

# *Détente and Decorum for Child Welfare Leaders*

## Strategic Teaming and Engagement with Tribes and Native American Communities

### DEFINITIONS

**Détente** (n) dé-tente \dā-'tänt\ 1. The relaxation of strained relations or tensions (as between nations). 2. A period of a détente. *An ending of unfriendly or hostile relations between countries.*

**Decorum** (n) de-co-rum \di-'kôr-əm\ 1. Literary and dramatic propriety: fitness. 2. Propriety and good taste in conduct or appearance. *Correct or proper behaviors that show respect and good manners.*

Through the speed of technology and social media we are instantly aware of the cultural, social, and political conflicts happening anywhere in the world with the hit of a button. Yet here in our own backyard centuries of conflict have left a legacy of strained relations, disproportionality and disparities that impact child welfare today.

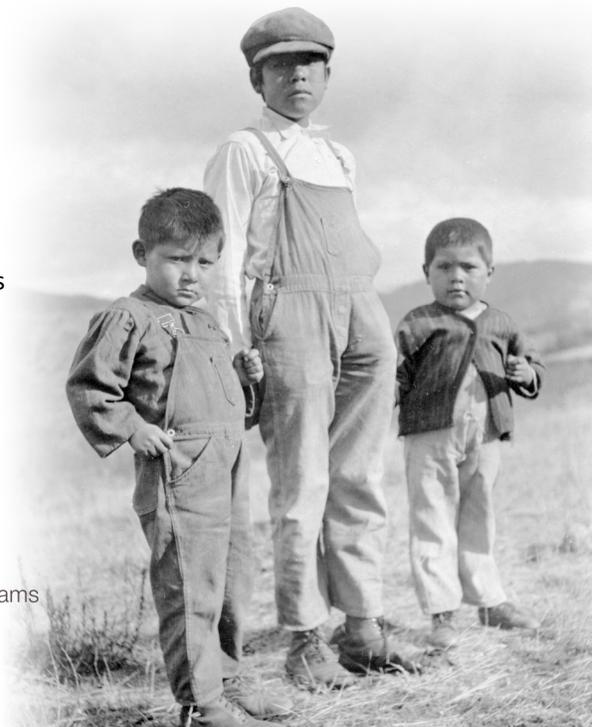
Efforts to build and strengthen trust between state child welfare agencies and tribes require knowledge of and acknowledgement of bias in social work practice related to the Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978 (ICWA) and past U.S. and California policies detrimental to California's Native Americans. Understanding the tribal narrative of local history and interactions between tribes and child welfare agencies can assist directors, managers and supervisors in navigating a collaborative path to safety, permanency, and well-being for Native American children. Strategic teaming and engagement with tribes and Native American communities can be achieved when child welfare leaders operate as change agents working toward inclusive and sustainable institutions and communities.

To be most effective, child welfare leaders need to lead by example and be aware of privilege, power, humility, and social justice and embrace a *growth mindset\** that seeks to understand the root causes of disproportionality and disparity related to American Indian children in the child welfare system. For child welfare leaders who are just beginning to team and engage with tribes and Native American communities the American Indian Enhancement (AIE) Implementation Toolkit\* provides a framework for decision making and strategies for improving practice when working with Native American families. The resources and recommendations within this document support the *California Child Welfare Core Practice Model* and the *2016 Federal Regulations and Guidelines for Implementing the Indian Child Welfare Act*.



CORE PRACTICE MODEL

*A Guiding Framework for Child Welfare Practice*



## Reach out to tribal members and communities through existing networks

Work collaboratively with tribal networks in your region and create opportunities to learn about local tribal history. Seek input from tribal representatives and Native American community members who participate in local ICWA training, collaborative meetings, and ICWA roundtables. Engage with Native American elders and tribal members to ask for advice on how to open and conduct a meeting in a culturally responsive manner. Review the engagement and communication tools of the AIE Implementation Toolkit.

Prepare your team for engagement and discuss the concepts of decorum, détente, diplomacy and the need to understand the context of current relations (or lack thereof). Prepare and plan for tribal participation and create the opportunity for tribes and Native American community stakeholders to be at the table. Review document *ICWA Guide for Tribal Leaders and Governments\** and review the section “*Be at the Table*”.

