



CHCDIV002

# **Promote Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander cultural safety**

Release 1

**Learner guide**

Aspire Version 2.1



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### **CHCDIV002 Promote Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander cultural safety, Release 1**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are advised that this learner guide may contain images or videos of people who have died.

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## Before you begin

This learner guide is based on the unit of competency *CHCDIV002 Promote Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander cultural safety*, Release 1. Your trainer or training organisation must give you information about this unit of competency as part of your training program. You can access the unit of competency and assessment requirements at: [www.training.gov.au](http://www.training.gov.au)

## How to work through this learner guide

This learner guide contains a number of features that will assist you in your learning. Your trainer will advise which parts of the learner guide you need to read, and which practice tasks and learning checkpoints you need to complete.

Feature of the learner guide	How you can use each feature
<b>Learning content</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Read each topic in this learner guide. If you come across content that is confusing, make a note and discuss it with your trainer. Your trainer is in the best position to offer assistance. It is very important that you take on some of the responsibility for the learning you will undertake.</li> </ul>
<b>Examples</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ These highlight learning points and provide realistic examples of workplace situations.</li> </ul>
<b>Practice tasks</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Practice tasks give you the opportunity to put your skills and knowledge into practice. Your trainer will tell you which practice tasks to complete.</li> </ul>
<b>Video clips</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Where QR codes appear, you can use smartphones and other devices to access video clips relating to the content. For information about how to download a QR reader app or accessing video on your device, please visit our website: <a href="http://www.aspirelr.com.au/help">www.aspirelr.com.au/help</a></li> </ul> 
<b>Summaries</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Key learning points are provided at the end of each topic.</li> </ul>
<b>Learning checkpoints</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ There are learning checkpoints at the end of each topic. Your trainer will tell you which learning checkpoints to complete. These checkpoints give you an opportunity to check your progress and apply the skills and knowledge you have learnt.</li> </ul>



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## Topic 1

In this topic you will learn how to:

- 1A Identify the potential impact of cultural factors**

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- 1B Identify critical issues that influence relationships and communication**

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- 1C Establish key aspects of cultural safety in consultation with Indigenous Australians**

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- 1D Evaluate cultural safety in own work**

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## Identify cultural safety issues in the workplace

Culture includes language, religion, beliefs, food and other shared characteristics of social or ethnic groups. Cultural awareness and knowledge provides educators with the ability to work effectively with people from different cultural backgrounds, and to meet their needs through understanding, empathy and an appreciation of the barriers they face. This topic focuses on the culture of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people.

Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people have distinct and complex cultures. Learning about these cultures, including their history, traditions and beliefs, allows non-Indigenous educators to design and implement service practices to meet Indigenous Australian individuals' needs in a culturally sensitive way. It also allows Indigenous Australian and non-Indigenous educators to work effectively together.

The following table maps this topic to the National Quality Standard and both national learning frameworks.

<b>National Quality Standard</b>		
	Quality Area 1: Educational program and practice	
	Quality Area 2: Children’s health and safety	
	Quality Area 3: Physical environment	
	Quality Area 4: Staffing arrangements	
	Quality Area 5: Relationships with children	
✓	Quality Area 6: Collaborative partnerships with families and communities	
	Quality Area 7: Governance and leadership	
<b>Early Years Learning Framework</b>	<b>My Time, Our Place</b>	
<b>Principles</b>		
✓	Secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships	
✓	Partnerships	
	High expectations and equity	
✓	Respect for diversity	
✓	Ongoing learning and reflective practice	
<b>Practice</b>		
✓	Holistic approaches	Holistic approaches
	Responsiveness to children	Collaboration with children
	Learning through play	Learning through play
	Intentional teaching	Intentionality
✓	Learning environments	Environments
✓	Cultural competence	Cultural competence
	Continuity of learning and transitions	Continuity and transitions
✓	Assessment for learning	Evaluation for wellbeing and learning
<b>Outcomes</b>		
✓	Children have a strong sense of identity	
✓	Children are connected to and contribute to their world	
✓	Children have a strong sense of wellbeing	
✓	Children are confident and involved learners	
✓	Children are effective communicators	

# 1A Identify the potential impact of cultural factors

Acknowledging the impact of events and issues throughout the history of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people, particularly the impact of colonisation, gives non-Indigenous Australian people an insight into the contemporary physical, mental, social, economic and political situations of Indigenous Australian people. These events and issues provide an explanation for why it is so important to empower Indigenous Australian people, including colleagues, to advocate for self-determination, access, equity and social justice.



The important events and issues that have shaped Indigenous Australian people's lives over many generations affect the way many Indigenous Australian people view non-Indigenous governments, people and policies, and the way many Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people feel about themselves. These effects flow on from generation to generation and influence the confidence and self-esteem of Indigenous Australian children.

## Pre-colonisation history

Australian Aboriginal people have been living on the mainland for more than 60,000 years (around 35,000 years for Tasmanian Aboriginal people, possibly more), making them one of the oldest aboriginal groups in the world.

Here are some important points about their pre-colonial history.

### Cultures and traditions

Traditionally, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people have a strong relationship with the land and a deep sense of spirituality, kinship, community life and reverence towards their ancestors. However, colonisation drastically changed the lives of many Indigenous Australian people. Practising their cultures and traditions was hindered by limited access to their sacred sites, especially when they were placed in mission compounds.

### The land as 'mother'

Many Indigenous Australian cultures consider the land as a 'mother' who nurtures and protects her people. The lives of many Indigenous Australian people have historically revolved around a deep connection to the land, and this knowledge has been passed down from one generation to another, dating back to ancestors from the Dreamtime or Dreaming. Many also believe that their spirituality lies within the cultural landscape, such as within sacred sites. These groups maintain their system of beliefs, law and culture through regular ceremonies that include music, song, dance and paintings.

### Hunters and gatherers

Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people were traditionally hunters and gatherers. In these groups, gender roles are clearly defined: women are the gatherers of food and carers of young children, while the men are the hunters. Children are raised in an extended family network. Tribes move from one place to another in search of food, moving on once resources have been exhausted. They show reverence to the land, their ancestors and their Elders, who are the decision-makers of the community.

## Impact of European settlement

When Europeans came, they saw no evidence of recognisable agriculture or civilisation, so they considered Indigenous Australian people to be savages. They used this view to justify their notion of terra nullius – an empty land belonging to no one. Consequently Indigenous Australian people were deprived of their land and restricted in their ability to engage in their cultural practices and speak their languages. European settlement had a devastating effect on Indigenous Australian communities.

### Loss of land and culture

Once the European way of life was imposed, many Indigenous Australian people were denied the right to practise their own culture, including their spiritual obligations to the Dreaming. They could no longer wander to search for food, nor could they practise their rites and ceremonies in sacred sites. The loss of their land and freedom to practise their culture meant the loss of many Indigenous Australian people's identity.

### Labour exploitation

From the early colonial period onwards, Indigenous Australian people became a cheap source of labour for Europeans who saw them as inferior beings to be exploited. Indigenous Australian men worked on stations and farms as stockmen and on roads and railways as labourers, while women worked as domestic helpers. Pay, if it existed, was often food or alcohol or, at best, very low wages.

## European settlement

Not only was the impact immediate, but it also continues to have an effect on people and their communities. Here is more information on the effects of European settlement on Indigenous Australian people.



### Reserves and missions

Until relatively recently, many Indigenous Australian people were forced to live in church- or government-run settlements. Families were separated. Tribes who did not know each other, or had been at war, were forced to live together, causing further conflict. Strict rules were imposed and movement in and out of the reserves was restricted. Being denied access to their traditional, spiritual life forced many people to escape the mission or reserve. Recapture brought punishment and further degradation.



### Introduced diseases

In the wake of European settlement, right through until today, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people remain susceptible to diseases brought by Europeans. In the colonial period, many Indigenous Australian people died of influenza, smallpox, syphilis and gonorrhoea; stories abound of the impact of the common cold on the health of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people. These exotic diseases had a devastating impact on a population lacking immunity to illnesses common to Europeans.



### Change of diet

The balanced diet that traditional Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people sourced from hunting and gathering was soon replaced by European staples such as flour, tea, sugar and alcohol. The legacy of this dietary change persists in Indigenous Australian communities today: obesity resulting in heart disease, diabetes and other related diseases is common, as is alcoholism.

## Legislation and policy

From the colonial period onwards there have been a number of significant legislative enactments used to manage Indigenous Australian people.

Here is further information on the management tactics used.



### Aborigines Protection Act 1909 (NSW)

The *Aborigines Protection Act 1909* (NSW) gave the Aborigines Protection Board absolute control over the lives of Indigenous Australian people, including regulation of residence, employment, marriage, social life and other aspects of daily life.

The board also had the power to delegate to local 'guardians' the authority to:

- ▶ provide for the custody, maintenance and education of Indigenous Australian children
- ▶ exercise general supervision and care over all matters affecting the interests and welfare of Indigenous Australian people
- ▶ protect Indigenous Australian people against injustice, imposition and fraud.

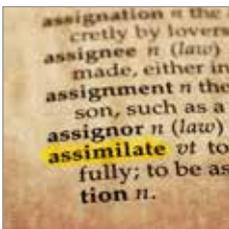
The APB had the power to remove children not of 'full blood' from their families without the consent of parents and without a court order. At this time, most Europeans were ignorant of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander cultures and believed Indigenous Australian people were living poor and unrewarding lives.



### Policy to remove children

Most Australian states from the mid-1800s established some kind of protectorate or policy that supported removing Indigenous Australian children from their families. The removal was motivated by supposed humanitarian policies and based on alleged parental neglect.

Compare this with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle, which has been introduced in all states and territories, and requires placement of Indigenous Australian children with family and kinship networks, carers in the child's community or carers in another Aboriginal community.



### Policy to assimilate

Other paternalistic methods of controlling Indigenous Australian people were expressed in various policies that existed right up until the late 1960s. From the 1930s to the 1960s, the government assimilation policy promoted the fostering-out of mixed race light-skinned Indigenous Australian children to white families. Indigenous Australian children were not allowed to speak their own languages or practise their own culture and their names were changed to Anglo-Celtic names.



### Citizen rights

Under colonisation initially, all inhabitants, including Indigenous Australian people, were regarded as British subjects and had the right to vote. However, under the new Commonwealth of Australia (1901), Indigenous Australian people were not included as citizens of Australia and could therefore not vote. It was not until a 1967 referendum that citizen rights were returned to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

## Stolen generations

Another strategy used by governments to try to eliminate Indigenous Australian cultures was separating children from their families. Here is further information of the strategy and the impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

### The stolen generations

The term 'stolen generations' refers to 100,000 Indigenous Australian children who were forcibly removed from their families and raised by church organisations, fostered or adopted by non-Indigenous families, or given to state institutions. Because they were so young, many grew up not knowing their parents, with no access to their heritage or culture. This event (which began in the 1930s, but peaked during the 1950s) was part of a policy that mistakenly believed the children were better off in a non-Indigenous community.

### Impact

The impact of the stolen generations on Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people and their culture was enormous. Since then, there have been a number of significant steps towards reconciliation.

The Child Placement Principle has been adopted to some extent in all states and territories. This requires placement of Indigenous Australian children with Indigenous Australian families or in Indigenous Australian care. The only exception is when such an arrangement is not possible, in which case the placement must be approved by the Indigenous Australian community.

In 2007, the Australian Government formally apologised to the stolen generations and their families. This was a noteworthy step towards the social, economic and political inclusion of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people in Australian society.

### Example

#### ***Lousy little sixpence***

The documentary *Lousy little sixpence* was made by Alec Morgan in 1983. It tells the story of five children, now Elders and representatives for the whole generation, who were taken away from their families by the Aborigines Protection Board and put to work as unpaid servants for non-Indigenous families.

The documentary contains newsreel footage, archival film, photographs and interviews detailing the experiences of victims of exploitation. The 'sixpence' in the title refers to the weekly allowance for Indigenous Australian people working as domestic help. The majority never received it; their weekly wages were kept by their employers.

*Lousy little sixpence* provides an insight into the exploitation of a generation of Indigenous Australian people and documents their right to demand compensation for themselves or their families.



## Deaths in custody

Death in custody is defined as ‘the death of a person in prison custody, or police custody, or detention as a juvenile’. Here are a few significant facts about deaths in custody and the criminal justice system.

### Facts about deaths in custody

The Royal Commission found that Indigenous Australian people were significantly over-represented in deaths in custody when compared with the non-Indigenous population.

According to the Australian Human Rights Commission, there were 96 Indigenous deaths in custody between 31 May 1989 and 31 May 1996.

There were 86 total deaths in custody for the 2008 calendar year. Indigenous Australian people remain more than twice as likely to die in custody as their non-Indigenous counterparts.

Indigenous Australian people remain proportionally over-represented in contact with the criminal justice system.

Statistics show that Indigenous Australian juveniles are around 20 times more likely than non-Indigenous juveniles to be detained.

## Analyse historical issues

The impact of British colonisation on Indigenous Australian people varies. Some people accept that these behaviours were in the past, while others continue to feel its direct impact on their personal identities and the development of their cultures.

As an educator, you must respect and empathise with the opinions of the families and children you are caring for. Your main focus should always be the care and development of children.

By asking questions and seeking answers, you can gain a better understanding of how these issues affect those in your workplace and the families of children in your care. You must always consider how these events may affect children in their ability to identify with their culture and how they integrate into formalised care.

As some of these events are quite recent, many Indigenous Australian families are still trying to deal with the consequences. For example, children in your service may have grandparents and other relatives who were forcibly removed from their families. When you work with Indigenous Australian people you may sometimes notice a level of mistrust or an unwillingness to cooperate. Time, patience and dedication to resolving these issues are needed.



## Example

**Learn about the effects of historical events**

Maree works with eight children in a suburban early childhood service. Maree is determined to learn, understand and involve herself with each child and their family to identify potential issues and work with them professionally.

Adam is a three-year-old Aboriginal boy. He is active and sometimes presents disruptive behaviours. Adam loves to get involved, but seems wary of others. Maree talks with her supervisor and Adam's mother to better understand his situation. She learns that his mother was raised by a foster family and is part of the stolen generations. She is educated to high-school level and is an attentive mother, but shows little interest in getting involved with the other parents at the service during open days and parent meetings.

Maree works with her supervisor and Adam's mother to better understand what Adam's mother wants for Adam and what aspects of her culture are important to her. By recognising the historical events that have led to this point, Maree is better able to provide effective and culturally supportive care for Adam.



## Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander health

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, the life expectancy of Indigenous Australian men is 10.6 years lower than for non-Indigenous men, while life expectancy of Indigenous Australian women is 9.5 years lower than for non-Indigenous women.

Indigenous Australian people are nearly twice as likely to be admitted to hospital as non-Indigenous Australians. There are social, economic and general lifestyle factors that may contribute to the overall poor state of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health.

### Factors that contribute to poor Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health may include:

- ▶ poverty
- ▶ poor nutrition
- ▶ poor housing
- ▶ dispossession of their traditional lands
- ▶ low education level
- ▶ high unemployment
- ▶ hidden racism
- ▶ inability of politicians to address Indigenous Australian issues.

## Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander quality of life

The 2004 World Conference on Health Promotion and Health Education revealed that the quality of life of Australian Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people is the second worst in the world. Indigenous Australian men die earlier from chronic diseases, such as cardiovascular disease, injury, respiratory disease, cancer and endocrine disease, and have higher rates of suicide than non-Indigenous men.

## A holistic view

Many Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people are often hesitant to seek advice from health services or health professionals. One reason for this could be that Indigenous Australian people view their health holistically. A holistic view takes into account the physical, spiritual, social, emotional and cultural wellbeing of individuals and communities. Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander relationships within the community, their spiritual link to the land and their ancestors often feature when interpreting health issues.



Many Indigenous Australian people believe that illness is caused by evil spirits, or that it is payback for behaviours such as disobeying certain cultural practices. Many also believe that the destruction of sacred sites where spirits live causes illness or natural disasters, such as floods and fires.

## Diversity of Indigenous Australian cultures

Cultural diversity refers to the many differences in language, law, ceremony, lifestyle, customs and beliefs between communities. Indigenous Australian cultures have strong links to 'country' – the term refers not only to the land, but also to the people, animals, birds and plants that inhabit it, and the creation spirit that formed the world. The Dreamtime stories, song lines and ongoing Dreaming, which apply to Indigenous Australian families, can be fostered through the education and teaching of their children from a very young age.

In every population, there is a wide range of backgrounds, personalities, values and beliefs represented. The same is true in Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander populations. For example, in the greater Sydney area alone there are 34 Aboriginal groups. Within these groups, there are four languages and a variety of cultural customs.

While every community will have common ground and similarities, they will also have different issues and attitudes. No single Indigenous Australian person or group is the knowledge holder for the whole community. Hence, it is important to always recognise and acknowledge diversity, and individual needs and approaches.

## Diversity of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people

The cultures of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people are complex and extremely diverse. Aboriginal people come from mainland Australia, Tasmania and other islands such as Stradbroke Island and Groote Eylandt. Torres Strait Islander people live between the top of Queensland and Papua New Guinea.

Locally, Aboriginal people use different words to describe themselves as Indigenous Australian.

The following information outlines some terms that roughly refer to the area of Australia a group comes from.



**Koori**

Refers to Indigenous Australian people in and from coastal New South Wales.



**Koorie**

Refers to Indigenous Australian people in and from Victoria.



**Noongar**

Refers to Indigenous Australian people in and from south-west Western Australia.



**Nunga**

Refers to Indigenous Australian people in and from South Australia.



**Palawa**

Refers to Indigenous Australian people in and from Tasmania.



**Murri**

Refers to Indigenous Australian people in and from Queensland and north-west New South Wales.

Torres Strait Islander people do not identify with the term 'Murri'.



**Yolngu**

Refers to Indigenous Australian people in and from Northern Territory (north-east Arnhem Land).



**Anangu**

Refers to Indigenous Australian in and from Central Australia.

**Language diversity**

Each area has a number of language groups, each with unique ancient cultural heritage that is based around their physical and spiritual connections to their local land and sea.

This website provides a map of Aboriginal Australia: <http://aspirelr.link/map-aboriginal-australia>

Here are some aspects of the diversity found in Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people’s culture.

Diversity across cultures	Diversity features
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Traditions</li> <li>▶ Ceremonies</li> <li>▶ Art</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Skills</li> <li>▶ Knowledge and stories</li> <li>▶ Kinship groups</li> </ul>

**Land rights**

The *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976* represents the first attempt by an Australian government to legally recognise the Indigenous Australian system of land ownership. The Act has provided a mechanism for some Indigenous Australian people in the Northern Territory to maintain or re-establish their cultural identity.

On 3 June 1992, the High Court of Australia gave Aboriginal land rights legal recognition with its famous Mabo decision. The case centred on the Murray Islands in the eastern part of the Torres Strait Islands between Australia and Papua New Guinea. The Meriam people, led by Eddie Mabo, took the action in the High Court to overturn the doctrine of terra nullius. The court found that under Australian law, Indigenous Australian people have native title rights to their land. The decisions ruled that these rights existed before colonisation and still exist under the common law.

## Religion

A key feature of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander spirituality is to look after the land, an obligation that has been passed down as law for thousands of years. This is because their story of the Dreaming, which provides Indigenous Australian people with the laws to live by, is from the land.

### The Dreaming

All life (human, animal, bird or fish) is part of an unchanging interconnected system that can be traced to the Ancestor Spirits of Dreaming.

These ancestors gave rise to living forms. Each founded a line of descendants made up of a living species and their human counterparts, linked as a Dreaming.

The Ancestor Spirits also connected particular groups of people with particular regions and languages.

All aspects of Indigenous Australian life revolve around the laws of the Ancestor Spirits. The stories and legends of these times are accepted as absolute truth.

Indigenous Australian people do not look back to the Dreaming. It never stopped. It is here and now, going on all around us.

During traditional ceremonies, Indigenous Australian people paint designs on their bodies from the Dreaming. By doing this, they keep the country and the Dreaming alive.

## Distinct and complex cultures

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have distinct and complex cultures that you need to understand and respect.

Identify any historical issues relating to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people and the land that the service is on. This may be at national, state or territory, or regional or local levels.

Watch this video for more information about Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people.



## Knowledge of cultural factors

Having a broad knowledge of the cultural factors that guide the behaviour of many Indigenous Australian people can help you in your daily interactions with them. Non-Indigenous practices can be at odds with the way many Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people act and expect to be treated; in many instances, systems and procedures can be confronting and alienating.

Learning about Indigenous Australian ways of life can deconstruct the negative stereotypes and assumptions that many people perceive and make about Indigenous Australian people. Keeping an open mind can make a difference in your dealings with Indigenous Australian people. For example, listen to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people and avoid telling them what to do, and show empathy and effective communication skills to avoid conflict and misunderstanding.



Photo © Ludo Kuipers, OzOutback.com.au

## Understand culture

Understanding Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander cultures enables non-Indigenous educators to dismantle the negative power relations that can exist between them and Indigenous Australian people. Here are some reasons why some systems and procedures may be confronting and alienating.

### Referral procedures

Referring Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people to other services, such as the Inclusion Support Programme (ISP), a maternal and child health service or a paediatrician, may not be as straightforward as anticipated due to a complex kinship structure. Indigenous Australian people may want to first consult with other members of the family regarding the referral and should be given time to do this.

