

Tips for Cross-Cultural Training from Tribal STAR

In order to effectively increase understanding of the complex issues surrounding child welfare services for Native youth, it is necessary to illuminate historical events and how they have shaped today's Tribal and non-Tribal relationships.

Key topic areas that increase understanding include how U.S. federal policies relating to relocation and assimilation (such as boarding schools) resulted in the break-up of Native American families and many Tribal family systems. As a result, many youth who became adults through the boarding school systems did not receive traditional teachings about how to raise children, how to be a good parent, and had few role models to show them how to maintain a healthy sense of cultural identity while also existing in contemporary society. These unresolved grief and loss issues have been identified as antecedents for many of the self-destructive behaviors that are seen among Native youth today, and as contributing factors to many of the currently identified health disparities (substance abuse, homicide, diabetes, etc.) Native Americans experience when compared to other ethnic/cultural groups.

Training Native and non-Native people about these issues is a challenging task that requires each trainer to have confidence and the resolve to thoroughly cover key topic areas while maintaining a collaborative and optimistic spirit. The risk in doing so is that non-Natives can feel guilt or shame to a point where they close themselves off from the experience. Additionally, Native people may feel this is the time to illuminate local historic and even personal familial events that relate to federal policies, grief and loss, and Tribal mistrust, and may vent their frustrations at representatives of local non-Native programs. Steps that can help achieve understanding during the training session:

- 1) Acknowledge that these historic events are U.S. history, and as residents of the U.S., we all share this history, some closer than others.
- 2) Illuminate apologies by the Child Welfare League of America and the Bureau of Indian Affairs and acknowledge that current child welfare systems are recognizing that active effort is needed to rectify these issues. This is why we're all here today!
- 3) Build on collaborative discussion and use the group's emotional charge to brainstorm new ways to work together.
- 4) Ask a local Tribal elder to be part of the training and ask their support for this specific segment with the goal to end this section in a positive manner.
- 5) End this section with time dedicated to the discovery of contributions Native peoples have made to contemporary society.