

**British Columbia Foster Care
Education Program**

**CARING FOR CHILDREN:
CULTURAL RESPONSIVENESS**

(3 hours)

Ministry of Children and Family Development

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About the Authors

This module reflects a collaborative effort of Malaspina University-College, Faculty of Health and Human Services, and the Ministry of Children and Family Development and is largely based on previously developed Ministry training materials.

Acknowledgments

This material has been prepared under the guidance and direction of the British Columbia Federation of Foster Parent

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

A. RATIONALE FOR TRAINING

This module prepares caregivers to understand culture and cultural differences, and to welcome children from varying racial, ethnic or cultural backgrounds into their home. It is critical that caregivers become comfortable dealing with issues of race and culture for several key reasons:

- BC is increasingly a multicultural community. Our population comprises families from around the world. Children will come into foster care from a wide range of backgrounds including racial and ethnic variations which caregivers need to understand in order to develop positive relationships with the child and his family.
- Caregivers must come to terms with any of their

own feelings about other races and cultures that could create barriers to positive relationships.

- There is a legislative imperative to respect children's culture, as outlined in the Child, Family and Community Service Act, the Standards for Foster Homes, and the Multiculturalism Act.
- There is evidence that developing and maintaining a strong sense of cultural identity promotes positive self-image in children.
- Any child who is perceived as "different" can be the recipient of teasing or more serious harassment from peers. Caregivers must be able to support children dealing with this stress, which will compound the stress all children feel when removed from their home and family.

This module provides an introduction to powerful, personal and complex issues. Participants should be encouraged to see it as a starting point, and to seek ways to further their cultural competence beyond the workshop (resources and suggestions are included).

B. LEARNING OUTCOMES

The caregiver can:

- identify the characteristics of culture and identify/describe how personal cultural background, values and attitudes may influence relationships with children and families.
- identify the importance of maintaining cultural identity for children's healthy development.
- identify sections of the Child, Family and Community Service Act, Standards for Foster Homes and the Child's Comprehensive Plan of Care as they relate to children's cultural, racial, linguistic and religious heritage.
- identify ways to provide children with opportunities, guidance and encouragement to maintain their cultural heritage in the home and community.
- identify ways to assist and respond with understanding and empathy to children's experiences related to racial

and cultural differences.

Honesty: Be as honest as possible and express yourself as you really think and feel.

Respect: We learn by examining and expressing our thoughts, feelings, and values.

Confidentiality: If using descriptions of children in care and their families, no names are to be used.

2. CULTURE AND ITS INFLUENCE ON RELATIONSHIPS WITH CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Learning Outcome:

The caregiver can identify the characteristics of culture and identify/describe how personal cultural background, values and attitudes may influence relationships with children and families.

Materials:

Handouts

- Handout # 3 Cultural Responsiveness - Key Terminology
- Handout # 4 Cultural Characteristics
- Handout # 5 Cultural Competence Self Assessment

Overheads

- Overhead # 3 Cultural Responsiveness - Key Terminology
- Overhead # 4 Cultural Characteristics
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- Overhead # 5 Instructions – Cultural

Similarities and Differences Exercise

Instructions:

This section of the module begins the exploration of culture with a presentation of definitions of the key terms used throughout the module

Participants will be asked to understand that culture is learned, and that cultural variations exist between all families not just between different races or ethnic groups. To emphasize this, they will be asked to think of cultural differences and similarities between themselves and peers. They will also be asked to think about situations where they had to handle cultural dissonance, and what can be learned from their responses which may have relevance to relationships with children and families. Finally, they will be asked to complete an exercise to assist in clarifying their own cultural attitudes and behaviours. This is the longest section of the module and builds important foundations for future sections and activities.

A. Key Terminology

Instructions:

It is important to begin with a common understanding of the terminology that will be used throughout this module.

Using Handout # 3, “Cultural Responsiveness – Key Terminology” and Overhead #3, “Cultural Responsiveness – Key Terminology” review the definitions providing illustrative examples throughout.

