

British Columbia Foster Care Education Program

CARING FOR CHILDREN: ABORIGINAL CHILDREN IN CARE

Ministry of Children and Family Development

About the Author

This material was initially prepared by writers contracted through the Ministry of Children and Family Development and has been edited for presentation by Malaspina University-College, Faculty of Health and Human Services.

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INTRODUCTION

Introduction

A. RATIONALE FOR TRAINING

Forty percent of children in the care of the Director of Child Protection are of Aboriginal heritage despite the fact that Aboriginal children make up 6% of the total population of children in BC.

The Child, Family and Community Service Act places a strong emphasis on respecting and preserving the unique cultural identity of Aboriginal children and their ties to their family, their Aboriginal community and their heritage. Aboriginal children should, wherever possible, be placed in Aboriginal homes in order to preserve their culture and ties to their community. However, because so many Aboriginal children are currently living in homes outside their culture, it is essential that caregivers develop an understanding of the importance of the child's Aboriginal roots and culture and how to integrate the child's culture into the the home. The caregiver plays a very key role in keeping the Aboriginal child's cultural heritage alive when the child is placed in-care. It is not only how the child's culture will be integrated into the caregiver's home that must be considered, but also how the child will continue to be connected to her cultural Aboriginal community.

Overall, the responsibility for ensuring that the child's cultural identity is maintained while in-care is shared by everyone involved: the child's worker, the family, the community and the caregiver.

It is important to acknowledge throughout this module the unique relationship between Aboriginal people and the rest of Canada. Aboriginal people have a different perspective and experience of colonization from those who immigrated to Canada. This unique relationship requires that Aboriginal people be understood as distinct societies and as the original inhabitants of this land. Aboriginal people are not part of the immigrant cultures who make up the broader Canadian population. Within Aboriginal society, there are many different cultures, each with unique customs and traditions as well as similarities.

This is an introductory three-hour module. It must be

stressed in the strongest terms that *this training is only the first step*. An important goal of the module is to help participants realize the need for ongoing learning about

Aboriginal children and cultures. This on-going training doesn't necessarily mean attending courses but can include such self-directed activities as reading, visiting Aboriginal communities and attending cultural events for the purpose of getting to know your broader community.

Trainers should be familiar with the following Ministry documentation:

Defining Cultural Competence
Strategic Plan for Aboriginal Services

Both documents are available on the Ministry website:
<http://www.gov.bc.ca/mcf/>

B. LEARNING OUTCOMES

The caregiver can:

- describe why it is important that there are sections of the Child, Family and Community Service Act (CFCS Act) that refer to Aboriginal children and communities.
- describe the importance of recognizing Aboriginal cultures and history within fostering.
- describe some values and beliefs of the Aboriginal people within her region.
- describe the similarities and differences between his own culture and local Aboriginal culture.
- describe ways to maintain cultural identity in caring for an Aboriginal child.
- identify and describe how to access local Aboriginal resources.

C. PREPARATION

The Aboriginal Children in care module is designed for presentation in one three-hour session.

Trainers must be familiar with Aboriginal cultures in their region, and the struggles and issues for Aboriginal people. If possible, they should have worked with Aboriginal families and communities. This module is best presented with an Aboriginal co-trainer.

It is strongly preferred that an Aboriginal resource person or a panel do the presentation about the local Aboriginal cultures. The presentations should represent the rich diversity of the people who make up the local Aboriginal groups. Consult with the Aboriginal presenters on the possible use of Aboriginal music, artwork and other suitable crafts. They may recommend the module be delivered in a setting more appropriate for their culture (e.g., a Big House or other cultural centre) and they may want to adapt the style of presentation as well. Whenever possible, arrange to have an Elder play a role in presenting the module. If there is to be a prayer and an Elder is present, it may be appropriate to ask the Elder to conduct it.

Consult with an Aboriginal resource person about the proper protocol in approaching Elders. It is advisable that the trainer consult with the resource person to identify Elders whom the Aboriginal community respect and by whom they feel comfortable being represented. If it is not possible to involve Elders or other Aboriginal resource people in the actual presentation, then it is imperative that the trainer involve them in the preparation of "A History of Aboriginal People in the Region" and "Aboriginal Beliefs and Values." When preparing the history, be sure to clarify which Aboriginal people are the focus.

TRAINER'S INSTRUCTIONS

Learning Outcome:

The caregiver can:

- describe why it is important that there are sections of the Child, Family and Community Service Act (CFCS Act) that refer to Aboriginal children and communities and describe why it is important to have specific legislation for Aboriginal children.