### Information and inquiry services

Services should show empathy and positive communication when dealing with any information or service inquiry. An understanding of family relationships, skin systems and attitudes towards death and dying is important to avoid misunderstandings. For example, refrain from mentioning a deceased relative's name as this is taboo in Indigenous Australian cultures.

### Education

Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people often respond better to visual information than to written material. For example, the use of drama or role-play instead of written communication can send powerful messages when educating Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people about healthy eating, personal hygiene and first aid.

Opportunities for extended family to participate might also support your relationships and help develop a greater understanding and trust between the family and yourself.

### Urban, rural and remote community settings

Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander cultural practice tends to be stronger in remote and rural communities than among city dwellers. Non-Indigenous Australians who work with Indigenous Australian people in rural and remote areas should respect their practices of performing rites and ceremonies. Refrain from interfering with cultural practices, especially where disputes need to be settled within the group.

## Apply cultural knowledge at work

You can ensure that services are more culturally sensitive through continually researching programs and government incentives to address discrimination in the service setting. Here are two things you can do to acknowledge Indigenous cultures and include Indigenous people in decision-making.

### Non-government or agency

The participation of Indigenous Australian people in the delivery of privately provided services can be encouraged through consultation in policy and procedure development. Exclusion from participation in employment and decision-making potentially creates a sense of once again being 'managed' by non-Indigenous Australians.

## Community settings

Indigenous Australian cultural practices are more prominent in remote and rural communities than among city dwellers. Non-Indigenous Australians who work with Indigenous Australian people in rural and remote areas should respect their culture of performing rites and ceremonies such as sorry business, women's/men's business and initiation to adulthood, among others. Refrain from interfering with cultural practices, especially where disputes need to be settled within the group.

## Diversity of culture

Here are some important cultural factors you may find helpful when working with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people.

### Kinship

In traditional Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander society, interpersonal relationships and behaviour codes are governed by a complex kinship – or skin – system. Kinship is based on an expanded idea of family. Under kinship rules, everyone in a language group knows exactly where they stand in relation to everyone else in that group and to people outside it.

Kinship system avoidance rules illustrate the complexity of relationships. For example, when strictly applied, a man and his mother-in-law are not allowed to communicate with each other.

### Skin system

The skin system – the law governing social interaction and marriage – is an essential part of traditional Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander cultures. In skin systems, even people who are not actual blood relations are assigned a relationship. As a result, outsiders who have significant interaction with such groups may be given a skin name. For example, non-Indigenous Australians who work in remote Indigenous Australian communities may be given skin names in order to belong to the community.

### Language groups

Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander language groups are similar to skin groups. Indigenous Australian groups are really language groups made up of people sharing the same language, customs and general laws. The people of a group share a common bond in their own language group.

### Elders

Some senior members of a traditional language group may become Elders. They are the link between past and present. Elders are initiated people who become ritual leaders because of their personal qualities and their knowledge of traditional law. Elders make decisions on behalf of the group and provide leadership in matters affecting the group. The wisdom of the Elders is rarely challenged.

'Uncle' and 'aunty' are used as terms of respect for older people in the community, even when they are not blood relations.

## Family

Understanding the family structure of Indigenous Australian people enables educators to understand the role of extended families. As Indigenous Australian people have close-knit families and communities, you may find you will deal with the extended families in relation to the care and treatment of many children.

Here is a brief overview of the family structure of Indigenous Australian people.

### The extended family

Indigenous Australian family structures have been fragmented since European colonisation, largely because of interracial marriages, the effect of assimilation and the 'child protection' policy. However, the extended family remains a strong constant in the lives of Indigenous Australian people.

### Living arrangements

Indigenous Australian people rarely live alone. Their families usually live in larger households than non-Indigenous families. Extended family share things such as food, clothing, money and housing with other family members and provide a support network, sharing the care of older people or sick relatives and children.

### Raising and educating children

Kinship also defines the roles and responsibilities family members have for raising and educating children in the community.

Children are not just the responsibility of their parents; they are the responsibility of the whole community. It is common for children to live or stay with family members other than their parents, sometimes for long periods.

### Torres Strait Islander communities

In Torres Strait Islander communities, traditional adoption – when a child is permanently transferred to another extended family member – is a widespread practice. This can be done for a number of reasons, such as to continue a family bloodline, to provide an infertile couple with a child, to strengthen family bonds or to meet the care needs of an older relative.

## Other aspects of cultural life

Here is a brief overview of some other aspects of cultural life in an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander community.



### Birthing and 'women's business'

Birthing is 'women's business'; only women can be present. Although a male doctor may be acceptable for consultation and information sharing, it is good practice to ensure a female doctor is available to attend the birth. It is also a good idea to consult with an Indigenous Australian health liaison officer or staff member for ethical and culturally appropriate advice.



### Attitude to death

Indigenous Australian people have a particular approach to death. To use the name of a deceased person indicates lack of respect for the deceased and for their bereaved family. Accordingly, a deceased person may be mentioned only indirectly. The name of a dead person is never mentioned and photographs or videos of the deceased have to be destroyed.



### Death ceremonies

Death ceremonies of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people can take up to two weeks or even longer, depending on the status of the dead person. Clients or colleagues may request extended leave to attend funerals. Give them time to practise what is called 'sorry business'; this is an important part of Indigenous Australian culture where everyone expresses their grief. Refrain from thinking about the notion of 'walkabout' when they haven't returned on the day they are supposed to. 'Walkabout' is an insult to Indigenous Australian people.



### Time

Some Indigenous cultures do not perceive time in the linear way that western cultures do. Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people's observance of time and measurement may sometimes cause concern or conflict in the workplace because it can be in contrast to non-Indigenous attitudes to time. Be sensitive to this, especially in terms of scheduled meetings and appointments.

## Understand culture

Indigenous Australian people have distinct and complex cultures that must be understood by those working with them.

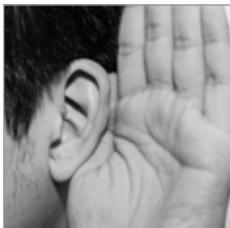


### Communication

Communication with some Indigenous Australian people may be difficult to understand at first. You may need to use an interpreter so that the person can express themselves in their chosen language.

Many Indigenous Australian people are more likely to respond to an indirect question than a direct one. Blunt questions may make them feel suspicious, and they may not respond to a question where the answer is already known.

For some Indigenous Australian people, looking a person directly in the eye is considered rude or disrespectful. Likewise, you should avoid pointing at a person when trying to emphasise something.



### Nonverbal communication

Nonverbal communication is a natural part of communication for many Indigenous Australian people. For example, silence does not mean an Indigenous person does not understand; instead, they may be listening, thinking, remaining non-committal or waiting for community support or input.

Time and trust may be required before people offer their opinion. They may also prefer to defer to an older or more authoritative person. It is also usual for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander meetings to be punctuated by long periods of silence and thought.



### Art and religion

Indigenous Australian people express their ceremonial and religious life through art, songs and dance. Art forms such as body painting, ground sculpture, bark painting, wood carving, and rock painting and engraving can represent multiple meanings about ownership of the land and relationships to ancestral beings. Often these art forms are believed to be manifestations of original ancestors who possessed special powers.

## Professional learning for educators

It is important that educators gain solid understanding of the impact of events and issues in Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander history. Knowledge of past and present issues assists you in offering accessible and inclusive service environments.

Cultural awareness training needs to be part of the induction or orientation program of new staff, and should be included in ongoing training in the education and care workforce. Knowing about Indigenous Australian culture helps provide an effective, efficient and appropriate service while minimising or eliminating cultural conflict. By educating yourself on these issues, you will feel more confident using and passing on cultural knowledge in an informed way.



## Practice task 1

1. What caused the early European settlers to declare that Australia was terra nullius, 'an empty land' or 'no man's land'?

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2. Name some practices of the European settlers that influenced the loss of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people's identity.

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3. What are some aspects of the cultural life of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people that it is important for an educator to know about?

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4. What are some of the consequences Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people have experienced as a result of their loss of cultural identity?

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5. What are some aspects of cultural diversity that you may encounter between different Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people?

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# 1B Identify critical issues that influence relationships and communication

The history of European occupation, with the dispossession and suppression it produced, is a key feature behind many of the critical issues influencing workplace relationships with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people. These issues form a complex set of factors that influence the social behaviour between many Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australian people.

Issues related to race, land, cultural traditions, health and welfare influence workplace and professional relationships. Some of the specific issues include dispossession, violence, power, decision-making, community development, social justice, education, the law, employment, housing and homelessness.



## Past power relations

You need to understand the power relationship that exists between yourself or the service you work for and Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people. To do this, you require some knowledge of historical, social, political and economic issues affecting Indigenous Australian people's engagement with community services and health systems.

Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people's ways of being and cultural identities existed for at least 60,000 years before European colonisation. The history of the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australian people is complex; however, it is important in understanding the relationship today. Dispossession, disempowerment and paternalism have been ongoing since colonisation and are central to the experience of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people. Colonial legislation imposed protectionism, segregation and assimilation, including the stolen generations. In most cases, these historical events excluded Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people from aspects of living the life of non-Indigenous Australians. For example, it affected their choice to decide where they lived, how they were educated and what they did for work.

## Present power relations

The Australian Government has taken steps to rectify the power imbalance. In 1972 it abolished the White Australia policy and introduced a policy of self-determination and recognition of land rights. In 2007, the Australian Government formally apologised to the stolen generations and their families. These steps went some way to include Indigenous Australian people in non-Indigenous Australian society and provided them with the opportunity to make decisions in future legal, social and economic frameworks about matters that affected their own lives. However, the historical, social, political and economic issues continue to impact Indigenous Australian people's engagement with education and care services today. It has resulted in a mistrust of institutions and has created barriers to everyday living. As a result, their social and emotional wellbeing continues to be affected.

## Identify the impact of cultural factors on service delivery

Supporting the culture of Indigenous Australian families and children is a practice that many educators in children's services now adopt. To provide this support successfully, you need to understand the effects past and current events have on Indigenous Australian families. You also need to understand how your own cultural values affect the way you interact with Indigenous Australian people.

This means understanding your own culture and cultural practices, and the power relationship that exists between you and the service you work for, and Indigenous people, families and communities.

Education and care service providers can contribute to cultural safety by fostering an environment where educators can reflect on personal and organisational cultural values and how these affect Indigenous Australian families.

### Cultural identity

The cultural identity of many Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people is defined by the relationship they have with their land, people, belief systems, traditions, society and many other factors.

Your own identity is also a product of many factors, such as your family history and educational background. Your cultural identity and values can affect how you treat others.

#### To explore your cultural identity further, consider these questions:

- ▶ What aspects of your life or immediate environment influence your world view?
- ▶ Does the way you view the world affect your judgments of how others live their lives?
- ▶ Do you think other people's world views affect the way they view you?

### Respect cultural identity

You should also be aware of and respect important cultural factors, such as:

- ▶ the historical events and issues that continue to shape the lives of Indigenous people today
- ▶ the importance and role of Elders in making decisions on behalf of the group
- ▶ the complex kinship rules about how each person relates to, and should interact with, everyone else in and outside the group
- ▶ the need to respect a deceased person and their family by not directly talking about or naming the person, and destroying any images of the deceased person
- ▶ being invited to use terms such as 'uncle' and 'aunty' as a sign of respect for older people in the community, even when they are not blood relations.

Watch this video for more information about respecting Indigenous Australian culture and identities.



## Attitudes to ageing

In traditional Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander cultures, the process of ageing elevates a person's status in the community. Older people are seen to have knowledge and wisdom that brings respect and reverence, and may become Elders. Elders perform valuable roles in their society, such as passing on cultural knowledge to younger generations. They are also the decision-makers of their community.

By contrast, other cultures do not always accord older people the same degree of respect. Age may be perceived to bring with it physical and mental deterioration and reduced capacity to function as a community leader. Rather than being deferred to as sources of wisdom and advice, older people in non-Indigenous communities may be viewed as less important than others or even subjected to ageism and prejudice.

When dealing with older Indigenous Australians, you need to investigate their place in the community and find out how to interact with them respectfully according to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander customs.



Photo © Ludo Kuipers, OzOutback.com.au

## Ways of thinking and learning

Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australian people can have different perceptions of everyday concepts, such as time and family. Often, whatever we grow up with is 'normal' to us, so it is important for you to consider what may be the norm for people from different cultures than your own. Many Indigenous Australian people have different learning styles to non-Indigenous Australians, as much of their teaching and learning has traditionally occurred through story and art.

Educators need to be flexible in accommodating people's sense of time and the role of extended families in the care, education and wellness of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander individuals and their children. Strategies may need to be negotiated to meet the needs of the family and the service.

## Expectations

For those living as part of an Indigenous Australian community, the education, health and wellbeing of their people is regarded as a family and community affair. Elders and other senior members of the community play an important role in this. Indigenous Australian people tend to prefer educators and service providers to work collaboratively with their community to identify needs rather than focusing on predetermined issues or solutions.

Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander individuals expect their culture to be taken seriously; they want to participate in an ongoing partnership with service providers when working towards meeting their needs. Expectations of early childhood education and care vary between individuals and communities.

## Responsibilities

Educators have a responsibility to ensure that education and care for Indigenous Australian people is effective and appropriate. Service procedures must provide cultural safety by getting the right cultural advice and adapting care provision models accordingly. Part of this approach is identifying and acknowledging the family members who should be consulted in relation to care and education. In some circumstances, it may be a member of the extended family rather than the immediate family who helps make decisions.

Some service providers consider the Inclusion and Support Programme (ISP) advice and support role integral to facilitating appropriate service delivery to Indigenous Australians. In addition, non-Indigenous Australian staff should receive a level of cultural safety training that ensures their cultural awareness is sufficient to allow them to work with others respectfully.

## Experience and work styles

Because of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people's history of contact with non-Indigenous political, social and economic structures, they may be hesitant about accessing education and care services. Suspicion, a lack of understanding and past negative experiences may mean many Indigenous Australian people are reluctant to use what they may consider to be inappropriate models of service delivery. Here is some further information on the effect of past experiences.

### Past policies

Past policies, such as assimilation, have made many Indigenous Australian people suspicious of the motives of institutions such as schools. Their own education may have lacked cultural relevance and sensitivity.

### Verbal and visual explanations

Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander educators may also have different working approaches to non-Indigenous Australians. They may prefer verbal or visual explanations or demonstrations. For example, instructions for a child's dietary requirements regarding meal routines may best be fully explained verbally, rather than by providing a written instruction to an Indigenous Australian educator. In dealing with parents and guardians, Indigenous Australian educators may prefer to sit with the person and talk rather than sending a letter home.

## Gender and kinship differences

Kinship is about the rules people have regarding their relationships with each other. It is about how they show respect for each other. When consulting with families or community members, be aware that there may be a division of responsibilities based on gender and cultural knowledge.

Kinship is an important consideration in Indigenous Australian culture. People who would, in a non-Indigenous Australian culture, be regarded as a distant relative may have strong cultural responsibilities to a child and their family. Family members may have designated roles and responsibilities to perform within the kinship system. There may also be 'avoidance relationships' where members do not speak directly or make eye contact.

For example, a child's father might need to avoid being in the same place as the child's grandmother. Another example is that an uncle and other young men might help parents to care for their male children. Learning more about kinship will help you in your ability to show respect to people.

## Cross-cultural issues

For many Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people, tradition, cultural practices related to land and other cultural differences can significantly affect relationships with non-Indigenous colleagues and families. Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people may have a negative view of their interactions with government and private health, education, welfare and community services agencies because these agencies are part of non-Indigenous Australian systems.

A lack of understanding and acceptance of cultural differences between Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people and non-Indigenous Australians may contribute to a one-size-fits-all approach to education and care. This kind of approach often doesn't appropriately meet the individual needs of the people you are working with.

Among the significant cross-cultural issues often influencing relationships with Indigenous Australian families and colleagues are:

- ▶ many Indigenous Australian people's suspicion of government systems and the motives of service providers affiliated with those systems
- ▶ bias and poor cultural awareness among educators
- ▶ geographical remoteness of some communities.

## Other factors that influence relationships

Communication and negative stereotypes can also influence relationships between some Indigenous Australians and non-Indigenous Australians, as shown below.

### Communication

Cultural misunderstanding often occurs in response to language differences, including differences in nonverbal communication. Language and literacy remain significant barriers for many Indigenous Australian people in their interactions with education and care services. Various cultural expectations and interpretations may also cause misunderstanding, resulting in workplace tension; for example, pitch or tone of voice may be misunderstood.

### Negative stereotypes

Negative stereotypes about Indigenous Australian people may influence the attitudes of non-Indigenous workers towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, children and co-workers, and the relationships between them. Entrenched views about lazy people who go walkabout, and misconceptions about violence and sexual, alcohol and drug abuse in communities are perpetuated by media focus on issues that are not common to every Indigenous Australian community.

Negative stereotyping has become an inappropriate norm that affects the perceptions of some educators towards children, families or co-workers.

## Ill health and common diseases

Misunderstandings of various cultural expectations and interpretations of events influence relationships and communication. This can happen in the way that health related events are understood and interpreted. Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people often define illness in cultural terms. The early European perspective of health issues did not include an understanding of the complexity of many Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people's culture and their holistic approach to health.

This resulted in considerable trauma for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people. The lack of recognition of their cultural traditions and beliefs around ill health resulted in loss of control and disempowerment, and remains distressing for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people. It has affected their engagement with community services and health systems. The impacts can be seen in the individuals' ability to make decisions, communicate, understand and retain information. These factors contribute to many Indigenous Australian people's ill health and susceptibility to common diseases.

Here are some examples of how Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people often define illness in cultural terms.

### **Suicide**

May be ascribed to being 'sung' (cursed).

### **Loss of mobility due to a stroke**

May be interpreted as a 'payback' for some kind of offence.

### **Depression (to an older person)**

Could be 'sick for country', after being removed from their birthplace/Dreaming.

## Practice task 2

1. What are some cultural misunderstandings you may encounter as an educator supporting Indigenous Australian people?

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2. What are some of the significant cross-cultural issues that influence relationships with Indigenous Australian families and educators?

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3. What are some negative stereotypes that you may encounter about Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people?

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# 1C Establish key aspects of cultural safety in consultation with Indigenous Australians

Successfully involving Indigenous Australian families, communities and co-workers in service delivery may require addressing historical and cultural realities of Indigenous Australian life. Many of the spiritual and social problems confronting Indigenous Australian people today, including physical and mental health problems and contact with the justice system, arise out of the clash of European and Indigenous cultures.



Educators require an awareness of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander history and the impact of European contact to better understand the holistic nature of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people's approach to health, education and wellbeing. The history of European contact has been one of conflict, domination and suppression, leaving many Indigenous Australian people dispossessed and culturally bereft. Many Indigenous Australian people continue to suffer significant health, social and educational disadvantage.

## Loss of culture, land, identity and Indigenous law

The loss of the culture that bound Indigenous Australian communities together and the breaking up of their complex kinship system has contributed to a loss of identity for many people.

The main factors contributing to this cultural crisis include:

- ▶ the dispossession of Indigenous Australian people from their land and their subsequent inability to practise rites and ceremonies (Indigenous Australian identity is closely tied to their traditional lands)
- ▶ the imposition of non-Indigenous law (some strict customs have been broken).

## Loss of family links

The legacy of the stolen generations and subsequent family dislocation had serious impacts on Indigenous Australian families. Educators must be aware that some Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander individuals may remember an unhappy mission life or may be victims of the stolen generations, either directly or indirectly through their parents or relatives.

Alcohol abuse, family violence and poor health are some of the potential outcomes of the loss of family connections.

## Geographical remoteness

The remoteness of some Indigenous Australian communities results in people having fewer opportunities or less inclination to access services. A trip to a city or regional centre for health or welfare services, particularly if a period of separation from family or community is involved, can result in stress and further illness for the person or their relatives. If there is no appropriate education or care service nearby, children in remote areas may not attend early childhood education.

## Lack of relevant and culturally appropriate education

Learning styles that are not based on oral, visual and demonstrative methods have left generations of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people with inadequate education. This presents a significant barrier to their ability to participate in education and care services, a problem exacerbated by information that relies on the written word and unfamiliar technical language.



Many Indigenous Australian families have bad memories of their school experiences. In many cases they were not allowed to speak their own language and they did not have opportunities to learn about their own culture in the classroom.

Oral and visual information can be used to provide information and advice in an accessible way to such families.

## Lack of meaningful employment or occupation

Some Indigenous Australian perceptions of employment may be easily misunderstood by non-Indigenous people. Money and material possessions may not be integral to an Indigenous Australian person's life. Keeping their culture and maintaining relationships with family, the community and the land take precedence over work and earning a living. Likewise, sharing whatever possessions they have with each other is embedded in Indigenous Australian culture.

Sometimes, Indigenous Australian people have problems keeping occupations that are not meaningful to them. They may avoid jobs that require a lot of paperwork, reading or conceptual thinking, or authoritative/bureaucratic positions in a hierarchal working environment.

For educators, this can help explain the attitudes of many Indigenous Australian individuals and provide a basis for understanding the outlook of Indigenous Australian co-workers.

## Health and education

Indigenous Australian people's health problems are characterised by high incidences of alcohol and substance abuse, poor diet and nutrition leading to obesity and diabetes, sexually transmitted disease and mental illness. A contributing factor to physical and mental illnesses experienced by Indigenous Australian people is a lack of knowledge about proper diet and nutrition, and the effect of drugs, alcohol and other substance abuse. Government programs provide health services promotion activities among Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander communities.