Note that definitions of emotion-laden terms such as these tend to be in constant flux and differ depending on the perspective of the originator. The following are quoted from “Raising Healthy Multiracial Families”, pages 67 – 69:

Bias: An opinion, preference or inclination formed without any reasonable justification. Bias is reflected in people’s attitudes (towards people of a different race, class, gender, and cultural background), and can often result in unfair treatment of individuals. There is significant European bias in Canadian school systems.

Cultural Sensitivity: Awareness of one’s own cultural

assumptions, biases, behaviours, and beliefs, and the knowledge and skills to interact with and understand people from other cultures without imposing one's own cultural values on them.

Culture: Patterns of learned behaviours and values that are shared among members of a group, are transmitted to group members over time, and distinguish the members of one group from another. Culture can include ethnicity, language, religion, spiritual beliefs, gender, socioeconomic class, age, sexual orientation, geographic origin, group history, education and upbringing, and life experiences. One's culture guides one's interpretation of life experiences and the development of coping strategies for day-to-day living.

Discrimination: The result of prejudice. The term refers to overt or systematic denial of equal treatment, civil liberties, and opportunity to individuals or groups. Under the B.C. Human Rights Act, discrimination is prohibited on the grounds of race, ethnicity, class, gender, age, religious or political belief, marital or family status, physical or mental disability, colour, ancestry, place of origin, sexual orientation, and criminal background (unrelated to employment).

Dominant Culture: Refers to the value system that characterizes a particular group of people (often called mainstream) that numerically predominates over the value systems of other groups or cultures.

Race: Race is a social, cultural and political concept. The concept of race as representing separate subspecies of Homo sapiens has little if any biological significance and today many scientists reject the use of the term in the human context. In common usage, race is a socially defined term, and the definition differs from society to society. For example, many people who are socially defined as blacks in the United States, because they have one or more black ancestors, would be called whites in Brazil. The social significance of the extent that its members draw unwarranted conclusions from the physical differences between peoples.

Racism: 1. Individual – Any action or practice that denies equality to any person because of their race, religion, ethnicity or culture. **2. Systemic** – Social and

organizational structures, including policy and practices, that, whether intentionally or, most often unintentionally, exclude, limit and discriminate against individual not part of the traditional dominant group. Systemic racism is most often an unconscious by-product of ethnocentrism and unexamined privilege. **3. Ideological racism** – A set of beliefs, whether conscious or not, in the superiority of one race over other races.

Stereotype: A false or generalized conception of a group of people that results in the unconscious or conscious categorization of each member of that group, without regard for individual differences. Stereotyping may relate to race or age; ethnic linguistic, religious, geographical or national groups; social, marital or family status; physical, developmental or mental attributes; and/or gender. Another key term that will be used is “values”.

Values: General principles or ideals, usually related to worth or conduct that a culture holds to be important. The values of any culture form the foundation for life within the culture.

B. Cultural

Characteristics

Instructions:

Consider culture as a shared system of values, beliefs, attitudes, traditions and behaviors of a particular group of people that is:

- created by people through the process of living together.
- passed on through learning – a life long learning experience.
- a set of bonds and activities that people create to give social organization and meaning to their lives.

Identify characteristics common to any culture and note these on a sheet of paper. As elements are identified, cluster them to emphasize that some are overt and obvious (e.g. food, religion) while others reflect more subtle ways of thinking and being (e.g. attitudes toward authority,

communication styles). Note that these variables are the components which together constitute “culture” and which distinguish one culture from another.

After you are finished review Overhead #4, “Cultural Characteristics” and note any additional variables which may have been missed:

Practices:

- Language
- Food
- Dress
- Religion
- Music, dance, visual arts
- Eating habits
- Manners
- Customs, traditions, holidays and celebrations
- Stories
- Child rearing
- Disciplinary practices
- Education
- Rites of passage
- Marital roles; general gender relations
- Communication styles
- Treatment of elders, children, people with disabilities, people in authority
- History
- Physical contact and eye contact

Some Values and Beliefs Underlying Practices:

- Expectations for males and females
- Accepted parent/child relationships
- Expectations of marriage relationships
- Attitudes
- Importance of individual Vs. group effort, achievement
- Direct Vs. indirect communication

C. Cultural Similarities and

Differences Exercise:

We all have cultural differences which need to be recognized if we are to enter into meaningful relationships. Review Overhead #5, “Instructions - Cultural Similarities and Differences Exercise”.

