Professionals' Sense-making of Requisite Parenting

Like the parents and children, social workers and child practitioners were invited to discuss their experiences of working with Black children and their parents, and then to explore how principles of requisite parenting resonate with those experiences.

On **Sacrificial love**, some professionals noted Black parents have different perspectives about their role as parents and would resist the term 'sacrifice'; and, that Black parents had high expectations of children:

Black parents would do this differently to White parents. I don't think Black parents would see this [the principle] as sacrifice. White parents would, for example, say, 'I have stopped working because you', and this is my perception of it. White parents would label and say this to the children, putting the guilt on to the children. (Rolanda)

I think Black parents focus on achievements and maybe more education. A White parent might be more proud of the experience, but Black parents focus on achievements. White foster parents looking after Black children were not able to look after them. They kept saying they treat them all the same, and we kept on saying, 'you can't treat them the same because the Black child has different needs'. They were washing them routinely, but not moisturising the Black child, they were getting itchy, they had actually been diagnosed with eczema. Foster carers did not realise they needed to moisturise this child. They started moisturizing the child daily, they didn't moisturise the other children, but they have to continue to moisturise for the Black child. White parents with Black partners sometimes ask for help on how to care for their children's hair. (Pennie)

Another professional's view highlights how structural inequalities and economic pressures mean Black parents must be better organised than others, to provide the same amount of time and care for their children:

But are Black parents properly available to see if the talking is working, because of work schedules? It [talking and guidance] may not achieve its purpose because of lack of availability because of work and meeting many financial commitments. (Lemanya)

A professional explained Black parents she had encountered did not practice *sacrificial love* properly, a sentiment also shared by a parent previously on this issue. Thus, reiterating that while this principle is more complicated for Black parents because of structural inequalities, it might be more generic to parenting in general, irrespective of race:

In the cases that I have had, Black parents have not had time to really see and hear them [children]. There was a case where a young boy with special needs had a room downstairs, on his own. This child has a Black mum, and I did not feel she parented him well. I don't think the child was a priority, but there was a professional reliance compared to her other children. On reflection I did not think of the colour of his skin, I focused on his special needs, and his difference in that way. She did not attend meetings, but when she needed him to be in respite she would get in touch. There were issues that he did not have enough clothes, and concerns raised by school. I had another young boy who had a Black dad. I think my head was focused on the children's disabilities and not their race. (Mirabelle)

On **Pride**, there was complete consensus among professionals about its relevance as a Black parenting principle:

This is a type of parenting we need to promote in Black and Asian families. Any parent would push for the self-esteem, but it is a very hard one, school has a part to play. Black kids have a way to care for the skin. (Nadia)

There is a case where I worked with a Black mum [whose kids were being raised by her White adopted parents] and I don't think the White parents considered what life must be for the children because the children lived in areas where it was not diverse. For Black children who remained in the care of their White parents, I don't think their White parents understood their identity needs. I think the children relied more on themselves as siblings. (Mirabelle)

I think Black parents advocate and support their [children's] identity by taking them to cultural events, being around families similar to them. Most Black parents do encourage their children to recognise and identify with their culture, by food, experience, hair, the way of caring for the hair, skin. Black parents are able to explain racism, or when their children come into contact with other different young people. I recognise and see it with Black parents. (Pennie)

I recognise that Black parents do this, especially our hair and skin, make sure they are washing and using moisturisers. The hair is very important, it is our identity, it needs to be cared for, but people don't understand that it isn't merely putting a wig, extensions. We are very passionate about it. For my son, when he goes to the barber, he sees role models, older Black people, listening to music and, he will not let us cut his hair. (Lemanya)

On **Adaptability**, there was also full agreement about its value as a requisite parenting principle. However, some professionals acknowledged the challenges Black parents face adapting to either new or hostile environments, while some thought Black parents can adapt easily to new or difficult circumstances, and do raise children to be independent to likewise foster children's adaptability:

Do you know the amount of referrals we've had in because somebody's seen on the bus an 8 years old [Black child] on their own? And the parents have been told they have to go with them to school on the bus and then come back with them and then go and pick them up at the end of the day, when actually they're eight, it's been risk assessed, the same bus driver they're very familiar with. They know where they're going. Sorry, and I think if it's been risk assessed and that child is capable and able to at whatever age they're at, I think it should be allowed. And actually, it's kind of detrimental to stop them if they're wanting to do certain things. (Rolanda)

Black parents can adapt. A Black parent would just do what they need to do, change jobs, and get results. (Pennie)

If you are a working parent, you cannot go to the children's centre. Capacity to learn might be there, but they have work, so there is no time. We have children who have been affected by COVID, understanding gadgets and computers is a challenge, because it is a totally different picture for children now. (Nadia)

Often in my experience, parents have moved here as adults, so sometimes they can have their child as the only Black child in a classroom. If their children face difficulties, I think it

would be hard for them. As a professional, if a child is being bullied, then you might need to help them understand what and how bullying might impact their children. (Christa)

This is a big issue for Black parents because they are coming from a different place, here is a culture shock, children talk back to parents. When parents drop something, you would pick it quickly. Here even when you give them the eye, the children don't understand it. Sometimes some schools are bringing sex education when children are as young as four. The food, the culture, the outlook, and perspectives, engage in communities. If I go into a pub I know one or two people will be looking at me. White parents can take their children for swimming, clubs, holidays. Maybe these days slowly it is changing, but Black parents tend to be comfortable at home because of this. Black parents who were not born here, it might be difficult for them but it is necessary. It is important for Black parents to try and understand the children's environment. (Lemanya)

On **Courage**, all professionals agreed it was pertinent to Black parenting, but for diverse reasons. There were contradictions between professionals about how Black parents navigate challenges – some thought Black parents were able to address difficult issues with confidence while two thought otherwise:

The Black mums I have worked with have been very clear on why they parent the way they do and are confident in this. I removed a Black child from parents, but the Black father queried if this was happening because he was Black, so he was able to challenge. I feel like I have had conversations with Black parents, there was love, but they had high expectations in relation to manners. (Mirabelle)

This is seen as something not warm when coming from a Black parent compared to a White parent. When a White parent sees a child falling over, they would say, 'oh are you okay, have you hurt yourself?'. A Black parent would say 'oh up you go'. Only when a child cries is when they would then deal with the presenting issue, 'do you need a plaster?'. It is different. It is not about emotional warmth but dealing with an issue. Discipline for Black parents is very clear cut, White parents will say I have warned you five times, I am going to take gadgets away. Physical chastisement, we see more in Black parents, but if that is what they were used to where they are from, they are not trying to harm their children, so I explain that they have to use different methods, because they have the respect from the children. We don't do a lot of parenting with Black parents, but White parents, we do a lot of parenting, put boundaries, say stick to them. (Rolanda)

I would imagine it would be difficult to challenge professionals - they might feel that it will make the situation worse by bringing more harm, more hassle. 'But I wonder again whether these judgements or professionals might jump on, damned if we do, damned if we don't' type of responses. As a White person, it [talking about race] feels very uncomfortable - because my husband and my daughter's boyfriend went to buy some matches, and he [daughter's Black boyfriend] was asked for ID. When he came out, he [my husband] couldn't believe it but my daughter's boyfriend said, 'this happens every day. I should have probably taken my ID with me'. He and my daughter went to a half empty café. The waiter said they were full, but my daughter said, obviously not, and she got very angry. He [boyfriend] pulled her away, and said

he was used to it. He just walked away and my daughter was so mad. I imagine his parents have helped him to know how to manage these types of situations. (Christa)

I do think Black parents don't discipline confidently because they are not sure about the law, and worried about children's rights. This changes on different paths, smacking a child on the leg when they are younger will be a different story if you were to do the same when they are teenagers. (Nadia)

Sometimes we have to advocate differently for our Black parents and families compared to what we [White people] may encounter because of racism and poverty. It is not always the case around disciplining children, I think Black families have to do it differently. We have legislation now. Some Black parents might not be able to articulate themselves in meetings because of lack of education, knowledge, language. Parents must be confident, even if they don't think they are able to communicate, I think confidence to share views with a teacher, counsellor that might be helping your child. (Pennie)