The health of Indigenous Australian children is a concern for the nation. According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare's report, *Australia's health 2014*, children of Indigenous Australian parents are two times more likely to die than children of non-Indigenous Australian people, with 13 per cent of all infant deaths being Indigenous infants.

#### **Factors that contribute to Aboriginal infant death include:**

- ▶ poor access to healthcare
- ▶ lack of education of parents (particularly for mothers regarding the infant stage)
- ▶ poor access to food and advice on nutrition.

## **Maternal health**

Indigenous Australian infant and child health is significantly poorer than that of non-Indigenous infants and children. Indigenous Australian mothers are twice as likely as non-Indigenous mothers to bear low birth weight infants. On average, around twice as many Indigenous Australian infants die before their first birthday as non-Indigenous infants.

While the exact reasons for these differences are not yet known, it appears that factors such as low self-esteem, smoking, drug and alcohol use during pregnancy, difficulty accessing maternal health services and a lack of culturally appropriate services play a significant part. Due to disharmony in many communities, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander women may also be victims of abuse and violence.

Successful maternal care programs run by senior Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander women in their communities successfully use traditional cultural approaches to parenting, lifestyle and support, as well as educating pregnant women about diet and antenatal care.

## **Food and nutrition**

Since colonisation, healthy Indigenous Australian 'bush tucker' has mostly been replaced by high-fat, low-fibre, high-salt and high-sugar foods of low nutritional value. As a result, obesity, diabetes and cardiovascular diseases are disproportionately common among Indigenous Australian communities.

Education, training and targeted promotion about diet and health are important factors in addressing health, food and nutrition issues. As an educator, you have the capacity to play an important role in raising and maintaining awareness of what contributes to a healthy lifestyle.



## **Smoking, alcohol and substance abuse**

Research indicates that the prevalence of smoking is much higher among poor and marginalised groups than mainstream society, and that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people feature as one of the heaviest smoker groups. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (2012–13) reported that Indigenous Australian people over 15 years of age were more than 2.6 times more likely than non-Indigenous Australians to smoke tobacco.

Statistics also indicate that Indigenous Australian people are more likely to consume harmful quantities of alcohol.

In 2013 it was reported that 42 per cent of Australians had used illicit drugs or misused pharmaceuticals. Of the Indigenous population, 22 per cent of those aged over 15 reported that they had used an illicit substance.

## Causes of alcohol and substance abuse

The impact of European social and economic systems on traditional Indigenous Australian culture has contributed to patterns of alcohol and substance abuse.

### Some of the causes of these patterns of alcohol and substance abuse are:

- ▶ the breakdown of traditional social control mechanisms
- ▶ the loss of group identity
- ▶ resistance to imposed controls on Indigenous Australian society
- ▶ boredom and dislocation.

## Mental health

Although it is difficult to obtain reliable statistics detailing mental health in Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander communities, indications are that mental health problems significantly affect around a third of Indigenous Australian people. Australian Bureau of Statistics data shows that in 2012–13, almost one third of Indigenous Australian people were reported as having high to very high psychological distress levels. This was nearly three times higher than for non-Indigenous Australian people.

Annually, more than 200,000 Australian people are hospitalised as a result of self-harm and around 2,000 Australians die by suicide. Statistically, Indigenous Australian people have two times the rate of suicide deaths and self-harm occurrences than non-Indigenous Australian people.

This means you may be needed to support a parent who is suffering from depression, or who needs a trustworthy person to talk to. You may suggest additional care for their child; for example, services or people they could make contact with such as a doctor or specialist. Alternatively, just give them time and respect while they work through their issues or feelings.

## Feelings of isolation, vulnerability and being culturally unsafe

Many Indigenous Australian people feel isolated and vulnerable because their cultural beliefs, values, and social and spiritual practices conflict with those of non-Indigenous society. These cultural differences can leave them feeling vulnerable among non-Indigenous Australian people, including when they use education and care services. Feelings of isolation and of being rejected by mainstream society arise from Indigenous Australian experiences of racism, segregation and discrimination.

It is now recognised that one way to help address these issues is to involve families and communities in making important decisions.

## Violence

Violence in its many forms, such as assault, family violence and sexual abuse, is common in many Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander communities. Some Indigenous Australian men may compensate for feelings that their traditional role and status is undermined by showing aggression towards women and children.

### **Indications are that violence in general, and family violence in particular, is often caused by:**

- ▶ racism, marginalisation and dispossession
- ▶ the loss of land and traditional culture
- ▶ the breakdown of community kinship systems and traditional Indigenous Australian law
- ▶ entrenched poverty
- ▶ alcohol and drug abuse
- ▶ the effects of institutionalisation and forced removal policies.

## Environmental health factors

Many Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people's health and wellbeing is affected by environmental health factors that result in unhygienic conditions and the transmission of disease and illness. Seen predominantly in rural areas, these environmental factors include:

- ▶ poor housing conditions and overcrowding
- ▶ poor hygiene standards
- ▶ open sewerage and inadequate or poorly maintained sanitation facilities
- ▶ unreliable or unsafe water supply
- ▶ dogs and other animals living closely with humans.



## Health issues and treatment

It is not unusual for sick Indigenous Australian people to present themselves for treatment in hospitals or health clinics when their illness is already in an advanced state. Because of the delay in seeking treatment, the prognosis is generally not favourable; treatment is likely to be complex, with a greater chance of failure or reduced life expectancy.

The causes of late presentation are likely to include:

- ▶ poor education in health matters
- ▶ reduced access to suitable healthcare facilities
- ▶ a reluctance to use centres that are predominantly non-Indigenous.

## Key aspects of cultural safety

In your workplace, you will develop relationships with various groups of people, including:

- ▶ your colleagues, supervisors and management
- ▶ children in your care and their family members
- ▶ visitors and volunteers in your service or program
- ▶ other service providers or care services.

The way you work with people from each of these groups is important, as the relationships you develop with them are a reflection on you professionally, as well as on your workplace or organisation. Think about how you speak, interact and behave when dealing with others, and be considerate of their views, values and backgrounds.



There are many ways to actively build good workplace relationships with others. This often depends in part on who the person is, as well as your role in interacting with them. Two fundamental requirements are mutual respect and acceptance of diversity.

## Mutual respect

Mutual respect is an important factor in a relationship or partnership, especially in the workforce. Making the effort towards mutual understanding, respect and trust lays the foundation for a culturally safe workplace. Mutual respect allows families and educators to establish common ground. By contrast, fear, stereotyping and a lack of understanding contribute to environments where there is a real possibility of discrimination and bias.

There are many strategies and techniques that can be used in a workplace to foster a respectful environment. These include having good workplace policies and procedures in place that provide culturally sensitive support for everyone.

### Other opportunities for a culturally safe environment may include:

- ▶ providing a welcoming environment
- ▶ encouraging diversity by sharing cultural experiences
- ▶ supporting cross-cultural teams
- ▶ having a positive attitude
- ▶ being willing to learn about how and why people act the way they do, and learning about their culture
- ▶ avoiding making judgments based on looks or culture; your job is to care for and help children, not judge people, their actions or their culture
- ▶ consulting people when decisions that affect them need to be made, to ensure processes are culturally suitable.

## Embracing diversity

Valuing cultural diversity involves recognising, respecting, utilising and benefiting from what another culture can offer your own. Diversity can be much broader than culture alone, and includes race or ethnic background, religion, sexuality, disability and political views. Accepting and valuing differences and diversity is empowering for individuals and organisations.

Cultural safety is a broad concept that fundamentally describes an environment that is characterised by acceptance and is free of discrimination. Characteristics of a culturally safe workplace are shown below.

### What a culturally safe workplace does:

- ▶ Treats everyone with dignity
- ▶ Respects people's culture, language, knowledge, experience and obligations to each other
- ▶ Allows no assault on a person's identity
- ▶ Provides pathways to empowerment and self-determination
- ▶ Allows people the right to promote, develop and maintain their own institutional structures, distinctive customs, traditions, procedures and practices
- ▶ Acknowledges individual differences
- ▶ Works with people where they are at, not where it is assumed they should be

Adapted from 'Cultural safety – what does it mean for our work practice?', published by UTAS Centre for Rural Health.

### Example

#### Cultural differences

Susan, an educator in a large urban early childhood service, decides to join a multifunctional Aboriginal children's service in a town in the north of Western Australia. Susan is excited about this position since it allows her to apply her years of experience in a different cultural setting.

Susan's first couple of weeks in the town are an awakening experience for her. As expected, many of the families in the service are Aboriginal, but what she finds difficult is that many parents are reluctant to talk to her or look her in the eye. It's very hard to get information from them. She expected the women to be more open with her than they are.

Susan finds this hard to reconcile with the happy, laughing people she sees outside the service and she begins to question her competence as an educator.





3. List some work practices that could be adopted in a work environment that is culturally safe for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people.

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# 1D Evaluate cultural safety in own work

To deliver effective education and care to children from diverse cultural backgrounds, it is essential to negotiate and implement policies, procedures and strategies to accommodate cultural differences in your service.

## Some ways that educators can create an inclusive education environment are:

- ▶ acknowledging religious practices and beliefs
- ▶ catering for dietary requirements, such as avoiding forbidden foods
- ▶ promoting awareness of cultural issues
- ▶ acknowledging gender roles
- ▶ building rapport, showing empathy and being non-judgmental
- ▶ using cross-cultural communication strategies, such as appropriate body language
- ▶ recognising the involvement of families in children's education and wellbeing
- ▶ consulting the Inclusion Support Programme (ISP) when necessary.

## Strategies to accommodate cultural differences

There are a number of strategies that can be used to accommodate cultural differences in the workplace.

These strategies include:

- ▶ workplace induction programs
- ▶ understanding your own culture and history
- ▶ understanding the impact of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander culture and history on education and care issues
- ▶ identifying common ground.

## Workplace induction programs

A sound, inclusive workplace induction program provides new employees with information and resources about Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander cultures. This will help them adjust their work practices to meet the needs of the children and families in their service. Organisational policy should provide the means for the service coordinator to properly induct workers into required work practices.



Guidelines should be provided so that:

- ▶ care and education is delivered to meet client preferences and cultural needs
- ▶ individuals have access to culturally appropriate resources; for example, Indigenous Australian music, languages and art
- ▶ individuals' problems are dealt with in an ethical and culturally appropriate manner
- ▶ the ISP is used as required.

## Understand culture and history

Understanding your own culture and history helps you understand other people's culture better. You need to be able to recognise and acknowledge your own values, expectations, beliefs and ways of communicating and dealing with conflict.

Features of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander culture and history contribute to current education and care issues.

### Relevant features of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander culture and history include:

- ▶ the dispossession of Indigenous Australian people from their land
- ▶ the legacy of the stolen generations and loss of identity
- ▶ discrimination
- ▶ social, political and economic inequality
- ▶ geographic and social isolation
- ▶ poor access to services or culturally inappropriate services
- ▶ past experiences of education systems that do not meet their needs.

## Reconciliation action plans

Many services are now developing a reconciliation action plan (RAP) to demonstrate their respect for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people and their willingness to welcome them into their environment.

A RAP outlines the vision, commitment and any strategies that your service wishes to put into place to develop relationships of mutual respect and awareness between Indigenous Australian people and those within the service. Although a RAP is not compulsory, respect and inclusion of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people is embedded into the National Quality Framework.

A RAP should be developed with all stakeholders involved, including any local Indigenous community representatives. The RAP might start from some discussion in a staff meeting, some research and shared learning, professional development activities or even through the training you complete using this resource.

To assist with writing the RAP, you might use the resources found on the Reconciliation Australia website at: <http://aspirelr.link/rap-hub>. There are many templates and guides that your service can use to create a RAP that reflects your service and its unique community. You might also reflect on the RAPs that other services have developed and identify parts that are important to you.

## Legislation, codes of practice and workplace policy

Workplaces are obliged to establish and follow policies, procedures and practices that are consistent with legislation, regulations and codes of practice.

There are international and Australian laws that ensure all people are treated equally and all cultures are respected.

The *Racial Discrimination Act 1975* (Cth), for example, means that racial discrimination is against the law. Its aim is to ensure that all people are treated equally regardless of their race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin.

Australia is also a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

You do not need to read all the legislation regarding culture and discrimination; the important thing is that you understand the laws are there to ensure people are treated equally and with respect, regardless of differences in age, culture, physical characteristics and capabilities.

Australian legislation includes:

- ▶ *Australian Human Rights Commission Act 1986* (Cth)
- ▶ *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (Cth)
- ▶ *Sex Discrimination Act 1984* (Cth)
- ▶ *Racial Discrimination Act 1975* (Cth)

States and territories also have their own anti-discrimination laws; for example, the *Racial and Religious Tolerance Act 2001* (Vic.), the *Equal Opportunity Act 1984* (WA), the *Equal Opportunity Act 2010* (Vic.) and the *Anti-Discrimination Act 1991* (Qld).

## National learning frameworks

*Belonging, being & becoming: The early years learning framework for Australia* (EYLF) and *My time, our place: Framework for school age care in Australia* (MTO) both include specific reference to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people. Namely, they address:



- ▶ the need for a commitment to improved outcomes for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander young people, and that we should ensure cultural security for these children and families (referencing the Melbourne Declaration on Education Goals for Young Australians)
- ▶ respect for diversity, and that an understanding of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander ways of knowing and being should be promoted
- ▶ responsiveness to children's expertise, cultural traditions and ways of knowing, the multiple languages spoken by some children – particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children – and the strategies used by children with additional needs to negotiate their everyday lives.

## Early Childhood Australia Code of Ethics

The Early Childhood Australia (ECA) Code of Ethics states an educator's responsibility to follow the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Some of the principles and responsibilities of the Code of Ethics are shown in the following table.

### Core principles

- ▶ Children are citizens from birth with civil, cultural, linguistic, social and economic rights.

### Commitments to children

- ▶ Ensure that children are not discriminated against on the basis of gender, sexuality, age, ability, economic status, family structure, lifestyle, ethnicity, religion, language, culture or national origin.

## Commitments to families

- ▶ Support families as children's first and most important teacher and respect their right to make decisions about their children.
- ▶ Listen to and learn with families, and engage in shared decision-making, planning and assessment practices in relation to children's learning, development and wellbeing.
- ▶ Develop respectful relationships based on open communication with the aim of encouraging families' engagement and to build a strong sense of belonging.
- ▶ Learn about, respect and respond to the uniqueness of each family, their circumstances, culture, family structure, customs, language, beliefs and kinship systems.
- ▶ Respect families' right to privacy and maintain confidentiality.

## Identify and use resources for effective service delivery

Effective education and care relies on the right kind of resources being available to educators. Cross-cultural awareness is essential for effective education and care; one of the most important resources is people who understand Indigenous Australian culture and their sense of family and community. At an organisational level, policies and procedures provide direction for educators dealing with Indigenous Australian children, families and communities, and information about how to modify the physical environment to enhance service delivery.

## Identify the appropriate people

When a child is brought to your service to enrol, parents or guardians usually have a short interview with the service director, administrator or other assigned person. It is this person's role to collect the critical and relevant information needed about the child. They usually record this information in the child's enrolment file and make it available to the educators responsible for the child.

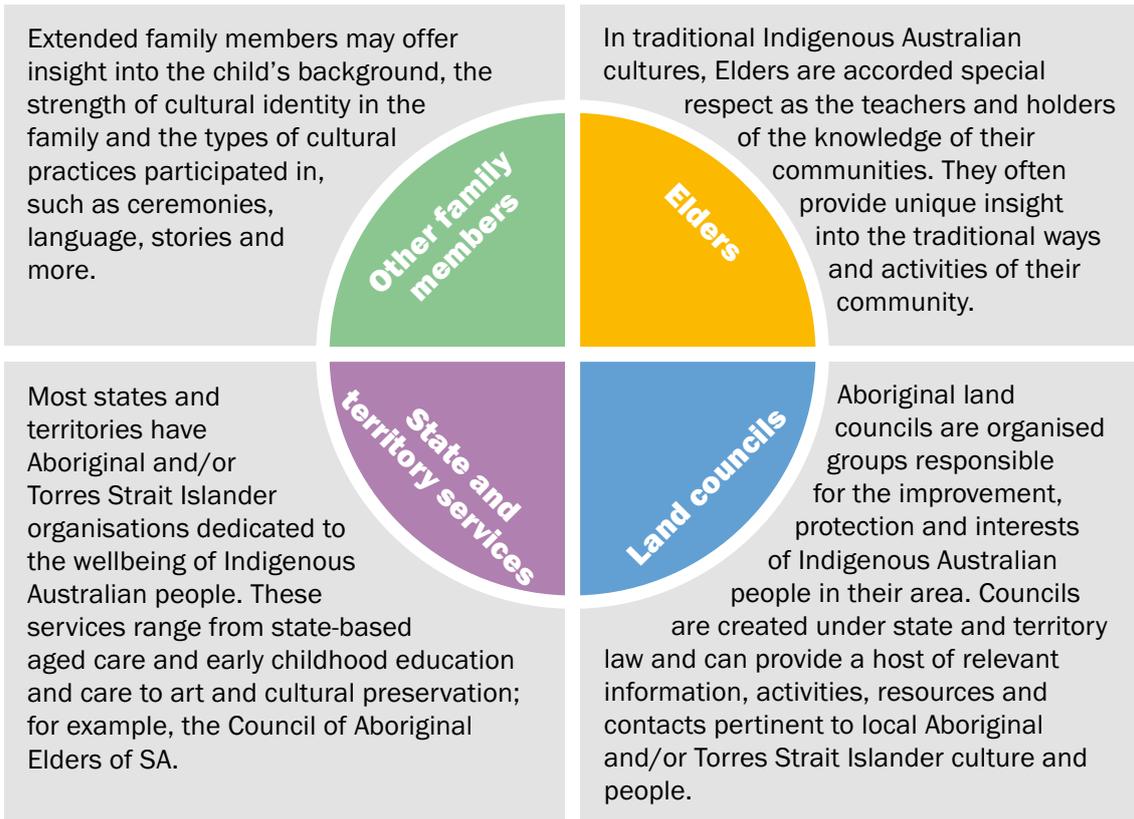
The child and their guardians are also often introduced to the child's assigned educators during this initial meeting.

### **As the child's educator, you will have access to initial information about the child and the family from:**

- ▶ the child's records
- ▶ the child's parents or guardians during the initial meeting
- ▶ the supervisor, director or administrator assigned to record the information.

## Obtain additional information

You may also need to obtain additional information relevant to the child's background. This information may not have been captured in the initial interview. Consider the following possible contacts and the information they may be able to provide you with.



## People with appropriate cultural knowledge

Identifying colleagues, professionals and community members who have knowledge of Indigenous Australian culture enables organisations to provide more effective education and care, and create a culturally sensitive and inclusive workplace. For example, without adequate cultural knowledge it is possible for an educator to misinterpret an Indigenous Australian individual's silence and avoidance of eye contact as a refusal to cooperate, when other cultural factors may be at play.

In an education and care service setting, the following human resources may be drawn on for their cultural knowledge.

### Human resources

- ▶ Community leaders, spokespeople and Elders
- ▶ Designated individuals and family through ancestral rights
- ▶ Inclusion Support Programmes and Inclusion Agencies
- ▶ Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander interpreters
- ▶ An appropriately trained Indigenous Australian staff member
- ▶ Indigenous Australian liaison or adviser

## Consult with appropriate people

When consulting with people about the cultural needs of a child, it's important not to have any preconceptions about the type of information you might gather. Ensure any discussion is open; use open questions that permit the person to provide you with extended answers and opinions.

Open questions are phrased in a way so the respondent cannot give a 'yes' or 'no' answer; they must give more detail. For example, instead of asking, 'Does Jasper's family observe cultural traditions at home?', you could ask, 'What cultural traditions does Jasper's family observe at home?'

Before implementing any information you receive during a discussion with family members, Elders, councils or other service representatives, you should always consult with your supervisor and read any policies your organisation may have that dictate the types of actions you can take to support Indigenous Australian children.

Check with your supervisor if you don't know where to access your service policies.

## Example

### Consult a supervisor

Judith is responsible for several children, including Philip, a two-year-old Indigenous Australian boy. Judith asks her supervisor to look at Philip's records and consults with her supervisor about what she can and can't do in the service. Her supervisor explains the details of their policy and focuses on the need to respect Philip's culture by obtaining information.

Judith asks if she can speak with Philip's mother next time she is in, and her supervisor agrees. They all sit together to talk about the sorts of things Philip is used to at home and how the centre can support his cultural heritage. Judith records important information about local events and protocols for taking photographs and storytelling. Then she speaks at length with her supervisor after the meeting to ensure she understands all the information she has gathered.



## Workplace design to accommodate cultural needs

Workplace design includes the physical environment, organisational practices and policies, legislation and worker attitudes. All of these play a role in accommodating cultural needs.

Organisational practices relating to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander service recipients should focus on family involvement. For example, you may include incursions and excursions as part of your program and encourage families to participate and spend time with the service, helping children to learn new skills and participate in new experiences.

The same level of respect shown to children and their families should be shown to colleagues. This includes:

- ▶ respecting a person's cultural beliefs and practices
- ▶ remaining non-judgmental
- ▶ showing understanding and empathy.

