



ISLAMIC ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS IN UK ADOPTION AND FOSTERING

Practice **Guidance** for
Social Work and
Adoption & Fostering
Professionals



Ethics &
Values



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About This Guidance

This guidance has been developed by the Muslim Children in Care (MCiC) project to support social workers, fostering and adoption practitioners, panel members, and safeguarding professionals in navigating Islamic ethical considerations that may arise in practice, using clearer language and practical examples. It assumes prior knowledge of UK statutory frameworks, safeguarding duties, and permanence planning processes. It does not repeat procedural guidance but focuses on areas where Islamic ethical considerations affect practice.

This guidance specifically supports practitioners to:

- Understand key Islamic concepts relevant to adoption and fostering
- Identify where religious misunderstandings may influence assessment or decision-making
- Recognise the diversity of Islamic views and community perspectives
- Apply culturally informed, proportionate, and safeguarding-led engagement

This document is not a religious ruling (fatwa), nor does it replace individual religious advice. It is a practice resource designed to enhance professional confidence when engaging with Muslim service users. It is intended as a practical resource to build practitioner confidence, strengthen assessment quality and ensure that religious considerations are understood without overriding statutory requirements.

Muslim Children in Care is a community-focused initiative committed to safeguarding, stability, and identity-sensitive care for children. We recognise that effective support requires both cultural literacy and adherence to statutory safeguarding standards.



Introduction

Professionals working with Muslim families may encounter questions or hesitation about fostering and adoption that are expressed in religious terms. These concerns often relate to:

- Preservation of lineage (nasab)
- Legal parenthood in adoption
- Surname changes
- Modesty and household privacy
- Guardianship (walī) in future marriage
- Inheritance
- Breastfeeding (riḍāʿ ah)
- Caring for children of a different faith

Some of these issues reflect genuine theological principles, while others stem from partial information or community narratives that may not reflect formal Islamic guidance. Practitioners should recognise significant diversity within Muslim communities, shaped by jurisprudential schools, cultural background, levels of observance, generational differences, and access to accurate information. Families may hold varied views about fostering and adoption, and these should be explored without assumptions.

Views may differ depending on:

- School of jurisprudence
- Cultural background
- Level of religious observance
- Generational perspectives
- Local community influences
- Exposure to accurate legal information

Some families may view adoption as religiously impermissible. Others may see it as compatible with Islamic ethics provided lineage is preserved. Some may distinguish between fostering and adoption, while others may not initially understand the legal differences.



Introduction

Practitioners are not expected to resolve theological debates. However, having confidence in key Islamic principles relevant to care practice enables professionals to respond proportionately, avoid reinforcing misconceptions and maintain clarity in discussions:

- Separate religious doctrine from cultural assumption
- Identify where concerns arise from misunderstanding rather than belief
- Engage in proportionate, respectful dialogue without over-accommodation
- Keep the child's welfare and best interests central to all decision-making

A central Islamic principle relevant to this discussion is the preservation of nasab (biological lineage). This prohibits falsely attributing a child to someone other than their biological parents, but it does not restrict care, belonging or permanence.

Practitioners should also be aware of the concept of kafālah — historically, a form of guardianship that provides care and protection without altering lineage.

This guidance aims to clarify the Islamic ethical principles most commonly raised by families, highlight where misunderstandings can arise and support practitioners in providing culturally informed, safeguarding-led engagement.

The purpose is not to prioritise religious considerations above statutory requirements, but to ensure practitioners feel confident addressing them without undermining the child's welfare.



Chapter 1 — Core Islamic Concepts Relevant to Care Practice

When Muslim families raise concerns about adoption or fostering, these concerns typically relate to a small number of recurring Islamic legal and ethical concepts. Understanding these concepts and the diversity of views surrounding them, supports proportionate, informed engagement.

This chapter outlines the principles most relevant to practice.

1.1 Preservation of Lineage (Nasab)

Preservation of nasab (biological lineage) is one of the most frequently cited Islamic principles raised in discussions about adoption. In Islamic law, nasab refers to a person's biological parentage. Islamic law prohibits attributing a child to someone other than their biological parents. This principle historically prevented practices that erased or reassigned ancestry.