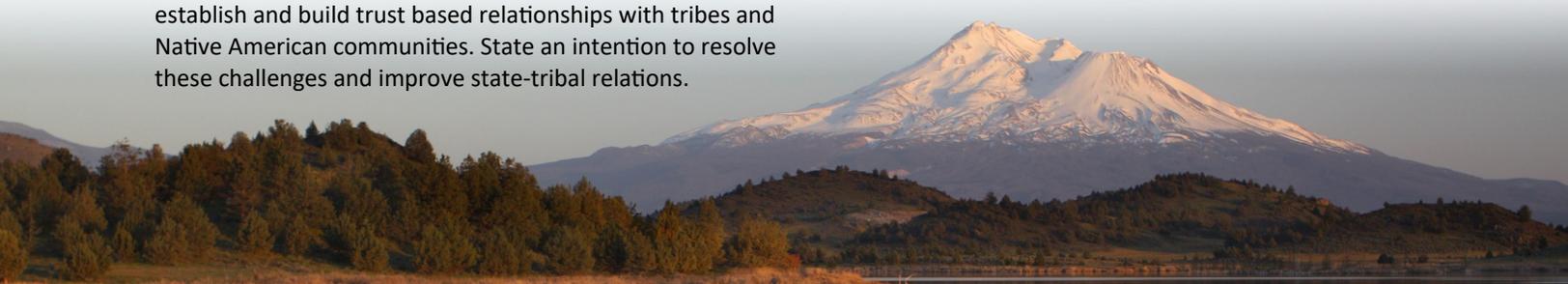
## When tribal representatives come to the table

- Provide for all the logistical details: a map and options for parking, state whether there are costs to participate in the meeting or event, provide beverages and a snack, and host the meeting to include having lunch together.
- Support awareness of and respect for tribal sovereignty at every level of interaction between child welfare staff, the courts, community partners, and Native American children and families.
- Be informed about ICWA related issues in your local area. Learn about the challenges Native children and families in your area may have to accessing county, state or federal-government resources.
- Learn about and acknowledge any past catalyzing events between your county child welfare staff and tribal social services that create challenges to collaboration.
- Maintain consistent and clear messaging of your intent to establish and build trust based relationships with tribes and Native American communities. State an intention to resolve these challenges and improve state-tribal relations.



## Demonstrate commitment through outcomes

- Work to resolve real-time issues that are affecting Native American children and families during your discussions.
- Create person-to-person linkages to resources. Provide information about who to contact when tribal social services have concerns.
- Create opportunities to gather input from the Native community to strengthen and support CPM, CSA, SIP, CFSR, CCR, RFA, and other on-going initiatives in child welfare.
- Discuss best practices for ICWA implementation. Support implementation of tribal child welfare specialists, appointing ICWA liaisons, and creating ICWA units to provide the agency with infrastructure for on-going engagement and meaningful outcomes.
- Continue learning about best practices related to ICWA implementation, teaming and engagement. Learn from and connect with other county child welfare leaders who have implemented specialized ICWA liaisons and Indian Specialty units.
- Create a track record of following through on commitments.



## Strengthen infrastructure for on-going teaming and engagement



**POSITIVE  
RELATIONSHIPS**



**ENGAGE  
COMMUNITY**



**PARTICIPATE  
AND DEBRIEF**



**ADDRESS  
ISSUES**

Ensure succession planning for key individuals who have established positive relationships within the Native American communities in your county.

Engage the Native American community regularly (quarterly, semi-annually) to collaborate and resolve challenges faced by tribal communities and the county.

Participate in existing networks (Tribal consultation advisory board, State ICWA Workgroup, round tables, ICWA collaboratives, and others) and debrief with tribal representatives.

Consider the value of authentic engagement to address issues and challenges before they become reasons for tribal consultation related to ICWA compliance.

Be proactive in introducing new staff who will have a key role in working with Native communities. Ensure that your new staff understands the history of your efforts, can demonstrate cultural humility, and are prepared to introduce themselves at meetings.

## Work with staff strengths

Some staff are better suited to engage Native American communities than others. Use a strength based approach to identify and grow champions who engage well with Native American families and communities. Be aware that some non-native individuals within our local communities often forget that at one time Native Americans were considered “problems” to society and local government. As time has progressed, some individuals who work within these systems interact with Native peoples thinking “they’ll have forgotten what has happened, and it’s in the past.” Yet the actions that created the rift in the first place may continue in the form of a bias that assumes Native people are still incapable of managing their affairs. Awareness and commitment to avoid re-traumatization of cultural and historic traumas is key to successful and on-going engagement.

## Work through resistance and challenges to build relationships

Authentic teaming and engagement with tribes is successful when the intention is clear about building a community of like-minded individuals who are committed to keeping families together and support cultural resilience. It is a slow process that requires cultural humility, especially during courageous conversations. Be aware of and support your staff to prepare for hearing difficult information and feedback, and not to take this information personally. *Support and model self-care practices that acknowledge secondary exposure to historical, cultural, and family traumas.*

## Consider the benefits

Active and on-going engagement with tribes and Native American communities provides an opportunity for child welfare agencies to strengthen family finding, improve placement outcomes, and potentially reduce ICWA related appeals. The long-term benefits can result in improved child welfare practices, well-being of children, families, and communities and reduce agency and court costs.