Identify something similar and something different between your family of origin in terms of the variables listed previously and another family that you know well. If you do not have a clear recollection of your family of origin, you can complete the exercise for a group with which you are identified (e.g. comparing cultural similarities/differences between two service clubs.)

Ask yourself how similar/dissimilar the personal cultural backgrounds were and whether any differences had been identified which would produce significantly different habits and expectations. It is important to recognize the challenges potentially created by bringing significantly different families together, and the possible relevance of this to building relationships with children and families from different cultural backgrounds.

D. Cultural

Dissonance

Instructions:

Now think of a time when you dealt with significant cultural differences: examples could be entering a new marriage, living in a foreign country, switching religious affiliations, moving to a new employer.

Identify the emotions experienced in a situation where comfortable, familiar practices are missing or the basic “ground rules” for behaviour are unknown: some examples include stress, loss of self-esteem and self-identity, incompetence.

Reflect on how we tend to respond in these situations: examples include “shutting down” or withdrawing, arguing or complaining about the differences, becoming aggressive (think of the stereotypical difficult tourist). Reflect on how these typical reactions to cultural differences could negatively impact relationships between a child and their family and the foster family – emphasizing that all players (child, child’s family, foster family) could be experiencing discomfort and reacting in ways that block the building of relationships.

Think about how we tend to resolve the tension of a cultural difference, and what we can learn from these approaches to guide our work with children and families from different cultural backgrounds. Examples include:

- gaining more knowledge
 - making an effort to learn about our differences
 - having more exposure to people of differing cultures
 - compromising
 - looking for examples and models in others' actions
 - seeking chances to try new activities or ways of behaving
 - ensuring ongoing positive dialogue about differences
 - developing a positive relationship so that conflicting approaches can be discussed openly and mistakes forgiven
- discussing feelings and opinions related to cultures with others.

E. Personal Cultural

Competence Exercise:

It is important for caregivers to assess their own cultural attitudes before attempting to provide care to children from different cultures. Refer to Handout #5, "Cultural Competence Self-Assessment"; complete the survey and reflect privately on your own cultural competence.

3. IMPORTANCE OF MAINTAINING AND SUPPORTING CULTURAL IDENTITY

Learning Outcome:

The caregiver can identify the importance of maintaining cultural identity for children's healthy development.

Materials:

Handouts

- Handout #6 Summary of Demographics
- Handout #7 The Importance of Recognizing the Child's Cultural Heritage

Overheads

- Overhead #6 Summary of Demographics
- Overhead #7 The Importance of Recognizing the Child's Cultural Heritage

Instructions:

Fostering always entails an interface between different family lifestyles: that of the foster home and that of the child's own family. In the situation of a child from another culture, the differences between habits and expectations of the parties are likely to be greater. This challenge can be compounded by communication difficulties (actual language barriers or differences in communication style). An additional barrier to successful placement can be racist attitudes or other biases, which may make it difficult for the child's family to accept the caregiver or for the child to feel welcomed into her/his new family and neighborhood.

All of the grief and anxiety (addressed in earlier modules) that the child and his/her family are experiencing related to removal and placement could be intensified in the situation of a cross-cultural placement.

Review Handout #6, "Summary of Demographics" and Overhead #6 "Summary of Demographics" to illustrate British Columbia's multicultural society.

Identify reasons why it is important to maintain children's cultural identity while they are in care, and the consequences if cultural identity is not maintained. Note the points on a sheet of paper. Refer to Handout #7, "The Importance of Recognizing the Child's Cultural Heritage" and Overhead #7, "The Importance of Recognizing the Child's Cultural Heritage" for assistance.

The importance of recognizing the child's culture:

- The Child, Family and Community Services Act and the Standards for Foster Homes require recognition and preservation of cultural heritage.