On **Resourcefulness**, all professionals thought it was specifically relevant to Black parenting because of the unique needs of Black children, which requires parents to be more proactive. A practitioner said some Black parents she had worked with struggled with *resourcefulness*:

Education wise, yes Black parents do it well. There are some areas, like too much work because they have family back home, while starting from scratch here. These days I am having discussions with our [Black] people, that you are living here, you need to focus here, because I understand that is how we grew up. Sometimes it can be a barrier to see what is out there in the community, engage with GP because they are too busy, other things are competing with other things. (Lemanya)

From my experience, Black parents are very resourceful in getting what they need to support their children. Black parents are more persistent, it might be coming from a point of knowing as they are Black they have to fight for what they deserve. Black parents make an effort, look into various things, even when they are stay-at-home mums, there is a thinking around that.... Adversity gives more courage to want something better. (Rolanda)

Black parents are knowledgeable about resources. I worked with a mum who was also open to resources I would suggest to her. She was available to opportunities but also had to manage three other children. A [White]mum I worked with took the [Black]children to people who could do their hair. (Pennie)

They do not access support well enough. I think this is a big struggle. With family and friends, yes, they would do because that is their safe space. I think schools, they would contact. I think GP they would struggle, there are stereotypes that if you have mental health recorded, you will not be able to work again. The appointments during working hours, and if appointments are due while you have to work, it is hard. (Nadia)



On **Spirituality**, the professionals believed it plays a huge role in Black parents' lifeworlds for several reasons. One social worker conflated spirituality with religion, although she was prompted several times during the interview that these were not necessarily the same. This suggests professionals might struggle to properly appreciate the value of spirituality for Black families.

I think in my experience, religion and faith has been quite important in relation to expectations in terms of strength, it is part of a routine. I think that's where people have got strength and resilience from. The connectedness and shared experiences I think are so important in getting together. I think this links even with language, because English does not come naturally to all people. Religion is big, because it is a thread that runs through from where they come from. (Christa)

I don't think Black parents give up on their children. (Nadia)

Some Black parents do this, some are affected by, for example, single parent household where a mum has not made good relationships decisions, children may see the bitterness of dealing with separation, and this can be passed down to the children. (Lemanya)

For a lot of Black families, faith is important. That should be promoted and sometimes, for children whether they want to go to church or not, when in meetings, they don't want to go to church, would rather be out with their friends, but they are encouraged by their family. I think it's also allowing children to say no, and communicating to parents that it is not their thing. If it's a non-religious family, there are other self-help materials to help build self-esteem for children. As a professional, I would research and find resources that is relevant to them. (Pennie)

**All the professionals were asked whether requisite parenting reflects optimal Black parenting, and all six affirmed that it does indeed.** Regarding how they thought other practitioners would receive it, one professional's response stands out:

Yes and no. They would love to see all the positives and be able to validate and say, 'yes, this is brilliant. You [Black parent] were doing that aspect of it really well.' but I still think they're gonna pick on the things that aren't aligned with their way of thinking. So, you could give them 10 amazing things and say, 'yeah, they [parents] are encouraging them [Black children] to be independent. They're giving them all social skills. They're caring for them adequately, but if they're not doing this in the way I think', they're still gonna chuck all of those good things out of the window for that one bad thing. I would say it's generally White social workers [*who would struggle with the model*], but there probably some Black social workers that would see it very much like, 'I've been given this legislation and it [parent's practice] doesn't marry up'.

The above response suggests professionals may be so focused on procedures they would find it challenging to explore the new ways of working with Black parents which requisite parenting approach necessitates.



## 3.8 Evolution of the Model

The main aims of the evaluation were to explore whether requisite parenting style represents participants' understandings of good Black parenting, and to see if participants could improve it. Participants were explicitly invited to share any such ideas, including those that differed from or refuted the parenting style, and these have been used to revise the model accordingly.

*Selfless love:* The principle 'selfless love' was originally termed 'sacrifice/sacrificial love'. Four participants – a social worker and three parents – reasoned this was not how Black parents thought or spoke about their childrearing role. The social worker explained that quantification of childcare in such terms is a Western concept, which she did not believe Black parents would recognise or share. One participant suggested the meanings relayed in this principle represent *selfless love* rather than sacrifice, while another thought sacrifice sounded too much like a burden rather than a gift – hence, the name change.

