



## **Cultural Awareness and Connecting with Native Communities**

This fact sheet is written expressly for Parent Centers and offers suggestions for connecting with Native communities in ways that enhance communication and connectedness.

*This fact sheet has been excerpted from "Culture Card: A Guide to Build Cultural Awareness," a publication of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).*

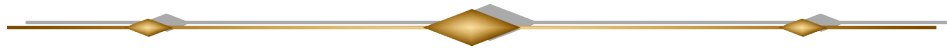
*This product was developed by NAPTAC and is now available at the Center for Parent Information and Resources, at:  
<https://www.parentcenterhub.org/naptac-tier2-outreach/>*

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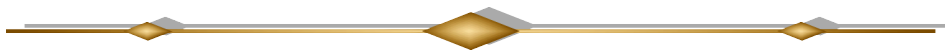
**NAPTAC** very much hopes that Parent Centers will have many occasions to visit the Tribal communities nearby and work with Native families whose children have disabilities. There is so much that Native families need and want to know about how to support their children's learning and development, the disability resources available locally, and how to team with the school system with respect to their children's education.

When Parent Center staff visit a Tribal community, they may find it helpful to know a bit about Tribal etiquette and culture. While etiquette will vary from Tribal community to community, there are commonalities as well. This fact sheet lists many such cultural considerations. Observing them will enhance communication with Native families and your Parent Center's connectedness with the Tribal community.



- ◆ Learn how the Native community refers to itself as a group of people (e.g., tribal name).
- ◆ Be honest and clear about your role and expectations—*and* be willing to adapt to meet the needs of the community. Show respect by being open to other ways of thinking and behaving.
- ◆ Listen and observe more than you speak. Learn to be comfortable with silence or long pauses in conversations. Observe community members and the typical length of time between their turns at talking.
- ◆ Casual conversation is important to establish rapport, so be genuine and use self-disclosure (e.g., where you are from, general information about your children or spouse, personal interests).
- ◆ Avoid all jargon. American Indian and Alaskan Native (AI/AN) community members may nod their heads politely, but they may not understand or agree with what you are saying.
- ◆ It is acceptable to admit limited knowledge of AI/AN cultures, and invite people to educate you about specific cultural protocols in their community.
- ◆ If you are visiting the home of an AI/AN family, you may be offered a beverage and/or food. It is important to accept as a sign of respect.

- ◆ If you're taking notes while in the presence of the individual or family, explain what you are writing.
- ◆ During a formal interview, it may be best to offer general invitations to speak, then remain quiet, sit back, and listen. Allow the person to tell his or her story before engaging in a specific line of questioning.
- ◆ Be open to allowing things to proceed as they will, in keeping with the Native understanding that "things happen when they are supposed to happen."
- ◆ Respect confidentiality and the right of the tribe to control information, data, and public information about services provided to the tribe.



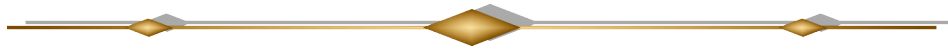
***There are also things to avoid when working with Tribal communities. We've listed a few below.***

- ≠ Avoid stereotyping based on looks, language, dress, and other outward appearances.
- ≠ Avoid intrusive questions early in the conversation.
- ≠ Do not interrupt others during conversation or interject during pauses or long silences.
- ≠ Do not stand too close to others and/or talk too loud or fast.
- ≠ Be careful not to impose your personal values, morals, or beliefs.
- ≠ Be careful about telling stories of distant AI/AN relatives in your genealogy as an attempt to establish rapport unless you have maintained a connection with that AI/AN community.
- ≠ Avoid frequently looking at your watch, and do not rush things.
- ≠ Avoid pressing all family members to participate in formal interviews.
- ≠ During discussions with families, if the person you are working with begins to cry, support the crying without asking further questions until the individual has regained composure and is ready to speak.
- ≠ Do not touch sacred items, such as medicine bags, other ceremonial items, hair, jewelry, and other personal or cultural things.

- ≠ Do not take pictures without permission.
- ≠ Never use any information gained by working in the community for personal presentations, case studies, research or so on, without the *expressed written consent* of the Tribal government or Alaska Native Corporation.

### **Where to Download the Culture Card Upon Which This Brief is Based**

***Culture Card: A Guide to Build Cultural Awareness: American Indian and Alaska Native.*** (2009, January). A product of SAMHSA, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Online at: <https://store.samhsa.gov/product/American-Indian-and-Alaska-Native-Culture-Card/sma08-4354>



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