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NAEYC PATHWAYS TO CULTURAL COMPETENCE PROJECT

Cultural Customs*

Cultural customs can be viewed as a particular group or individual's preferred way of meeting their basic human needs and conducting daily activities as passed on through generations.

Specific cultural customs among American Indian/Alaskan Native (AI/AN) groups may vary significantly, even within a single community.

Customs are influenced by: ethnicity, origin, language, religious/spiritual beliefs, socioeconomic status, gender, sexual orientation, age, marital status, ancestry, history, gender identity, geography, and so on.

Cultural customs are often seen explicitly through material culture such as food, dress, dance, ceremony, drumming, song, stories, symbols, and other visible manifestations.

Such outward cultural customs are a reflection of a much more ingrained and implicit culture that is not easily seen or verbalized. **Deeply held values, general world view, patterns of communication, and interaction are often the differences that affect the helping relationship.**

A common practice of a group or individual that represents thoughts, core values, and beliefs may be described by community members as "the way we do things" in a particular tribe, community, clan, or family. This includes decision-making processes.

Respectful questions about cultural customs are generally welcomed, yet not always answered directly.

Any questions about culture should be for the purpose of improving the service provider's understanding related to the services being provided.

Many AI/AN people have learned to "walk in two worlds" and will observe the cultural practices of their AI/AN traditions when in those settings, and will observe other cultural practices when in dominant culture settings.

Sharing food is a way of welcoming visitors, similar to offering a handshake. Food is usually offered at community meetings and other gatherings as a way to build relationships.

*adapted from Culture Card. www.SAMHSA.gov/shin



Resources



The information to the left is taken from the "Culture Card: A Guide to Build Cultural Awareness" which is being sent to you as gift from the **Early Childhood Project**, watch for it in the mail. The guide is intended to provide information to enhance cultural competence for those providing services to American Indian and Alaska Native Communities. However, the information, suggestions and concepts may be helpful to you with other families and cultural groups you may work with. If you would like more copies of the "Culture Card", you can order up to 50 copies at no cost from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) website: www.samhsa.gov.

A Reflection on Culture

(Lynch & Hanson 1992 Cross Cultural Competence, Slide source: National Center for Cultural Competence, 2007)

Culture is akin to being the person observed through a one-way mirror; everything we see is from our own perspective.



It is only when we join the observed on the other side that it is possible to see ourselves and others clearly – but getting to the other side of the glass presents many challenges.

Going slowly on your pathway to cultural competence is a good thing.



NAEYC offers a series of online Q&As with authors of their publications. Below is an excerpt of an archived Q & A with Louise Derman Sparks & Julie Olsen Edwards authors of Anti-Bias Education. To read the entire session go to: <http://www.naeyc.org/event/anti-bias-education>

“Submitted by: Sue on Dec 01, 2010” (an NAEYC member from New Jersey)

“I teach in a small school of almost all white, upper class preschoolers who have little exposure to minorities in their daily lives or in their school. We touch on multiculturalism throughout the year through stories and music; we discuss bias relating to Martin Luther King Day. I would welcome suggestions that you might have or websites that could be helpful to make this a more prominent part of our program, as it is going to be so important in the lives of these children in the coming years.

Thanks. Sue (NJ)”

“Question from Sue”

Submitted by: Louise on Dec 06, 2010

Your question is one that many teachers working with predominately white groups of children have raised over the years. As a result I co-authored a book with Patricia Ramsey titled, *What if all the kids are 'white?'*, published by Teachers College Press. We are in the process of updating the book, and the 2nd edition will be available in April, 2011. I refer you to the book for a more complete discussion. The basic principle is to begin exploring diversity and fairness with whatever group of children you have in your program. White children have many differences among them—gender roles, family structures economic class, abilities/disabilities, looks, interests, and so forth. Explore with the children the same and different from each other and promote their learning the very basic ideas that 1) differences are a normal and enriching part of everyone’s life and 2) that each of us is both the same and different from others. In addition create a daily culture of fairness, where children build caring, respectful, cooperative relationships with each other and where teasing and rejection based on who a classmate is—their appearance, or family, or amount of possession or clothes, or needing to wear glasses or use a wheelchair – is never acceptable. These are daily activities. Once you have built these basic ideas of diversity and fairness into your daily learning environment, and activities, you have created the foundation for helping the children explore similarities and differences, as well as connection and fairness, in relation to racial and cultural groups other than their own. First learn what the children are thinking and feeling about people from various racial/cultural groups. Even if they do not have exposure to real people, they DO have exposure to images and messages through TV, movies, parental/family attitudes, and other children. These messages influence their ideas about others even without direct contact. The ABE and *What if all the kids are White?* books suggest ways to learn what your children think. Next, introduce a variety of activities that help children learn about how they are the same and different from people in racial/cultural groups other than their own, counter misinformation and stereotypes they may hold about people in other groups, and to develop a sense of fairness toward others beyond their own experience. The ABE book has many suggestions for doing this. You can use children’s books, persona dolls, regular visits from guests, music. Make exploring diversity beyond the classroom a regular part of your daily environment and curriculum, not just an occasional or one-time activity.”

African proverb: Don’t ask me where I’m going, ask me where I came from.

KEEP IN TOUCH

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