

Services For Education

SAFEGUARDING SUBSCRIPTION RESOURCES

ADULTIFICATION

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What Is Adultification?

Adultification is not a modern phenomenon but affects children from all socioeconomic backgrounds, with those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds being particularly vulnerable. It describes the process of viewing and treating children as if they are adults, often leading to harsher punishments and less leniency than what would typically be given to their peers.

This can manifest in a variety of ways, from holding them to expectations that are beyond their development level to simply expecting more out of them than what is reasonable or age-appropriate. Its consequences can be wide-reaching and damaging to children's self-esteem and mental health.

ORIGINS

The practice of adultification can also be traced back to historical trends and practices. Historically, Black children have been subjected to adultification and treated as if they were adults at younger ages than their white counterparts due to deeply entrenched stereotypes about their capabilities.

In many cases, these stereotypes were created by adults who had limited contact or exposure to Black children, leading them to assume that all young people of colour had the same level of maturity and ability as someone much older. These norms were then passed down through generations, making it difficult for some communities to break free from this damaging cycle.

GENDER

Moreover, adultification can also be seen in how parents treat their children differently based on gender roles. Parents often expect girls to act more maturely than boys at an earlier age which reinforces gender stereotypes and perpetuates the idea that girls must take on responsibilities traditionally associated with adulthood such as raising siblings or completing household chores while boys get away with more freedom.

SOCIOECONOMICS

Furthermore, research shows that poverty often predisposes certain families towards adultifying their children by having them take on meaningful roles within the family unit early in life such as working outside the home or taking care of younger siblings so that parents can work longer hours or find additional employment sources. These practices further contribute towards normalizing the practice of adultifying young people before they are emotionally or cognitively ready for it. Finally, it is important to note that adultification also exists in education systems where teachers may have lower expectations of students who come from underserved communities or penalize misbehaviour more harshly than others without considering potential cultural differences or other factors that might influence student behaviour.

The Consequences of Adulthood

Research has shown that adulthood can have far-reaching consequences for children. Children who are seen as more adult-like are more likely to be suspended or expelled from school, to be involved in the juvenile justice system, and to be perceived as less innocent and in need of protection. They may also be less likely to receive the services and support they need to thrive.

These outcomes are especially likely for black girls, who are often seen as less child-like and more adult-like than their white counterparts. This difference in perception can lead to serious disparities in how these girls are treated by educators and law enforcement officials. For example, black girls are disproportionately likely to be suspended or expelled from school even though they do not engage in more disruptive behavior than other students. They are also more likely to be charged with crimes like "disturbing the peace" even when they have not committed any offense.

How Can We Safeguard Against Adulthood?

Given the potentially damaging effects of adulthood, it's important that we take steps to safeguard against it.

Be aware of your own biases: We all have biases that can distort our perceptions of others. It's important to become aware of your own biases so that you can counteract them when interacting with children.

Challenge assumptions: If you find yourself making assumptions about a child's maturity or abilities based on their race or economic background, challenge those assumptions! All children deserve to be seen as individuals with unique strengths and needs.

Advocate for fair treatment: If you witness someone treating a child unfairly because of their race or economic background, speak up! Advocate for equitable treatment so that all children have an equal chance at success.

Adulthood does not just occur through overbearing adults but can be perpetuated by peers or even by media representation of children as autonomous adults. Understanding the various ways adulthood manifests will help to develop strategies that keep children safe while providing them with necessary support and guidance so they can reach their full potential without being hindered by prejudicial beliefs and practices.

If you need extra support on this topic, please contact us at safeguarding@servicesforeducation.co.uk



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