To me, I don't know if its sacrifice – you brought children into the world, you just get on with it. They are a beautiful gift from God. (Kobe, father)

*Spirituality:* A social worker suggested the notion of 'grace' should be added to the 'spirituality' principle, to convey to parents *they are enough* and doing enough, and that their children are also *enough as persons*. The social worker believes Black parents are overburdened by society and consequently, by family, and that taking grace for oneself allows parents to not endlessly strive, but to be at peace with themselves, despite any perceived inadequacies.

Parental self-care – a mother thought it important that parents show children that they (parents) take care of themselves too, and that everyone should remember to take their rest or do something that gives them pleasure just for the sake of it. The idea of parental self-care fits with *spirituality*. Another parent echoed this point by suggesting it is important to show children it is sometimes okay to be vulnerable.

It's about letting children know they can be vulnerable. As the older one, I was raised in a way that the younger one should look up to you, but the older one might be different, so that gets me every time. (Sharon, mother)

Following participants' contributions to notions in the requisite parenting approach, the principles have been revised accordingly, in figure 5:

Figure 5 – The Revised Requisite Parenting Model

Principles of Requisite Parenting	Parent Application
<p><b>Selfless love:</b> intense personal labour from parents. Investment in children including financial, time, educational, emotional, and practical care.</p>	<p><b>How do parents show love and care for children?</b></p> <p>Emotional, financial, educational/training, shared personal time and space, practical – food, clothing, personal care. Making and keeping appointments, attending events for and with children. Balance work within and outside the home with dedicated space and time to really ‘see’ and ‘hear’ children – problem solving.</p>
<p><b>Pride:</b> affirmation that whatever the child attains is against the odds; identity fostering, and nigrescence (pride in Black identity and features), physical care of Black body and hair, psychological care of self-esteem, rejection of deficit narratives regarding Black people, promotion of positive Black image.</p>	<p><b>How do parents promote children’s self-esteem?</b></p> <p>Recognise children’s efforts – praise them when they accomplish something and share with others.</p> <p>Support children’s nigrescence – Black identity and culture. Parents seek out materials and spaces to support their an/d children’s understanding of Black experiences, developmental needs, and self-care, including hair and body.</p>
<p><b>Adaptability:</b> be nimble, mobility, acculturation (spatial and interpersonal), astute, and able to evolve with the situation/circumstance/environment.</p>	<p><b>How do parents adapt to the environment and children’s development?</b></p> <p>Actively learn about the environment and circumstances where children are growing.</p> <p>Acclimatise and be willing to evolve with children and situations. Foster independence in children.</p> <p>Be nimble and mobile in outlook and on issues affecting children.</p> <p>Seek to understand and work with the children’s reality, which may differ from parents’, while recognising that access to knowledge is partial – parents may never fully obtain/understand children’s experiences of life outside the home, but should try.</p>

**Resourcefulness:** being open to finding and using new information, opportunities, and materials to help the child develop against adversity.

#### How do parents access support?

Seek and connect with social systems (extended family/friends, community associations, formal systems – school, GP, etc.) to support children’s development.

Be alert to available opportunities/facilities & new developments in the community and how they can impact on children.

Seek and access new information and materials to help children.

**Courage:** ability to explain harsh reality to children of varied ages in age-appropriate ways – ‘the talk’; to take a stance; accept reality. Strength to persevere for and with children in the face of damaging systemic social injury such as racism and/or poverty.

#### How do parents address sensitive-difficult issues?

Engage effectively with and challenge children, professionals, authorities and systems on sensitive/difficult issues, including on racism, poverty, sexism, sexuality, etc.

Discipline children with confidence and compassion, taking time to explain why and offering the child ways to amend or make restitution for their behaviour.

Accept, together with the child, reality of certain insurmountable situations, and endeavour to work with what is available.

Staying the course – never giving up on children, helping children persist and or persisting with children.