For some Muslim families, this principle creates concern about adoption, particularly where:

- Legal parenthood transfers permanently
- A child's surname changes
- The child is described as "as if born" to adopters

Diversity of Understanding

Muslim views vary significantly:

- Some families believe any form of adoption that transfers legal parenthood conflicts with preservation of lineage.
- Others distinguish between falsifying ancestry (which is prohibited) and establishing legal parental responsibility for safeguarding and permanence (which they view as permissible if transparency is maintained).
- Some are unaware that UK systems retain birth records and support life-story work.



Chapter 1 — Core Islamic Concepts Relevant to Care Practice

Practitioners should explore whether hesitation reflects confusion between legal parenthood and biological ancestry. Clarifying that UK adoption does not erase birth records, and that children retain access to their origins, often addresses the core religious concern.

1.2 Kafālah (Guardianship of a Vulnerable Child)

The term kafālah refers to providing care, support, and protection to a vulnerable child without altering their biological lineage. Historically, this included offering shelter, financial support and integration into family life while preserving identity.

Historically, kafālah involved:

- Providing housing and financial support
- Integrating the child into family life
- Preserving biological identity

Many Muslim families are more familiar with kafālah than with Western legal adoption models.

From an engagement perspective, it can be helpful for practitioners to understand that:

- Fostering aligns closely with the ethical structure of kafālah.
- Adoption may also align ethically for some families where lineage transparency is maintained.
- Some families will accept fostering but reject adoption on this basis.
- Others will accept both once distinctions are clarified.

Practitioners are not required to promote a theological interpretation, but awareness of the kafālah framework can support culturally informed conversations.



Chapter 1 — Core Islamic Concepts Relevant to Care Practice

1.3 Collective Responsibility (Farḍ Kifāyah)

Islamic ethical thought includes the category of farḍ kifāyah — collective responsibilities fulfilled when enough members of a community act. If enough members of the community fulfil them, the obligation is discharged. If no one does, the community bears collective responsibility.

Some scholars frame caring for vulnerable children within this concept, emphasising communal duty. For practitioners, this means religious motivation may act either as a barrier (due to misunderstanding) or as a strong positive driver for engagement.

However, not all families are familiar with this framing, and some community narratives focus more heavily on perceived restrictions than on communal duty.

Professionals should be aware that religious motivation may be both:

- A barrier (where misunderstandings dominate), and
- A powerful recruitment driver (where collective responsibility is emphasised).



Chapter 1 — Core Islamic Concepts Relevant to Care Practice

1.4 Modesty, Privacy and Household Boundaries

Islamic teaching includes guidance on modesty, particularly after puberty. Families may raise concerns about:

- Opposite-sex foster placements
- Bedroom arrangements
- Physical boundaries
- Clothing within the home

These concerns are often expressed as religious obligations.

Diversity of Practice

In reality:

- Observance varies significantly between families.
- Cultural practice may be conflated with religious requirement.
- Some families adopt strict household boundaries; others do not.

Importantly, many UK safeguarding standards already align with privacy and boundary expectations.

Professionals should approach such concerns without dismissal, while also ensuring that:

- The child does not experience exclusion or differential treatment
- Safeguarding standards remain consistent
- Household rules do not undermine emotional belonging



Chapter 1 — Core Islamic Concepts Relevant to Care Practice

1.5 Inheritance and Financial Concerns

Islamic inheritance law allocates shares primarily based on biological relationships. Fostered or adopted children do not automatically inherit as biological heirs under classical Islamic rules.

Some families mistakenly interpret this to mean:

- They should not form permanent attachments
- Adoption is religiously invalid
- Financial provision is restricted

In practice, Islamic jurisprudence permits:

- Lifetime gifts
- Testamentary bequests (within certain limits)
- Voluntary financial arrangements

Inheritance questions are often raised early but are legally and practically distant concerns.

Some scholars frame caring for vulnerable children within this concept, emphasising communal duty. For practitioners, this means religious motivation may act either as a barrier (due to misunderstanding) or as a strong positive driver for engagement.