Tribal representatives and Native American communities respond to individuals who demonstrate consistent behaviors over time and who understand the value of their actions to improve outcomes for their children and families. Child welfare leaders who work closely with tribes and tribal members can create communities of collaboration and restore social justice. Take the time to honor the contributions of stakeholders and successful outcomes and create a continuous pathway to cultivate champions within the agency and community. With decorum, détente, and diplomacy, child welfare leaders can achieve social justice and strengthen inclusiveness within their agency and community and thus benefit **all** families, Native and Non-Native.



# ICWA is the *Gold Standard* in Child Welfare

Tribal STAR acknowledges the Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978 as the *gold standard* for best practices related to family reunification and placement in child welfare. It is the first trauma informed legislation for child welfare that was intended to be culturally responsive.

Since 2013 a partnership of organizations, led by Casey Family Programs, have pointed out that in the Indian Child Welfare Act, Congress adopted the gold standard for child welfare policies and practices that should be afforded to *all children*, and that it would create serious harm to child welfare programs nationwide to curtail the Act's protections and standards.\*

\* [Brief for Casey Family Programs et al. as Amici Curiae, \*Adoptive Couple v. Baby Girl\*](#), 570 U.S. \_\_\_ (2013).

## TRIBAL STAR

These recommendations are derived from over a decade of training child welfare workers on how to improve outcomes for Native American children and families by Tribal STAR (Successful Transitions for Adult Readiness), a program of the Academy for Professional Excellence, SDSU School of Social Work. Tribal STAR participated in the California Breakthrough Series Collaborative to Reduce Disproportionality in Child Welfare in 2009 and, since 2004 has provided training and technical assistance to state child welfare agencies, the courts, and tribes, using a collaborative model.

**The Summit** for directors, managers, and supervisors is a full day training designed to improve positive outcomes for Native American foster youth and integrates the information provided in this document. Beginning in 2017, Tribal STAR's curriculum *ICWA: Working with Native American Children and Families* is required training as a part of the California Common Core curricula for all new hire social workers.

## CREATED BY

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## References and Resources

**American Indian Enhancement (AIE) Implementation Toolkit**  
[calswec.berkeley.edu/toolkits/implementation-toolkit-american-indian-enhancement-project/implementation-toolkit-american-indian-enhancement-project](http://calswec.berkeley.edu/toolkits/implementation-toolkit-american-indian-enhancement-project/implementation-toolkit-american-indian-enhancement-project)

**Top 10 ICWA Myths Fact Sheet:** [www.nicwa.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Top-10-ICWA-Myths.pdf](http://www.nicwa.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Top-10-ICWA-Myths.pdf)

**Resources for ICWA Specialist:** [theacademy.sdsu.edu/programs/tribal-star/resources-for-icwa-specialists/](http://theacademy.sdsu.edu/programs/tribal-star/resources-for-icwa-specialists/)

**California Disproportionality Project Breakthrough Series Collaborative Final Report (2011)**  
[www.cfpic.org/sites/default/filesCA\\_Disproportionality\\_Project\\_BSC\\_FINAL\\_REPORT\\_July\\_2011.pdf](http://www.cfpic.org/sites/default/filesCA_Disproportionality_Project_BSC_FINAL_REPORT_July_2011.pdf)

**California ICWA Compliance Task Force Report to the California Attorney General's Bureau of Justice 2017**  
[theacademy.sdsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/icwa-compliance-task-force-final-report-2017.pdf](http://theacademy.sdsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/icwa-compliance-task-force-final-report-2017.pdf)

**California Tribal Behavioral Risk Factor Community Survey Summary Report (2016)**  
[crihb.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/CTBRFCSSummaryReport.pdf](http://crihb.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/CTBRFCSSummaryReport.pdf)

**Growth Mindset** Developing a growth mindset  
[youtube.com/watch?v=hiiEeMN7vbQ](https://youtube.com/watch?v=hiiEeMN7vbQ)

**ICWA Bias, Media, and Historical Context (60-90 minute eLearning)**  
[theacademy.sdsu.edu/elearning/icwa-elearning-bias-media-context/story\\_html5.html](http://theacademy.sdsu.edu/elearning/icwa-elearning-bias-media-context/story_html5.html)

**ICWA Guide for Tribal Leaders and Governments**  
[tribalinformationexchange.org/index.php/component/k2/item/162-icwa-guide-for-tribal-governments-and-leaders](http://tribalinformationexchange.org/index.php/component/k2/item/162-icwa-guide-for-tribal-governments-and-leaders)

**Tribal Behavioral Health Agenda**  
[nned.net/NNED\\_content/news\\_announcement/tribal-behavioral-health-agenda-a-first-of-its-kind-collaborative-tribal-fe](http://nned.net/NNED_content/news_announcement/tribal-behavioral-health-agenda-a-first-of-its-kind-collaborative-tribal-fe)

**Tribal Child Welfare Information Exchange**  
[tribalinformationexchange.org/](http://tribalinformationexchange.org/)