## Reference groups

Reference groups can be a useful way of gathering information and ideas, and resolving problems with service delivery. A reference group relevant to delivering Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander services may include community leaders and/or Elders, Indigenous Australian health professionals, non-Indigenous professionals with the right kind of expertise, Indigenous Australian liaison officers, professional support coordinators and representatives from funding bodies, service providers or government departments.

**Reference groups can:**

- ▶ provide advice about community or cultural needs
- ▶ discuss and evaluate issues facing Indigenous Australian individuals and provide advice to the organisation or funding agencies about Indigenous Australian matters
- ▶ suggest funding or service delivery options
- ▶ keep other community services groups informed about Indigenous Australian issues
- ▶ work collaboratively with the local community to provide information and advice that supports culturally appropriate education and care
- ▶ provide strategic advice on policy options and their implications for educators.

## Provide culturally diverse experiences

Cultural diversity is the range of skills, knowledge, practices and experiences represented by all members of a group. It includes the range of perspectives, responses and ideas possible in a diverse group.

Children should be given opportunities to experience significant cultural diversity through learning activities. By creating specific opportunities for learning, children can receive information through their senses (sight, touch, smell, hearing and taste) and process the meaning at their existing level of development.

For example, if you show children a dot picture, they will see it as an intricate pattern and may be able to make out shapes of animals or trees, but once the story is explained to them, they will begin to see and understand the representations of land, water, rocks, tracks and more.

Learning opportunities that could enhance children’s experience of Indigenous Australian cultural diversity include those outlined below.

<b>Art activities</b>	Indigenous Australian culture is reliant on the teachings passed down through art. These include stories of the Dreamtime, rituals, and family history and events. Dot paintings are a common form of art, as are cave paintings, rock art and bark paintings. Consider creating experiences that include the stories behind the artwork and describe the meaning of images, rituals and ceremonies. Allow the children to try painting on different surfaces and consider showing how Indigenous Australian people traditionally mixed the pastes they used to paint with. To extend this activity, look at art from other cultures to note the similarities and differences; for example, Maori, Pacific Islander and Asian artwork may be of interest in this activity.
<b>Dance activities</b>	Dance is used to mark occasions of importance in many cultures. Indigenous Australian dance is often used for storytelling rituals, as well as for celebrations and for spiritual reasons. Encourage children to participate and learn what various dances mean to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people. Again, you can extend this activity by comparing the dances of other cultures using videos, pictures or demonstrations.

<b>Visits</b>	Hearing stories directly from a respected member of a community will captivate the imagination of children and draw them closer to the culture you are sharing with them. Ask local Elders or other prominent members of the community to share personal experiences, family history and traditional stories with the children so they can imagine the life of an Indigenous Australian person. For Indigenous Australian children, this activity strengthens knowledge of their culture and increases their self-respect.
<b>Social events</b>	Help to organise social events where different cultural experiences can be shared. These may include preparing traditional foods, wearing traditional dress and observing ceremonies or rituals. Social events allow adults and children to mix and can provide an enriching experience of cultural diversity. Social events can be themed to represent one culture or the culture of each child or family.
<b>Craft activities</b>	<p>Indigenous Australian craft includes traditions that date back more than 1,000 years. For many non-Indigenous children and adults, their first experience of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander culture is the craft sold in souvenir shops. The craft of Indigenous Australian people includes making didgeridoos, boomerangs, music sticks and paintings. Lesser known crafts include making dolls, baskets, weavings and carvings.</p> <p>Opportunities to experience objects from diverse cultures include visits to museums, shops and art galleries, or demonstrations by craftspeople at the service.</p>
<b>Excursions</b>	Excursions are a great way to expose children to an array of crafts and artwork created by Indigenous Australian people. Children should be shown aspects of modern Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander cultures. Contemporary culture may be demonstrated through visits to communities, Indigenous Australian dance and art schools, or healthcare facilities. Additionally, visiting the traditional land of local groups can allow discovery of rock art and other remnants of historical culture.

Check that activities are culturally appropriate, and provide background information on the activity appropriate to the children's stage of development.

## Apply knowledge of your own and others' cultures

It is important to acknowledge the reality of your own culture as well as your knowledge and understanding of other people's culture in your work practices. Consider some of the common work practices you may encounter in early childhood education and care services. Keep in mind the historical and cultural perspectives of many Indigenous Australian people and their experience of Australian government and non-government services. Take a non-judgmental approach and use empathy to build rapport with your clients. Ask yourself, 'Am I able to engage with Indigenous Australian people as effectively as I am able to engage with non-Indigenous Australians?'

How do your work practices reflect a cross-cultural context? You can look at:

- ▶ administrative processes
- ▶ referral protocols
- ▶ inquiry services
- ▶ health promotion
- ▶ access to services.



## Administrative processes

Think about how individuals feel when dealing with administrative processes in your service setting. For some it may be a confusing or intimidating experience because they are dealing with unfamiliar processes. Now consider what it may be like for a person who may experience language and literacy difficulties as well as fear or suspicion of a system they do not understand. In all likelihood, it can be a threatening and perhaps overwhelming experience. This is a common scenario for many Indigenous Australian parents.

## Protocols

There are a number of protocols that can be observed to show respect to Indigenous Australian people.

A 'welcome to country' is usually conducted when a service is new or under new management, or when an event or gathering is held. This ceremony allows the traditional custodians to welcome visitors to the land.

In addition, acknowledging the traditional custodians should occur at the start of each semester and when guests are visiting in an official capacity. An 'acknowledgment of country' can be presented by an Indigenous or non-Indigenous Australian to pay respect to the traditional owners of the area.

It is also important to recognise that the Dreaming is an ongoing feature of many Indigenous Australian people's lives. It is not an ancient myth observed as a religion; rather, it is an integral part of the land, people, animals, birds and sea life that make up the country.

Many Indigenous Australian people refrain from using the names or viewing photographs or images of deceased people during the mourning period. This period may extend indefinitely. Always warn a group that includes Indigenous Australian people if images or recordings of deceased people may be shown.

Men are usually greeted before women, but this varies in more modern contexts. For this and any other specific protocols, you should ask community Elders or local families to ensure you are following the appropriate rules.

**Example****Use correct protocols**

When starting the new year at Little Rock Childcare Centre in outback South Australia, the service director invites families and local Indigenous Australian representatives to celebrate another year and to remember the special place that the land plays in the hearts of the local Aboriginal people and those working at the service.

Before doing so, the director contacts the local Elders group to ask if they will perform a 'welcome to country' ceremony and allow the centre to recognise their people as the traditional owners of the land. The Elders group agrees and also offers to organise a welcome dance ritual and song.

The ceremony is conducted with all the children and many parents in attendance, and serves to strengthen the bond between the educators, children, families and the local Indigenous community.

**Inquiry services**

Effective interpersonal and communication skills are important in responding to inquiries.

An Indigenous Australian person may be anxious and not assertive when making inquiries for their children, themselves or a member of their community. Often at this point it may be more effective to focus on recognising cultural protocols, breaking down cultural barriers and opening lines of communication as a first step towards dealing with an inquiry. Recognise that these individuals may be sensitive to your body language and will have different approaches to seeking assistance.

**Illness and health promotion**

In times of sickness requiring hospitalisation, some Indigenous Australian people with support needs may have concerns relating to western medicine and the presence of spirits of the dead in the hospital. Both of these concerns can be addressed with the support of a traditional healer who can work in conjunction with health professionals to care for the sick person's spirit. While many community services providers and government agencies produce a range of printed and visual health promotion material, passive resources are often not the best method of reaching an Indigenous Australian audience.

Demonstrative educational tools, such as drama, role-play and Aboriginal arts that promote health, intervention and treatment may be more effective.

**Indigenous Australian educators**

Some Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people will feel more comfortable with an education and care service if there are Indigenous Australian educators working there. While cultural awareness can help bridge cultural gaps, the presence of staff with shared cultural experiences makes a service setting more welcoming.

Examples of practices that a service coordinator can employ are listed below. In addition, service providers should maintain good networks with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander organisations and workers, as well as keeping informed of how Indigenous Australian cultural activities in their area can be supported.

### Coordinators

Coordinators can:

- ▶ acknowledge family and kinship expectations of Indigenous Australian families, communities and staff
- ▶ develop routines and practices that are appropriate for Indigenous Australian individuals
- ▶ modify the organisation's policies and procedures to acknowledge Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander cultural needs
- ▶ ensure the organisation's staff have the skills and knowledge necessary to provide appropriate services to Indigenous Australian individuals.

### Educators

Educators need to be able to:

- ▶ understand the emotional impact on some Indigenous Australian people of their own experiences and their family's experiences
- ▶ be aware of what is culturally appropriate for the services being provided
- ▶ understand the historical reasons for the lack of trust some Indigenous Australian people have of institutions and how to build bridges between Indigenous Australian individuals and service providers
- ▶ make their management practices appropriate to all Indigenous Australian individuals.

## Urban, rural and remote community settings

Access to education and care services for Indigenous Australian people living in remote and rural areas is often difficult.

Although Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people living in urban centres have better access to a wider range of services, their uptake of those services is not necessarily higher than in remote communities. Cultural barriers and discrimination remain.



Regardless of location, suspicion of institutions is common among the Indigenous Australian population.

## Cultural competence

Cultural competence grows out of cultural awareness. It refers to the ability to interact effectively with people of different cultures and socioeconomic backgrounds. This is something that every organisation should demonstrate, both at an organisational level and through the individual actions of its staff.

## Organisational level

At an organisational level, cultural competence should be:

- ▶ embedded in the philosophy, mission statement and policies
- ▶ demonstrated through culturally diverse staff
- ▶ promoted through training at the start of employment
- ▶ supported by resources on cultural competence.

A culturally competent organisation is also likely to have:

- ▶ a strong understanding of the cultural profile of your local community
- ▶ employees who seek information on specific cultural behaviours or understandings so that their interactions with other people and co-workers are sensitive to cultural differences
- ▶ people in higher management who actively promote the benefits of cultural competence
- ▶ quick access to essential services, such as interpreting, if required
- ▶ a system of reward for initiatives that are culturally competent.

## Individual level

At an individual level, cultural competence involves becoming culturally aware. It is the ability to:

- ▶ identify and challenge one's own assumptions, values and beliefs
- ▶ develop empathy for other people and cultures
- ▶ see the world from a different point of view.

A culturally competent individual is likely to have:

- ▶ a strong knowledge of how one's own culture shapes attitudes, perceptions and behaviours
- ▶ a willingness to learn about other people's cultures
- ▶ specific knowledge of the language, customs and values of particular cultures
- ▶ the skills to feel comfortable and communicate effectively with people from diverse cultural backgrounds
- ▶ an unwillingness to stereotype individuals from certain cultures or ethnicities.

## Cultural safety

Cultural safety is the result of cultural competence. It describes an environment that accepts all people and is free of discrimination. It is a vital part of every organisation, at every level, in every work role.

Here are some ways to evaluate the extent to which cultural safety is integrated into your own work.



Do you demonstrate a willingness to explore and recognise your own values, expectations, beliefs, attitudes and ways of communicating and dealing with conflict?



Do you understand how Indigenous Australian culture and history shapes Indigenous Australian people's interaction with non-Indigenous society?



Do you show you are prepared to re-shape your own values and perceptions to accommodate the needs of Indigenous Australian families, children and co-workers?



Do you regularly reflect on situations you encounter in your work practice as a way to develop your own cultural safety practices?

## A culturally safe organisation

At an organisational level, in consultation with Indigenous Australian community leaders and staff, service providers should develop culturally appropriate policies and procedures that provide direction for workers dealing with Indigenous Australian children, families and communities. At the same time, the physical environment can be modified to enhance education and care.

### **A culturally safe organisation:**

- ▶ acknowledges cultural diversity among its staff and families with appropriate policies and procedures
- ▶ analyses the extent to which it can respond to the cultural needs of Indigenous Australian families and educators
- ▶ includes cultural knowledge and awareness in all aspects of the planning, delivery and evaluation of its services.

## Cultural safety evaluation

To evaluate the extent to which cultural safety is integrated in your own work and in your workplace, it is a good idea to put yourself in the shoes of an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander individual.

**Questions an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander client may ask themselves:**

- ▶ Is the environment welcoming and friendly?
- ▶ Is my family welcome here?
- ▶ Is there a safe place available to talk?
- ▶ Are there Indigenous Australian educators and staff available?
- ▶ Does it value Indigenous Australian people? For example, are there posters, art work and flags around?
- ▶ Is there information available on Indigenous Australian events happening in the community?

## Signs of concern

Here are some signs that would indicate the workplace is not culturally safe.

**Indicators of a culturally unsafe service**

- ▶ Denial of suggestions there is a problem
- ▶ Low levels of service use
- ▶ Low levels of people with support needs following through with referrals made for them
- ▶ People with support needs attending, but not engaging with staff
- ▶ Low self-worth
- ▶ Anger

**Example**

**Providing cultural safety**

An education service in regional Western Australia provides an important cultural connection for its Indigenous Australian children and families with a designated area offering space for a campfire, meetings and cultural activities in bush surroundings. Local Indigenous Australian people bring bush tucker to the centre on a regular basis to be prepared and shared with Indigenous Australian children in the traditional way.



## Practice task 4

1. What is likely to happen if a workplace is not seen as culturally safe?

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2. What are some signs that would tell an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander individual that the service was culturally safe?

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3. What signs would tell you that an education and care service is working towards cultural safety at an organisational level?

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## Summary

- ▶ The impact of colonisation on cultural practices, together with the experiences of Indigenous Australian individuals in western institutions, can have a significant impact on the way Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people participate in education and care services.
- ▶ It is important to understand and respect the impact of events and issues in Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander history, such as post-colonisation history, legislation, health and land rights, as these factors help shape the lives of Indigenous Australian people today.
- ▶ The effects of the stolen generations remain with many Indigenous Australian people even today, so it is necessary to practise sensitivity and acknowledge the emotional, mental and social effects on the victims.
- ▶ The history of European occupation is a key feature behind many of the critical issues that influence workplace relationships and communication with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people.
- ▶ It is important that Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Elders and community leaders are consulted, and work in collaboration to develop and maintain cultural safety in the organisation.
- ▶ Cultural safety is a broad concept that describes an environment that is accepting of all people and is free of discrimination. Cultural safety allows people to promote, develop and maintain distinctive customs, traditions, procedures and practices.
- ▶ Education and care services and individual educators need to evaluate their cultural safety work practices on a continual basis.



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2. In what ways did European settlement impact on Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people?

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3. Explain what it means when we say that Indigenous Australian people have a holistic view of their health.

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4. Name some of the legislation and policies that have been used since European settlement to manage Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people.

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5. What are some strategies you can use to ensure the cultural safety of an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander individual?

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## Part C

Read the case study, then answer the questions that follow.

### Case study

Jacquie is a four-year-old Aboriginal girl who lives in a rural town with her mother, father and three siblings. She has just started attending an early childhood service with her older sister Tasha. Tasha is playing on the climbing frame when she slips and falls to the ground and breaks her ankle.

When the paramedics come to assist with the injury, Jacquie witnesses Tasha crying when they move her into the ambulance. The only other time Jacquie has had contact with paramedics was when her grandmother died. She has negative associations with paramedics and is afraid that Tasha will be taken away and will not come back.

Anna, the service director, contacts the girls' mother to notify her of the incident and asks her to collect Jacquie. Jacquie is very distressed and is hiding in the book closet, as she is afraid that the paramedics will come and take her away too.

Jacquie's mother arrives with Jacquie's grandmother, three aunties and four cousins to pick her up on their way to the hospital. Anna, however, feels overwhelmed by the number of visitors in the service and asks that only Jacquie's mother comes inside to collect Jacquie. Jacquie's grandmother feels hurt and disrespected that she isn't allowed in to help console Jacquie.

Jacquie's mother coaxes Jacquie out of the cupboard and assures her that it's okay and that she will take her to visit Tasha in the hospital.

1. What important cultural aspect did Anna overlook when she asked Jacquie's grandmother to wait outside the service?

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2. How could Anna have helped Jacquie overcome her fear and distrust of the paramedics?

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3. What aspects of Jacquie’s environment may have contributed to her fear?

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4. What cultural aspect of Indigenous Australian people applies to Jacquie’s extended family that would have helped Anna respond more sensitively had she understood this?

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5. The Early Childhood Australia Code of Ethics includes responsibilities to families. Which point of the code could have helped Anna to manage this situation more effectively?

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## Part D

Read the case study, and then answer the questions that follow.

### Case study

Sondra, an Indigenous Australian woman, comes into your service for the first time to enrol her child. As you hand her some forms to fill out, she appears uncomfortable and unsure of what to do.

1. Briefly discuss **two** ways you could make Sondra feel welcome and more relaxed in your service.

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2. What body language could you use to help Sondra feel more comfortable?

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## Topic 2

In this topic you will learn how to:

**2A Ensure work practices are grounded in awareness**

**2B Reflect awareness of own and other cultures in work practices**

**2C Use respectful communication techniques**

**2D Engage with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander interpreters and colleagues**

## Model cultural safety in own work

Cultural safety includes creating and maintaining a work environment that is socially, emotionally and spiritually safe for people who have a cultural identity that is different to your own. It is about acknowledging and respecting cultural differences. It is important to acknowledge how your own culture, as well as your knowledge and understanding of your support recipient's culture, can influence the work practices of your service and yourself. When you model cultural safety in your own work practices you are contributing to promoting the cultural safety of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people.

The following table maps this topic to the National Quality Standard and both national learning frameworks.

<b>National Quality Standard</b>		
	Quality Area 1: Educational program and practice	
	Quality Area 2: Children’s health and safety	
	Quality Area 3: Physical environment	
	Quality Area 4: Staffing arrangements	
	Quality Area 5: Relationships with children	
✓	Quality Area 6: Collaborative partnerships with families and communities	
	Quality Area 7: Governance and leadership	
<b>Early Years Learning Framework</b>	<b>My Time, Our Place</b>	
<b>Principles</b>		
✓	Secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships	
✓	Partnerships	
	High expectations and equity	
✓	Respect for diversity	
✓	Ongoing learning and reflective practice	
<b>Practice</b>		
✓	Holistic approaches	Holistic approaches
	Responsiveness to children	Collaboration with children
	Learning through play	Learning through play
	Intentional teaching	Intentionality
	Learning environments	Environments
✓	Cultural competence	Cultural competence
	Continuity of learning and transitions	Continuity and transitions
✓	Assessment for learning	Evaluation for wellbeing and learning
<b>Outcomes</b>		
✓	Children have a strong sense of identity	
✓	Children are connected to and contribute to their world	
✓	Children have a strong sense of wellbeing	
	Children are confident and involved learners	
✓	Children are effective communicators	

## 2A Ensure work practices are grounded in awareness

We form ideas of other cultures from information we gather from direct contact with people from other cultures, the media and other people's experiences and perceptions. From these sources it is easy to make general assumptions about other cultural groups. We may then become biased about how we see them. This is known as cultural bias.

### Cultural bias

Cultural bias leads to negative stereotyping and discrimination. For example, 'Indigenous Australian people are violent and do not listen to their Elders' is a stereotype held by some non-Indigenous Australian people. It's not always easy to understand how your own culture can influence how you think, feel and behave. Developing an awareness of your cultural biases takes you a step closer to providing an effective and culturally safe work environment for Indigenous Australian people.

It's vital to gain cultural awareness to overcome cultural biases and improve your work practices. For example, you might need to gain cultural awareness about Indigenous Australians' attitudes towards older people.

### Cultural safety in an education context

Practising cultural safety requires you and your organisation to send a clear message to the community that you are non-judgmental and respectful of the needs and expectations of people from other cultures. It requires you to build a relationship of trust and to share information. Cultural safety means that people can retain their own cultural identity and their way of doing things.

Education and care services should have policies and procedures that foster an understanding of cultural safety. This is fundamental to building effective cross-cultural relationships with colleagues, and to providing an environment that enhances the empowerment and self-determination of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children and families.



### Cultural competence in community services

Cultural competence requires a commitment from the whole organisation. The focus of cultural competence is to integrate culture into all aspects of the delivery of the service to increase effective outcomes.

#### Factors that contribute to cultural competence

- ▶ Having an awareness of other cultures
- ▶ Knowing how aspects of your culture may limit the effectiveness of the work you do with people from other cultures (for example, cultural bias)
- ▶ Knowledge of cultural safety

## Policies and procedures

Cultural competence means that education and care services have structures, systems, policies and procedures in place to eliminate the barriers that prevent Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people from accessing them.

### Effective policies and procedures ensure cultural competence by:

- ▶ providing cultural awareness and cultural safety training to their staff
- ▶ outlining steps to ensure all education and care is culturally appropriate
- ▶ having a mission statement and values that include aspects of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people's cultures.

## Impact of western systems on service delivery

All aspects of Indigenous Australian life remain affected by European settlement and subsequent government policies. Until 1967, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people were not counted in the Australian census. A paternalistic and westernised approach to meeting their needs has been a common theme until recently.

In 2007 the Australian government formally apologised to Indigenous Australian people for past government legislation and policies, including the stolen generations. The speech was a noteworthy step towards the social, economic and political inclusion of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people in Australian society, and government agencies and organisations are now reaching out to Indigenous Australian people.