Chapter 1 — Core Islamic Concepts Relevant to Care Practice

1.6 Marriage and Guardianship (Walī)

Occasionally, families ask hypothetical questions about:

- Whether a fostered or adopted child could marry someone within the household
- Who would act as a walī (marriage guardian) for a girl raised in care

These concerns are usually theoretical and arise from incomplete understanding.

Interpretations differ across schools of jurisprudence and cultural contexts

Such scenarios are rare in practice. Practitioners should reassure families that safeguarding structures prevent inappropriate relational dynamics and that specific guidance can be sought if ever needed.

Professionals should avoid engaging in detailed religious adjudication and instead:

- Reassure families that safeguarding structures prevent inappropriate relational dynamics
- Emphasise that such scenarios are rare and can be addressed if ever relevant



Chapter 1 — Core Islamic Concepts Relevant to Care Practice

1.7 Diversity Within Muslim Communities

Practitioners should avoid assuming that Muslim families hold a single, uniform interpretation of Islamic law.

Muslim families differ by:

- Jurisprudential school
- Cultural background
- Ethnic identity
- Level of observance
- Exposure to accurate information
- Generational interpretation

Two families attending the same mosque may hold different views about adoption. Some may prioritise lineage preservation more than anything else. Others may prioritise permanence and stability as the greater ethical good. Some may initially reject adoption but reconsider when legal distinctions are explained.

Each family should be engaged as an individual case rather than as representatives of a collective religious position.

Practice Implications

When religious concerns arise, practitioners may find it helpful to:

- Ask clarifying questions rather than assuming doctrinal position
- Distinguish between lineage and legal responsibility
- Avoid framing adoption as identity erasure
- Maintain child-centred focus
- Recognise that diversity of opinion exists within Islamic thought

Religious literacy supports engagement. It does not replace statutory responsibility.

The next chapter addresses how these principles intersect specifically with identity planning and permanency conversations.



Chapter 2 — Identity, Permanence and Religious Concerns in Practice

This chapter focuses on how Islamic ethical concerns typically intersect with permanence planning, identity work, and placement decisions.

The emphasis is practical: what practitioners may encounter, and how to approach it proportionately.

2.1 Adoption and the Question of “Becoming the Child’s Real Parent”

A common concern raised by some Muslim families is whether adoption involves “claiming” a child as biologically one’s own.

This concern stems from the principle of preserving nasab (biological lineage).

Families may express this as:

- “Islam doesn’t permit altering a child’s biological lineage.”
- “We cannot claim the child as biologically ours.”
- “We can care for them lovingly, but we must preserve their identity.”

Each family should be engaged as an individual case rather than as representatives of a collective religious position.

Practitioners should understand that:

- The religious concern relates to biological misattribution, not emotional belonging.
- Many families are unaware that UK systems retain full birth records, encourage transparent life-story work and ensure that children can access their biological identity in adulthood.
- Some families conflate legal parenthood with biological falsification.



Chapter 2 — Identity, Permanence and Religious Concerns in Practice

It may be helpful to clarify that:

- Adoption transfers legal parental responsibility for safeguarding and permanence.
- It does not erase birth records.
- Children retain access to their biological identity.

Some Muslim families will accept this distinction. Others may remain uncomfortable with adoption but feel confident about fostering.

Practitioners should avoid positioning themselves as resolving theological disputes. The role is to clarify legal realities and assess suitability in light of the child's needs.

2.2 Surname Changes and Identity Anxiety

Surname changes may be perceived as obscuring or weakening a child's lineage

Reactions vary:

- Some families object strongly to any surname change.
- Others accept it for safeguarding reasons.
- Some are open to double-barrelled or hybrid approaches.

The key religious concern is concealment of ancestry rather than the name itself.

In professional discussions, it can be useful to explore:

- What specifically the family believes is religiously problematic
- Whether the concern relates to concealment, misrepresentation, or social presentation
- Whether they understand that record retention preserves biological identity

Understanding the underlying concern allows proportionate response.



Chapter 2 — Identity, Permanence and Religious Concerns in Practice

2.3 Fostering as Ethically Distinct from Adoption

Many Muslim families instinctively distinguish between fostering and adoption.

