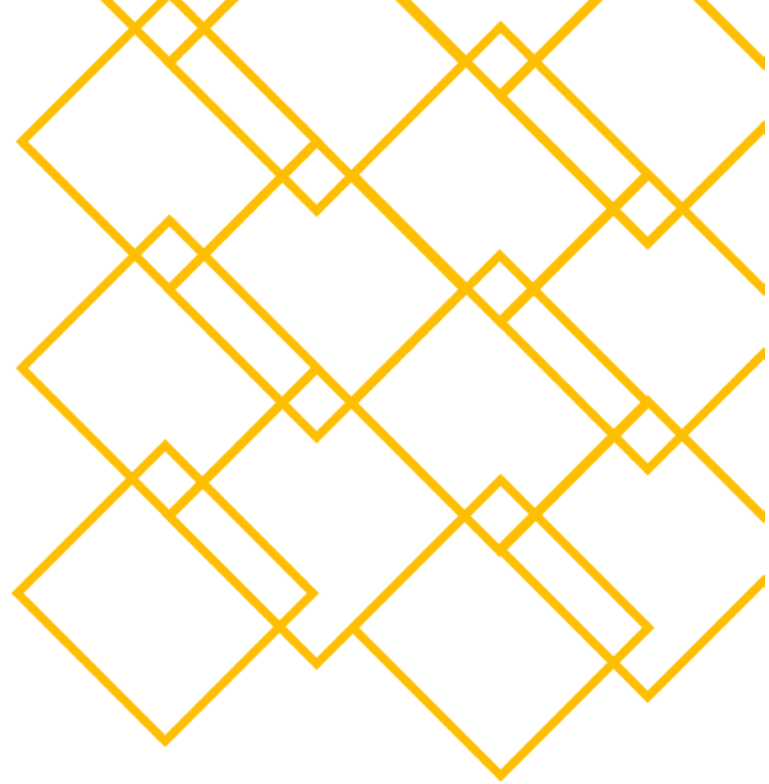




Capacity Building
CENTER FOR TRIBES



Considerations in Conducting Family Assessments

INTRODUCTION

When a Native family comes to the attention of child welfare, a caseworker might be inclined to define the family by its crisis. But that's just one part of the family's present, and it need not foretell the family's future. By using cultural engagement and trauma-informed care and collaborating with the family, extended family, and community, child welfare professionals can plan interventions and supportive services that will help their clients reach safety, permanency, and well-being.

This resource by the Capacity Building Center for Tribes (CBCT) promotes a strength-based approach to family assessment by offering principles and tips for:

- engaging families,
- preparing to conduct an assessment, and
- conducting the assessment

PRINCIPLES FOR SUCCESSFULLY ENGAGING FAMILIES

Incorporating these principles throughout the family engagement process will help caseworkers create assessments that fully support the journey toward safety, permanency, and well-being.

1. Engaging Family and Family Relations

How does one define “family?” The word can include people who have been a part of the family, yet are not blood relatives. The concept of extended family can embrace those who are connected with the family in other ways and will support the family during and after a crisis. By identifying and then engaging each member of the family with love and empathy, holding all in equal regard, the caseworker will develop a clearer vision of each person’s experiences and needs and how they relate to one another.

Check out CBCT’s View of Family from a Tribal Perspective:

tribalinformationexchange.org/index.php/strengtheningfamilies/

2. Timely Response

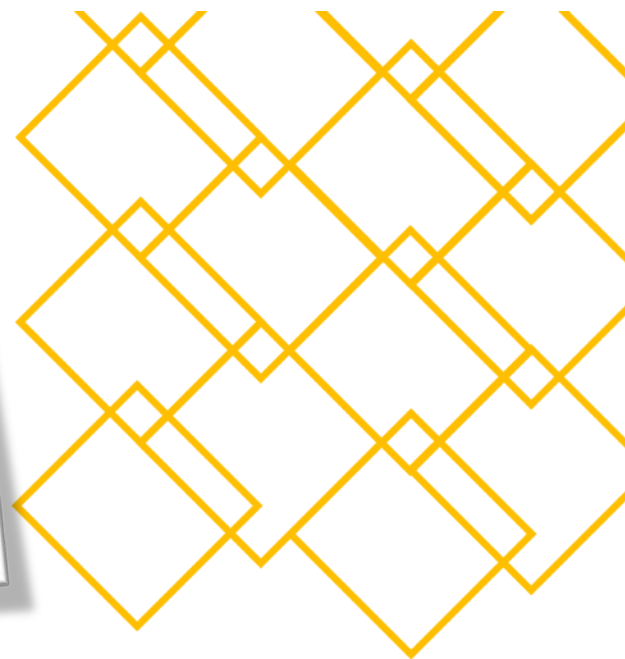
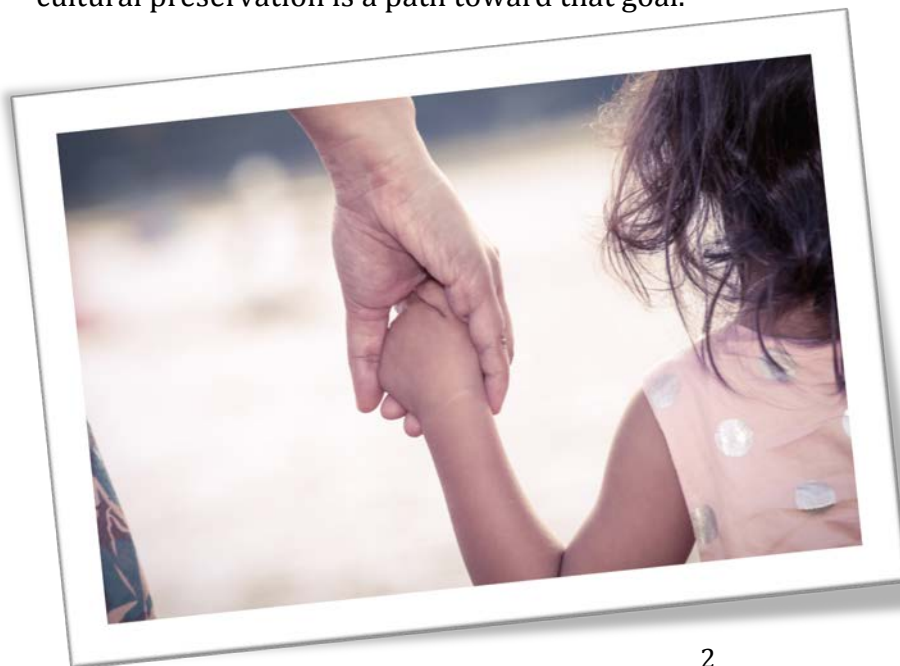
Families in crisis need a quick response that includes assessment, intervention, and service delivery. When one recognizes all families as their own, we don’t want any family to suffer.

3. Compassionate and Hopeful Approach

A caseworker’s attitude and approach will greatly influence a family’s success. Using a compassionate and hopeful approach means engaging families with kindness and with a belief that they can successfully parent, can make good decisions about their child’s safety, and that success is both possible and feasible.

4. Child Safety, Permanency, and Well-Being

What would you want for your relatives? A tribal caseworker who asks that question of themselves will recognize that the goals of safety, permanency, and well-being are interrelated and inseparable throughout the assessment and planning process. For each child, family and cultural preservation is a path toward that goal.



PREPARATION FOR THE PROVIDER

Every assessment a caseworker conducts can change the course of someone's life. The stakes couldn't be higher. To serve their clients best, caseworkers must see clearly. They need to be aware of their professional lens and intentions when engaging with families.

Mindfulness

Paying attention *on purpose*, or mindfulness, involves a conscious direction of one's awareness. In other words, people make a choice to think, and then behave, in a certain way. Making mindfulness an integral part of one's practice or organization can strengthen self-care and build that individual's capacity to engage with families. Examples of mindful actions are daily smudging and/or prayer.