This means that western systems of service delivery have needed to adapt their approach to meet the needs and expectations of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people, while taking into account the legacies from past government laws. This is a complex task that requires many changes in their approach. An example of the legacy of the past is that many of the towns and communities that Indigenous Australian people live in were established by the government and churches without their consent. Their distinct cultural and language groups were not recognised and they had to live in a single community.

An education and care service will need to have strategies, systems, policies and procedures that are accepted by members of the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander community.

## Strategies to develop effective relationships

All educators have responsibilities and roles to play in developing and maintaining effective relationships.

There are many ways to actively build positive workplace relationships with families, communities and colleagues. This depends on who the person is and your role and interaction with them. You may need to behave and speak in different ways for different people, remembering that there are many distinct groups within Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander cultures.

### How to build good relationships with others

- ▶ Think about your words and actions; think about different ways the things you say and do may be interpreted; put things into a cultural context.
- ▶ Avoid using terms that may not be understood by others.
- ▶ Remember that many Indigenous Australian people may regard western institutions with suspicion and distrust.
- ▶ Be aware of laws against discrimination and racism that apply in Australia, and avoid comments that may be discriminatory, racist or biased.
- ▶ Look for opportunities to make positive, helpful comments about others.
- ▶ Always be professional when carrying out your work tasks and model appropriate behaviour in front of other staff.

## Establish constructive relationships

Once trust and respect is established, a truly constructive relationship is possible. A constructive relationship is one where ideas, decisions and outcomes are achieved through collaborative approaches to tasks. Depending on your level of involvement at the service, the extent of your collaboration may vary.

Positive, quality relationships need maintenance. Once the effort has been made to create a relationship, it would be unfortunate to lose that trust and respect due to a lack of attention or poor communication. Here are some things to keep in mind to maintain relationships.

### Things you must consider to maintain a constructive relationship

- ▶ Ensure regular and open communication.
- ▶ Ask questions, don't just give answers.
- ▶ Set and re-evaluate goals.
- ▶ Schedule regular contact.
- ▶ Keep communication at an appropriate level (matching, as best you can, the level of literacy and language displayed by the other person).
- ▶ Regularly demonstrate the elements of trust.

## Share power through shared decision-making

Always involve Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander families, communities and colleagues when making decisions. By negotiating and discussing issues in this way, the power can be shared.

### The outcomes of negotiation for Indigenous Australian families, communities and colleagues include:

- ▶ respect for children, families, communities and colleagues
- ▶ the chance to participate in decision-making about issues affecting them
- ▶ cooperation with staff
- ▶ ensuring that they have equal access to services and resources
- ▶ knowing their rights as parents in the service.

## Example

**Establish relationships with community members**

Jim has spent three months communicating with Indigenous Australian community Elder, Polly. He wants to establish a strong bond with the local people to ensure the children in his care can gain access to land for excursions and to establish regular story times for Polly to come to the service. He realises the drive to the service is long and that Polly prefers the solitude and safety of her home and family.



Polly understands that Jim is trying to create a cultural link and she is happy to help where she can. While the intentions are good from both sides, there are issues with establishing a more constructive relationship due to distance, cost and time involved in the travel.

Through the help of the local council, they establish a small fund to offset the cost of transport for the children and for Polly. By overcoming the issue, Jim and Polly build a strong bond and work together to champion the cause of cultural awareness.

**Negotiate roles and responsibilities in the workplace**

It is valuable to involve Indigenous Australian co-workers in making decisions through negotiation and discussion.

The outcomes of sharing decision-making about roles and responsibilities with Indigenous Australian colleagues are shown below, along with things that need to be acknowledged when working with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander colleagues.

**Outcomes of sharing decision-making**

- ▶ Respect for children, families, communities and fellow educators
- ▶ The chance to participate in decision-making about issues affecting them
- ▶ Their cooperation with educators
- ▶ Ensuring that they have equal access to services and resources
- ▶ Positive, respectful and open relationships

**Things to acknowledge**

- ▶ Indigenous Australians have a cultural perspective that has a major influence on how they approach their work and service recipients.
- ▶ They should be included in decision-making about how they can contribute to an effective workplace.
- ▶ They should be able to advocate for Indigenous Australian people with support needs.
- ▶ They have a duty of care to work in a manner that is not harmful to individuals' health and safety.

## Culturally safe work practices

One of the most important strategies in developing and maintaining effective workplace relationships is to establish culturally safe work practices.

A culturally safe environment is one where there is no denial of a person's identity and no challenge to who they are or what they need. When applied to Indigenous Australian children, families, educators and communities, it is very much about sharing knowledge and experience.

### **Culturally safe work practices require that you:**

- ▶ establish rapport
- ▶ are sensitive to what culture means for children, families, educators and communities
- ▶ use interpersonal skills that acknowledge the integrity and worth of children, families, educators and communities
- ▶ show respect and empathy
- ▶ are supportive and non-judgmental
- ▶ listen rather than talk.

## Identify and consult with key contact people

Interaction with some Indigenous Australian children, families and co-workers can be enhanced if you identify appropriate key people, such as Elders, other people acknowledged as having cultural knowledge, interpreters and professional support coordinators (PSCs).

PSCs can play a vital role in bridging the gap between Indigenous Australian people and non-Indigenous institutions and cultural practices.

### **A professional support coordinator can:**

- ▶ involve an Indigenous Professional Support Unit (IPSU)
- ▶ provide emotional, social and cultural support to children, their families and community
- ▶ advocate and liaise on behalf of a child or their family
- ▶ provide information about early childhood education and care services
- ▶ assist with referrals to Indigenous and non-Indigenous organisations.

## Display empathy and be flexible

Empathy – the ability to share and understand another person's emotions and feelings – must be part of all dealings with Indigenous Australian families and colleagues.

Empathy is fundamental to providing a sense of cultural safety. It allows educators and coordinators to share the experiences of Indigenous Australian children, families and co-workers.

A culturally safe workplace will acknowledge that not all Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander families and educators fit neatly into non-Indigenous work patterns. For example, mention has already been made of the potential role of the extended family and community in making decisions about a child. Likewise, a workplace may need to acknowledge Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people's responsibilities if there is a death in their extended family.

In both instances, service providers, coordinators and educators need to take a flexible approach to workplace arrangements. This may require collaboration to develop strategies that provide flexibility in:

- ▶ work hours, breaks and leave arrangements
- ▶ consultation and participation
- ▶ dietary requirements.

## Orientation and arrival procedures

A welcoming, friendly face and a show of warmth makes all individuals feel comfortable in your service. Practising cultural awareness and sensitivity with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children and families during orientation, arrival and departure is essential to fostering their confidence in the service. Past experiences of rejection, racism and discrimination can arouse suspicion of institutions, including those seeking to help Indigenous Australian people. This can be exacerbated when the service is staffed wholly by non-Indigenous workers.

### You may demonstrate that Indigenous Australian people are welcome by:

- ▶ inviting parents to stay and chat while they watch their children play (they may feel more comfortable outdoors)
- ▶ including events in your program such as Sorry Day and National Aboriginal and Islander Day Observance Committee (NAIDOC) Week
- ▶ encouraging and welcoming Indigenous Australian students, volunteers and employees into the program
- ▶ including Indigenous Australian language, music, art and dance in children's activities
- ▶ inviting Elders or Indigenous Australian community members to the service.

### Example

#### Ensure work practices are grounded in awareness

During the past year, Doris, an educator, has engaged with an Indigenous Australian parent support group that is based in a community hall nearby. She often asks for advice and attends group meetings with families and children from her service. This helps establish a better connection between the service and the parents of the children attending.

Many of the parents whose children attend the service are also actively involved in the parent support group. Many of them have helped to organise cooking days, excursions and other social events. Other families have seen the need for these events and lent their support. The group has become an integral part of the service's interaction with the local Indigenous Australian community and has helped to shape a more culturally aware workplace.





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6. What are **three** strategies for developing effective relationships with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people?

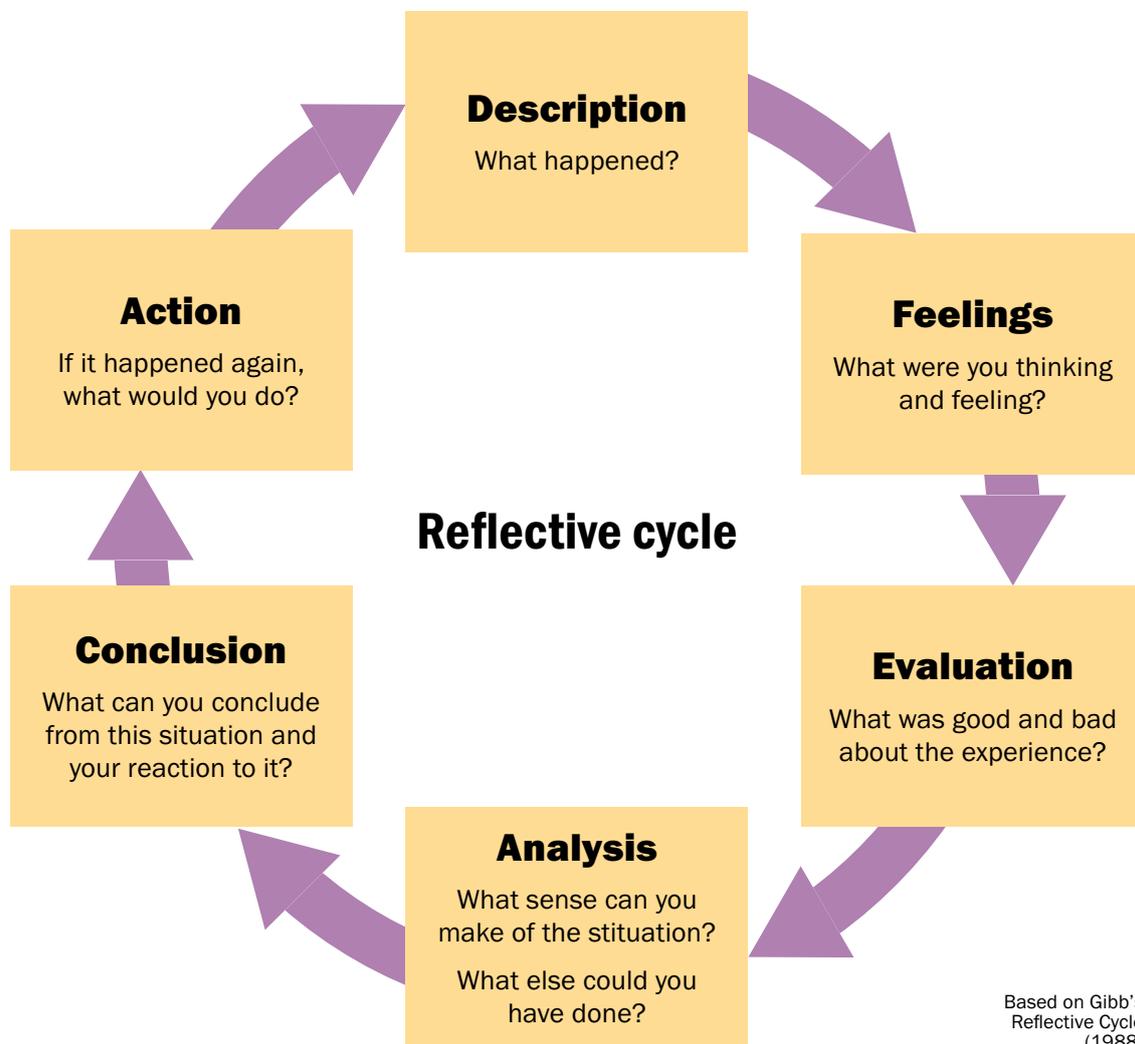
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# 2B Reflect awareness of own and other cultures in work practices

When you work in an early childhood service environment, you need to recognise and respect diversity, and understand that everyone must be treated with courtesy and respect regardless of their race, religion, gender, beliefs or culture. People have a right to be different and everyone must be treated equally. You need to recognise and understand different cultures and how cultural differences can affect your work.

Keeping a reflective journal is a good way to examine your personal experiences of working with culturally diverse groups of people, and to reflect on your own social and cultural bias.

Here is a reflective cycle that is commonly used to help people think about and make sense of their personal experiences.



## Use the reflective cycle

Follow these steps of the reflective cycle to examine your own social and cultural bias. Write each response in a reflective journal.

- 1 Description**  
Think of a recent incident where you were working with a socially and/or culturally diverse person or group of people. What happened?
- 2 Feelings**  
What did you already know about the background of this person or group of people? What did you think and feel at the time?
- 3 Evaluation**  
Were these good or bad thoughts and feelings? Why?
- 4 Analysis**  
Were these thoughts and feelings realistic? What do you base this opinion on? Do you think you could have reacted in another way?
- 5 Conclusion**  
What do you conclude about this situation and your reaction to it?
- 6 Action**  
If it happened again, what might you do differently? Why?

## Become culturally aware

Building cultural awareness is the first step towards changing your perspective and breaking down any social and cultural biases.

Cultural awareness involves the ability to stand back and become aware of your cultural values, beliefs and perceptions. Why do you do things in that way? Why do you react in that particular way?

Cultural awareness is essential if you interact with people from other social and cultural backgrounds. People see, interpret and evaluate things in different ways. Misunderstandings can easily arise if you try to use your own view of the world to make sense of somebody else's reality.



## Degrees of cultural awareness

For most people, cultural awareness does not happen overnight. It is something that must be worked on and cultivated as you live and work with people from different social and cultural backgrounds to your own.

There are several levels of cultural awareness outlined below (adapted from Quappe and Cantatore, 2007, *What is cultural awareness anyway? How do I build it?*, which can be found at <http://aspirelr.link/cultural-awareness>).

## Levels of social awareness

### My way is the only way

People are aware of their way of doing things, and their way is the only way. They ignore the impact of cultural differences.

### I know their way, but my way is better

People are aware of other ways of doing things, but still consider that their way is best. Cultural differences are seen as a problem and usually ignored or downplayed.

### My way and their way

People are aware of both ways of doing things. They realise that cultural differences can lead to both problems and benefits, and use diversity to create new solutions.

### Our way

People from different backgrounds come together to create a shared culture. They talk with others to create a new solution to meet the needs of a particular situation.

## Have the right attitude

You may not know everything about the socially or culturally diverse children in your care, but you can still build bridges by having the right attitude. It is well known that the right attitude can form a strong link between people of different backgrounds, no matter what your work role.

Here are some useful suggestions (adapted from Quappe and Cantatore, 2007, *What is cultural awareness anyway? How do I build it?*).

### Admit that you don't know

Admit that you don't know everything. This is part of the process of becoming culturally aware. Assume differences, not similarities.

### Suspend judgment

Suspend your judgment. Collect as much information as possible so you can describe the situation accurately before evaluating it.

### Have empathy

Try standing in another person's shoes. This is the best way to learn more about how other people would like to be treated.

### Don't assume

Don't assume anything. Ask your colleagues for feedback. Constantly check your views to make sure that you clearly understand the situation.

### Don't seek to control

Acknowledge that other people are also resourceful and that their way may add to what you know.

### Celebrate diversity

Celebrate diversity within your organisation. Find ways to share the different cultures of children and colleagues. There is much to learn from other people and their diverse ways of life.

**Example****Become culturally aware**

Rohini has just started working in a childcare centre. Although she is aware of her own cultural background, she has little understanding of the other cultures represented in the service and how they might impact on the behaviour of the children. To improve her cultural awareness, she asked her manager if there were any resources on Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander cultural information available for her to read. She was pleased to find out that not only were there resources, she was also about to complete some cultural competence training as part of her induction.

Watch this video for more information on becoming culturally aware.

**Context of awareness**

When working with Indigenous Australian people, it is important that you are aware of your own cultural beliefs, attitudes and values. This awareness prevents you from thinking that a person is doing something for the same reasons that you would. For example, a western person would consider a lack of eye contact to be disrespectful, whereas an Indigenous Australian person may think direct eye contact is disrespectful. A person's culture is so ingrained that they may not notice it; their thoughts and behaviours may have become automatic. When you reflect on your own attitudes and beliefs it helps you to develop strategies to manage your work with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people.

**Systems, structures and engagement with services**

Many Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people have had a negative experience with government and private education services and schools. Because of this, they may consider many service providers to be part of a non-Indigenous system with an ineffective one-size-fits-all approach to education.

Successfully working in partnership with Indigenous Australian people requires their full participation, consultation and involvement in decision-making about issues affecting them. Education and care services should be more flexible when dealing with Indigenous Australian people, as they may not be familiar or comfortable with the structured, highly organised system.

**Programs and services that most benefit Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander communities are those where:**

- ▶ the partnership is based on the concerns of the whole community and is not imposed from outside
- ▶ the arrangement meets the whole community's needs
- ▶ the community owns the service and the way it is delivered
- ▶ communication is effective and information is freely available.

**Example**

**Respecting cultural preferences**

An educator in a regional Victorian childcare centre recently ran an eight-week course designed for young mothers under 25. The course, based on competencies from the Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care, has attracted around 25 per cent of its participants from Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander backgrounds because of its focus on sharing knowledge in an inclusive environment.

## Practice task 6

1. Why is it important that an educator is aware of their own cultural beliefs, attitudes and values?

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2. Until recently, how would you describe the Australian government’s approach to meeting the needs of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people?

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3. What are some characteristics of the Australian government’s current approach to meeting the needs and expectations of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people?

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4. What are some features of programs and services that most benefit Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people?

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## 2C Use respectful communication techniques

It is important to demonstrate a respect for existing cultural differences when working with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people. You can do this by using a range of effective communication techniques and work practices. Some of these techniques are provided in the following information.

### Effective communication techniques and work practices

Become self-aware of own cultural influences.

Reflect on professional practices.

Identify and consult with appropriate key people in the community.

Display empathy appropriately.

Identify and remove communication barriers.

Use culturally appropriate visual resources.

### Identify and consult with key contacts

Interaction with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander families and colleagues can be enhanced if you identify appropriate key people to contact. These people may include Elders, other people acknowledged as having cultural knowledge, interpreters and Aboriginal liaison officers.

Aboriginal liaison officers can play a vital role in bridging the gap between Indigenous Australian people and non-Indigenous institutions and cultural practices.

#### Aboriginal liaison officers can:

- ▶ provide emotional, social and cultural support to families and communities
- ▶ advocate and liaise on behalf of a person or their family
- ▶ provide information about education and care services
- ▶ assist with referrals to Indigenous and non-Indigenous organisations.

### Display empathy

Empathy, the ability to share and understand another person's emotions and feelings, must be part of all dealings with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people and colleagues. Here is some information for further consideration.



#### Cultural safety

Empathy is vital if you want to provide a sense of cultural safety. It allows educators to learn about and understand the experiences of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander individuals and co-workers.



### Interactions

Empathy is important as many Indigenous Australian people feel insecure in their interactions with education and care services systems.

## Barriers to effective communication

It is important to identify the barriers to effective cross-cultural communication in your workplace. These barriers may include:

- ▶ lack of understanding of kinship relationships
- ▶ differences in nonverbal communication (for example, avoiding eye contact is a mark of respect in some Indigenous Australian cultural groups)
- ▶ use of direct questioning that discourages a narrative-style answer
- ▶ difficulty for Indigenous Australian people to express numbers, time or distance, as some traditional languages do not provide a means for quantifying information
- ▶ language differences (Indigenous Australian people do not always understand jargon or western concepts).

## Strategies for better communication

There are many strategies for better communication with Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander colleagues, together with children, families and communities. The effectiveness of each method is determined by its cultural relevance.



### Gestures and nonverbal techniques

Nonverbal communication through gesture, touch, eye contact and body language is an essential part of Indigenous Australian communication. A person's feelings, thoughts, satisfaction or dissatisfaction can be determined by gestures.



### Non-judgmental approach

Positive regard, honesty and respect foster positive, effective communication. One way to show this is to remain calm; a raised voice, impatience or exasperation can leave people feeling frightened, confused or angry.

In much the same way, refraining from judging or criticising fosters an atmosphere of mutual respect. Remember that Indigenous Australian people have suffered much because of assumptions about their culture and way of life made by non-Indigenous Australian people.



### Ongoing interpersonal skill development

Regular exposure to training and workshops that provide cultural awareness and interpersonal skill development helps to enhance or maintain worker performance and contribution in the workplace.

Coordinators and educators can benefit from developing leadership and influencing skills, networking to share ideas and resources, and teamwork training to share skills and experience.



### Monitoring and reflection

Reflecting and examining your own actions, the way you do and say things, and your perceptions and expectations adds to your self-understanding. This reflection provides a valuable insight into where your values lie and the extent to which you impose them on others. Part of being empathetic and non-judgmental is having this personal awareness and trusting Indigenous Australian families, communities and colleagues to make their own decisions about what is right for them.



### Partnerships with cultural groups

Working in partnership with cultural groups and community organisations can be a useful way to maximise the education and care of Indigenous Australian children. It can help develop and strengthen relationships by working together, identifying community needs and priorities and finding the best ways to address these needs.

## Other communication techniques

Visual/iconic strategies and media technologies can also be considered to provide clear communication with some Indigenous Australian families or children. Here are a couple of points to consider before using these techniques.

### Visual/iconic strategies

Visual strategies may be useful, but only when they have cultural meaning. What is relevant to one culture may not be meaningful to another because of different cultural expressions, interpretations and understanding of diagrams, tables, graphs or pictures.

