

Levels of Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect

Strategies and Resources for Tribal Communities



Prevention by definition is the action of stopping something from happening or arising. Child welfare professionals actively work to prevent child maltreatment and the unnecessary removal of children from their families.

Many tribes recognize that prevention efforts align closely with traditional values and knowledge and serve as protective factors for children and families. Protective factors encourage positive engagement and focus on strengths and identifying areas where assistance is needed.

Our cultural values exemplify keeping families together, creating space for language, storytelling, traditional teachings, and ceremonies. Culture is a means of healing, bringing a sense of belonging and purpose.

Embracing this traditional knowledge while conducting child welfare services is essential. Honoring our stories, ways of knowing, and belief systems when developing policies, codes, and practices can guide us to better outcomes and meaningful connections with the families we work with.

Prevention services can range from Active Efforts to Customary Adoption. Weaving cultural stories and practices into any decision-making child welfare practice is prevention. This document describes the three main types of prevention and provide resources aligned with each so tribal child welfare programs can better identify where the services they are already providing fit along the continuum.

Prevention Resource Guide

The Prevention Resource Guide is an annual publication from the Children's Bureau that highlights innovative and purposeful prevention work throughout the country. It includes "Questions to Consider" when identifying practices tribes may want to implement in their own communities.



PRIMARY PREVENTION

The goal of primary prevention is to prevent abuse or neglect. These strategies are directed at all members of a community. Education about traditional tribal ways of knowing and being, traditional cultural values, and the role of the community to protect and nurture children are examples of primary prevention strategies. Increased knowledge and practice of cultural teachings, including ceremonies and rituals, have been proven to reduce the risk of child maltreatment.

Tribal Information Exchange Resources:

- [Indigenous Healing webinar series](#)
- [Lakota Worldview videos](#)
- [Reclaiming the Child Welfare Narrative podcast](#)

Children's Bureau Resource:

[Strengthening families through primary prevention of child maltreatment and unnecessary parent-child separation \(IM-18-05\)](#). This Information Memorandum from the Children's Bureau provides information on working together with the courts and other public and private agencies to plan, implement and maintain integrated primary prevention networks, with the goal of strengthening families and preventing maltreatment and the unnecessary removal of children from their families.



SECONDARY PREVENTION

The goal of secondary prevention is to reduce the impact of child abuse or neglect that has already occurred. Strategies that are designed to support families and children, facilitate reunification, acknowledge and repair harm, and enable the restoration of healthy family dynamics are examples of secondary prevention strategies.

Tribal Information Exchange Resources:

- [Active Efforts webinar and resource list](#)
- [Qualified Expert Witness resource list](#)
- [Placement Preferences resource list](#)
- [Engaging and Supporting Native Grandfamilies resource list](#)
- [Engaging and Supporting Native Fathers resource list](#)
- [Tribal Customary Adoption resource list](#)

TERTIARY PREVENTION

The goal of tertiary prevention is to soften the impact of child abuse and neglect that is ongoing and to prevent its reoccurrence. Services that work directly and intensely with families, to support their continued learning and practice of healthy ways to manage stress, interact with children in a safe manner, and address individual mental, emotional, and physical health needs are examples of tertiary prevention strategies.

Tribal Information Exchange Resources:

- [Protective Factors and Science Behind Resilience webinar](#)
- [Engaging Families resource series](#)
- [Family from a Tribal Perspective video](#)

Being mindful and aware of trauma experiences will help tribal child welfare programs decrease the negative effects youth may experience throughout the various transitions associated with removal, placement(s), and reunification. No two youth are exactly the same, but all youth bring their thoughts, feelings, and questions with them as they transition in, through, and out of foster care.





PREVENTION EXAMPLE

A child arrives at school without appropriate clothes for the cold weather:

Primary Prevention efforts could include posters around the school and notices sent home with information about the need for children to be dressed warmly for the cold weather, facts about how quickly hypothermia can happen, examples of appropriate clothing, and a school policy about appropriate clothing.

Secondary Prevention efforts could include a closet with extra clothing that could be provided to ensure the child is dressed appropriately and does not feel shame or embarrassment, connecting families to outside agencies who provide winter clothing, reaching out to the family to identify circumstances that make it challenging for them to provide for the child, and identifying other supports that can be offered to alleviate ongoing stress.

Tertiary Prevention efforts could include wrap-around services for the family, intensive case management, referrals to outside agencies that provide in-home services, classes and resources that teach parenting, self-care, and living skills, and mental health counseling.