

A photograph of a woman and a young girl climbing a rope net. The woman, on the left, has dark hair in braids and is wearing a light blue sweater, smiling. The girl, in the center, has bright pink hair and is wearing a green jacket, looking towards the camera. The rope net is made of thick, grey ropes. The background is a red, textured surface.

ANTI-OPPRESSION: OUR COMMITMENT

The Kids Network is a London based early intervention mentoring charity for children aged 8-11 who have experienced trauma in the form of adverse childhood experiences. We exist because children in London disproportionately experience adverse childhood experiences due to systemic minoritisation. We support children to live the lives that they deserve.

Founded in 2016, The Kids Network is a growing community of children and mentors, connecting through fun, friendship and hardship to reduce inequality. We want every person in our community to feel safe, empowered, brave, valued, aligned and heard. To enable this, we create spaces for individuals to examine and develop their anti-oppression literacy. To us, trauma-informed practice, safeguarding and anti-oppression action are inextricably linked. This document provides an outline of our approaches to anti-oppression work and the areas in which we are currently taking action. This is ongoing work and we'd be doing it wrong if in isolation from any other areas. We welcome feedback; see the end of the document for how to share your thoughts with us.

Diversity and integrity are two of our core values at The Kids Network. A key strategic pillar for us is that children's voices shape their futures. As an organisation in the charity sector, we are part of a wider system, and a system in ourselves. All systems can be oppressive, and the ways in which this manifests must be continually interrogated and dismantled in the interest of permanent change that promotes justice.

The Kids Network is powered by people for children. Intersectionality is absolutely vital at every level in the interest of amplifying the voices of the children we work with, learning from what they share, and ultimately contributing to systems of change so that their voices shape their futures and they can live the lives they deserve.

We take a trauma-informed approach to anti-oppression work, as with all of our work. This means acknowledging the whole person, working with, not for, and supporting the provision of protective factors so that children's resilience – their capacity to bounce back after challenges – is developed.

Definitions

Oppression: is the cruel or unjust treatment or exercise of authority which results in people being denied power and their rights not being met.

Resilience: is not endurance. Is it our capacity to recognise, communicate and meet our own needs and bounce back after challenges arise.

The global systems of oppression we commit to working to dismantle are below and have been agreed upon by staff and our board of trustees.

- Racism
- Colourism
- Disablism
- Sexism (Or Misogyny)
- Classism
- Colonialism
- Islamophobia
- Antisemitism
- Heterosexism (Or Homophobia)
- Cissexism (Or Transphobia)
- Ageism
- Xenophobia
- Fatphobia
- Poverty

If you are reading this and any of the above systems are unfamiliar to you, do some learning! There are many resources freely available.

Anti-racism:

‘Anti-racism is safeguarding. We must educate schools and teachers, and come together as anti-racists and talk to the government.’ *Child Advisory Panel, June 22*

75% of the children in our community who finished the programme in 2022 were of the global majority. Our Child Advisory Panel, a board of our programme alumni aged 10 and 11, said the above when co-designing our 23-25 strategy. In the interest of taking action, we started with racism as the system of oppression we would build in opposition to. We started with an anti-racism learning document, then partnered with The Black Curriculum (TBC), a national social enterprise set up to address the lack of Black British history in the national curriculum, utilising arts focused programmes, teacher training, campaigning and the mobilisation of young people to facilitate social change. TBC delivered staff, trustee and mentor training across 2022. From this we developed actions to embed anti-racism

in our programme and organisation which formed part of our community safety workplan completed in 2023. What follows is a brief overview of the action we've been taking.

Community Safety:

Experiencing prejudice is traumatic and constitutes abuse. When mapping the key risks to our community in late 2022, experiencing prejudice or discrimination was identified as one of the highest priority risks to our community's safety. Our commitment to dismantling systems of oppression that children are at risk of being traumatised by forms part of the Safeguarding measures we have in place. See our Safeguarding Policy in the footer of our website, [HERE](#).

- In recruitment and in all sessions, we acknowledge the expertise through lived experience of anyone who has been oppressed. The intersections of individuals' identities does not increase or affect the amount of labour they are asked to do at TKN. If they wish to draw on their own lived experiences that is encouraged and supported but never expected.
- During workshops with children when they're 1 month into the programme, we explore Safeguarding and anti-racism to embed their recognition of prejudice as a safeguarding concern and empower them in reporting concerns to us.
- Our staff inductions, mentor training and mentor meet ups enable community building and anti-oppression literacy: new recruits examine bias, privilege, identity and active listening and are provided with resources to continue their anti-oppression journeys and embed this in sessions with children.
- Every space we facilitate comes with a content warning and space setting exercise, ensuring everyone present opts in to being respectful and sensitive, maintaining an awareness of the space they're taking up, and being willing to embrace the potential discomfort that may come with changing or shifting their belief systems as a result of what they learn.

Wellbeing:

It's important that anti-oppression work is regenerative: as well as working to prevent harm, we must promote and build that which heals: community, empathy and fun. Our programme has this built into its core:

- Children lead their experience of the programme: they shape their mentor match, including stating which identity characteristics they wish to share with their mentor, decide on the content of their weekly sessions and lead on managing the use of their monthly session budgets.
- Our 5-point framework for mentoring: Express Care, Challenge Growth, Provide Support, Share Power, Expand Possibilities – and regular mentor reviews maintains mentor accountability in our approach.
- We invest in our mentor wellbeing through offering continued learning and development opportunities, providing year-round support from our programme managers, encouraging peer support in our monthly mentor meet ups and community platform and ensuring that they have out of hours support through our NSPCC partnership.
- Our staff wellbeing strategy includes markers from our anti-oppression quality framework including: *Regular learning about the histories involved in oppression, learning about the varied lived experience of individuals of the same identified group and facilitating diverse representation through data-driven positive action.*

Sector development & External dissemination:

We see an opportunity to share our anti-oppression action with others in our community to enable them to develop their own anti-oppression literacy and actions. We commit, therefore, to sharing our anti-oppression approach with all stakeholders upon onboarding to the organisation. We also ensure that events and capacity building we provide externally promote and share anti-oppression approaches and are always open to invites to speak to this topic.