Visual strategies are more relevant to Indigenous Australian people when the material reflects Indigenous Australian modes of expression; for example, images that relate to their arts, environment, land and people.

Likewise, video material should reflect the language and culture of the audience and respect cultural sensitivities if it is to be useful.

### Computer technology and other media

Although using computer technology and other media is an excellent method of communicating, do not assume it will be appropriate. A percentage of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people are not computer literate or comfortable with the place of technology in their lives.

Given the significance that Indigenous Australian people assign to personal interaction, many computer or other media-based strategies that are acceptable to western culture may be inappropriate when dealing with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander communities.

## Use appropriate communication strategies

Effective communication is the result of understanding that a person's cultural background and experiences may influence how that person interacts with others. Be aware that what is normal to you may not be normal for someone from a different cultural background, and this may present communication barriers.

Speak clearly, observe individuals' body language and facial expressions, and stay alert for signs that they may not understand. You may need to repeat information, phrase things differently or invite the individual to ask questions. It may help if you speak a little slower than usual, but it is important to never speak to people in a condescending way.

Watch this video for some information about overcoming communication barriers.



## Take turns

Effective relationships in a cross-cultural workplace involve being able to stand back and wait for your turn to speak or do things, rather than being pushy and impatient. For example, in communication with Indigenous Australian people, respond slowly and carefully.

A conversation may take time and be punctuated by long silences while the person considers all angles. Be prepared to withdraw from a situation, step back and reflect on what is going on before you act or say something.

### Example

#### Communication gone wrong

Here are two examples of communication gone wrong. Example 1 is an Aboriginal liaison officer's perspective of the most common difficulty faced by Indigenous Australian people when trying to deal with a non-Indigenous system. Example 2 is a reminder that even with the best of intentions, you can be culturally insensitive.

##### Example 1

One of the most common complaints I get from Kooris is that they feel they are being talked down to when they go to an agency for information or help. So often, the people behind the counter treat my people like idiots when they don't know how to fill out a form. Despite all the cultural awareness training they supposedly get, a lot of people at service desks aren't good at recognising when support recipients need help to understand what the system wants from them.

So instead of asking for help at the point of service, people with support needs bring the forms here or to other Aboriginal organisations. I think that is humiliating too.

##### Example 2

Maria is very religious. She befriends a Torres Strait Islander co-worker, Lillian. Lillian is very accepting of Maria and appreciates her warm friendship, but is not interested in her religion.

Lillian feels Maria is turning their conversations more and more to religion: why it is good to believe in God, and how her church group is a wonderful social network. Maria also mentions that she thinks a lot of Lillian's beliefs are wrong.

Although she is uncomfortable with all of this, Lillian is too polite to say anything and just goes along with the conversation, not saying very much.

Eventually, Maria's persistence angers Lillian, who tells Maria the story of how Lillian's mother was taken from her family and placed in a church-run children's home. In tears, Lillian tells Maria how much she resents the people who took her mother away. 'They were people like you, Maria', she says.

## Practice task 7

1. List the key groups of people in the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander community that may need to be consulted as part of a communication strategy.

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2. List some barriers that may prevent effective communication with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people.

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## 2D Engage with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander interpreters and colleagues

The introduction of Indigenous Australian interpreters and liaison officers in education and care services delivery has had a positive influence on professional relationships with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander colleagues, families and communities. Indigenous Australian liaison officers, in particular, are a vital resource for bridging cultural gaps. They provide cultural, emotional and social support to Indigenous Australian people accessing services.

Interpreters help break down the language barriers frequently faced by Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people when dealing with health, social welfare and legal systems.

You need to be discerning when using a family member to interpret. They may only tell you what they want you to hear, not what the person actually says or means.

An official service, however, employs registered interpreters who are bound by a professional code of ethics. They are required to maintain strict confidentiality, interpret accurately and impartially, and act professionally at all times.



### Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander interpreters

Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander interpreters can improve communication with people who may be parents or colleagues. One example is the Aboriginal Interpreter Service (AIS) in the Northern Territory. The AIS has more than 400 registered interpreters and covers over 100 languages and dialects.

#### Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander interpreters provide:

- ▶ Aboriginal interpreter service
- ▶ face-to-face interpreting interviews
- ▶ telephone interpreting
- ▶ interpreting at community meetings
- ▶ regular rostered sessions (for example, in meetings with educators)
- ▶ audio recordings.

## Using an interpreter

If you plan on using an interpreter, here are a few basic rules to follow.

### Before the session

You need to provide the interpreter or the interpreter service with information about the child or family member, such as their name and skin name, their age, language and community of origin. You also need to brief them on the purpose of the interview.

The interpreter advises you on seating arrangements and any cultural issues they want to address.

### At the start of the session

Explain the role of the interpreter to the family. Many Indigenous Australian people have never worked with an interpreter. They need to understand that the interpreter only interprets what you are saying; they do not advocate or give advice, or tell anyone outside the meeting what was said.

### During the session

Act in a culturally appropriate manner, following nonverbal protocols in relation to eye contact and facial expressions. Use short statements, preferably in plain English, and speak directly to the individual. Do not ask the interpreter for their opinion; they must remain impartial.

### Multilingual people not related to the person

In some cases, you may be able to use a multilingual person, such as a staff member, who can speak a family member's language or dialect and act as an interpreter for you. Some services ensure a multilingual staff member is always on hand to deal with problems that arise.

## Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander educators

Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander educators can help to bridge the cultural gap between the service and Indigenous Australian families to improve the quality of care and education, and to identify appropriate support services if required.

All educators have a responsibility towards the families and children in the service.

Indigenous Australian educators may assist with bridging the cultural gap by filling the following roles.

### Improving education experiences

Improving the education experiences for Indigenous Australian children by:

- ▶ embedding relevant concepts and practices
- ▶ providing appropriate learning materials and context
- ▶ providing Indigenous Australian role models
- ▶ bringing a wider range of cultural perspectives into the education and care setting.

### Improving state of health

Improving the state of health in Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander communities by:

- ▶ promoting good health practices to children and their families
- ▶ enhancing communication between educators, health professionals and Indigenous Australian service recipients
- ▶ promoting a better understanding of the cultural beliefs and medical practices of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australian people.

### Assisting

Assisting individuals and communities to take control of their own health and lifestyles.

### Interpreting

Acting as interpreters to non-Indigenous educators.

### Developing networks

Developing networks with Indigenous Australian communities around the early childhood education and care service.

## Aboriginal liaison officers and other colleagues

Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander educators and support workers can provide cultural, emotional and social support to Indigenous Australian families and co-workers. They can also act as interpreters when needed. Aboriginal liaison officers have a designated role to provide a bridging service to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander families in various circumstances.

Aboriginal liaison officers may be employed in hospitals, community centres, the justice system, educational institutions or wherever Indigenous Australians come into contact with institutions and agencies.

### An Aboriginal liaison officer's role may be to:

- ▶ provide emotional, social and cultural support to Indigenous Australian people and their families
- ▶ advocate and liaise on behalf of Indigenous Australian service recipients and their families
- ▶ provide information about hospital services, support agencies or government agencies
- ▶ assist with referrals to Indigenous and non-Indigenous organisations or service providers.

## Use the services of professionals and specialists

In addition to using the services of an Aboriginal liaison officer or a colleague with specialised skills, there are other professionals and specialists who can help you meet your duty-of-care responsibilities to children.

The Inclusion Support Programme (ISP) provides an integrated approach to meeting the inclusion and professional support needs of education and care services. This is achieved by increasing the skills and knowledge of educators through professional advice, access to additional resources and inclusion support for children.

Inclusion Agencies employ a number of inclusion professionals for each state and territory. They assist eligible services to build their capacity and capability to provide and embed inclusive practice in their delivery of early learning and care programs. Target groups for inclusion support include children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and Indigenous Australian children. Bicultural support will be accessible through the Inclusion Development Fund, Innovative Solutions Support funding, and specialist equipment available through the Inclusion Agencies.

For more information about the program, go to the Department of Education website at: <http://aspirelr.link/inclusion-support-programme>

## Your duty of care

Your duty of care can be described as the responsibilities you have in your job as part of the relationship between you, the children in your care and their families. You have to provide a standard of care that a reasonable person in your position could be expected to provide. This may mean making a decision to enlist professional assistance or reporting an incident.



If you have any concerns about a child's wellbeing, seek the assistance of your supervisor or a relevant professional.

## Privacy and confidentiality

Privacy refers to a person's ability to control others' access to themselves, their space and their possessions, including information about themselves. Maintaining privacy also means taking steps to avoid embarrassment and humiliation.

Confidentiality is about data or information, not people, and refers to managing access to private information. Confidentiality provisions restrict an individual or organisation from using or disclosing information about a person that is outside the scope for which the information was collected.

Be mindful that before you engage someone's assistance with an issue involving children in your care or their families, you may need to gain the permission of the child's parents or other family members. If the confidential matter involves a work colleague, you may need to gain their permission. A parent (or their representative) must give consent before any information is shared with or accessed from another agency. Most community organisations obtain this consent using a specific form. Consent is given for access to particular information for a particular purpose. Often the specific workers in the agency receiving the information are also named.

## Cultural brokers

As well as using the services of an interpreter, Indigenous Australian liaison officer or a colleague with specialised skills, there are other professionals and specialists who can help you meet your duty-of-care responsibilities to children and families. People such as healthcare workers, teachers, community workers and your colleagues can act as effective cultural brokers, bridging the gap between Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander cultural practices and western culture.

## Role of cultural brokers

A cultural broker is a person who mediates between people of different cultural backgrounds for a particular purpose, such as reducing conflict or producing some kind of change. Nurses and teachers are sometimes thought of as useful cultural brokers because of the following characteristics.

### Characteristics of nurses and teachers as cultural brokers

- ▶ They have experience in dealing with conflict situations between cultural groups.
- ▶ They are often seen as having an affinity with/understanding of the two cultures.
- ▶ They can cultivate varied social relationships and mediate between people/systems or act as a go-between.
- ▶ They can translate interests and messages between groups.

### Example

#### Interpreters and cultural brokers

Carrie Parker is a health coordinator at a medical centre and works with young women at risk.

As an Indigenous Australian person and trained nurse, Carrie also has a community role and is often called upon by educators to act as a cultural broker when interviews are being conducted with parents who find it difficult or confusing to deal with educational professionals.

'They don't understand the language of educators, so I act as the liaison for the community. When the teacher is talking, I go through the language and put it into community language that the people can understand.'



Watch this video for more information on interpreters and cultural brokers.



## Practice task 8

1. What is the role of an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander interpreter?

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2. What are some situations where the services of an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander interpreter can be used?

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3. Other than an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander interpreter, name some other professionals who can bridge the gap between Indigenous Australian cultural practices and western culture.

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4. In what ways can a cultural broker be useful?

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# Summary

- ▶ It is important to reflect on awareness of your own culture in your work practices. By doing this, you can avoid making assumptions, reduce the chances of misinterpretation and avoid cultural bias.
- ▶ It is equally as important to reflect on other cultural realities in your work practices. By doing this, you work towards creating a culturally safe work environment.
- ▶ A culturally safe environment is one where people can live and work together with dignity. People are acknowledged and accepted for who they are and what they need. It is an environment based on mutual respect, shared meaning, and shared knowledge and experience.
- ▶ A culturally safe environment provides pathways to empowerment and self-determination.
- ▶ An organisation can be seen as being culturally competent when all aspects of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander cultures are integrated into education and care.
- ▶ An organisation and its workers need to develop a range of strategies to develop and maintain effective relationships that respect existing cultural differences. Strategies include sharing power in decision-making, demonstrating flexibility to acknowledge obligations that go beyond those from western cultures, and appropriate communication to overcome barriers.
- ▶ The legacy of a paternalistic approach by western education systems needs to be replaced. Organisations need to adapt their systems, policies and procedures to be culturally inclusive of the needs and expectations of their local community.
- ▶ Aboriginal liaison officers, interpreters, health workers and other professionals are important resources who can contribute to bridging the cultural and language gap between Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children and families, and non-Indigenous education and care services.







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3. Do you think racism and/or discrimination has played a part in the attitudes of the educators? Why or why not?

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Photo © Ludo Kuipers, OzOutback.com.au

## Topic 3

In this topic you will learn how to:

- 3A Support the development of effective partnerships**
- 3B Identify and utilise resources to promote partnerships**
- 3C Devise and document ways to support the delivery of education and care**
- 3D Integrate strategies that encourage self-determination and community control**

## Develop strategies for improved cultural safety

It is now recognised that the way forward in community services and programs is through culturally safe practices that offer community control and self-determination through a partnership approach. Successfully working in partnership with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people requires their full participation, consultation and involvement in decision-making about issues affecting them. You should be flexible when dealing with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people as their cultural practices do not readily accommodate a structured, highly organised system.

The following table maps this topic to the National Quality Standard and both national learning frameworks.

<b>National Quality Standard</b>		
	Quality Area 1: Educational program and practice	
	Quality Area 2: Children’s health and safety	
	Quality Area 3: Physical environment	
	Quality Area 4: Staffing arrangements	
	Quality Area 5: Relationships with children	
✓	Quality Area 6: Collaborative partnerships with families and communities	
	Quality Area 7: Governance and leadership	
<b>Early Years Learning Framework</b>	<b>My Time, Our Place</b>	
<b>Principles</b>		
✓	Secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships	
✓	Partnerships	
	High expectations and equity	
✓	Respect for diversity	
✓	Ongoing learning and reflective practice	
<b>Practice</b>		
✓	Holistic approaches	Holistic approaches
	Responsiveness to children	Collaboration with children
	Learning through play	Learning through play
	Intentional teaching	Intentionality
	Learning environments	Environments
✓	Cultural competence	Cultural competence
	Continuity of learning and transitions	Continuity and transitions
✓	Assessment for learning	Evaluation for wellbeing and learning
<b>Outcomes</b>		
✓	Children have a strong sense of identity	
✓	Children are connected to and contribute to their world	
✓	Children have a strong sense of wellbeing	
	Children are confident and involved learners	
	Children are effective communicators	

# 3A Support the development of effective partnerships

Successfully working in partnership with Indigenous Australian people requires their full participation, consultation and involvement in decision-making about issues affecting them. Participation in decision-making at a community level, with a focus on self-determination, is the focus of many service delivery programs.

## Develop and implement strategies to increase participation

Consultation and negotiation are central to effectively providing education and care to the children of Indigenous Australian people, as they often have a broad range of issues they need to address when dealing with your service. Establishing the level of involvement of the relevant Indigenous Australian people is an important part of the early negotiation process.

Identify early who the decision-makers are and how consultation is to occur; Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people generally want to recognise their community obligations and kinship relationships. Everyone who needs to be involved should be included in a meaningful way. Develop trust and credibility, allowing time for the decision-making process.

## Consultation with community representatives

Consultation with Elders and leaders in Indigenous Australian communities is essential in developing strategies to increase participation of Indigenous Australian people in education and care services. Observing appropriate protocols when working with Indigenous Australian people, including Elders and their communities, is critical to establishing positive and respectful relationships. Consultation should always be seen as a two-way process, with both parties learning together and from each other.



Providing Indigenous Australian people with the opportunity to become involved in education, health, community services, justice and housing programs gives ownership to local communities and is consistent with their decision-making processes.

## Community participation in decision-making processes

To increase the participation of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people in education and care services, it is important to promote and allow for community participation in decision-making processes. Although many communities defer to their Elders or designated leaders, these groups may also consult with their family members before settling on a decision. This means that families have to be consulted at all times on a wide range of matters.

A service provider's consultation should also include Indigenous Australian employees and Aboriginal liaison officers or professional support coordinators (PSCs), as these people can offer valuable insights into how to effectively engage with a community and its leaders.

## Culturally safe and appropriate care, services and practices

Education and care services and practices must be culturally appropriate to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander individuals' needs, particularly to overcome any suspicions Indigenous Australian people may have of non-Indigenous education systems. Well-informed coordinators can contribute to providing effective education by ensuring adequate training of educators about culturally appropriate services, responsibilities and practices. Workplace policies, procedures and strategies should likewise be tailored to meet the holistic needs of Indigenous Australian children and their families.

## Programs for Indigenous families

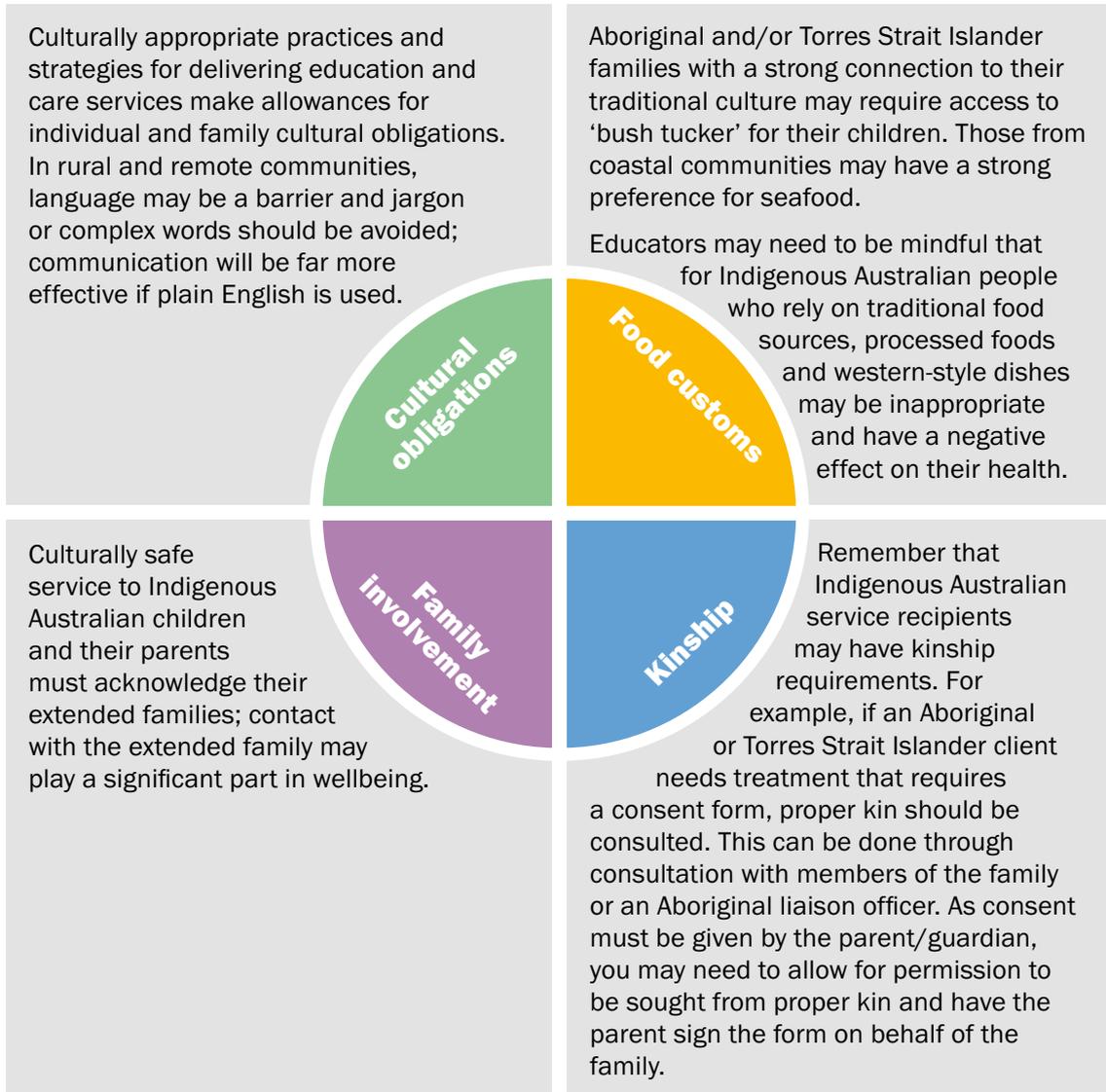
The number of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children attending mainstream early childhood education and care services has increased in recent years. Commonwealth government support is available to childcare services to ensure that they provide inclusive environments for children from Indigenous Australian families. For example, the Inclusion Support Programme (ISP) offers specialist support to help care services include Indigenous children.

Inclusion Agencies (IAs) are available to work with education and care services throughout Australia to help ensure that quality is provided; that is, education and care that is culturally safe, appropriate and meets the needs of Indigenous Australian children. Resources, training, support and advice about all aspects of service provision are available to children's services professionals.



## Other strategies to increase participation

Other important issues to identify when developing strategies to increase participation are outlined below.

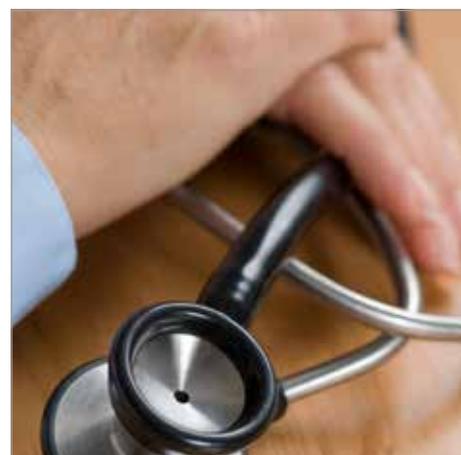


## Provide a service that caters for health issues

Although poor access to healthcare is a major factor for Indigenous Australian people, better education for mothers and children is possibly the most critical factor in reducing health issues.

