

CareCertify LLC

Foster Care Training Series

FC-07

Cultural Responsiveness, Identity & ICWA

Participant Guide

Foster Care Training Series · Audience: Foster Parents · Agency Staff · Treatment Foster Care Providers · CE Hours: 1.0

Identity Is Central to Healing

A child's culture, race, ethnicity, religion, language, and identity are central to who they are. Children in foster care have already lost so much; foster care must support — never erase — their identity and connections. And for Native American children, federal and Minnesota law provide special protections that recognize the importance of tribal identity and community.

This guide covers honoring each child's identity and the special protections of the Indian Child Welfare Act and Minnesota Indian Family Preservation Act. Supporting identity is essential to a child's healing and wellbeing.

Learning Objectives — by the end of this module you will be able to:

- Explain why identity and culture matter for children in care
- Practice cultural humility and responsiveness
- Support a child's racial, ethnic, religious, and gender identity
- Maintain cultural and community connections
- Describe ICWA and MIFPA protections for Native children

Section 1: Why Identity and Culture Matter

A child's culture, race, ethnicity, religion, language, and identity are central to who they are and how they understand the world. Children in foster care have already lost so much — family, home, routine — and their identity is an anchor of self-worth and belonging. Honoring and supporting a child's identity supports their healing; ignoring or erasing it causes real harm.

Section 2: Cultural Humility and Responsiveness

Cultural humility means approaching each child's culture with curiosity, respect, and openness — recognizing the limits of your own perspective rather than assuming. Learn about and from the child's background, ask the child and their family, and adapt your home and care to honor their culture. Cultural responsiveness isn't about being an expert in every culture; it's about respect, humility, and a willingness to support each child's identity.

Section 3: Supporting Racial, Ethnic, and Religious Identity

Support each child's racial and ethnic identity in concrete ways: learn to care for their hair and skin, provide familiar foods, honor traditions and holidays, and connect them to their community. Respect and support their

religion and spiritual practices. Surround children with books, role models, and connections that reflect who they are. Never pressure a child to abandon or downplay their identity to 'fit in.'

Section 4: Gender Identity and LGBTQ+ Youth

LGBTQ+ youth are overrepresented in foster care and face higher risks of rejection, harm, and poor outcomes. Every child deserves a safe, affirming home. Respect and affirm a child's gender identity and sexual orientation, use their chosen name and pronouns, and protect them from harm, rejection, and conversion practices. For LGBTQ+ youth, an accepting home isn't just kind — it measurably improves safety and wellbeing.

Section 5: Maintaining Cultural and Community Connections

Help children stay connected to their community, culture, faith, and language — through cultural events, mentors, places of worship, and community ties, as supported by the case plan. These connections preserve a child's sense of identity and belonging, which is part of their wellbeing and healing. Work with the child's family and agency to maintain them.

Section 6: ICWA and the Indian Child Welfare Act

The Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) is a federal law that protects Native American children and the interests of their tribes, enacted in response to the historical removal of Native children from their families and cultures. ICWA recognizes that tribes have a vital interest in their children and sets placement preferences — favoring placement with extended family, the child's tribe, or other Native families. Tribes have a legal role in child-welfare cases involving their children.

ICWA is the law

ICWA isn't optional or just cultural sensitivity — it's binding federal law with specific requirements. Native children's tribal identity and connections are legally protected.

Section 7: MIFPA and Supporting Tribal Connection

The Minnesota Indian Family Preservation Act (MIFPA, Minn. Stat. 260.751-260.835) strengthens ICWA's protections in Minnesota, emphasizing keeping Native children connected to their family, tribe, and culture. If you foster a Native child, your role is to actively support their tribal, cultural, and community connections per the case plan, in partnership with the tribe and agency. The tribe and agency lead on ICWA cases — your job is to honor and support the child's identity and connections.

Section 8: Working With the Team to Honor Identity

Honoring a child's identity is a team effort. Work with the agency, the child's family, the tribe (for Native children), and community to support cultural, religious, and identity needs. You don't have to be an expert — ask for resources and guidance. Keep identity central in daily care and decisions. Supporting each child's identity is part of their rights, their wellbeing, and their healing.

Key Terms

Term	What it means
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Cultural humility	Approaching a child's culture with curiosity and respect, not assumptions.
Cultural responsiveness	Adapting care to honor a child's culture and identity.
ICWA	The Indian Child Welfare Act — federal protections for Native children and tribes.
MIFPA	Minnesota Indian Family Preservation Act, strengthening ICWA in Minnesota.
Placement preferences	ICWA's preference for placing Native children with family, tribe, or Native families.
Affirming care	Respecting and supporting a child's gender identity and orientation.

Check Your Understanding

1. Why does identity matter for children in foster care?
2. What is cultural humility?
3. Give two concrete ways to support a child's racial or ethnic identity.
4. What does ICWA do and why?
5. What is your role with a Native child's tribal connections?

What's Next

Looking ahead

Next, FC-08: Mandated Reporting & Child Safety covers your duty to recognize and report child maltreatment.