Fostering is often perceived as more clearly aligned with **kafālah** (guardianship), because:

- Biological lineage remains legally intact
- Parental responsibility does not fully transfer
- Fostering is generally understood as protective rather than substitutive, which aligns more readily with Islamic expectations around lineage preservation.

Some families who initially reject adoption will express openness to fostering.

Practitioners should be aware that:

- Religious comfort with fostering does not always translate into comfort with permanence planning, and this may require sensitive exploration.
- Families may be motivated by faith but anxious about permanence frameworks.
- Additional time and clarity may be required to explore permanency options sensitively.



Chapter 2 — Identity, Permanence and Religious Concerns in Practice

2.4 Modesty, Gender, and Household Boundaries

Questions about modesty often emerge when families consider:

- Opposite-sex placements
- Adolescents
- Bedroom allocation
- Household routines

These concerns may be expressed as religious obligation.

Diversity in Practice

In reality:

- Observance varies significantly between families.
- Cultural norms may be presented as religious requirements.
- Some families are flexible; others are stricter.

Professionals should:

- Explore how proposed boundaries would operate in practice
- Ensure household rules apply fairly to all children
- Avoid arrangements that isolate or stigmatise the child
- Ensure safeguarding standards remain consistent

It is important that religious boundary-setting does not lead to:

- Emotional distancing
- Differential treatment
- Reduced integration into family life

Safeguarding and belonging must remain central.



Chapter 2 — Identity, Permanence and Religious Concerns in Practice

2.5 Cross-Faith Placements

Families may raise concerns about:

- Caring for a child of another religion
- A Muslim child being placed in a non-Muslim household
- Exposure to religious practice different from their own

Interpretations differ.

Some Muslim families feel they should only care for Muslim children, while others are comfortable caring for any child provided there is no religious coercion.

Practitioners should recognise:

- Restricting placements solely by religion can significantly limit matching options and delay stability for children.
- Many Muslim carers successfully care for non-Muslim children.
- Many non-Muslim carers provide thoughtful identity support for Muslim children.

The key religious principle frequently cited in this context is the Qur'anic statement that there is “no compulsion in religion.” Families who are open to cross-faith care often rely on this understanding.

Professionals should ensure that identity planning is proportionate and child-centred rather than assumption-driven.



Chapter 2 — Identity, Permanence and Religious Concerns in Practice

2.6 Inheritance and Long-Term Permanence

Inheritance questions are often raised early in assessment, particularly in adoption discussions.

These questions may signal:

- Desire to remain religiously compliant
- Anxiety about long-term legal implications
- Misunderstanding of what Islamic inheritance rules require

Practitioners are not required to provide religious estate-planning advice. However, it may be helpful to recognise that:

- Islamic inheritance law allocates shares based primarily on biological relationships.
- Voluntary financial provision is permitted through gifting or testamentary bequest.
- Concerns about inheritance do not undermine suitability as carers and can be addressed separately through legal and religious mechanisms.

Often, reassurance that financial provision is legally flexible reduces anxiety.

2.7 Avoiding Over-Correction

There is a risk that professionals may:

- Minimise religious concerns too quickly, or
- Over-accommodate in ways that compromise safeguarding or belonging.

Balanced practice requires:

- Respectful listening
- Clear legal explanation
- Child-centred decision-making
- Consistent safeguarding standards

Religious literacy should support — not override safeguarding obligations and professional judgment.



Chapter 3 — Engaging Muslim Families

Chapter 3 — Engaging Muslim Families: Communication, Assessment and Professional Boundaries

This chapter focuses on practitioner approach. It addresses how to engage Muslim individuals and families when religious concerns arise, while maintaining clarity of role and safeguarding standards.

The objective is neither to endorse nor challenge theological positions, but to ensure that engagement is informed, proportionate and child centred.

3.1 Do Not Assume Uniform Religious Position

A widespread practice error is treating Muslim families as though they hold a single, shared interpretation of Islamic law.

In reality:

- Religious observance varies widely.
- Jurisprudential schools differ.
- Cultural traditions influence understanding.
- Generational perspectives differ.
- Exposure to accurate information varies.
- Two families from the same community may hold entirely different views about adoption.