Materials:

Handouts

- Handout #1 Learning Outcomes

Overheads

- Overhead #1 Learning Outcomes
- Overhead #3 Culture: Three Levels
- Overhead #4 Responses to Sensitive Issues

- Overhead #5 Participation Guidelines

Other

Instructions:

The module is a 3-hour introductory session. Search out opportunities for examining their own beliefs, values, attitudes and assumptions, and to participate in learning more about the children for whom they provide care. The importance of maintaining cultural identity is also emphasized in the “Cultural Responsiveness” module.

Forty percent of children in care are Aboriginal even though Aboriginal children represent only 6% of the general population of children in the province. The Constitution of Canada defines Aboriginal as including people of First Nations, Inuit or Metis heritage. The Child, Family and Community Service Act provides a slightly different definition, which is reviewed below.

The purpose of this module is to help examine our understanding of Aboriginal history and cultures and how this is reflected in the care of Aboriginal children. It is important for caregivers to develop an understanding of and appreciation for the history of Aboriginal children and their beliefs and values. Caregivers should be able to integrate some aspects of the child’s culture into their daily living in ways that promote and enhance the well-being of Aboriginal children in care. It is also important for caregivers to help the child maintain his connection to and contacts with his family and the Aboriginal community.

What is culture?

Refer to Overhead #3, “Culture: Three Levels.”

Culture is not static. All cultures evolve over time. It is important to remember that individuals are on a journey from the values, beliefs and traditions of their childhood to new places as an adult. Some people are attempting to live within the customs of their childhood, and some are moving away from their childhood traditions, and some are returning to their cultural roots. It is important to recognize

this movement and change in order to avoid making assumptions based on ethnicity about the values and beliefs of individuals without getting to know them.

As the module proceeds, participants are asked to keep in mind that there are a number of different ways people may respond when exploring a sensitive subject like culture. These include:

- denying we may be biased or wrong in our beliefs (e.g., “This could not have happened!”).
- generalizing a great deal about people in terms of their race and ethnicity.
- becoming defensive about our views and trying to compensate by avoiding recognizing there may be cultural differences.
- minimizing the importance of the differences with comments like “In the end, we are all really after the same things aren’t we?”.
- partial acceptance with rationalizations (e.g., “This may have happened but it was an exception and could not happen again.”).
- recognizing the scope and depth of racism in our society and how it affects individual lives as well as groups. This can include recognition of the pervasiveness of stereotypes and how we inadvertently perpetuate some of them.

Refer to Overhead #4, “Responses to Sensitive Issues.”

Discussions of culture and racism are sensitive because they involve people’s core identity and may relate to powerful negative, hurtful experiences.

Participation Guidelines and Agenda

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 or other identifying information are to be used.

This module should help achieve:

- a willingness to listen, to hear and to understand the differences as well as the similarities in cultures (e.g. language, customs, values, beliefs, food, rituals).
- a willingness and ability to change our views and actions so we recognize and accept the validity of other people's culture.
- an appreciation of the understanding of how people of other cultures understand the world so we can begin to see how their views and needs are the same or different from our views and concepts of culture.

Consider the uniqueness and individuality of Aboriginal cultures. Note that many teachings and traditions written about Aboriginal cultures vary according to families.

2. KEY SECTIONS OF THE CHILD, FAMILY AND COMMUNITY SERVICE ACT (15 minutes)

Learning Outcome:

The caregiver can describe why it is important that there are sections of the Child, Family and Community Service Act (CFCS Act) that refer to Aboriginal children and communities.

Materials:

Handout

- Handout #3 The Child, Family and Community Service Act: A Review of Key Sections Relating to Aboriginal Children and Their Families.

Overhead

- Overhead #6 Reasons for Legislation to Preserve An Aboriginal Child's Culture and Identity

Instructions:

The purpose of this presentation is to inform you of the

legislation and standards for foster homes that specifically address caring for Aboriginal children. (Review Overhead #6, "Reasons for Legislation to Preserve An Aboriginal Child's Culture and Identity.")

The reasons why there is legislation to preserve a child's Aboriginal culture and identity, and to maintain contact with her/his Aboriginal community, include:

1. **History:** Earlier attempts to assimilate Aboriginal people into mainstream society endangered their culture.
2. **Numbers:** The high number of Aboriginal children in care requires their needs be given specific attention.
3. **Current Developments:** The movement towards Aboriginal self-government and developing Aboriginal Family and Children's services requires a focus on their cultural issues.
- 5) **Current Policy and Practice:** The Ministry of Children and Family Development's policy and practice promote the concept that a child's well being is essential to developing as a healthy adult. Preserving and enhancing the child's knowledge of and contact with their Aboriginal heritage are an essential part of the child's well being.

