**Proposed amendments to PACE Codes of Practice A and C: strip searches**

**About Action for Race Equality**

[Action for Race Equality](https://www.actionforraceequality.org.uk/) (ARE) was founded in 1991, and over the last 30+ years we have worked to champion fairness, challenge race inequality and pioneer innovative solutions to empower young people across education, employment, and criminal justice.

ARE believes that equal treatment under the law is a fundamental aspect of the criminal justice system that is consistently denied to people who are Black, Asian or Mixed Heritage. Our vision is a criminal justice system that delivers fair outcomes for all. Our purpose is to help those involved in the development and delivery of criminal justice practice and policy to create a system free from unfair outcomes for Black and Minority Ethnic people. We believe that action must be taken to address the issues that lead to unjust experiences and outcomes for Black, Asian and Ethnic Minority people in the criminal justice system.

**The disproportionate use of strip searches**

Action for Race Equality and the [Alliance for Police Accountability](https://www.actionforraceequality.org.uk/criminal-justice/alliance-for-police-accountability/), an initiative which we support as secretariat, have been incredibly concerned about the disproportionate use of strip searches on Black, Asian, and Mixed Heritage children, young people, and adults.

The use of strip searches on children and young people is an abuse of power that dehumanises and degrades them. There is a particular disproportionate overuse of intrusive strip searches on Black children, and the impacts of these searches on a child, their lives, and the communities that they live in are incredibly traumatising. Strip searches can have a long-term impact on a child and young person, worsening their mental health and impacting their experiences and attainment in education, employment, and beyond. This set of powers and how they are utilised are rooted in a deeply entrenched institutional racism that must be urgently ended.

We welcome the decision made by the Home Office to revise the codes of practice and it’s recognition that these powers are some of the most intrusive powers available to the police. However, it is our view that strip searches should not be carried out on children, and we would like to see policy updated **to end the use of strip searches on children.**

Below we have set out some recommendations and points where further information is required in relation [the summary of proposed changes.](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/proposed-amendments-to-pace-codes-of-practice-a-and-c-strip-searches/letter-to-consultees)

**1. PACE Code C**

1. We would welcome a clarification of what ‘consult’ means. A senior ranking official should be responsible for conducting a strip search of a child or vulnerable person or be in the vicinity whilst it occurs.
2. Requiring the notification of a parent/guardian ‘as soon as practicable’ does not go far enough in our view. A strip search of a child or vulnerable person should not take place without a parent/guardian being first notified.
3. An officer of the rank of at least superintendent should be notified before a strip search or a child or vulnerable person takes place in all instances. This officer should give final approval of the search taking place.
4. As well as a safeguarding referral, we believe therapeutic support should be made available to a child following a strip search.

**2. PACE Code A**

1. We do not feel it is appropriate for a strip search of a child or vulnerable person involving the exposure of intimate parts to be conducted under stop and search powers and we believe this power should be removed from the PACE Code.

It is our view that the use of strip searches on children should be ended. If this does not happen, then the codes of practice which relate to the use of strip search should be written as such that the mental health and wellbeing of a child is the first priority in the instance that a strip search is performed and that the strip search is only performed as an absolute last resort. Ensuring the child’s dignity and autonomy is respected throughout the process is an absolute priority, and that child must have an appropriate adult of their choosing present whilst the search is taking place. The child must have immediate access to mental health support following the search.

**Data**

The current collection and publication of data on the use of strip searches is poor, and we would encourage a more transparent process for data on strip searches to be recorded and published. We would welcome an annual release of this data, similarly to the way in which stop and search statistics are published every year, and ideally this would include clear figures on who has been strip searched (including data on all protected characteristics and location), why they were strip searched (reasons given to justify the search) and the outcome of the strip search.

We would be happy to contribute further to this process if helpful. For further information, please contact Meka Beresford, Head of Policy, via meka@actionforraceequality.org.uk.