Practitioners should therefore:

- Ask open, curiosity-driven questions rather than presuming objection.
- Avoid limiting placement options based on assumed religious barriers.
- Avoid treating religious concerns as fixed or immovable without exploration.
- Use exploration to understand the family's actual beliefs rather than relying on assumption.



Chapter 3 — Engaging Muslim Families

3.2 Distinguish Between Doctrine and Cultural Narrative

Some objections presented as religious may in fact be:

- Cultural norms
- Community folklore
- Misinformation
- Anxiety framed in religious language

For example:

- “Islam forbids adoption” may reflect misunderstanding of lineage rules rather than doctrine.
- “We cannot change a child’s name” may reflect concerns about concealment rather than surname mechanics.
- “We cannot care for a non-Muslim child” may reflect community pressure rather than religious teaching.

Practitioners are not theologians. However, recognising that doctrine and culture are not identical prevents over-simplification.

Clarifying legal realities often resolves concerns rooted in misinformation.



Chapter 3 — Engaging Muslim Families

3.3 Maintain Professional Boundaries

Practitioners should avoid:

- Issuing religious rulings (fatāwā)
- Entering theological debate or interpretation
- Positioning themselves as religious authorities

Attempting to challenge or override sincerely held belief Instead, practitioners should:

- Clarify statutory requirements and professional responsibilities
- Explain legal frameworks accurately and neutrally
- Explore whether the family's interpretation still leaves space for care
- Assess the family's ability to meet the child's needs within safeguarding expectations
- Encourage families to seek religious reassurance from trusted scholars where needed

Where families seek religious reassurance beyond practitioner expertise, they may consult a trusted scholar independently.

The professional role remains assessment and safeguarding — not religious arbitration.



Chapter 3 — Engaging Muslim Families

3.4 Explore the Practical Impact of Religious Beliefs

When religious concerns are raised, the key question for assessment is: How would this belief operate in practice?

For example:

- Would modesty rules result in differential treatment?
- Would surname concerns prevent honest life-story work?
- Would cross-faith reluctance severely limit placement availability?
- Would inheritance concerns affect willingness to provide permanence?

The assessment should focus on:

- Would modesty expectations result in differential treatment within the home?
- Would surname concerns prevent open and honest life-story work?
- Would restrictions on cross-faith placements significantly limit matching options?
- Would inheritance concerns affect willingness to commit to permanence?

Belief alone is not determinative. Its practical implications are.

3.5 Avoid Stigmatising Faith-Based Applicants

There is a risk that strong religious identity may be misinterpreted as rigidity. Conversely, there is also risk that professionals may avoid probing religiously framed concerns out of fear of appearing discriminatory.

Balanced practice requires:

- Respectful curiosity rather than avoidance of religious topics
- Consistent application of assessment standards
- Clear articulation of expectations
- Equitable assessment for all applicants regardless of faith identity
- Recognition that faith commitment does not predict suitability — capacity does
- Faith commitment does not predict suitability — either positively or negatively. Individual capacity does.



Chapter 3 — Engaging Muslim Families

3.6 Permanence Planning and Religious Hesitation

Where families express openness to fostering but hesitation about adoption, practitioners should:

- Explore the specific concern being raised (lineage, surname, permanence language)
- Clarify mechanisms for preserving identity within adoption
- Assess willingness to prioritise the child's permanence needs
- Differentiate between religious belief and misconceptions that can be classified

In some cases, fostering may be an appropriate route. In others, hesitation may indicate limits around permanence that require careful consideration. The child's welfare remains paramount.

3.7 Cross-Religious Placement Conversations

When discussing cross-faith placements:

- Avoid presenting religious matching as absolute or inflexible
- Avoid implying that identity does not matter at all
- Ensure the discussion remains centred on the child's holistic wellbeing
- Families may feel community pressure to restrict placements by religion.

Practitioners should ensure applicants understand:

- Local placement needs and available carers
- Assessment and approval expectations

The practical implications of restricting placements by religion should be clearly explained to support informed consent to the fostering task.