**Spirituality:** hope and belief for and with children that against substantial odds, the children can grow, be okay, and/or excel. Faith, including religious faith, that innate or supernatural powers can help children overcome incredible obstacles; a reference to the notion of the superhuman strength of the soul. Tapping into transcendental forces within and around children to support their uniqueness.

#### How do parents support the spiritual development of children?

Help children develop values that transcend power, self, and instant-gratification, such as, forgiveness, healing, redemption, restoration, restitution, perseverance, hope, inner peace, and non-judgemental acceptance of limitations in oneself, others, and society. Take grace for oneself and children.

Faith – religious or non-religious belief in an inner or transcendental strength that surpasses children’s present challenges.

Walking alongside children.

## 4. Key Messages

There was unified endorsement of the requisite parenting model – participants overwhelmingly expressed it reflects their lived experiences of Black parenting. Parents, children, and professionals hoped it would be welcomed by the relevant groups. The most well-received principles of requisite parenting – seen as most representative of positive Black parenting – are *pride* and *spirituality*. Parents recommended *Courage* and *Resourcefulness*, which they thought were particularly important for other parents to show their children how to overcome the wide-reaching impact of racism. There were a few noteworthy doubts about how some professionals would perceive the requisite parenting style. Some participants, including two professionals, questioned whether White British social workers would welcome the model. They were concerned some practitioners of all ethnicities might struggle to utilise the model if they were not pragmatic enough to see the parents' style from a strengths-based perspective.

Of the six principles of requisite parenting, parents expressed the most resistance with *adaptability*, on the specific point about *working with children's reality, which might differ from parents'*. Some were opposed to this point in view of rapid changes in modern society's progressive interpretations of gender and sexuality, including ideas about transgender, gender identity and expression. Given that every parent in the study had religion, this is perhaps not surprising, as the tensions between religion and contemporary gender norms are well documented (see Best & Weerakoon, 2021; Golriz, 2021). The issue of physical chastisement was unexpectedly muted in participants' responses, except with a couple of parents. Meanwhile, interviewers were conscious not to focus particularly on physical chastisement, so as not to repeat the mistakes Western professionals and media make about Black parents – where many positive aspects of their practices are too often minimised while any negatives are accentuated.

Parents saw *selfless love* as the most inevitable of the principles and the one largely shared across races, ethnicities, and cultures. But this principle is made more difficult for Black parents because of structural challenges such as racism and poverty. The second most common underlying concern for participants relates to higher levels of structural inequality experienced by Black people. These inequalities also impact on their ability to work shorter hours or be financially well-off enough to make provisions for quality time and care required in the principle of *selfless love*.

For children, engaging with spirituality, which sometimes meant forgiving those who have racially harmed them, was sometimes difficult. The pain expressed by children and parents from their experiences of racist practices in society was harrowing. The research team had prepared for the potential of such distress but were still disheartened by the level of racialised suffering being inflicted on Black children and young people and their parents in contemporary Britain. Among the young people, the older boys aged 11-15 years seemed to have the most challenges. Their parents expressed heightened worries about the boys' well-being and safeguarding outside the home. While their parents were hopeful for positive input from professionals, they laboured to keep themselves and their children well-informed about the dangers of being Black and male in England. The following key messages address other salient messages from the findings.

## 4.1 Different lenses for understanding, assessing and supporting Black parenting practices and child welfare

The idea of different lenses is best highlighted through a White mother's experience of how people who are not Black (or share the lived experience of Black people) struggle to see the realities of the Black experience in majority White societies:

...there's so much that people, that White teachers – who have always lived here, who are British – just don't know because they have never seen it from a different perspective. But when you are from a different culture, you see things differently and you understand that people have that one worldview of looking at things and they are not able to look at it in a different way (Edith, mother).