You should be aware of the following common child health issues in Indigenous children:

- ▶ underweight newborns
- ▶ middle ear infections, causing speech delay and hearing disability if untreated
- ▶ diseases of the chest and throat
- ▶ injuries from accidents.



## Gender issues

Women's and men's business in the traditional cultural life of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people is generally taken seriously. Services therefore need to provide policy guidelines that observes traditional customs in relation to gender.

### Examples of policy guidelines

An Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander child may need to be helped in dressing or toileting by an educator of the same gender as there may be taboos about being seen naked by someone of a different gender.

There may be cultural barriers to allowing men in the same room as women.

Don't assume that women have attended antenatal classes or seen a doctor during their pregnancy; they may have different ideas about children's care than you.

Indigenous Australian people may feel more comfortable seeing an Indigenous Australian educator than a non-Indigenous educator at first contact.

## Access to services

It is vital that your rapport with each family helps them to feel welcome and access education and care services relevant to their needs. If your service refers families to an external service, ensure you pass on necessary information. This would not be confidential information – unless permission is given – but may include details of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander customs or languages.

You might help Indigenous Australian families access an Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Service (ACCHS), which is governed by an Aboriginal body. An ACCHS is different to an Aboriginal Medical Service (AMS) in that an AMS will be funded to support Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people, but not all AMSs are community controlled.

### You might tell families about (or refer them to) services such as:

- ▶ hospitals or other facilities/services; for example, admission, entry and discharge processes
- ▶ referral protocols
- ▶ reception and inquiry services
- ▶ diagnostic services
- ▶ inpatient services
- ▶ outpatient and community services
- ▶ screening services
- ▶ health promotion
- ▶ public health
- ▶ non-government agencies.

## Ongoing learning for staff and children

Culturally appropriate learning programs are an essential component for providing an inclusive and relevant education and care setting for Indigenous Australian children. Your service can do this by:

- ▶ enabling all staff to build knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander cultural practices through professional learning
- ▶ ensuring induction programs provide relevant education about Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander cultural practices
- ▶ developing the skills of educators to include Indigenous Australian history and cultural practices in programs and learning experiences.

Be aware that many Indigenous Australian people respond well to primary caregiving strategies where one educator remains the main educator for their child throughout the education and care process. This allows parents to develop a strong relationship of trust and understanding with the educator.

### Example

#### Effective partnerships

In the mid-1980s, the Nganampa Health Council introduced a strategy to improve antenatal care for women in Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara lands, South Australia.

The strategy involved developing a care record system for antenatal patients to be used in all Nganampa Health Council clinics. It introduced standard protocols for antenatal care, birthing and child healthcare.

When performance information from 1984 to 1996 was reviewed, the success of the strategy was revealed by a decrease in perinatal mortality and the proportion of low-birthweight babies, but an increase in the recorded mean birthweight.



## Practice task 9

1. Make a list of potential health issues that you think an educator should be aware of when caring for children from Indigenous Australian families.

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2. Make a list of the cultural issues an educator should be aware of when working with families to address the health needs of children in their care.

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# 3B Identify and utilise resources to promote partnerships

Strong community partnerships are fundamental to effective service delivery and self-determination. Facilitating this kind of relationship may require some level of formal structure, such as forming reference groups, determining a clear communication process or establishing a memorandum of understanding (MOU) between an education and care service and its community. Although you will not be required to initiate this kind of formal structure, it is useful to be aware of the processes outlined in this section.



## Form reference groups

Reference groups can be a useful way of gathering information and ideas, and resolving problems with the delivery of a service. For example, education-related reference groups can provide community views and advice in relation to issues such as children's health education, Indigenous Australian cultural heritage, selecting culturally appropriate toys, activities and learning experiences, and participation in appropriate celebrations with the Indigenous Australian community.

Reference groups need to acknowledge cultural considerations such as the place of Elders or community-designated leaders, gender, customs, taboos, and traditional practices and kinships. Indigenous Australian and non-Indigenous education and health professionals and Aboriginal liaison officers are also relevant personnel to consider contacting when forming reference groups. The following are ways that reference groups assist in understanding Indigenous Australian views and needs.

### What reference groups do to promote understanding of Indigenous Australians

- ▶ Provide advice about community or Indigenous cultural needs.
- ▶ Discuss and evaluate issues facing Indigenous clients in the community.
- ▶ Work collaboratively with the community to provide information and advice that supports the achievement of effective, responsive and culturally appropriate education and care.

## Memorandums of understanding

A memorandum of understanding (MOU) between an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander community and its local education and care service can provide a formal mechanism for the two groups to work collectively to improve Indigenous Australian people's education, health and wellbeing.

### **A memorandum of understanding with a community services organisation may provide for:**

- ▶ meeting the basic needs of the community, such as food, clothing and accommodation
- ▶ ensuring the safety of children, women, family and the community as a whole
- ▶ protecting the family from violence as a result of alcohol, drugs and substance abuse
- ▶ identifying and proposing solutions to underlying issues causing family problems
- ▶ taking a collaborative approach to helping single parents, older people, people with mental health problems and people with disabilities.

## **Mutual respect**

Mutual respect is an important factor in any relationship or partnership, especially at work. It helps lay the foundation for a culturally safe workplace and allows service recipients and service staff to establish common ground.

### **Strategies to foster an environment of mutual respect**

- ▶ Consult people when making decisions about new procedures to ensure they are culturally suitable.
- ▶ Create a welcoming environment.
- ▶ Encourage diversity by sharing cultural experiences.
- ▶ Support cross-cultural teams.
- ▶ Have a positive attitude. Be willing to learn about how and why people act the way they do and learn about their culture.
- ▶ Avoid making judgments based on people's looks or culture; your job is to care for and help people, not to judge.

## **Support the development of effective partnerships to facilitate quality services**

There are ways that education and care service providers can establish effective partnerships that increase uptake of services by people with support needs in Indigenous Australian communities.

These partnerships address:

- ▶ accessibility
- ▶ affordability
- ▶ accountability
- ▶ sharing information and resources
- ▶ appropriate services.

## Accessibility

The distance a child has to travel impacts on preschool and school attendance. Proportionally more Indigenous Australian people live in remote areas than non-Indigenous Australians. It can be difficult to access a preschool or school in remote areas, simply because there are fewer services available and because of the time and distance required to travel. Many Indigenous Australian communities are located more than 50 km from their nearest primary school.

Providing culturally appropriate care and programs provides incentive for Indigenous Australian people to access and participate in education services.

## Affordability

Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander communities are generally in a poorer economic position than non-Indigenous Australian communities. Affordability of services is therefore an important issue, particularly for Indigenous Australian people on low incomes. With limited economic means, access to all but the most basic health, welfare, education and community services is often denied. Even transport can be a significant issue for people who do not have access to concession public transport fares or who live in remote areas. The cost of medication can also be a deterrent to participation in health programs. Affordability can be an important factor influencing preschool access for children from Indigenous Australian families.



Some ways the Aboriginal-specific preschool sector in New South Wales responded to access and affordability issues were through:

- ▶ low fees
- ▶ a bus service to promote access and participation.

(Source: Aboriginal Early Childhood Support & Learning Inc. Information Sheet, August 2013)

## Accountability

Fundamental to the success of any partnership arrangement for delivering services to Indigenous Australian people with support needs is the accountability of all parties for the service.

A coordinator can support the development of effective partnerships by helping to establish accountability between Indigenous Australian communities, a reference group and other partners to the service. Accountability relates to maintaining aims and objectives, ensuring that financial requirements are met, following project plans and reporting on activities.

## Acceptability of appropriate care and workplace service

Services and programs that are developed in partnership with provider staff, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people and their communities should meet cultural acceptability requirements.

Partnerships are about working collaboratively in an environment of respect, trust and equality. Programs and services that most benefit Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander communities are likely to be those that connect education and care service delivery with projects of community concern and that build community capacity.

### Capacity-building can be enhanced when:

- ▶ the partnership evolves from the concerns of the whole community and is not imposed from outside
- ▶ there is community ownership of a service and the way it is delivered, from planning and development through to implementation and evaluation
- ▶ communication is effective and information freely available so the arrangement meets the whole community's needs.

## Two-way communication

To maintain effective partnerships, there needs to be a two-way flow of information and resources between the community and various other parties in the relationship. It is important that Indigenous Australian voices are well-represented and clearly heard in the process to ensure cultural needs are met and the objectives of the partnership are achieved.

## Use effective strategies to maintain relationships and resolve misunderstandings

Much about the relationships between Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people and non-Indigenous people and institutions can be explained through the history of Indigenous Australian dispossession.

Some of the effects of the history of European settlement for Indigenous Australian people living in contemporary Australian society are listed below. Services providers can respond with strategies that build trust and confidence in the service being offered.

### Some effects of the history of European settlement

This emotional and cultural experience shapes the outlook of many Indigenous Australian people and the way they interact with non-Indigenous communities and institutions.

Barriers and stereotypes exist that impede access to services and the ability of an Indigenous Australian person to develop their skills.

Many Indigenous Australian people do not trust institutions.

## Develop and maintain relationships

Providing a culturally safe environment and implementing strategies that reflect an understanding of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander history and place are essential.

Services providers should:

- ▶ foster an understanding of spiritual relationships, the Dreaming and Indigenous Australian history
- ▶ be aware of family relationships, kinships and the place of Elders as decision-makers
- ▶ be flexible enough to support different cultural values and beliefs
- ▶ take a holistic approach to service, recognising all aspects of an Indigenous Australian child's life
- ▶ provide culturally appropriate care and educational programs, and acknowledge individual differences
- ▶ maintain effective networks to ensure appropriate referrals can be made.

## Acknowledging barriers

The way educators interact with Indigenous Australian staff and service recipients needs to take into account the barriers Indigenous Australian people face. Some of the strategies to help overcome these barriers are shown below.

### **It is useful for an organisation to have strategies in place that allow it to:**

- ▶ assess each family and child individually, ignoring stereotypes
- ▶ understand what identity can mean for each Indigenous Australian person
- ▶ acknowledge the effects of the stolen generations and the difficulty some Indigenous Australian people have as a result of the clash of cultures
- ▶ be flexible and allow for different concepts of time
- ▶ identify and deal with issues of bias or race
- ▶ take into account language and literacy differences.

## Trust of institutions

Because of many Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people's experiences, either directly or indirectly through family members, some may be reluctant to use education and care services. Some strategies that can be used to personalise the services are shown below.

### **Some strategies to personalise the service**

- ▶ Make sure educators are aware of trust issues and the reasons for them.
- ▶ Make services welcoming and help Indigenous Australian people with support needs become comfortable with the service.
- ▶ Reassure parents and families that their information is treated confidentially and, if they seem uncomfortable, explain why you need to collect it.
- ▶ Involve Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people or organisations in strategy development.

## Example

**Cultural misunderstanding**

Rowena, an educator in a busy metropolitan childcare centre, decides on a lifestyle change. When the opportunity arises, she applies for and is appointed to a job on an Aboriginal reserve. Rowena had positive relationships with many of the families in the city service, so decides to approach her relationships in her new job in the same way.

On her first day, Rowena turns up to work without having consulted with any community members beforehand. She doesn't realise that some of the children are dropped off at the centre by family members other than their parents, and makes comments assuming that this is the case.

A new family is also starting on Rowena's first day, and when she first welcomes them to the service, she gives them lots of paperwork to fill out before they have a conversation. They look very uncomfortable and leave most of it blank. Much to Rowena's confusion and dismay, they seem aloof and don't provide much information about their child in the conversation.



## Resolve difficulties, differences and misunderstandings

It is important to develop positive relationships in order to avoid difficulties and misunderstandings in the workplace. To establish positive relationships with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander families and colleagues, your service needs to implement culturally appropriate practices. This includes:

- ▶ negotiating culturally appropriate guidelines
- ▶ identifying appropriate mediators
- ▶ negotiating a workplace code of practice.

## Example

**Resources**

Josie is an educator employed by a local childcare centre. Her role is to try to bridge the gap and enhance the communication between educators and the local Indigenous Australian community. Josie has developed a range of programs and resources that will encourage increased participation and an improved partnership between the community and the centre.

One idea is to have visual images of Indigenous Australian people on the walls and in the books in the centre. She hopes that these images will make people feel welcome.

Josie will also be travelling around the community in a small bus speaking to the Elders and other community leaders about families using the free bus service to travel to and from the childcare centre.



## Practice task 10

1. What are some of the functions of reference groups in assisting and understanding Indigenous Australian people's views and needs?

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2. What are some of the functions of a memorandum of understanding (MOU) between an education and care service and the Indigenous Australian community?

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3. Why is accountability fundamental to any partnership with Indigenous Australian communities?

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4. Casey is an educator. She is aware of the affordability issue that affects the Indigenous Australian people in the community, particularly the access to education and care services. Casey has been asked to develop a relationship with the local community and start a program to make education and care services more affordable and to improve attendance. Outline the strategies Casey needs to consider.

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# 3C Devise and document ways to support the delivery of education and care

It is important to work in partnership with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people to create and record culturally safe strategies for education and care. This will encourage an increase in participation in education and care. Here are some strategies that can be documented.

## Providing a workplace induction program

A sound, inclusive workplace induction program provides new employees with the information and resources about Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander culture to help them adjust work practices to meet client needs.

## Developing guidelines for appropriate behaviour

Guidelines should support appropriate behaviour and work practices to ensure that:

- ▶ care is delivered to meet individual preferences and cultural needs
- ▶ children and families have access to culturally appropriate resources; for example, Indigenous Australian music, art or books
- ▶ individuals' problems are dealt with in an ethical and culturally appropriate manner
- ▶ Aboriginal liaison officers are used as required.

## Understanding your own culture and history

To understand other cultures better, you must be aware of your own culture and history, and how this influences the way you think and act. This involves acknowledging your own values, expectations and beliefs. It also involves recognising the cultural influences on your day-to-day behaviour; for example, the way you communicate or deal with conflict.

## Understanding the contributing factors

It is helpful to understand the contributing factors to an issue. For instance, the main factors that contribute to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people's current health issues are:

- ▶ the dispossession of Indigenous Australian people from their land
- ▶ the legacy of the stolen generations and loss of identity
- ▶ discrimination
- ▶ social, political and economic inequality
- ▶ geographic and social isolation
- ▶ poor access to services or culturally inappropriate services.

## Understanding cultural terms

Understanding cultural terms is also important if you are trying to accommodate the cultural differences of people with support needs. For instance, Indigenous Australian people often define illness in cultural terms:

- ▶ Suicide may be ascribed to being 'sung' (cursed).
- ▶ Loss of mobility due to a stroke may be interpreted as a 'payback' for some kind of offence.
- ▶ Depression could be 'sick for country', after being removed from their birthplace/ Dreaming.

## Finding similarities and common ground

While there may be marked differences between Indigenous Australian and non-Indigenous cultural beliefs and practices, educators, children and families may also share cultural similarities. Common ground can be achieved through observance of religious practices, gender roles, interest in sport and recreation, and art and music, among other things.

## Legislative context

Organisations in Australia must comply with a variety of federal Acts and national standards. National anti-discrimination legislation has a number of aspects, as shown in the following.

<p><b>Age discrimination</b></p>	<p><b>Age Discrimination Act 2004</b></p> <p>The <i>Age Discrimination Act 2004</i> (Cth) is a relatively new law which is especially important considering Australia's ageing population. It protects people who are discriminated against because of their age and states that, regardless of age, everyone has the same right to equality before the law.</p> <p>The Act also allows appropriate benefits to be given to people of a certain age, particularly younger and older people, according to their circumstances. Objectives of the Act also include removing barriers to older people participating in society and changing negative stereotypes about older people.</p> <p>Exemptions include stipulations regarding youth wages, healthcare and voluntary work.</p>
<p><b>Disability discrimination</b></p>	<p><b>Disability Discrimination Act 1992</b></p> <p>The <i>Disability Discrimination Act 1992</i> (Cth) gives a broad definition of disability and prohibits direct or indirect discrimination based on disability. It also prohibits discrimination against anyone who associates with people who have disabilities; these may be friends, relatives, carers and co-workers. The Act makes it unlawful to discriminate in the areas of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ employment</li> <li>▶ education</li> <li>▶ access to public premises</li> <li>▶ purchase of house and land</li> <li>▶ provision of goods, services and facilities</li> <li>▶ administration of Commonwealth Government laws and programs.</li> </ul> <p>Exemptions to the <i>Disability Discrimination Act</i> include when a potential employer would be placed under unjustifiable hardship in order to employ a person with a disability, although the employer is expected to make reasonable adjustments. An example of an unjustifiable hardship might be the cost of extensive renovations to allow for wheelchair access to and throughout a small, second-floor studio owned by a small business.</p>

<p><b>Racial discrimination</b></p>	<p><b><i>Racial Discrimination Act 1975</i></b></p> <p>The <i>Racial Discrimination Act 1975</i> (Cth) covers all of Australia and prohibits racial discrimination and offensive behaviour based on racial hatred. It covers discrimination based on race, colour, descent and national or ethnic origin. It also protects those who may be discriminated against based on their association with people of a particular ethnicity. The Act applies to everyone in Australia and all organisations.</p> <p>The <i>Racial Hatred Act 1995</i> (Cth) provides an avenue for people to complain about racist behaviour that offends, insults, humiliates or intimidates others in public. Exceptions to the law include when the behaviour is a matter of public interest (such as a newspaper report on racially based violence), or is part of an academic discussion which is not malicious or spiteful. These exceptions often involve rights to free speech.</p>
<p><b>Sex discrimination</b></p>	<p><b><i>Sex Discrimination Act 1984</i></b></p> <p>The <i>Sex Discrimination Act 1984</i> (Cth) explains that it is unlawful to discriminate against someone based on their sex, marital status, pregnancy or potential pregnancy. It sets out laws against sexual harassment as well as dismissal from work based on family duties, including pregnancy.</p> <p>According to the Act, it is unlawful to refuse to provide goods or services, education or employment based on a person's sex. The Act also covers discrimination within awards and enterprise bargaining, insurance and superannuation, Commonwealth laws and programs, and accommodation.</p> <p>Sexual harassment is included in the Act because it is a form of discrimination to treat a person unfairly because of their sex.</p> <p>An exception to the Act includes when goods or services can only be applied to one sex, for example female- or male-specific healthcare. Another exception covers employing a person to look after a child in the child's home. Sexual discrimination in the training and ordination of religious ministers is also not covered under the Act.</p>

<p><b>Human rights</b></p>	<p><b><i>Australian Human Rights Commission Act 1986</i></b></p> <p>The Australian Human Rights Commission (initially called the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission) was established in 1986 to deal with breaches of anti-discrimination laws and to promote human rights education.</p> <p>This Act only covers actions or policies of the Commonwealth.</p> <p>The Act promotes human rights for all people, and covers most forms of discrimination not already covered in the other Acts, including discrimination on the basis of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ criminal records</li> <li>▶ marital status</li> <li>▶ medical records</li> <li>▶ political opinions</li> <li>▶ religion</li> <li>▶ sexual preference</li> <li>▶ social origin</li> <li>▶ trade union activity.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Privacy</b></p>	<p><b><i>Privacy Act 1988</i></b></p> <p>If your organisation is in the habit of collecting information about customers or clients, its operations will come under this Commonwealth Act. This Act deems personal information about individuals to be sensitive, such as information about:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ criminal records</li> <li>▶ health</li> <li>▶ membership of a professional or trade association</li> <li>▶ membership of a trade union</li> <li>▶ political affiliations or opinions</li> <li>▶ racial or ethnic origin</li> <li>▶ religious affiliations or beliefs</li> <li>▶ sexual orientation or practices.</li> </ul> <p>This information about a person could be used by others to discriminate against them or identify them when they may wish to remain anonymous. Your organisation should inform you of your responsibilities regarding individuals' privacy. It should also inform you of its responsibilities with regards to your privacy. It is always advisable to take any information provided to you about any individual as confidential.</p> <p>People generally have a right to see and correct, if necessary, files of personal information kept about them by organisations. Individuals are usually only denied access to files about them if their own or another person's safety is at risk, or if there are other legalities involved.</p>

**Equal opportunity**

***Equal Opportunity Act 2010 (Vic.) and Equal Opportunity Act 1984 (WA)***

The *Equal Opportunity Act 2010 (Vic.)* makes it against the law to discriminate against a person based on their personal characteristics. It is also against the law to sexually harass someone, or victimise them for speaking up about their own or someone else’s rights.

The *Equal Opportunity Act 1984 (WA)* has the objectives of eliminating discrimination on the grounds of sex, marital status, pregnancy, family responsibility, family status, race, religious or political conviction, impairment, age or, in certain cases, gender history, and eliminating sexual and racial harassment. It also aims to promote recognition and acceptance of the equality of men and women, and the equality of people of all races, ages, abilities, and religious and political convictions.

**Culturally appropriate guidelines**

In consultation with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander community leaders and workers, educators should develop culturally appropriate guidelines for education and care. Guidelines give a source of direction and a behaviour code that ensures culturally appropriate services are offered.

