

Supporting Cultural Permanency for Children and Youth

This tip sheet is intended to help child welfare staff facilitate and maintain the cultural connections of children and youth. When children and youth enter out-of-home care, they often lose their connection to their respective cultures. This loss chips away at a sense of self and the formation of self-identity.

It is important for child welfare staff to assess their knowledge of cultures outside their own on an ongoing basis. It is unrealistic to think that you can know about every culture. As a result, there are a few things to keep in mind when you are working with children, youth and their families whose cultures differ from your own. Being respectful of people's differences is key. Instead of making assumptions, be willing to ask questions. Putting effort into learning about their cultures can go a long way toward making connections with the children, youth and their families.

As a child welfare professional, you will find that you facilitate engagement by honoring and respecting the cultural heritages of children and youth. Following are some strategies that can facilitate that engagement.

Be informed:

- Do background work to learn about the cultures of children and youth.
- Talk with children's and youths' parents to gather information about their cultural connections. Share that information with caregivers.
- If you are unfamiliar with a child's or a youth's culture, research that culture's norms and traditions.
- Ask children and youth about their cultural identities and about which cultural practices or norms are important to them.
- Learn about cultural rituals, activities and preferences to share with children and youth.
- Ask children and youth if their cultural needs are being addressed (e.g., Are they able to worship the way they want and to listen to the music that they like? Do they have connections with people who share the same culture?).
- Know yourself. Identify your bias, and be mindful of that as you work with children, youth and their families.

Maintain connections for children and youth:

- Siblings help to maintain children's sense of identity. Make every effort to keep siblings together.
- Prioritize placing children and youth near their respective parents, communities and schools.
- Prioritize placing children and youth with families who speak their languages.
- Include the value of cultural identity during court case planning for children and youth.
- Make space for young people to identify what is important to them. Determine the "speed" at which they can be encouraged to take charge of decisions related to their permanency.
- Listen to children and youth when they identify people to whom they wish to stay connected, and find ways to make this happen.
- Convey through your words and actions that you value the families of children and youth and understand the importance of that connection.



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Seek opportunities:

- Choose service providers for children and youth who speak their languages and have a cultural connection with them.
- Provide resources for caregivers to learn about the heritages and cultures of children and youth.
- Actively engage and seek opportunities for children and youth to connect with individuals who share their races and ethnicities.
- Provide guides and mentors to help children and youth navigate communities where they are placed (especially for children and youth moving into neighborhoods and areas where they do not share the majority's culture).
- Provide networks of supports; identify resources that are accessible and appropriate.
- Create and share "cultural care packages," especially when children and youth are in spaces or placements different from their own cultures.

Activities to Maintain Cultural Connections

The examples below are some activities that child welfare caseworkers can do with children or youth. Some of these activities also can be done between the children and youths and their caregivers.

For all ages:

- Ask about foods the children or youths were used to eating, and try eating some of those together.
- Support children and youth in maintaining their native languages. Ask a child or youth whose native language you do not speak to teach you a few phrases.
- Use art as a way to have children and youth express their cultural connections. Provide supplies for drawing that represent all skin and hair colors.
- Play age-appropriate games that are common in the cultures of children and youth.
- Find mentors from the cultures of children and youth who are able to keep them connected with their cultures.
- Find ways to ensure that children and youth can participate in their respective religious faiths.
- Ask developmentally appropriate questions about the cultures of children and youth. Allow children and youth to share what is important to them.
- purchase of hair products and clothing that are culturally appropriate.
- Help caregivers to learn how to care for a particular child's or youth's hair.

For school-age children (6 to 12):

- Ask about the children's traditions and customs (e.g., Which holidays do they celebrate? How do their families celebrate those holidays?)
- Suggest "show-and-tell" sessions at school to share information about the children's cultures. Attend these if you can; and, if not, ask the children to show you what they shared during show-and-tell.
- Identify cultural museums and parades that children could attend and if possible work one into a visit.
- Identify ethnic festivals taking place that children could attend and if possible attend one during a visit.
- Either purchase or obtain from a library books, movies, cartoons, games and toys relevant to the children's cultures.
- Read or listen with children to books that are culturally relevant for the children.
- Identify movies or podcasts that are culturally relevant for the children and try to work one in during a visit.

For teens (13 and older):

- Encourage participation in sports, clubs and organizations tied to the youths' cultures.
- Consider conducting visits to museums or art exhibits tied to the youths' cultures.
- Listen to regional music with youths.
- Support youths' cultural expression through how they choose to dress.
- Provide books and media relevant to the youths' cultures of origin.
- Identify cultural workshops or musical events and if possible attend one with youth during a visit.
- Allow youths to pick restaurants from their cultures. Arrange to visit and to eat with them at the restaurants of their choice.



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