



TIPS FOR ENGAGING AND SUPPORTING NATIVE FAMILIES CARING FOR CHILDREN

1. Take time to listen, observe, and build collaborative relationships with families.

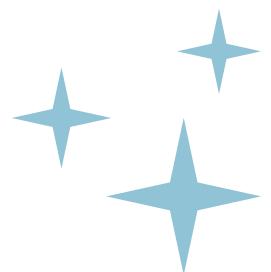
This can help establish trust and engage families as active contributors to their child's learning and development.

2. Create space for families to share information, stories, and insights, and engage in meaningful conversations about what they believe is most suitable to meet their children's needs. This strengths-based approach acknowledges the expertise and experience families already have and focuses on how services and programs can complement and enhance their efforts to support their children. Families should feel empowered to engage in decision-making that affects the health and development of their children.

3. Explore and respect the different norms and/or unwritten rules of etiquette for communication. If you are unsure about something a family has shared, respectfully give pause to see if they offer more details when they are ready. Families may not feel comfortable sharing everything all at once, so it's important to approach the conversation with patience and avoid rushing the relationship building process.

Families might answer questions through storytelling, which calls for active listening and a willingness to be fully present in the moment. Non-verbal cues, like a nod or a soft "mhm," can serve as reassuring signals that you are engaged in the conversation, helping to maintain the flow of information and support the process of building the relationship. There may be moments where an open-ended question can help invite further dialogue after an extended pause. It's okay if this process takes time.

By actively listening, you can gain valuable insights into the family's communication style, helping you recognize the non-verbal and verbal cues that resonate with them most effectively. By showing genuine care and taking the time to understand the family's experiences and needs within their cultural context, you can offer responses that are more individualized and mindful of their unique values and perspectives.



4. Be open to developing an awareness of the historical events, sociolinguistic practices, and cultural backgrounds of Native children and families that influence child development today. Being cognizant of cultural values can help service providers identify factors that may influence and shape decision making around early child learning and development.

5. Account for the centrality of extended family structures and relationships to healthy development, family and community values, and the varying traditional and conventional perspectives on child growth and development in service provision, program development, and other spaces that impact the health and well-being of Native children and their families.



Here are some quick links to other educational materials:

Generations United and the National Indian Child Welfare Association. (2020). ***American Indian & Alaska Native Grandfamilies: Helping Children Thrive Through Connection to Family and Cultural Identity, Chapters 3 and 4.***

<https://www.nicwa.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/AIAN-Toolkit-WEB.pdf>

National Indian Child Welfare Association. (n.d.). ***Cultural Connectedness and Indigenous Youth Well-Being.*** <https://www.nicwa.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/2019-10-30-Cultural-Connectedness-Fact-Sheet.pdf>

National Indian Child Welfare Association. (2022, Nov). ***The State of American Indian and Alaska Native Children and Families.*** <https://www.nicwa.org/latest-news/state-of-american-indian-and-alaska-native-children-and-families-report/>

Native American Rights Fund. (2013). ***Bringing Our Children Home*** (video) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VJCqeauLvY8>

Native Child Advocacy Resource Center (2022). ***Practice Brief 3: Native Children and Forced Assimilation.*** <https://ojjdp.ojp.gov/library/publications/practice-brief-3-tribal-children-and-forced-assimilation>

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (n.d.). ***Culture Card.*** (a resource created for first responders new to tribal communities; it is intended to fold up to fit in a back pocket) <https://store.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/sma08-4354.pdf>