

**Oregon Judicial Department
Citizen's Review Board
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"Native Identity: Cultural Connection and Accessing Culturally-Appropriate/Culturally-Responsive Services for Native People"

Kelli Cunningham, BS, QMHA

Native American Rehabilitation Association (NARA)

Assessment

When assessing Native families, questions should be asked that seek to determine what kind of culturally-appropriate and culturally-responsive services a Native family may need or want. As we talk with Native families, we seek to understand what their connection is to their culture and let that guide us as to where they will be most comfortable and where they would have the most success.

Voice and choice should be first and foremost the consideration. Many Native families who are in need of supportive services have often not had a choice in the matter of how services are brought to them and historically, have not had a choice in matters of their own families. Their voice has often not been heard and consequently, many feel they still do not have a voice when it comes to getting support for challenges and issues they may be dealing with, regarding their children and other family matters, especially cultural needs. Assisting Native families and supporting them by letting them know their voice is essential and that they do have choice in guiding systems about how to access culturally-appropriate and culturally-supportive services needs to be a priority.

Culturally-appropriate services are those services that address specific cultural needs, for which Native families can benefit from and that they have a voice and choice in. (It should be noted that, for instance, a Native family may be more comfortable with a faith-based organization than a Native-specific organization). Voice and choice of the family you are working with would indicate that the most appropriate place to seek services is the one that the family is familiar with and/or is comfortable going to. If they are unfamiliar with a service provider/service organization, then assessing their level of cultural connectedness (ties to tribe, ceremonies, community, language, etc.), would be the focus, to better assist them in connecting with the appropriate service provider.

Culturally-responsiveness speaks to an organization's ability to understand the cultural dynamics that a Native family is immersed in. This includes grasping the families' cultural ties, historical trauma as well as current trauma, unresolved grief and loss, loss of cultural connection, and focusing on the families' strengths and remaining ties. It also includes assisting in that cultural reconnection whether the loss of connection presents in this generation or a previous generation.

Understanding Culture: Identity

- ◆ Beyond filling out forms, asking about Native heritage is priority, so that identity may be assessed.
- ◆ The question of how a family sees identity needs to be asked—how do you identify?
- ◆ Identity is a personal consideration, influenced by ties, even though those ties may be temporarily interrupted. The goal should be to assess where the family/individual is, and help them through a conversation that ultimately reveals how they identify—whether that is with a particular tribe, more than one tribe, with a tribe and another ethnic group, or other bi-racial considerations. Thus, many Native people are multi-cultural, so while the family or individual may identify with a specific tribe, they may also identify with another group.
- ◆ It is also important to understand that Native people can only enroll in one federally-recognized tribe. This means that for a child or any individual who may have blood ties to two or more different tribes, legally he/she can only choose one to enroll in (and will only be eligible if he/she meets the blood quantum of that tribe and provided there is open enrollment. Some tribes choose to close their rolls at specific times.) In this case, we listen and acknowledge their identity and help them connect to both tribes.
- ◆ Identity is how we most see ourselves. It is influenced by:
 - ties to tradition
 - language
 - connection to family and community
 - how we communicate

-what values we keep

- ◆ For some, Native identity can be tied to their participation in their local community, ties with other Native families, participation in cultural activities and ceremonies (even if those activities and ceremonies are from another tribe). This usually is accompanied by the fact that Native families in the local community recognize that the individual or family is recognized as a relative, even though they may not carry Native blood. Acknowledging and respecting this supports and strengthens the cultural connection the family has made.

Cultural Connection

- ◆ Cultural connection has many levels and can be very complex. Traditional teachings and ties run deep but for some Native families, those cultural/tribal connections have been disrupted, largely tied with historical governmental policies that sought to sever traditional ties of families and children and tribal communities. Governmental policies such as boarding schools, termination and relocation, to name a few, were key in changing tribal life. Unresolved historical grief and trauma often are issues tribal communities struggle with. Even with these devastating historical events, tradition remains and many tribal connections are intact. For those families that are in need of culturally-specific and culturally-responsive services, the following list of questions serve to *begin* to put together a picture of cultural identity, tie, connection, areas of need and can help guide where to look with regard to culturally-responsive services:

- ◆ Was the family/individual born and raised on a reservation?
- ◆ Are tribal ties maintained?
 - Does the family go back to see other family members?
 - Does the family go back to attend ceremonies?
- ◆ If the family lives away from the tribe, are they connected into any local Native community?
- ◆ What are the significant events that have happened that has resulted in loss of connection?
- ◆ How is the historical trauma, current trauma being addressed?

- ◆ Does the family attend cultural events and/or activities?
- ◆ Does the family have other family members they seek out for support and/or cultural connection?
- ◆ Are there connections the family has to cultural/spiritual counsel and/or ceremony?
- ◆ If the family/individual is seeking cultural connection/re-connection, what local resources have been looked at, to assist them?
- ◆ If there is loss of cultural and/or loss of family connection, how can we assist in helping to connect and strengthen that renewed tie?
- ◆ Did the family grow up in tradition?
- ◆ How has family kept up connection—
 - to other family members?
 - to traditional ways?
 - back to tribe?
- ◆ Is family connected to local Native community?
- ◆ Does family participate in cultural events or activities?
- ◆ In what ways, if any, do the family keep up cultural ties?
 - ceremonies?
 - language?
 - traditional teachings?
 - traditional celebrations?
- ◆ How can the family be helped to connect or re-connect to traditional ways?

It is important to note that *not all* Native families, regardless of level of connection to extended family, tribe, cultural services, community, (local or reservation), are aware of all resources that are available to them. Many grapple with how to navigate larger systems, so they may not be aware of every Native-specific or non-Native service provider or connection.

NARA, NW PROGRAM SERVICES AND LOCATIONS

NARA Administration
Oyate Building
1776 SW Madison
Portland, OR 97205
(503) 224-1044

NARA Outpatient
1631 SW Columbia
Portland, OR 97201
(503) 231-2641

NARA Indian Health Clinic
15 N. Morris
Portland, OR 97227
(503) 230-9875

NARA Totem Lodge
1438 SE Division St.
Portland, OR 97202
(503) 548-0346

NARA Wellness Center
12360 E. Burnside
Portland, OR 97233
971-279-4800

NARA Youth Program
12360 E. Burnside
Portland, OR 97233
971-279-4838

NARA Nak-Nu-Wit Program
(Youth mental health)
1776 SW Madison
Portland, OR 97205
(503) 224-1044

NARA Residential Tx
17645 NW St. Helen's Hwy
Portland, OR 97231
(503) 621-1069

Other Resources

Indian Health Service

Bureau of Indian Affairs

National Indian Child Welfare Association (NICWA)

Northwest Portland Area Indian Health Board (NPAI/IB)

Native American Youth Association (NAYA)

Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission

White Bison (Is an American Indian non-profit organization based in Colorado Springs, Colorado)