Chapter 3 — Engaging Muslim Families

3.8 Language That Supports Engagement

In practice, the following approaches are often effective:

- “Can you tell me what specifically concerns you about this?”
- “What have you previously been told about adoption or fostering?”
- “What would preserving lineage look like to you in practice?”
- “How do you see this belief affecting day-to-day care?”
- “If records are retained and the child knows their background, does that address your concern? “

These questions separate emotional anxiety from doctrinal principle and from practical impact.

3.9 Keeping the Child Central

Throughout any discussion of religious concern, practitioners should gently but consistently return to:

- The child’s need for safety
- The child’s need for permanence
- The child’s need for belonging
- The child’s right to identity

Religious literacy should support—never obscure—these outcomes.



Chapter 4 — Identity Planning, Adolescence and Cross-Religious Placements

For Muslim children — and for Muslim carers — identity considerations often become more pronounced over time, particularly during adolescence.

This chapter focuses on how practitioners can approach identity planning where Islamic ethical concerns intersect with placement realities.

4.1 Identity as a Safeguarding Issue, Not a Symbolic One

For some Muslim families, identity is primarily framed in religious terms. For others, it is cultural. For many children, it becomes developmental.

Identity planning should not be treated as:

- A tokenistic or surface-level cultural gesture
- A secondary consideration left until after placement
- A procedural checklist exercise without meaningful engagement.

Instead, identity is linked to:

- Emotional stability
- Self-esteem and confidence
- A sense of belonging within the household and community
- Long-term, healthy integration

For Muslim children, identity may include:

- Religious practices (e.g. prayer, Ramadan awareness)
- Dietary requirements (e.g. halal food)
- Cultural connection
- Community belonging
- Understanding of heritage

Practitioners should avoid assuming that all Muslim children will prioritise the same aspects of religious identity; observance varies widely by family background and individual development.



Chapter 4 — Identity Planning, Adolescence and Cross-Religious Placements

4.2 Muslim Children in Non-Muslim Placements

Where a Muslim child is placed with non-Muslim carers, concerns may arise around:

- Maintaining religious continuity and identity
- Dietary requirements (e.g., halal food)
- Maintaining safe community connections
- Concerns about loss of cultural or faith identity

These concerns may come from:

- Birth family
- Wider community
- The child themselves (particularly in adolescence)

Practice Considerations

Professionals should assess:

- Whether carers can support halal dietary needs consistently
- Whether carers are open to learning about key religious observances
- Whether identity support can be integrated proportionately and sensitively

Whether safe, appropriate community connections can be facilitated. Identity support does not require religious conversion or strict observance— only reasonable, child-centred accommodation. It is important not to assume that non-Muslim carers are unable to provide appropriate identity-sensitive care. Many do so effectively.



Chapter 4 — Identity Planning, Adolescence and Cross-Religious Placements

4.3 Muslim Carers and Non-Muslim Children

Some Muslim applicants may initially state they prefer to care only for Muslim children.

This may stem from:

- Fear of unintentionally breaching religious guidelines
- Community or extended-family pressure
- Misunderstandings about caring for a child of another faith
- Concern about influencing a child's belief or identity, interpretations vary widely.

Some Muslim carers feel fully comfortable caring for children of any faith provided there is no coercion.

Practitioners should ensure applicants understand:

- Local placement needs and the range of children requiring care
- That fostering often involves cross-faith placements
- That restricting placements by religion significantly limits matching options

Assessment focuses on providing unconditional, non-coercive care Assessment should focus on the applicant's capacity to provide unconditional, non-coercive care.



Chapter 4 — Identity Planning, Adolescence and Cross-Religious Placements

4.4 Adolescence and Modesty

Adolescence is often when modesty concerns become more visible.

Families may raise questions about:

- Opposite-sex placements once children reach puberty
- Household dress expectations and norms

Privacy and personal-space arrangements Islamic modesty expectations vary significantly in practice.

Professionals should assess:

- Whether household rules are applied consistently to all children
- Whether arrangements protect emotional inclusion and belonging
- Whether privacy expectations meet safeguarding requirements
- Whether modesty expectations risk isolating or stigmatising the child

Modesty frameworks must not result in:

- Emotional distancing
- Segregation within the home
- Stigmatisation
- Safeguarding and belonging remain paramount.