**When working with Black families, professionals should be alert to how racism complicates Black parenting. This means professionals cannot depend on current universalised parenting theories and styles, as those are based on Eurocentric knowledges and experiences that do not properly take the impact of racism into account.**

Black people bear extra burden in racialised societies, which a mother termed the 'Black levy' because of enduring stigmatisation of Black people's physical features – darker skin, tightly-sprung hair, broad noses and lips that are distinct from every other race's (Martine Luther King, in Osborne, 2005). This 'levy' is relevant in Black parenting experiences in racialised societies:

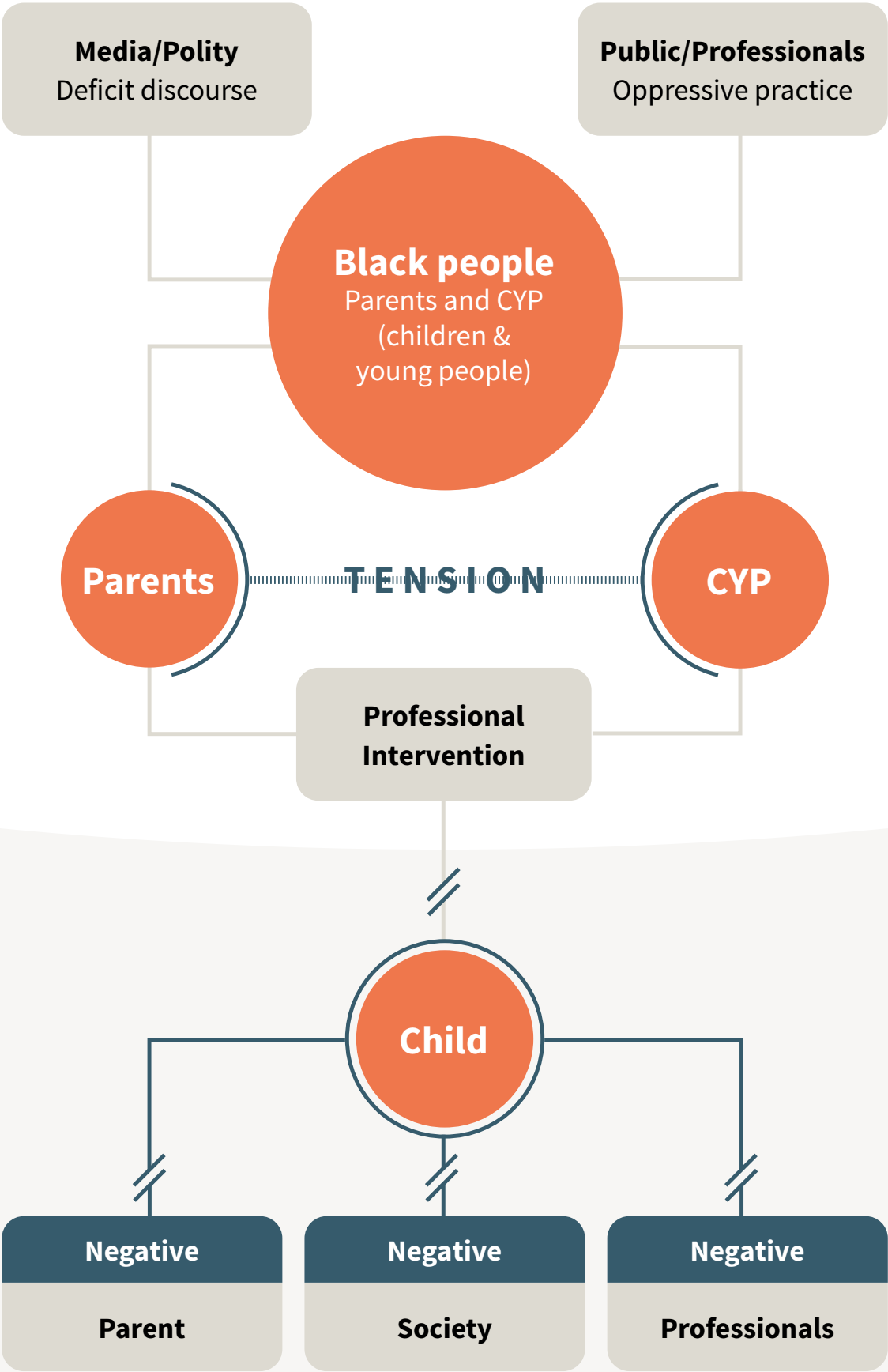
Black parents have an added challenge because their children receive the same treatment or the same challenges as White children, but then have an extra layer for being Black. And so, when professionals are either assessing or supporting or working with Black children and their parents, that they recognise the parents are doing these extra things – part of the *Black levy*. That tags to whatever else you're having to deal with, professionals should understand the extra burden on Black parents (Katie, mother)

