

# Selecting an Assessment Tool

A family assessment process in Indian Country is most effective when the process uses the family's strengths to maintain both family and culture. There are many assessment tools from which to choose.

The National Resource Center for Family Centered Practice published the [Comprehensive Family Assessment Guidelines for Child Welfare](#) in 2005. It says that a comprehensive family assessment:

- Recognizes patterns of parental behavior over time;
- Examines the family strengths and protective factors to identify resources that can support the family's ability to meet its needs and better protect the children;
- Addresses the overall needs of the child and family that affect the safety, permanency, and well-being of the child;
- Considers contributing factors such as domestic violence, substance abuse, mental health, chronic health problems, and poverty; and
- Incorporates information gathered through other assessments and focuses on the development of a service plan or plan for intervention with the family. The service plan addresses the major factors that affect safety, permanency, and child well-being over time.

Assessment tools are often developed by and for use in non-Native communities and therefore have inherent bias. Be on the lookout for that possibility when selecting the right tool for your community. If bias is present, change the tool to adapt it to your tribe's needs.

A 2012 article, "A collaborative and trauma-informed practice model for urban Indian child welfare," (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/23444791>) describes an adaptation that was undertaken by the Denver Indian Family Resource Center (DIFRC).

A 2016 practice brief, "[Child Safety and Risk Assessments in American Indian and Alaska Native Communities,](#)" reviews relevant literature, cultural appropriateness, and examples of assessment tools and processes in some tribal communities.

Every assessment a caseworker conducts can change the course of someone's life. The stakes couldn't be higher. By using an effective assessment tool, caseworkers can engage family, extended family and community to regain a stable and healing environment for the safety, permanency, and well-being of Indian children.



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