

Child Welfare Guide to **Balancing** **BIAS**

What is Bias?

Bias is a shortcut for decision-making. It was very important to our early brains when we had to decide who was a member of our group or an intruder, or what animals might try to eat us. It kept us safe. Some biases are still helpful, like those that help us quickly classify foods that are more or less healthy.

In child welfare, bias includes the automatic thoughts that lead us to premature decisions about our cases. These decisions can have major impacts on families.

With training, we can slow down our thoughts to recognize our biases and interrupt them to ensure we are making good, fair, and family-centered decisions. Look at some of the common biases below and the questions you can ask yourself to slow down and challenge these automatic thoughts.

Normative Bias

Having an idea of how things ought to be or what a "normal" family should look like, which limits our ability to value things outside these ideas.

Ask Yourself: *What biases about a family like this have I been exposed to and how does this impact my automatic thinking? Am I attaching my own value and belief system to a family who does not share the same values, beliefs, or resources?*



Confirmation Bias

The tendency for individuals to seek out evidence that confirms their own beliefs, while simultaneously discounting refuting evidence.

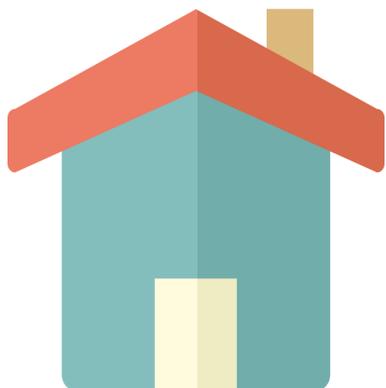
Ask Yourself: *What did I expect to see when I met the family? Did I look for evidence that contradicts those expectations? Did I search for and assess strengths as thoroughly as risks? What is this family doing right?*



Group Think

The idea that a group of decision makers will tend to make decisions that confirms the uniformity or harmony of the group, resulting in faulty or irrational decisions. Groupthink becomes evident when groups overestimate their power and righteousness, hold closed-minded attitudes, and are pressured to maintain unanimity within the group.

Ask Yourself: *Am I making this decision because I am afraid of upsetting the harmony of the group? Am I challenging faulty assumptions? Are my opinions influenced by someone who may also be holding bias?*



Performance Attribution Bias

Attributing the success of someone from a high performance group to their abilities, and attributing the success of someone from a low performance group to the help they received from other people.

Ask Yourself: *Am I trying to own some of the success of my families while attributing their failure to them solely? Am I recognizing the efforts of each individual even if the outcomes look different? Do I recognize how history, access to services, and other factors contribute to ability?*

Internalized bias can lead people to believe negative stereotypes about themselves, and even behave as if the biases are true. Institutional bias occurs when systems create policies or carry out practices, either explicit or implicit, that favor certain kinds of people. Structural bias describes the cumulative negative impact of multiple kinds of bias, and leads to disparate outcomes for families of color. Child welfare workers must help dismantle all of these kinds of bias that show up in their practice settings.

