

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS FOR NON-INDIAN [CHILD WELFARE] WORKERS AND NEWCOMERS TO TRIBAL COMMUNITIES



1. Keep in mind that you are the "foreigner" in "Indian Country": it is up to you to adapt and learn the Indian ways.
2. Do not assume that you are 'needed, 'right', or should be in control; be respectful at all times.
3. Go slowly; be cautious about attempts to change Indian people and tribal systems.
4. Spend time in informal social exchanges with staff and tribal community members; talk, listen, be seen, help out.
5. Avoid professional jargon: remember that some clients may be unfamiliar with long words. Explain written forms.
6. Make yourself as available as possible; accept that clients will not always make or keep appointments.
7. Explain your role and services; do not assume that clients are familiar with [child welfare services].
8. Be flexible and adjustable about your role; and be prepared to change gears and pitch during tribal events.
9. Develop team relationships with Indian social service staff who can help you learn about family resources, Indian values and culturally appropriate service approaches; ask for feedback; don't let yourself become isolated.
10. Learn who is related to whom and how this affects social roles.
11. Respect traditional beliefs and practices.
12. Remember that spiritual matters may be private; watch, express respectful interest and what to be told.
13. Be careful what you say about clients, staff and tribal members; remember that your attitudes and ability to keep confidentiality will be examined and that the person you are speaking with may be related to the person you are discussing.
14. Be willing to adjust your therapeutic expectations; understand that you are working with complicated and long term problems in a system which you do not completely understand.

Swinomish Tribal Community (1991) A gathering of wisdoms: Tribal mental health: A cultural perspective. (p. 312-313)

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