- A strong and positive cultural identity promotes self esteem, a sense of belonging and healthy development in children.
- The child's health and well-being will benefit from caregivers understanding and maintaining consistency in practices such as diet, hair and skin care.
- Research demonstrates that caregivers develop stronger ties to children when they are willing to incorporate children's cultural patterns and differences.
- Research demonstrates that the child's self-esteem will be stronger the more aware he/she is of cultural and racial roots.
- Maintaining relationships to, and being able to fit in with, the child's cultural group enhances self-image.
- A sense of racial and ethnic pride plus coping skills to deal with racism and discrimination, acquired as a child, can serve the individual for a lifetime.

Consequences of not recognizing the child's culture:

- The child's feeling of competence and self-esteem could be negatively impacted if cultural differences lead to perceived errors or deficits in daily living skills, or to conflicts with foster parents or other children in the home.
- When children do not develop a cultural identity, they tend to feel isolated, cut off from their background, different from others and not connected to any cultural group; they have no sense of belonging.
- In the absence of a positive cultural identity, children are at risk of questioning if their culture is as good as the dominant culture, feeling embarrassed about their families and themselves, losing pride and self esteem, and feeling aimless.

4. LEGISLATION
Learnin

g Outcome:

The caregiver can identify the sections of the Child, Family and Community Service Act, the Standards for Foster Homes and the Child's Comprehensive Plan of Care as they relate to children's cultural, racial, linguistic and religious heritage.

Materials:

Handouts

- Handout # 8 Child, Family and Community Service Act Excerpts
- Handout # 9 Standards for Foster Homes Excerpts
- Handout # 10 Looking After Children Assessment And Action Record Questions About Culture
- Handout # 11 Multiculturalism Act Excerpt

Overheads

- Overhead # 8 Looking After Children Assessment And Action Record Questions

Instructions:

The Child, Family and Community Service Act and the Province's Standards for Foster Homes make it very clear that children's culture must be protected when they are in care. It is critical that caregivers recognize this mandate, and are also aware of the related commitments enshrined in BC's Multiculturalism Act.

Review Handout #8, "Child, Family and Community Service Act Excerpts" and Handout #9, "Standards for Foster Homes Excerpts".

The "Looking After Children Assessment and Action Record" also requires attention to cultural issues. The Child's Comprehensive Plan of Care will outline the caregiver's role in maintaining the child's cultural, racial and religious heritage no matter what his/her age. Review Overhead #8, "Looking After Children Assessment And Action Record Questions" and Handout #10, "Looking After Children Assessment And Action Record Questions" which quotes the key questions for children of different ages, noting the shift in indicators as the child matures.

Finally, BC's Multiculturalism Act reflects the Province's commitment to respecting cultural diversity. Review Handout #11, "Multiculturalism Act Excerpt" which

contains Sections 2 & 3 of the Act, making sure the language and relevance are understood.

5. PROMOTING CULTURAL IDENTITY

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Outcome:

The caregiver can identify ways to provide children with opportunities, guidance and encouragement to maintain their cultural heritage in the home and community.

Materials:

Handout

- Handout # 12 Supporting and Maintaining the Child's Cultural Identity

Overhead

- Overhead # 9 Supporting and Maintaining the Child's Cultural Identity

Instructions:

Caregivers, in consultation with the child's worker and wherever possible the child's family and or extended family, can put in place opportunities that support children and youth to develop positive cultural and racial identities. As discussed earlier, maintaining cultural identity is critical to children's sense of belonging and their overall healthy growth. Negative incidents related to cultural differences, if they occur, will be less devastating to a child with friends and allies, role models, and well-developed self-esteem.

Reflect briefly on an occasion where you were in a minority situation (examples could include being the only female in a trades class or male in a nursing class; visiting a church with unfamiliar rituals; being the only non-aboriginal person at a traditional celebration; being a mature student in a class of 18-19 year olds) and the awkwardness and intimidation these situations can create. It is important that children in care receive consistently positive feedback from caregivers who model respect for their cultural and racial and heritage.

