

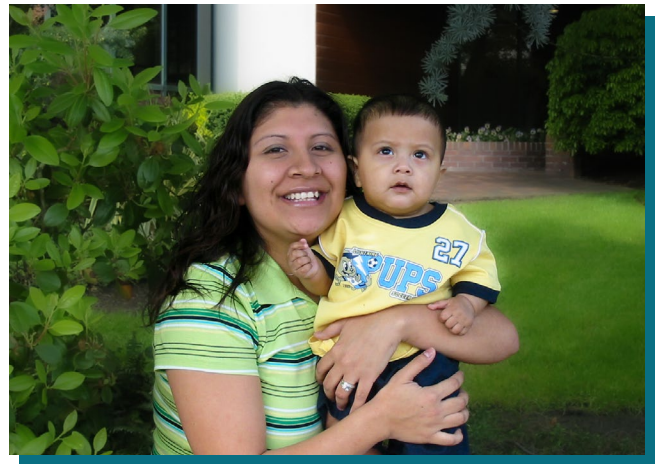
Strengthening Prevention Services: A Guide for Caseworkers



NICWA

National Indian Child Welfare Association
Protecting Our Children • Preserving Our Culture

This guide provides practical strategies for caseworkers, to strengthen prevention services in Tribal child welfare for Native children and families. It emphasizes honoring cultural identity, building trust, reducing barriers, and partnering with communities and Tribes to ensure families receive effective, culturally responsive support.



Build Trust First

Trust is the foundation of effective partnership in prevention efforts. Creating child welfare programs and services that community members trust to reach out to for support before situations turn into formal department involvement is an important part of effective prevention services in Tribal communities. Here are some ways to build trust within Tribal communities:

- Engage with the community at community events by having an information booth about the prevention services that are necessary.
- Volunteer at a community event to serve food or participate in some other way.
- Host a community event where the program shares protective factors for children, and provides family friendly activities.

Caseworkers should use relational, trauma-informed engagement to create a safe and respectful environment for the families they engage with. Families are more likely to participate in services that benefit them when they feel heard, valued, and understood.

Some ways to build trust:

- Use relational, trauma-informed engagement techniques to reduce stress and build rapport.
- Give families a voice and choice in decisions, to empower them and increase buy-in.
- Avoid jargon; explain supports clearly so families understand available resources.
- Take culturally centered trainings, such as Positive Indian Parenting, and learn about the community's culture and history.
- Clearly provide information to families to understand their case.

Lower the Barriers

Families often face logistical and systemic challenges that prevent them from accessing services. Caseworkers can help by simplifying processes and offering flexible options to meet families' needs. Caseworkers can lower barriers by:

- Simplify referrals to reduce paperwork and confusion.
- Provide warm handoffs instead of just phone numbers to ensure continuity.
- Offer evening/weekend options when possible, to accommodate work schedules.
- Consider transportation, ID requirements, and waitlists when planning services.
- Advocate for culturally responsive services.



Be Flexible

Flexibility allows caseworkers to meet families where they are, and respond to both immediate crises and long-term goals. Below are ways caseworkers can be flexible:

- Meet families in their preferred setting, including home, community, or virtual options.
- Invite families to bring a support family member, friend, or community person they feel supported by.
- Allow for crisis needs while supporting long-term goals.
- Adapt plans as circumstances change to maintain engagement.



Stay Connected to Community Resources

Strong prevention services rely on community collaboration. Caseworkers should maintain this by:

- Maintaining updated resource lists for quick referrals.
- Building ongoing relationships with local providers, Tribal communities, and Native organizations. You can do this by:
 - Creating a wrap-around team of community resource staff, and meeting bi-monthly.
- Building bridges across systems, to allow for strong relationships to be formed.
- Co-creating supports with families and strong community partners. This can look like:
 - Informing families about services from community partners.
 - Inviting community partners to events for families to get to know them.

Honor Culture and Identity

Culturally responsive services are a protective factor for cultural identity. Prevention efforts are the strongest when families stay connected to their culture and community. To honor culture and identity, caseworkers should:

- Ask families what cultural supports matter to them.
- Connect with cultural mentors or Native-led organizations where appropriate.
- Recognize historical trauma and the protective power of cultural identity and cultural healing.
- Connect the family with cultural and language programs if available.
- Learn about the Tribal community by attending events and learning the Tribal community's history.

Partner with Tribal Programs

Collaborate with Tribal programs internally and in other areas. Connection with Tribal programs ensures culturally grounded services and supports Tribal sovereignty. Tribal caseworkers can do this by:

- Engaging with Tribal social services and health clinics.
- Engaging with Tribal communities and Native-led organizations in your area.
- Including culturally responsive mental health or healing programs in the referrals they issue for families.
- Working with elders' programs and Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) support units in the community.

Support Sovereignty and Self-Determination

Caseworkers should be respectful of Tribal sovereignty by following local protocols and involving Tribal leaders early in prevention planning. This can look like:

- Asking and involving the Tribe in what collaboration looks like for their community.
- Following local Tribal protocols and asking what works best for their community.
- Ensuring cultural safety by prioritizing Native-led providers when available.

Conclusion

Strengthening prevention services requires trust, flexibility, cultural responsiveness, and strong partnerships. By implementing these strategies, caseworkers can help Native families thrive.



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The National Indian Child Welfare Association (NICWA) protects the safety, health, and cultural identity of all Native children and families—today and for future generations—by upholding culturally based services, community strength, and Tribal sovereignty.

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