Through Native Eyes:  Serving Native American Families and Tribal Communities

WREIC April 29th, 2021

Important General Information to Know about While Providing Services to All Native Families:

* Wait Time: This is very important. Be respectful and quiet. Silence is awkward, but it will become more comfortable with time.
* Listen: Let families talk and wait for a few minutes even after you feel like they are done talking.
* Be patient: More often than not, families begin to talk at the very end of a visit-stay and listen.
* Families take time to process what is being said to them. This could be due to being bilingual and taking the time to accept the diagnosis of their child.
* If a family offers you a drink/snack, it is important to accept the offer. It is showing disrespect if you do not accept what they are offering to you.
* It can take some time to form a relationship with a Native family. Know not to rush it and respect this time of trust building.
* Do not bring any toys and/or books that show a snake or owl.
* How a Native family views “time” may be different from other cultures. (Native time is very similar to how Deaf culture views time) Families may not be on time for visits. Please accept this. It does not mean that the visit is not important to them.
* For some Native communities, the first visit will establish a first impression which is very important for building a trusting relationship. Try to be culturally sensitive and aware on your very first visit.
* For some Native communities, extended family members play a tremendous role in decision making. This is especially true with decisions about traditional healing ceremonies and western medicine ideas.

Dine’ Families:

* Some Dine’ families will only share with you what they feel is important for you to know. Please respect this. In time they may share more.
* If the family offers for you to sit on the couch, then sit on the couch. The floor is where a medicine man sits, and ceremonies are performed.
* If there is a different smell or little changes in the home, this means a ceremony has happened recently. This can include:

-ash on the body of the child(stays for four days)

-feather or beads in the hair

-family avoiding shaking hands or staying away from you

* Children are not allowed to look at a mirror until they have said their first word. Do not bring mirrors or please ask first about using a mirror.
* After a ceremony has happened, the family will be in harmony for a week. They may delay services until this time is over.
* Certain toys are not allowed in the home. (Dolls that have moving parts) Ask about an activity before you start to see if is appropriate.
* Eye Contact: It is respectful to only look at the family’s face for short periods of time. Look at the child or look down while talking.
* Do not look around the house. Keep your focus on the child.

Zuni Families:

* Ask the family ahead of time what activities are appropriate for their cultural beliefs.
* Before entering a home, ask the family what the proper way is to greet them.
* Do not open an umbrella inside the home. This will bring bad luck to the family for four years.
* Do not tickle a baby’s feet. This will encourage the baby to play with their feces.
* Do not play with a baby’s lips. This will keep a child babbling as they grow older.
* As stated above, when you are offered a snack or drink, please take the offer. Zuni tradition is to make guests feel at home.

These are just a few tips shared by Native families in northwest New Mexico. There are different views and beliefs even within the Native communities, especially on the Navajo reservation because of its vastness. What may be a traditional belief on one area of the reservation, may not have that same belief only an hour or two away. Find an early intervention provider that is Native and from that area in which you are planning on visiting. Speak to them first about what is culturally sensitive to know and if possible, have that Native provider go with you to introduce you to the family.

How To Contact Us

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