Brainstorm things you could try (or have tried) that help promote and maintain the child or youth's connections to their own cultural and racial heritage. Refer to Overhead #9, "Supporting and Maintaining the Child's Cultural Identity" and Handout #12, "Supporting and Maintaining the Child's Cultural Identity" after the brainstorming to ensure all key points have been covered:

Support and maintain the child's cultural identity by:

- observing what is important to the child directly.
- enrolling the child in a school where he can interact with peers from his culture.
- involving the child in community or religious activities.
- seeking out cultural consultants to support the child directly and to advise caregivers.
- seeking out cultural events relevant to the child's culture.
- gathering information from the library and other resources regarding the child's cultural heritage.
- maintaining contact with the child's primary and extended family and significant others.
- talking to members of the child's community if the child is Aboriginal.
- talking with the child about similarities and differences between the foster family and her culture.
- asking the child directly what aspects of his cultural identity are important to be maintained and how this might be accomplished.
- providing opportunities for the child to make friends with others who share the same cultural identity.
- celebrating the child's cultural holidays.
- putting together a lifebook with the child.

- encouraging the child to maintain his first language if it is different from the foster family's.
 - making sure that toys, books, and music in the home positively reflect the child's culture.
 - respecting the child's clothing and dietary practices.
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6. RACISM AND DISCRIMINATION

Learning Outcome:

The caregiver can identify ways to assist and respond with understanding and empathy to the child's experiences related to racial and cultural differences.

Materials:

Handouts

- Handout # 14 Fifty Invisible Privileges
- Handout # 15 Helping Children And Youth Deal With Racism And Discrimination

Overhead

- Overhead #10 Questions For Racism/Discrimination - Examples

Instructions:

This component of the module asks participants to think about the existence of racism and discrimination by identifying some of their experiences related to their cultural and racial heritage.

Take a few moments to reflect on the following questions based on your own experiences or the experiences of children who have been placed in your care.

- Have you had any experiences of being a minority? What were their feelings?
- Have you ever felt discriminated against? Describe the situation and feelings.

Review Handout #14, "Fifty Invisible Privileges."

Exercise:

The goal of this exercise is to identify what skills or approaches are helpful in supporting children and better preparing them to cope with incidents of racism and discrimination. Choose one example of a hurtful incident relating to racial or cultural heritage that someone you know has experienced (this could include an experience of a child in their care) and respond to the following questions.

Overhead #10, "Questions for Racism/Discrimination - Examples."

1. How would you respond to a child in this situation?
2. How would you teach the child to respond to these types of situations?

It is important to review the following points:

1. "How would you respond to a child in this situation?"
 - Foster parent awareness of these issues is crucial to helping children and youth deal with racism and discrimination. The first step is to acknowledge to the child that an incident has occurred and ask him what happened.
 - The next step is to ask the child how he felt when it happened. Allow the child to express his feelings at his own pace. Ask him open-ended questions in a supportive manner about what he said or did during the incident.
 - The third step is to explore with the child ways to respond if something like this happens again.

Following these painful incidents, it is important to give the child affirmations that promote positive self-esteem and pride in his cultural heritage.

2. How would you teach the child to respond these types of situations? Here are some practical suggestions:
 - Acknowledge to the child that racism and discrimination exist.
 - Teach them that racism and discrimination are never acceptable.
 - Let the child know that there are rules and laws to

protect her: e.g. Standards for Foster Homes (Standard D 2. Cultural and Religion); Child, Family and Community Service Act – Section 70 (1) (l) (j) (k); Multiculturalism Act; Human Rights Code of British Columbia; Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

- Practice with the child how to speak up for herself using:
 - role plays: develop age-appropriate opportunities to practice a variety of difficult situations by preparing and rehearsing responses.
 - “What If”? Game: Design potential or real-life situations using “What if”? For example: “What if someone said they wouldn’t play with you because you talk funny and they can’t understand you?”

Review Handout #15, “Multicultural Services In BC” which suggests additional sources of information to further your cultural awareness and competence.