

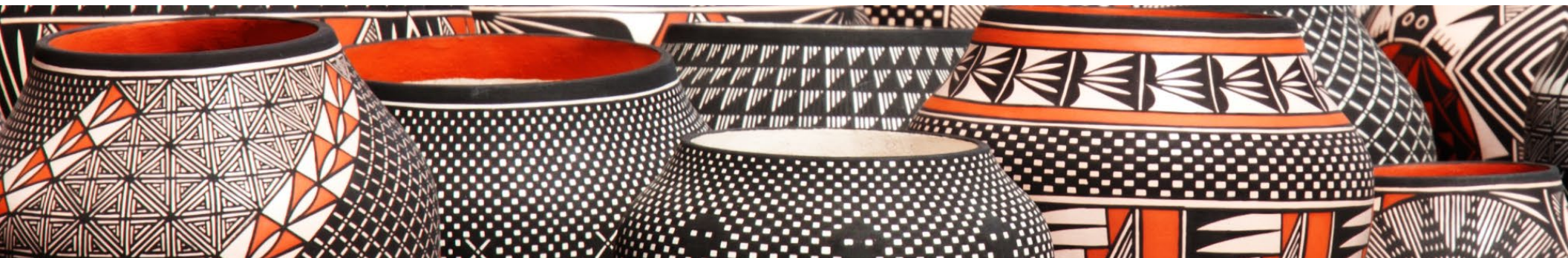


# CULTURE IS PREVENTION: WE ARE ALL CONNECTED

Building and nurturing strong cultural connections within tribal communities helps create healthy families and prevent the occurrence of negative outcomes. These cultural practices and traditional values are protective factors that can also improve child welfare outcomes, maintain family and community connections, and prevent additional harm.

Cultural connectedness is closely linked to positive health and social outcomes for Native youth. A growing body of research supports what tribal communities have long known and practiced – that building a sense of belonging and helping youth grow a connection to place and cultural identity helps them grow into healthy adults.

The following resources expand on the concept of culture as prevention, provide examples from tribal communities, and offer suggestions from the field for how caseworkers can be mindful of incorporating into their daily practice the culture of the children and families they serve.



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## Aanikoobijigan

### Ojibwe Teaching

Aanikoobijigan speaks of belonging. It is a source of our culture, and a source of our resiliency. In English it translates into great grandparents and great grandchild. It is used to refer to either and both individuals. Why would that be? This is a teaching of seven generations and there are spiritual and scientific teachings deeply embedded within this one word. A great grandparent and a great grandchild are individuals, but they are also the same being. The word, when used, it also refers to myself, my parents, my great grandparents, and my future great grandchildren. It includes seven generations within this one word. When this word is being used, what it says is that your identity goes back to time immemorial, that those that came before you are alive in you, in the present and that the future of those not yet born reside in you as well. That's a very powerful word. The teaching of seven generations spans many, if not all, tribal Nations. It means that what came before is interwoven into our past, our present, and our future. It tells us that when we as individuals make decisions or actions, we need to be mindful of our past, our present, and how it will affect our future. It also tells us when we are working with tribal families, the decisions that will be made or the actions that will occur will affect their familial line. For this reason, as workers, it is important to be mindful to avoid re-traumatization of the children and families you work with. Spiritually, it tells us that we belong to someone since the beginning of time. It tells us that we are in the line of those who have yet to be born. We are all connected.

- Lisa Stark, MSW (Bad River Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Tribe)  
featured in [\*Protective Factors and the Science Behind Resilience\*](#)

## CULTURE IS PREVENTION RESOURCES

### [Protective Factors and the Science Behind Resilience](#)

Capacity Building Center for Tribes, 2020, Webinar

This webinar in the Trauma and Resiliency Series looks at the science behind resilience and provides in-depth exploration of protective factors that support resilience for children, families, and tribal communities. Presenters discuss culture as one of the environmental factors that builds resilience, and they offer detailed suggestions for tribal child welfare caseworkers to help them build or maintain a child's connections to their culture and tribe. Other videos from this series include: [Building a Trauma Lens](#) and [Secondary Traumatic Stress](#).

### [Reclaiming the Child Welfare Narrative](#)

Capacity Building Center for Tribes, 2022, Podcast Series

Join Jackie Crow Shoe, enrolled member of the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa, as she connects with experts across Indian Country to address the importance of building tribal child welfare programs that are reflective of their communities' values and cultures – reclaiming the narrative from a dominant system to one that reflects Indigenous worldviews and emphasizes responsibilities to children.

- Episode 1: Looking Back to Understand Where We Are Now
- Episode 2: The Interconnectedness of Language and Culture
- Episode 3: Restoring Our Children to Their Original Value of Sacred Beings
- Episode 4: Making Communities Whole Through Restorative Justice
- Episode 5: Are Child Welfare Decisions Better Using Peacemaking Circles?

### [Culture is Prevention](#)

Healthy Native Youth, 2021, Video

“When we are experiencing and interacting with culture, we are doing more than just putting smiles on our faces, we are changing our chemistry and strengthening our protective factors that have both immediate and long-term effects. Leading this call were our friends from the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium (ANTHC), Southeast Alaska Regional Health Consortium (SEARHC), and the Aleutian Pribilof Islands Association (APIA).”

Supporting documents for the Culture is Prevention [video](#) include the [slides](#), [mentimeter results](#), and [chatfeed](#).