The Standards for Foster Homes include the following caregiving practices:

1. The caregiver assists in preserving the child's unique cultural identity as identified in the child's Comprehensive Plan of Care.
2. Within the context of the child's Comprehensive Plan of Care, the caregiver assists the child of Aboriginal heritage to maintain positive contact, involvement and participation with his Aboriginal community.

Refer to Handout #3, "The Child, Family and Community Service Act: A Review of Key Sections Relating to Aboriginal Children and Their Families." Key points are included below.

**The Child, Family and Community Service Act:
A Review of Key Sections Relating to Aboriginal
Children and Their Families**

Part I of the CFCS Act provides the following definitions.

Aboriginal child means a child:

- who is registered under the Indian Act (Canada),
- who has a biological parent who is registered under the Indian Act,
- who is under 12 years of age and has a biological parent who:
 - is of Aboriginal ancestry, and considers himself or herself to be Aboriginal, or
 - who is 12 years of age or over, of Aboriginal ancestry and considers himself or herself to be Aboriginal.

In determining if a child is Aboriginal, the consideration is whether the family member who is of Aboriginal ancestry identifies himself or herself as an Aboriginal person. It is not based on the percentage of Aboriginal heritage.

Aboriginal Community:

- If a child is registered or entitled to be registered under the Indian Act, an Indian band is the appropriate Aboriginal community for that child.
- If the child's band receives services from a First Nation's child and family service agency, the service agency must be involved in planning for the child.
- If the child is an Aboriginal child not registered or entitled to be registered under the Indian Act, the child's community can be determined by asking the parent to identify the appropriate Aboriginal community which may be a band, an Aboriginal community other than a band, or a Metis or Inuit community. If the child's Indian band or Aboriginal community cannot be identified, the Director contacts the representative of the urban organization closest to where the child resides, and which is registered in the regulations.

Designated Representatives:

The CFCS Act requires that Aboriginal organizations and designated representatives of Indian bands and Aboriginal communities must be involved in the development of a placement plan for an Aboriginal child. These representatives are designated in accordance with the Regulations of the CFCS Act.

**The Child, Family and Community Service Act:
A Review of Key Sections Relating to Aboriginal**

Children and their Families

Guiding principles. Section 2 (e) and (f) say:

- kinship ties and a child's attachment to the extended family should be preserved if possible.
- the cultural identity of Aboriginal children should be preserved.

Service delivery principles. Section 3(b) and (c) say:

- Aboriginal people should be involved in the planning and delivery of services to Aboriginal families and their children.
- services should be planned and provided in ways that are sensitive to the needs and the cultural, racial and religious heritage of those receiving the services.

Best interests of child. Section 4 (1) (e) and (2) say the best interests of a child must consider:

- the child's cultural, racial, linguistic and religious heritage.
- the importance of preserving the child's Aboriginal identity.

Out-of-home living arrangements. Section 71 (3) (a) and (c) say:

- priority must be given to placing the child with:
 - the child's extended family or within the child's Aboriginal community, or
 - with another Aboriginal family.

Rights of children in care. Section 70 (j) says:

- the child has a right to receive guidance and encouragement to maintain his cultural heritage.

3. ABORIGINAL HISTORY

Learning

Outcome:

The caregiver can describe the importance of recognizing Aboriginal cultures and history within the fostering process.

Materials:

Handouts

- Handout #4 Glossary
- Handout #5 A Chronology of First Nations/BC Relations
- Handout #6 The Impact of Residential Schools

Instructions:

This presentation need only focus on the history of the local Aboriginal people as the next topic will cover the full range of culture. It is important to research the "History of Aboriginal People in the Region." This handout is not referenced in the Resources. The Federation of Aboriginal Foster Parents may be able to assist in this task.

To fully understand Aboriginal concerns, the history of Aboriginal peoples must be understood and appreciated. It is the key to Aboriginal issues that face all of us today.

Refer to Handout #4, "Glossary," Handout #5, "A Chronology of First Nations/BC Relations," and Handout #6, "The Impact of Residential Schools," and review key points from each handout.

4. ABORIGINAL VALUES AND BELIEFS

Learning Outcome:

The caregiver can describe some values and beliefs of the Aboriginal people within her region.

Materials:

Handout

- Handout #7 Traditional Values and Beliefs
- Handout #8 Another View of Traditional Values and Beliefs

Instructions:

Try to gather information on local Aboriginal people through community resources and the internet.

Federal Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (DIAND) personnel should also be able to assist.