Chapter 4 — Identity Planning, Adolescence and Cross-Religious Placements

4.5 Breastfeeding (Riḍāʿ ah) and Early Placement

Occasionally, questions arise about riḍāʿ ah (milk-kinship established through breastfeeding), which in Islamic law can affect future marriage boundaries. This is most likely to arise in early adoption discussions rather than fostering.

Practitioners should understand:

- Riḍāʿ ah applies only within early childhood.
- In fostering, it is rarely feasible due to parental responsibility arrangements and consent requirements.

Riḍāʿ ah is not required for religious validity of care, and emotional bonds do not depend on biological processes. Families raising this issue may be seeking reassurance that religious boundaries are respected. Clear explanation of legal realities is usually sufficient.



Chapter 4 — Identity Planning, Adolescence and Cross-Religious Placements

4.6 Identity Tensions During Adolescence

Adolescence may introduce new dynamics/ Be influenced by peers, community or online narratives:

- Seek stronger religious identity than their carers
- Reject religious practice entirely
- Experience tension between placement identity and birth-family identity

Practitioners should ensure:

- The young person's voice is central
- Avoid suppressing healthy identity exploration
- Provide carers with supervision and support

Manage identity-related conflict so it does not escalate into placement instability
Identity development is developmental, not purely theological.

4.7 Avoiding Polarisation

There are two risks in identity planning:

1. Over-emphasising religious matching as determinative
2. Dismissing religious identity as irrelevant

Balanced practice requires recognising that:

- Safety and permanence as primary
- Identity as integral to wellbeing
- Religious literacy supporting — not overriding — safeguarding

Child-centred proportionality guiding decisions Child-centred proportionality should guide decisions.



Chapter 5 — Working with Muslim Communities and Managing Public Narratives

Recruitment of Muslim carers and support for Muslim children in care does not occur in isolation. It is shaped by community narratives, religious messaging, and public understanding of adoption and fostering.

Professionals benefit from understanding how these dynamics operate.

5.1 Community Narratives and Misinformation

In some communities, adoption may be described in ways that reflect misunderstanding or incomplete religious teaching, including:

- Religiously prohibited
- Equivalent to erasing or replacing lineage
- Socially inappropriate or discouraged

A potential long-term moral or ethical risk is that these narratives may circulate through

- Informal community discussion
- Social media
- Cultural assumptions
- Incomplete religious teaching

Importantly, such narratives are not uniform across Muslim communities. In many areas, community leaders actively support fostering and adoption.

Practitioners should recognise that family hesitation may reflect external messaging rather than individual belief or values.



Chapter 5 — Working with Muslim Communities and Managing Public Narratives

5.2 Engaging Faith Leaders Constructively

Faith leaders often hold considerable influence within local Muslim communities.

Where appropriate, agencies may benefit from:

- Offering information sessions explaining how UK adoption and fostering preserve identity
- Clarifying misconceptions about lineage and record retention
- Explaining safeguarding structures

Encouraging constructive dialogue rather than theological debate The objective is not to seek endorsement of specific placements, but to ensure public messaging is informed.

When religious leaders understand that UK systems retain birth identity and prioritise safeguarding. Messaging often becomes more balanced and supportive when faith leaders understand how identity is preserved within UK care systems.

5.3 Recruitment Sensitivity

Muslim applicants may present with strong faith motivation. This can be a significant asset.

However, recruitment discussions should ensure clarity around:

- Openness to cross-faith placements
- Realistic placement needs (older children, siblings, complex trauma)
- Expectations around permanence and legal frameworks

Commitment to identity transparency and child-centred care It is important to:

- Avoid recruiting based on faith identity alone
- Avoid assuming that religious motivation automatically predicts resilience

Avoid underestimating the impact of community pressure or family dynamics
Assessment standards must remain consistent, transparent, and equitable for all applicants.



Chapter 5 — Working with Muslim Communities and Managing Public Narratives

5.4 Avoiding Cultural Essentialism

There is a risk that services may:

- Overstating the need for religious matching in every case
- Avoiding discussing religious identity entirely to prevent discomfort.