**Culturally appropriate guidelines**

- ▶ Show respect for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander cultures and languages.
- ▶ Be sensitive to Indigenous Australian people’s relationship with the land.
- ▶ Learn how to pronounce names correctly.
- ▶ Speak clearly and in plain English.
- ▶ Communicate openly, honestly and with sincerity.
- ▶ Establish rapport to build trust and respect.
- ▶ Be supportive and non-judgmental.
- ▶ Observe the fundamentals of nonverbal communication and active listening.

**Workplace code of practice**

Negotiating a workplace code of practice, based on your knowledge of Indigenous Australian workers and with community consultation, is a good way to ensure that all employees operate from an agreed framework of understanding.

Here are some points to consider.

**Professional and ethical behaviour**

Educators must ensure they do not do or say things that are unprofessional or detrimental to the health, and emotional and mental wellbeing of colleagues, children and families. This could include culturally unsound practices, such as being judgmental, or failing to acknowledge an Indigenous Australian worker’s family obligations in the event of a death in the extended family.

**People’s rights**

It is vital that a code of practice recognises people’s rights, including those that are protected by law. People have a right to participate in traditional cultural practices and have their cultural heritage recognised.

## Empathy

Any workplace code of practice should make reference to empathising with Indigenous Australian families and workers, to share and understand their feelings and experiences.

## Flexibility

Flexibility in dealing with Indigenous Australian people acknowledges that their ways of doing things are not necessarily structured or organised in the same way as you might be used to.

## Capacity to take turns

The ability to stand back and wait for your turn to speak or do things is important in developing a good working relationship with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people.

## Encourage increased participation

Encouraging the participation of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander communities is important in the planning and development of programs. Thinking about what is culturally appropriate when setting up a program means that participation is more likely to be ongoing.

Consultation and negotiation are central to getting Indigenous Australian people to participate. Establishing the level of involvement of the relevant community members is an important part of the early negotiation process. Lay the groundwork by identifying who the decision-makers are and how consultation is to occur. It may be a good idea to begin with a focus group or ask an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander support worker to be involved to gain some insights into the decision-makers' role and what might be the best way to approach the community in a culturally sensitive way.



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## Encourage ongoing participation

To encourage ongoing participation and involvement, don't present ideas driven by process and rules that do not match the decision-making and communication styles of the group you are interacting with. Make involvement meaningful, try to encourage trust and credibility, and allow time for the decision-making process. Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people generally want to recognise their community obligations and kinship relationships, which may mean decision-making is slowed.

Consider the following factors to encourage initial and ongoing participation.

### Strategies to encourage participation

- ▶ Ask a focus group about particular cultural information relevant to the community.
- ▶ Identify the decision-makers.
- ▶ Negotiate where and when the consultation will take place.
- ▶ Know who should participate; for example, Elders and local family group representatives.
- ▶ Establish which communication methods are required.
- ▶ Make time for decision-making.
- ▶ Collaborate to make people feel a part of the decision-making process.
- ▶ Develop trust, credibility and mutual understanding.

**Example**

**Document a culturally safe delivery service**

Philip has been given the task of improving the delivery of education and care in a service that has a majority of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children. Philip arranges to speak with a support worker to contact the main decision-makers in this community. He visits some Elders and with the help of the support worker, gains an understanding of the needs of the community. Philip will use this information in developing the next stage of his program.



He records the processes he has undertaken so that he can reflect on how they worked and provide information to colleagues about successful processes and relationships.

## Practice task 11

1. You have been asked to participate in a reference group at work to come up with a draft code of practice for the workplace. Your group has been given a list of guidelines to consider when writing the code to encourage cultural safety for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children and families.

Complete this table by writing down a workplace example that explains the guidelines provided.

<b>Professional and ethical behaviour</b>
<b>People's rights</b>
<b>Empathy</b>

<b>Flexibility</b>
<b>Capacity to take turns</b>

2. List **four** areas of discrimination legislation that exist in Australia.

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3. What benefits are there in having a negotiated workplace code of practice that reflects the needs of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people?

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# 3D Integrate strategies that encourage self-determination and community control

The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights defines self-determination as the 'right of people to freely determine their political status and pursue their own economic, social and cultural development'.

Here are some points to consider.

## What is self-determination?

Most Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people take self-determination to mean the opportunity to effectively participate and make decisions on issues that relate to them and to manage their own affairs. Community control is now generally seen as a requirement in overcoming health disadvantages of Indigenous Australian people.

## Achieving self-determination

Education or policy intervention from outside the community has not always been able to adequately deal with the education issues of Indigenous Australian children. Developing effective working relationships with Indigenous Australian services and groups in the community increases access to education and care services. These services are more responsive to Indigenous Australian people's needs and issues because they are staffed by Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people who have a shared understanding and empathy.

## Self-determination

Self-determination may have a different meaning for different Indigenous Australian people because of different experiences and varying levels of access to resources. Historically, policies and programs were often imposed with little consultation and, in most cases, did not reflect the ideals and views of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people. Despite these differences, there is one main shared view, as outlined in the following information.

### Healthcare and community services providers need to:

- ▶ plan and review new and existing services
- ▶ use the views and expertise of Indigenous Australian communities on different issues
- ▶ find appropriate ways to make services more friendly and welcoming to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people
- ▶ discuss Indigenous Australian identities and how they impact community members.

## Community control

A coordinator's role in a health or community services facility is to motivate, encourage and engage individuals and members of the community in all health service activities, including service promotion. This also includes encouraging community leadership development and health education. By definition, community control allows the community itself to define and prioritise its health needs.

Here is further information about what community control assumes.

### **Community control**

The whole community has the opportunity to participate in the decision-making process; this is not controlled by the service or program.

Government is prepared to invest in community autonomy by providing support and the opportunity for development.

Health service staff must respond to community health needs.

## **Support self-determination and community control**

In the spirit of self-determination and community control, Indigenous Australian communities operate more than 140 Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services (ACCHSs) or Aboriginal Medical Services (AMSs) across Australia. Although these are local services, they are represented by a national body.

Here is more information about local and national representation.

### **Local services**

A local Aboriginal Medical Service delivers holistic, comprehensive and culturally appropriate healthcare to its community. There is a range of services providers, from large multi-functional services with medical practitioners and allied health professionals, through to small organisations where primary healthcare is provided by nurses or Aboriginal health workers.

### **National body**

Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services throughout Australia are represented by the national peak Aboriginal health body, the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO). More information can be found at: <http://aspirelr.link/naccho>

## **Involvement in planning of services and programs**

Any decisions to be made about planning or reviewing a particular education and care service should involve members of the Indigenous Australian community. The educators in an education and care service have expertise in children's education and care, but they need to work alongside and in collaboration with community leaders. These leaders are best placed to provide an insight into the workings and cultural context of their community.

Community control means that the direction of education and care services is driven by the community; therefore community members must be involved in the planning process. Strategies that involve a community control model are more likely to lead to improved education outcomes because they evolve from the community itself.

## Involvement in delivery of services and programs

Self-determination means that Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people are given the opportunity to participate and make decisions that relate to their own affairs. Indigenous Australian people can choose to be trained in qualifications that enable them to deliver education and care to their community. This strategy is being used as a way of overcoming the education disadvantages of some Indigenous Australian people and their communities. Workers trained in the education and health issues of Indigenous Australian people can work alongside the community with a unique view and understanding of the issues particular to an area. They may also be able to find appropriate ways to make services more friendly and welcoming, increasing attendance in education and care.



### Example

#### Encourage self-determination and community control

Ruby was born in a remote area of Australia and had always wanted to train as an educator. When she completed her degree, she was keen to go back and work in her local community. The Department of Education employed her as a teacher. She works alongside other education professionals where they offer a comprehensive range of education and care services. Each education professional is multi-skilled and offers holistic and culturally appropriate education to their community. Local community leaders have a key role in decisions made regarding their early childhood service, and Ruby enjoys working alongside the community to evaluate and review the services provided.



## Practice task 12

1. What is the common definition of self-determination for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people?

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2. What **three** factors describe community control?

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## Summary

- ▶ Culturally safe practices offer community control and self-determination through a partnership approach.
- ▶ Strong community partnerships are central to effective service delivery and for Indigenous Australian people's self-determination.
- ▶ The history of white occupation is a key feature behind many of the critical issues that influence workplace relationships with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people.
- ▶ Numerous cross-cultural issues need to be considered when developing effective cultural safety strategies.
- ▶ Adequate and appropriate resourcing, particularly by establishing reference groups and formal agreements to support community self-determination of service delivery, contributes to the success of community service programs.
- ▶ Working in partnership with local Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people in the community ensures that their local cultural differences are recognised and respected.
- ▶ Organisations in Australia must comply with federal legislation regarding discrimination.
- ▶ Encouraging participation of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people in the decision-making around children's services is an important aspect of community control.
- ▶ Self-determination and community control are the underpinning concepts that enable the delivery of children's services to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people.







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## Topic 4

In this topic you will learn how to:

- 4A Agree on outcomes to measure cultural safety strategies**
- 4B Involve Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people in evaluations**
- 4C Evaluate programs and services against desired outcomes**
- 4D Revise strategies based on evaluation**

## Evaluate cultural safety strategies

Services that are delivered in a culturally safe environment lead to empowerment and self-determination for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people and their communities. To achieve this, it is important to include Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people in all aspects of evaluating the effectiveness and cultural safety of educational programs.

The evaluation process includes firstly agreeing on measurable outcomes, secondly on evaluating programs and services against these outcomes, and finally revising cultural safety strategies. There are several processes that can be used for evaluation, but a model that may better suit Indigenous Australian communities might need to have less structure and allow success to be measured in a specific cultural context.

Consultation is vital in each step of any evaluation. If revisions of culturally safe strategies are required, these revisions are more likely to be implemented and successfully adopted when the community has had control throughout the process.

The following table maps this topic to the National Quality Standard and both national learning frameworks.

<b>National Quality Standard</b>		
	Quality Area 1: Educational program and practice	
	Quality Area 2: Children’s health and safety	
	Quality Area 3: Physical environment	
	Quality Area 4: Staffing arrangements	
	Quality Area 5: Relationships with children	
✓	Quality Area 6: Collaborative partnerships with families and communities	
	Quality Area 7: Governance and leadership	
<b>Early Years Learning Framework</b>	<b>My Time, Our Place</b>	
<b>Principles</b>		
✓	Secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships	
✓	Partnerships	
	High expectations and equity	
✓	Respect for diversity	
✓	Ongoing learning and reflective practice	
<b>Practice</b>		
✓	Holistic approaches	Holistic approaches
	Responsiveness to children	Collaboration with children
	Learning through play	Learning through play
	Intentional teaching	Intentionality
	Learning environments	Environments
✓	Cultural competence	Cultural competence
	Continuity of learning and transitions	Continuity and transitions
✓	Assessment for learning	Evaluation for wellbeing and learning
<b>Outcomes</b>		
✓	Children have a strong sense of identity	
✓	Children are connected to and contribute to their world	
✓	Children have a strong sense of wellbeing	
	Children are confident and involved learners	
	Children are effective communicators	

# 4A Agree on outcomes to measure cultural safety strategies

Through consultation with the local Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander community, you can identify what the community needs to establish a culturally safe practice and develop clear, measurable indicators for evaluating the effectiveness of culturally safe strategies.

The community can identify and make decisions on the culturally safe practices suitable for their early childhood education and care service. To begin evaluating a service or program, a number of agreed outcomes need to be developed so the success of cultural strategies can be measured. The following questions may be useful in these discussions.

## Examples of outcomes that can be measured

- ▶ Has the service been welcoming and friendly?
- ▶ Is my family welcome here?
- ▶ Is there always a safe place available to talk?
- ▶ Are there Indigenous Australian workers in this workplace?
- ▶ Does it value Indigenous Australian cultural icons such as artwork or flags?
- ▶ Does the service have information on Indigenous Australian events happening in the community?

## Measures of success

Measuring success is an objective process in which strategies are identified and a program or service is examined to see whether the strategies have been successfully implemented and are operating as they should. Actions can then be taken to implement changes to improve the service or program.

Cultural safety strategies can be subjective and specific to the community in which they apply. Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people may have general cultural sensitivities you need to be aware of, but keep in mind that these may not apply to all groups. Measuring the success of cultural safety will vary in different communities.

Community leaders will need to provide insights into which culturally safe practices should be in operation, and how the success of these practices will be measured based on cultural context.

The measure of success needs to be based on collaboration with the community, and should be specifically developed and agreed to by that community. The measures of success and agreed outcomes can only be identified after this has occurred.



**Example**

**Measure success against agreed outcomes**

To measure the success of the cultural safety strategies implemented by a program or service, it may be helpful to ask the following questions as a way of working towards agreed outcomes with the community members involved.

Does the service have:

- ▶ a willingness to explore and recognise Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander values, expectations, beliefs, attitudes, and ways of communicating and dealing with conflict?
- ▶ an understanding of how Indigenous Australian cultural practices and history shape many of their interactions with non-Indigenous Australians?
- ▶ a process to regularly reflect on cultural safety practices?

## Practice task 13

1. Explain why the measure of success is variable and subjective.

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2. Write an example where a measure of success for cultural safety may differ between **two** communities.

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# 4B Involve Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people in evaluations

When evaluating cultural safety strategies, it is important to involve Elders of the local Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander community, as well as community leaders and local family group representatives. The decisions about how the evaluation process will occur and who will be involved need to be made during the initial planning process. Mediators or support workers could be involved to offer their understanding of the workings of the community.



Involving all key stakeholders and community leaders in the collaborative process will mean that a broad number of responses, experiences and viewpoints are collected. Actively involving local Indigenous Australian people from the early stages will mean that measures of success will reflect the cultural values of the community.

## Seek feedback

Seeking and recording feedback needs to occur throughout the consultation process. Events and points of view need to be recorded and appropriately filed. The feedback received can be used to draw conclusions about actions or changes that may need to be implemented in the delivery of the service or program. Having accurate documentation means that there is a record of evidence and examples to back up the need for a change.

The records of the feedback you receive need to include accurate details of comments and discussions, as well as notes on comments made by community members. Seeking feedback requires careful listening and mediating skills; be mindful of allowing enough time for answers while also thinking about keeping the discussion on track.

Feedback is more likely to be authentic and meaningful if you develop a relationship of respect and partnership with all the people involved in the discussion. This will also mean the results will be more likely to be in context for the community and will benefit the services being evaluated.

### Example

#### Cooperative evaluations

Julia is employed as an Aboriginal educator and has been asked to begin planning for an evaluation on the delivery of a specific education and care program run by the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early childhood service. The evaluation aims to see if the program's culturally safe strategies are adequate and meet the needs of the local community. Julia is making a list of the key decision-makers and representatives of the community who will need to have their viewpoints recorded. Julia is identifying the best location for the meetings and debating the most appropriate methods for recording the conversations. The records Julia gathers will need to be used later for summarising and making conclusions about the service. These will eventually become recommendations for improvements.

## Practice task 14

You have been given the task of planning an evaluation of an early childhood service in a local community. The evaluation aims to see if the program's culturally safe strategies are adequate and meet the needs of the local community.

List some of the things that need to be done and considered in the initial stages of preparation. Think about collaboration and the importance of accurate recording of the conversations and feedback.

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# 4C Evaluate programs and services against desired outcomes

Once the desired outcomes have been identified and agreed upon, evaluation can occur. The set of agreed outcomes will be used to determine if the service or program being evaluated has met the needs of the community. They will be used as a reference point to look into the level of cultural safety offered.

The leaders and representatives who will be involved in the feedback will be selected based on the scope and aims of the evaluation. If possible, it is a good idea to incorporate a wide variety of people, including individuals with support needs, volunteers, permanent and casual educators and staff.



Findings and recommendations should be put together and shared with the appropriate people. Information needs to be collected in a format that is easy to collate and must clearly show the findings. Data must be easily summarised and condensed into a format that is easy to read and share.

## Analyse feedback

To analyse feedback gathered about a program or service, the information will need to be collected and collated. Data collecting can occur by face-to-face questioning, or by preparing a written or online evaluation form. This type of data is called quantitative data because the results it provides are expressed as numbers. For example, if you ask health workers how many times they provide a particular service to an individual in a week, the results would be a quantity represented by numbers. Other examples of ways to collect quantitative data include interviewing with closed questions (questions requiring yes/no answers) and observation.

Another form of data you can collect is called qualitative data. This is typically more descriptive and is more difficult to analyse. Qualitative data is useful for case studies where you want to find out something in detail about someone or a group; for example, how a certain action or event made them feel. Generally, this form of data collection involves smaller numbers of participants and is best gathered through interviewing. For determining cultural safety, qualitative data might be useful when collecting feedback that is subjective and for responses about levels of comfort or feeling welcomed.

### Example

#### Evaluate services against outcomes

Clive recently completed his evaluation and now needs to present his findings to his coordinator. His coordinator is looking forward to hearing about the strategies that can be implemented that will improve the cultural safety of the early childhood education and care service. Clive has used a quantitative method for collecting information from the staff, parents and families, and the local community. Clive will present his results in a table format to show the numbers of people he interviewed and examples of their responses to the questions he asked them. Clive will summarise the data and show how the service's cultural safety strategies already in place compare with the strategies that the community would like to see in place.



## Practice task 15

1. Explain the uses of quantitative data and give examples of this form of data collection.

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2. What are the benefits of using qualitative data for gathering information about a person's feelings; for example, their experience of the level of cultural safety provided?

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# 4D Revise strategies based on evaluation

Revision is the final stage of the evaluation process. When the evaluation of cultural safety strategies has been concluded, there are likely to be areas that have been identified as needing revision. In some cases new strategies may be required to be introduced.

To ensure changes are implemented in the most meaningful way and that they suit the specific needs of the community to which they apply, key decision-makers should be engaged for their help and advice. Consultation and involvement with local Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people is vital in determining areas for improvement and developing strategies to implement change. When modifying delivery strategies to accommodate the changes recommended by an evaluation, you should involve participation from the community so they have some control over how the changes will occur.



## Make suggestions for improvement

The improvements made to enhance the cultural safety of a program or service delivery can vary from very small changes to large organisational change. These changes will be implemented at different speeds according to the scope of the changes and the resources required to implement them. Housing, buildings, transport, money for purchases, skill development of staff and additional staffing may have to be budgeted for and may not immediately appear. Resources will have to be redirected to accommodate changes.

It is important to develop a plan that outlines how the service can work towards putting suggestions and improvements in place. Improvements in making a service more culturally safe and welcoming to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people will be valued and seen as something worth working towards. Feedback from the local Indigenous Australian leaders and key stakeholders should continue; an open dialogue demonstrates respect and that improvements in cultural safety are an ongoing priority.

### Example

#### Revise strategies based on evaluations

A list of improvements is presented to the coordinators of an early childhood service that operates within an Indigenous Australian community. The suggestions are based on an evaluation and feedback from the Elders of the community and several recommendations refer to improving the cultural safety of the service. One item involves improving the atmosphere of the entrance foyer of the building to make it more welcoming to Indigenous Australian people. Another idea presented by the Elders is to provide opportunities for the community to contribute to the children's cultural activities. The coordinators put together a plan for some activities that could incorporate community participation. They ask the local community Elders to present this back to the community.



# Practice task 16

Read the case study and answer the questions that follow.

## Case study

Glen's young son attends an early childhood service in his local neighbourhood. Recently, he was told that he might notice some changes at the service over the following weeks. The changes are a result of feedback gathered from interviews that Glen and some other local Aboriginal community members participated in several weeks earlier. Glen notices over the next few weeks that there are some new Indigenous Australian staff members employed at the centre, and the Aboriginal flag and other cultural symbols appear. Glen feels that this makes the service more welcoming to him and the people in his community.

1. What evidence is there that the changes were aimed at improving cultural safety and increasing participation by the local Aboriginal Australian people?

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2. What resources might have been redirected and used to implement the revised strategies and suggested improvements?

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## Summary

- ▶ Consultation will enable agreed outcomes to be developed and can then be used to measure success.
- ▶ Measures of success need to be developed by the community for which they are to be used.
- ▶ Cultural safety will differ between communities.
- ▶ Involve Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people in the collaboration process to enhance its meaningfulness to the local community.
- ▶ Keep accurate documentation and records of the feedback. When interviewing, listen closely and allow time for responses.
- ▶ Analyse feedback carefully and present recommendations in a clear way.
- ▶ Use quantitative and/or qualitative data for the collection of feedback.
- ▶ Consultation should be employed when revising and implementing any new strategies.
- ▶ Improvements in cultural safety can be small or large, but either way will require a redirection of resources for implementation.

# Learning checkpoint 4

## Evaluate cultural safety strategies

Read the case study, and then answer the questions that follow.

### Case study

Dylan is an Elder who is assisting in the evaluation of an education and care service. The majority of the families who attend the service are from Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander communities and travel various distances every week to attend.

Dylan has asked interview questions and has been involved in small group discussions to help identify how best to improve the cultural safety of the centre. Dylan is one of several Elders who are involved. Over many weeks they have developed a set of measures that can be used to examine the cultural safety of the centre.

When a list of suggested improvements is finally developed, Dylan believes the suggestions are a good representation of the feedback from the Elders. The recommendations should improve and encourage further participation of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander families at the centre.

1. Why is it important to have Dylan and the other Elders agree on outcomes for measures of success before an evaluation begins?

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2. What type of data collection was used in this evaluation?

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3. What is the value of revising cultural strategies based on evaluation?

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