Refer to Handout #7, "Traditional Values and Beliefs."
Read the handout.

The following is a suggested list of topics to try to get information on when gathering information on local Aboriginal Culture.

- Aboriginal Perspective on History
- Spirituality (include rites of passage)
- Value System
- The Role of the Elders
- Types of Elders
- Food
- Similarities and Differences Between Bands and Nations and other Aboriginal Groups (e.g. Metis, Inuit, etc.)
- Metis history and connection to BC
- Dance
- Beliefs
- Language
- Language as a Reflection of the Culture
- Elements of the Language that Relate to Belief
- Big House or Long House
- Land Issues
- Political and Social Structures
- Protocol for Approaching an Elder
- Way of Life for Urban and Rural Families
- Cultural Events
- Ceremonial Events (e.g. Potlatches, naming Ceremonies, Funerals)
- Housing (past and present)
- Hunting and Fishing
- Stereotypes
- Family and Community Structures

The following are topics that particularly relate to Aboriginal people from other parts of Canada.

- Sweat Lodge
- Vision Quest
- Sun Dance
- Pow Wow

The focus should be on families, children and child welfare concerns. The goal is to help caregivers understand and appreciate the cultures of Aboriginal people and to learn why they need to ensure the child continues to have contact and access to family and community.

Review Handout #8, "Another View of Traditional Values and Beliefs".

5. CULTURAL COMPARISON

Learning

Outcome:

The caregiver can describe the similarities and differences between his own culture and local Aboriginal culture.

Materials:

Handouts

- Handout #9 Cultural Comparisons: Worksheet
- Handout #10 Cultural Comparisons: Questions For

Overheads

- Overhead #7 Cultural Comparisons: Questions for Discussion

- Overhead #8

Cultural Comparisons

- **Exercise:**

Caregivers need to be aware of similarities and differences between their own culture and local Aboriginal cultures in

order to make the fostering process "real" for the Aboriginal child in care.

Refer to Handout #9, "Cultural Comparisons: Worksheet," and Handout #10, "Cultural Comparisons: Questions For Discussion." These questions are also displayed below. Complete Handout #9, "Cultural Comparisons: Worksheet." Review Handout #10, "Cultural Comparisons: Questions for Discussion." Write down any comments or questions you may have.

There are no right or wrong answers to these questions.

Cultural Comparisons: Questions for Discussion

1. What are some of the obvious differences between your cultural values and beliefs and Aboriginal values and beliefs as presented here?
2. In what ways are your values and beliefs similar to Aboriginal values and beliefs?

Summary Remarks:

Review Overhead #8, "Cultural Comparisons," to highlight the summary.

It is important to know how Aboriginal and mainstream cultures are similar and dissimilar since caregivers need to help Aboriginal children maintain their own culture as well as adapt to and live in mainstream society. The child needs caregivers who understand his struggles in bridging the differences and their support in remaining connected to his roots.

6. INTEGRATING THE ABORIGINAL CHILD'S CULTURE INTO THE CAREGIVER'S HOME

Learning Outcome:

The caregiver can describe ways to maintain cultural identity in caring for an Aboriginal child.

Materials:

Handout

- Handout #11 Integrating the Aboriginal Child's

Culture into the Caregiver's Home

Overheads

- Overhead #9 Integrating the Aboriginal Child's Culture Into the Caregiver's Home: Question for Discussion
- Overhead #10 Integrating the Aboriginal Child's Culture into the Caregiver's Home

Exercise:

It is the policy of the Ministry of Children and Family Development that an Aboriginal child's culture must be considered at all levels of the child's Plan of Care. We have looked at the principles that flow from the Child, Family and Community Service Act. Now we need to look at how these principles are put into practice.

Referring to the Overhead #9, "Integrating the Aboriginal Child's Culture Into the Caregiver's Home: Question for Discussion," respond to the following.

How can you, as a caregiver, maintain and preserve an Aboriginal child's cultural identity while in foster care?

Review Overhead #10, "Integrating the Aboriginal Child's Culture into the Caregiver's Home," to highlight Handout #11 and the points following.

Integrating the Aboriginal Child's Culture into the Caregiver's Home

1. Comfortable Atmosphere

- Have toys available that relate to the child's heritage (dolls with darker coloured hair and skin and Aboriginal accessories, story books depicting Aboriginal legends, teddy bears with Aboriginal clothing).
- Have pictures, videos, books and other visible signs of the Aboriginal child's culture around the home.