Balanced practice requires:

- Recognising identity as relevant but not absolute
- Assessing each child individually
- Avoiding assumptions about observance or cultural practice

A Muslim child from a secular household may have different identity needs from one raised in a highly observant family, and a carer's level of observance cannot be assumed from outward markers alone. Similarly, a Muslim carer's level of observance cannot be inferred from outward markers alone.

5.5 Supporting Placement Stability

Community misunderstanding can affect placement stability.

For example:

- A carer experiencing criticism for fostering non-Muslim children
- A Muslim child facing questioning or scrutiny in a non-Muslim home

Extended family pressure around modesty, religious practice or permanence

Practitioners should ensure carers have:

- Space in supervision to discuss community or family pressure
- Clear expectations about identity planning and support
- Support managing extended family dynamics or concerns

Placement disruption should not occur due to gaps in religious literacy or cultural understanding.



Chapter 5 — Working with Muslim Communities and Managing Public Narratives

5.6 When Religious Concerns Mask Other Anxieties

Sometimes religious language may express:

- Fear of attachment or emotional vulnerability
- Anxiety about permanence or emotional vulnerability
- Financial concerns or practical uncertainties
- Community judgement or criticism
- Fear of making a religious mistake

Exploring the emotional layer beneath the religious framing can be helpful.

Questions such as:

- “What worries you most about this?”
- “What have you heard that concerns you?”
- “How would this work day-to-day for you?”

often surface underlying anxieties that are not purely doctrinal.



Chapter 5 — Working with Muslim Communities and Managing Public Narratives

5.7 Maintaining Safeguarding Primacy

Religious literacy enhances practice, but it must sit within — not override — safeguarding obligations.

Professionals must remain clear that:

- The child's welfare is paramount.
- Religious accommodation must sit within safeguarding standards.
- Placement suitability is determined by capacity to meet the child's needs.

Where a belief system would result in:

- Differential treatment of children
- Reduced emotional integration or belonging
- Discriminatory practice, intentionally or unintentionally
- Restriction of the child's autonomy or development

this must be addressed directly in assessment.

5.8 Moving from Hesitation to Informed Engagement

When misinformation is reduced and legal realities clarified, many Muslim families express greater openness to fostering and adoption.

Practitioners should recognise that:

- Religious concern does not equal rejection of care.
- Clarification often reduces resistance.
- Engagement should be respectful but confident.

The aim is not to persuade families against their conscience, but to ensure their decisions are informed, balanced, and grounded in both safeguarding and accurate religious understanding.



Conclusion

Religious literacy is not an optional add-on to practice in diverse communities. It is part of competent safeguarding.

Understanding key Islamic concepts such as:

- Nasab (lineage)
- Kafālah (guardianship)
- Farḍ kifāyah (collective responsibility)
- Riḍā'ah (milk-kinship)
- Walī (marriage guardian)

allows practitioners to:

- Engage without anxiety
- Clarify misconceptions confidently and respectfully
- Separate confidently and respectfully Assess impact on the child rather than belief alone
- Maintain clear, child-centred decision-making

Muslim communities are not monolithic; interpretations vary widely, and each family should be approached as an individual rather than as a representative of a single religious position. When practitioners combine:

- Statutory clarity
- Cultural competence
- Professional boundaries
- Safeguarding primacy

religious considerations become manageable aspects of practice rather than barriers to permanence.

The child's welfare remains paramount. Religious literacy strengthens—rather than complicates—practitioner confidence in achieving safe, stable, and identity-sensitive outcomes.



About the Muslim Children in Care (MCiC) Project

The Muslim Children in Care (MCiC) Project works to improve outcomes for Muslim children across the UK care system. The project raises awareness within Muslim communities, supports the recruitment of culturally and faith-sensitive carers, and provides accessible guidance to help families understand how fostering and adoption align with Islamic principles.

MCiC also engages with mosques, community leaders, fostering agencies and local authorities to ensure that Muslim children in care are supported with dignity, identity continuity, and emotional safety. The project is committed to increasing representation, improving understanding, and ensuring every child feels seen, valued, and supported wherever they are placed.



For further information or support:

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