Check out the Mindfulness App from the CBCT:

<https://mindfulness.tribalinformationexchange.org/index.html>

Cultural Humility

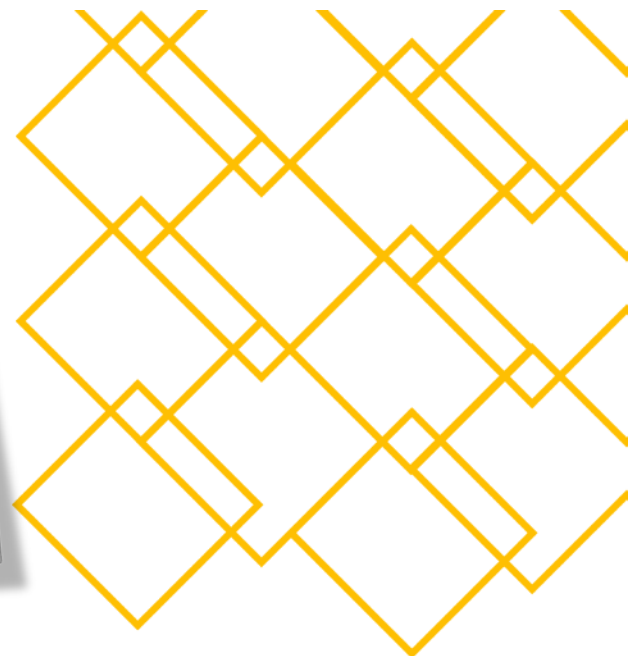
To act with cultural humility is to acknowledge that every assessment is unique and can teach something new. In some Native languages, humility can also mean "compassion." Within the assessment process, behaving with cultural humility means actively engaging family members as individuals, each equal to each, none better nor worse than the others.

Cultural Bias

Unrecognized and unconscious biases get in the way of accurately assessing a family's strengths and needs. Caseworkers who identify their biases are more likely to be successful in their work with families.

Check out the cultural bias-related resources from the CBCT:

<https://tribalinformationexchange.org/index.php/professionaldevelopment>



PRACTICE CONSIDERATIONS IN CONDUCTING THE ASSESSMENT

An effective family assessment identifies child and family needs, strengths, and risks by engaging the key people in the process and doing so in a timely manner. The assessment is completed within the context of the family's culture and with a lifelong perspective for the child and their family.

A strengths-based approach to assessment is grounded in the belief that the family wants to provide care for their children. This approach considers the strengths of both the immediate and extended family – strengths that can be built upon to create safety, permanency, and well-being for the child(ren).

When conducting an assessment:

1. Use an inclusive team approach that includes professionals, family members and cultural resources to make decisions regarding child safety, permanency and well-being. To build an assessment that completely and accurately represents the family, seek information from multiple sources. Base decisions about who to interview on the purpose of the assessment. If a child is in immediate danger, child removal may be required. When this happens, it is important to recognize that the assessment is not yet complete.
2. Set family and cultural preservation as the goal. Understandably, child welfare staff often focus their attention primarily on the children. Keeping in mind that the goal is to maintain or reunify families helps ensure that parental needs also are addressed.
3. Use the assessment to understand the many things that led to the child maltreatment crisis. Provide examples of family strengths and how they can be used as a foundation for restoring the family.
4. Prepare an assessment report that could be used in court for determining whether children remain with or return to their parents. It is essential that they include the perspectives of everyone involved to accurately represent the family situation at each point in time.
5. Develop the family's case plan with the family, based on the identified needs and strengths found in the assessment process. A strong case plan will outline how identified strengths will be used as a foundation for safety, permanency, and well-being. Be realistic. Prioritize the actions needed immediately and those that may occur over a short period of time.
6. Use cultural resources and community programs to support the family's recovery from trauma. Cultural engagement is critical to building family wellness, increasing protective factors in the home and regaining a stable and healing environment for the family.
7. Develop community efforts, tribal-state partnerships, and other collaborations that support improved coordination, linkages, and access to services for child safety, permanence and well-being.