2. Language

- Find out if the child, his family, or community have an Aboriginal language that is spoken among them.
- Determine if the child's learning of his Aboriginal language can be maintained while in care.
- Find out what programs and resources are available to assist (e.g., is the language taught in child's school? What type of contact with family or community members is available?).
- Learn some words in the child's language from the child, family, or community members, if possible.

3. Rituals and Customs from the Child's Culture

- First seek advice from the child's family and community. An example is that a caregiver should not assume an Aboriginal child with long hair has not been cared for appropriately. Check the family's wishes regarding getting a hair cut. Given the diversity of Aboriginal cultures, one cannot make assumptions about the appropriate customs. An Elder may be able to provide guidance to the caregivers.
- Try to determine what parenting practices the child's family follow or prefer.
- Have some physical reminders of the child's culture in your home (e.g., pictures, posters, articles used in rituals, Aboriginal music, Aboriginal drum, arts and crafts, videos, and appropriate magazines.)
- Find out what holidays and traditions that are observed by the child's family can be integrated into your home.
- Encourage the child in her self-expression of her culture (e.g., style of dress, hair styles, jewellery, etc.).

• Help the child in care acquire Aboriginal possessions of importance to himself, the family, and their community.

- Introduce age-appropriate arts, crafts, and recreational activities (beadwork, carving, pottery, basket work).

4. Diet/Food

- Have traditional foods the child and/or his family recommends.

5. Document/Record

- Use the child's Life Book to help the child prepare a record of her own family and community history.

- Keep a record of significant cultural events and the role the child played in them.

6. Religious/Spiritual Beliefs

- Ask what the religious/spiritual beliefs and practices are of the child's family and community.

7. Other Issues

The child may have been isolated from her Aboriginal community for some time. This may contribute to the child feeling confused or shy about her heritage, especially if she was placed in a home with different cultural roots from her own. The child may simply be trying to fit in, with the subsequent loss of her own identity.

The child may seem uninterested or resistant to being involved in her culture. It is important that caregivers continue to assist the child to find some aspect of her heritage with which she can identify. For example, if the child is interested in art, introduce her to Aboriginal art. If the child is interested in dance, introduce her to Aboriginal dance. It may help to have some storybooks depicting Aboriginal folklore. Ask the child's family and the child's worker for help. It is important that caregivers let the child know they are always available to support her in becoming involved in her culture.

Summary Remarks:

It is important that Aboriginal children in care see themselves and their culture reflected in the caregiver's home so that they do not feel they are invisible or discounted. Belonging is a primary need that may be hard to achieve if there are marked differences and an absence of other connections.

It is generally accepted that positive self-esteem and identity are essential to normal growth and to the development of effective life skills. Evidence indicates that the more aware a child or youth is of his own cultural heritage, the more positive is his self-esteem. The importance of ensuring the child is exposed to his culture and roots is thus of extreme importance. It is important to

do more than talk about the child's culture; the child needs contact with people from his culture and opportunities to maintain and expand his knowledge and experience. Caregivers are key players in this regard.

7. RESOURCES

Learning

Outcome:

The caregiver can identify and describe how to access local Aboriginal resources.

Materials:

Handouts

- Handout #12 Local Aboriginal Resources
- Handout #13 Suggested Resources

Instructions:

Research the Aboriginal resources available in your community and prepare the information for Handout #12, "Local Aboriginal Resources." The handout should include people who are available for training and consultation, books, videos, Aboriginal agencies, newspapers and magazines, etc. These resources should cover the diversity of groups in your local area. The Federation of Aboriginal Foster Parents may be able to assist in identifying these resources. It is the intent of the FAFP to have local and regional councils. These councils have access or information on local contacts, history, etc. If there are particular protocols and expectations about how these resources are to be accessed, ensure the correct information is included in the handout. If you are not able to develop a Local Resource list please inform instructor when contacted so that one can be forwarded to you as a reference.

It is as important to know how to approach Aboriginal communities and resources as it is to know where to contact them. It is best to start this process by discussing the plan with the child's worker and learning of any protocols or expectations about whom to contact and how to contact them. The resources can both assist the child with her needs and provide support and guidance to the caregivers in planning best approaches to meet the child's

needs.

Local Aboriginal Resources

Refer to Handout #12, "Local Aboriginal Resources," and Handout #13, "Suggested Resources."

Summary Remarks:

This module is only the first step in learning about Aboriginal culture. On-going training must occur and can take many forms.

We encourage participants to expand their knowledge by reading and visiting resources in the local area.

8. CLOSURE

Objective:

To bring the session to a close and to provide feedback to the trainers.

Instructions:

How does your understanding and views of Aboriginal people and their issues may have changed and how that might impact your ability to care for Aboriginal children.