Some parents are firmer with their young Black people, especially boys, because experience and statistics indicate the children will suffer worse punishment from Western society if they break rules outside the home (see Lammy, 2017). Professionals should be open to *seeing* such parents' practices differently. The cold and emotionally distant Black parent (and therefore practising *authoritarian parenting*) is a labelling trope. It is another example of universalised lens used in judgements about Black parents' emotional responses to children. Professionals should take care and time to understand the context of such interactions before making conclusions. Parents in this study showed diversity about how warmth is expressed with children, with some supporting effusive displays of love while others did not and rationalised why. Some explained that in certain instances, not being too emotional prepares children for independence and potential adversity by making them more resilient. It is important that parents are trusted to make these choices about how best to support their children if children do not bear any signs of abuse.

## 4.2 Promote Black parent-child partnership

Media narratives in the UK usually portray Black people, including Black children and young people, in poor light (Hertog & McLeod, 2001; Iheme, 2022). Professionals' actions too frequently mirror those negative discourses. Black children and parents in the study referred several times to how they were perceived and treated unfavourably not only professionals but by the general public. The toll on Black children and their parents was visceral, and the negative impact on Black children is not fully known. Nevertheless, Pezzella et al. (2016) reveal that these intense harmful experiences are linked with increasingly poor Black parent-child relationships and pro-delinquency attitudes in Black children; they create fissures between children and their parents, professionals who work with them, and the children's connections to the society, as depicted below.

Figure 6 - Impact of deficit discourses and oppressive practices on Black parent-child relationships





Some of the negative discourses, including that Black parents are unduly harsh and uncaring, lazy, irresponsible, or ignorant contribute to Black children's questions about the legitimacy of their parents' rights to guide and discipline them. Professionals' practices can further damage or improve Black parent-child relationships. If social workers and other professionals involved in child welfare interact with Black children and parents from a baseline perspective that Black parents are more likely than not to love their children and would act in the best interest of their children, then Black children are more likely to respond positively to their parents' authority. This tenet should be the starting point of assessment and intervention with Black parents, which is also the central notion of the rule of optimism as originally theorised by Dingwall (1983). Professionals can mitigate the racialised harm on Black children by fostering partnership between the children and their parents.

**To strengthen the Black parent-child relationship and the success of requisite parenting approach, three factors must be present:**

- 1. the child should perceive the parent as acting in their best interest and be open to accept the authority of the parent**
- 2. parents should be open to seeing their children's lifeworld as being both similar to theirs in terms of structural racism and/or poverty, and being distinct and unique to the children in ways that transcend the parents' experiences**
- 3. professionals and policy makers should embody and project respect for Black parents.**

**Professionals, policy makers, and the media can draw on requisite parenting to produce necessary counter discourses that highlight the high emotional and practical labour of Black parenting.**

When professionals intervene in Black families, they should work consciously not to undermine the parents' already diminished authority. Social workers and relevant practitioners can promote Black parent-child partnership through being *light-touch mediators*. In their role as corporate parents, professionals working with Black children should be trained to engage children and parents in discussions and interactions which seek to find common ground on contentious issues. Professionals can draw on the principles of requisite parenting for a window into parents' considerations and children's needs. For instance, after social workers have intervened in cases where parent-child conflict is present, social workers could draw on relevant principles of requisite parenting to explain the parents' efforts and challenges to the child, and vice versa.

### 4.3 Requisite parenting style as a guide for understanding positive Black parenting

Black parents, like other races and ethnicities, are generally represented across the range of established parenting styles – which means Black parents also practice authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and unengaged parenting (see Hill, 1995; Querido, Warner & Eyberg, 2002). Specific Black parenting practices in this study reflect some interactions that can be described as authoritative parenting (see LeCuyer & Swanson, 2017). Yet those parents displayed a vague sense of deficit – even as they consciously evaluated their own parenting as being positive. The self-doubt and negative self-judgement are linked with the endemic deficit narrative about Black family practices in Britain, where Black parents are broadly perceived as inadequate based on Eurocentric standards.