June 2023 saw us hosting an event on ‘Making Mentoring Programmes Anti-Oppression’ in which we shared alongside experts through experience as part of our role within a consortium of organisations convening and delivering a high-quality network meeting that builds capacity in the voluntary youth sector in Hammersmith & Fulham, as part of the Mayor of London’s New Deal for Young Londoners. Feedback from this event was positive, with one participant sharing: ‘It was great to ... be part of such an inspiring training session - thank you again. I will run a training session for my staff and volunteers in awareness raising and positive approaches to tackling oppression using a few of your slides as a hook.’

Calling in:

Our team’s and mentor’s anti-oppression literacy requires providing a framework of action to follow when identifying incidents of prejudice or insensitivity. We do not tolerate language that is hurtful or discriminatory of any kind and have a responsibility to disrupt and educate. As stated in our Safeguarding policy, incidents of insensitivity or microaggressions are threats to wellbeing and therefore safeguarding concerns.

Principles of our response to incidents of prejudice/'Calling In':

1. Address in the moment in every circumstance.
2. Attempt to understand intentions - 'What did you mean by that?' or repeat what you heard or saw.
3. Consider what happened as an opportunity to learn together as members of a community.
4. Notify the person(s) responsible for the individual's development e.g. a teacher/line manager and discuss.
5. Agree next steps: a series of commitments, and what action will be taken if a further incident occurs.

How might we be the problem?

Over 2023, we have reflected on how we at TKN are part of oppressive systems. [The Diversity Gap: Where Good Intentions Meet True Social Change](#) by Bethaney Wilkinson and [Class 13](#) helped us to think about identifying key values of white supremacist culture, acknowledging when and how they come up in our culture, and naming what we can do to oppose them has been a liberating process.

For example, perfectionism and a sense of urgency are two key values of oppressive culture. From induction, staff are encouraged to recognise these when they come up and actively disrupt them through connection: collaborating with a colleague or their line manager to learn what contributed to the oppressive value coming up and how they can use our values to guard against it repeating.

The language we use needs continual examination too due to the risk of perpetuating oppressive stereotypes about the children and families we serve.

Our Shared Language:

We know that language can be a barrier to speaking about anti-oppression; people fear 'saying the wrong thing' or feel that a lack of direct experience of prejudice means that they shouldn't speak to matters of oppression. These self-inflicted barriers are counter-productive – so in the interest of supporting our community's anti-oppression work, we have a shared language. This was originally produced as part of our anti-racism action and is a live document that will expand with regards to other systems of oppression. See our Shared Language, and the process we took to develop it, [here](#).

What's next:

Our hope is that if we can emulate anti-oppressive practice in our community, this will have a ripple effect on those who experience it, empowering them to stand for justice and enact anti-oppression in other spaces they occupy.

42% of the children in our community identify as having a disability, neurodiversity or mental ill health. Our Advisory Panel in 2022 recommended that we do more to be inclusive of these children. We have redesigned our child referral and onboarding process to enable better information sharing and a strengths-based approach, and provided mentors with updated training on supporting and learning from children with additional needs. We will be embedding anti-disablism action in our community safety action a similar process to our anti-racism action. This does not mean that our anti-racism action is over but that anti-disablism will be incorporated into the actions we are currently taking. Partnering with experts to learn from them, reviewing our organisation and programme for inclusion of people with Disabilities, neurodiversity, and/or mental ill health and reviewing and expanding our shared language will form part of this action.

Anti-oppression work is a continual journey and can always be improved. We know we won't always get it right and welcome the feedback and thoughts of everyone in our community. You can share feedback with us via email info@thekidsnetwork.org.uk

Resources/Further Reading:

- [Fearless Futures](#) - are a beacon of best practice in the anti-oppression educator space, and we recommend engaging with their work to gain high-quality insight and learning opportunities.
- [Class 13](#) - are on a mission to transform schools into anti-oppressive, dynamic environments in which young people can shape their own narratives and identities.
- [The Black Curriculum](#) - are campaigning to change curricula in the UK to include all of British history.
- [The Runnymede Trust](#) generate research to challenge racial inequality in Britain.
- [Kids of Colour](#) hold spaces for young people to consider race and campaign for change.
- [Action for Race Equality](#) champions fairness, challenges discrimination and pioneers innovative solutions to empower young people through education, employment and enterprise.
- [Marie Beecham](#) - speaker, advocate for social justice and unity and educator about racial equity.
- The [Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families](#) have resources for supporting children with their mental health and a range of [Anti-racism resources for schools](#).

There are so many inspirational teachers that inform our work. We are particularly indebted to the work and teachings of: bell hooks, Angela Y. Davis, Gina Dent, Erica R. Meiners, Beth E. Richie, Munroe Bergdorf, James Baldwin, Layla F. Saad, Indya Moore, John Amaechi, aja monet, Ijeoma Oluo, Peggy McIntosh, Kimberlé Crenshaw, Mari Matsuda, Stuart Lawrence, Akala, Schuyler Bailar, Laïla El-Métoui, Micky ScottBey Jones, Adrienne Maree Brown, Tiffany Jewell, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Dr Muna Abdi, Dr Shola Mos-Shogbamimu, Rowan Carr.