### What are Protective Factors?

Child Welfare Information Gateway

“Protective factors are conditions or attributes in individuals, families, and communities that promote the health and well-being of children and families. By using a protective factors approach, child welfare professionals and others can help parents find resources and supports that emphasize their strengths while also identifying areas where they need assistance, thereby reducing the chances of child abuse and neglect.”

- [American Indian Resilience: Culture as a Protective Factor](#)
- [Protective Factors to Promote Well-Being and Prevent Child Abuse and Neglect](#)
- [Protective Factors Toolkit](#)
- [Protective Factors Conversation Guides](#)

### [Culture is our Best Protective Factor and Healing Practice](#)

Alaska Native Women's Resource Center (AKNWRC), 2021, Video

"Many of our cultures have cues built in that are designed to connect us to each other and the natural world around us. We are taught from a young age to use them in everyday life both for safety and learning new skills. Our cultures are visual and use many cues making us comfortable with extended periods of silence when learning and in everyday life. As a result of learning by observation we are taught not to question systems, and this leads us not to question initially the introduction of systems that harmed us. As our cultures teach us resiliency we are learning to speak out and heal from those traumas. We need to change our perspective from intergenerational trauma to intergenerational resiliency. This workshop will explore how culture provides both barriers and the skills to overcome them in our modern world."

The work of the AKNWRC was also [featured in an article](#) from the National Indigenous Women's Resource Center.

### [Connecting Prevention Specialists to Native Communities: Culture is Prevention](#)

National American Indian and Alaska Native Prevention Technology Transfer Center, Document

Cindy Sagoe, Sarah Murray, Sean A. Bear

"For many reasons, research is slow to catch up with what Native elders have been telling health workers for decades: 'our culture is our treatment'. Growing research is showing more and more support for this adage, which means as prevention specialists, we need to be open to alternative models of knowing."

### [Cultural Connectedness and Indigenous Youth Well-being Fact Sheet](#)

National Indian Child Welfare Association, Document

This two-page brief focuses on the concept of cultural connectedness, what steps service providers can take to ensure Native youth have the best chance of benefiting from this connection, and also how to measure this feeling.

### From the Field: Practice Suggestion

#### [From the Protective Factors and the Science Behind Resilience Webinar](#)

Current child welfare systems often only work with a parent and a child. However, tribal nations are community focused and naturally connect and pull together. This is a cultural factor that can help build resiliency, support, and connection. Culturally, a worker should be engaging not only with the children and their parent(s), but also aunts, uncles, grandparents, and other caregivers.

### From the Field: Practice Suggestion

#### [From the Protective Factors and the Science Behind Resilience Webinar](#)

Workers can use family team meetings to explore what is important to the child, the parent, and the extended family. These meetings provide an opportunity to discuss how to maintain or introduce a connection to the tribe. Caseworkers can explore:

- How does the family live in a cultural way?
- What cultural traditions would the family like to participate in?
- How can a child's trauma be reduced by maintaining their cultural norms?

## Culture is Prevention

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), Native Connections, Document

“Cultural values are the threads that tie one tribe’s or village’s practices to other Indigenous practices; they are also the links between the past and the present. They align with what the research tells us works in prevention.”

SAMHSA also hosted a [webinar on this topic](#), focusing on the resilience and strengths of tribal communities implementing cultural revitalization strategies.

## **TRIBAL PRACTICE EXAMPLES: TRADITION NOT ADDICTION**

The Southern Plains Tribal Health Board received funds from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) to engage youth at the community level and implement culturally appropriate substance abuse prevention programs. Their intervention, “Tradition Not Addiction”, is focused on culture as prevention.

[Information about the grant and outcomes achieved for the Comanche Nation and the Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes is provided in this document.](#) Outcomes included an increase in resiliency, pride of Native heritage, and family attachments, with a decrease in consumption of alcohol and non-medical use of prescription drugs.



**Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribal Partnership for Success Tradition Not Addiction Program** strategically uses social media as a communication tool and bases its campaigns on risk and protective factor data. The program also hosts prosocial seasonal activities and classes.

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*"Dancing is my prevention against addiction. It is my responsibility, my past, the present and my future helps set a positive example for EVERYONE. I choose my culture."  
- Memo Valenzuela (Grass Dancer)*

*Like Memo, we can all have positive impacts on our youth and young adults thru dancing and traditions or simply by just talking and listening. Even youth can lead other youth to make better life choices. Talk to each other. Listen to one another. Let's help each other prevent underage drinking and drug abuse.*

*#CultureIsPrevention #TraditionNotAddiction  
Credit: [@TraditionNotAddiction](#)*

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## From the Field: Practice Suggestion

### From the Protective Factors and the Science Behind Resilience Webinar

A caseworker can ask a family how to maintain their connection to culture and community. Each family is different, and each family will have different values, culture, and traditions they follow. It is the role of the worker to individualize the needs of each family. This can also be an opportunity to introduce new and healthy cultural activities to a family and show that tribal cultures have healthy and healing opportunities.

Questions to ask could include:

- Does anyone in the family want to make dance regalia and start dancing?
- Does anyone want to attend sweat lodges to address the adversities they are facing?
- Are there language tables the family can attend?
- Are there ceremonies the family plans to attend or would like to attend?
- Is the family's tribal nation a horse culture? Is there someone who can work with a family in equine therapy while also teaching the family about horse culture?
- Are there elders that the family can reach out to and talk to?
- Are there LGBTQ or Two-Spirit considerations that need to be known and addressed?
- To whom in the community can you connect the family for cultural activities?
- Is the child of an age that they can be involved in decision-making about cultural learning and involvement?