So, it was gratifying to see such parents feeling justified and proud during interviews when they realised their practices were well aligned to the principles of requisite parenting shared with them. Some parents sobbed openly from relief during interviews – because they felt heard and validated. That sense of fulfilment is important because it provides motivation for parents and authenticates their realities, especially after feelings of being persecuted by racialised public and professional censure.

**Requisite parenting provides a useful benchmark for parents to self-assess their practices, and likewise for professionals who work with Black children and parents to help the families better articulate how they support their children.**

It is important to emphasise that if a parent does not meet all the criteria in requisite parenting, this does not mean the parent is failing or not good enough. It is also crucial that in using the approach, people apply the impact of structural challenges outside parental control – not just in relation to children's external relationships, but in the concrete provision of services and amenities that improve outcomes for children and young people (see Firmin (2020) for *contextual safeguarding*).

## 5. Conclusion

Black children and their parents in the Western world face challenges that require unique and innovative approaches. Too often, the distinct nature of these needs is ignored, and Black children fail because the systems are designed from White European perspectives, which are then interpreted as universal.

In theorising an approach that draws directly from the experiences and perspectives of Black children and parents/guardians, requisite parenting style counters the notion of racialised assimilation that has consistently proven to be harmful in all spheres of social experiments. Findings of the research reveal the immense challenges Black children and their parents must navigate daily because of racism and poverty, and how this impacts parenting. While some of the parenting practices are generic to other races and ethnicities, there are important differences that should be better recognised, particularly by the media/public and professionals, to reduce misjudgement of Black parenting and the ensuing harm to children. It is significant that every participant – parents, children and young people, and professionals – has articulated that requisite parenting constitutes an optimal Black parenting style and has expressed anticipation for the research.

A crucial aspect of requisite parenting model is that it is an applied approach. It should stimulate reciprocal, empathic understandings between the various stakeholders. Parents, children, and professionals can draw on the approach to better conceptualise theirs and others' practices. The parenting style is constructed to be accessible to Black children and families, professionals, agencies, academics, policymakers, and the public – in the UK and across relevant societies.

### 5.1 Strengths and Limitations of the Model

Requisite parenting is based on a study in England, UK, and so could be limited by locale. Nevertheless, the findings should be relevant for understanding Black parenting practices and motivations across other countries with Black populations.

Requisite parenting is a style about everyday parenting – how parents manage their children's care and well-being. The approach best shows Black parenting when children, families and possibly professionals are dealing with low-to-medium risk of harm. Knowledge of the model may improve how Black parents and professionals respond to risk in parent-child relationships. Requisite parenting is nuanced and recognises the complexities of parenting. Professionals should not conflate its principles with abusive parenting – signs of abuse in Black children should be investigated appropriately.

The approach is situated, which means that as an applied theoretical frame, it is mainly relevant in specific contexts, where families are living under identified structural adversities such as racism or poverty. The *situated* contexts means the model could be applicable to non-Black parents; thus, the model could be extended to other marginalised groups who experience significant structural adversity because of how they are constructed within social systems.

Only three fathers participated in the study, which makes it gendered towards mothers. Nonetheless, most studies about parenting, across various nationalities and cultures, indicate that women continue to bear greater responsibility in parenting (Sunderland, 2006; Willey, 2020). Future similar research should take an even more targeted approach for recruiting fathers. This would require more time for data collection, to accommodate the likely periods of delay, where once the desired number of mothers has been reached, only fathers would be invited to participate.

This evaluation applied qualitative approach. Quantitative evaluation was also considered as a follow up to this study. However, as the findings show requisite parenting style as being overwhelmingly aligned with what participants report as optimal Black parenting, the quantitative evaluation has not been commissioned. This does not mean there is no potential for a larger scale quantitative or qualitative evaluation of the model; and the option remains for the research team or other interested parties to consider undertaking large-scale surveys, longitudinal, or applied studies of the parenting style.

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