



Cultural Humility in Safety Organized Practice

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At the heart of the Safety Organized Practice approach to child welfare is the belief that a collaborative, partnership-based approach to working with children and families in care will engage families to participate in safety planning, which will ultimately result in better outcomes. For child welfare professionals informed by Safety Organized Practice, cultural humility plays a large role in this collaborative, partnership-based effort.

The culture of the child welfare agency and the culture of the children and families served by the agency are rarely the same, especially when breaking down the definition of culture and recognizing that cultures vary from one family to the next, or even within certain members of the same family. Even within the same self-identified cultural group, there may be different contexts with which cultural members identify themselves. For a child welfare worker who often deals with multiple families, cultures, and cultural contexts daily, "cultural competence" is an unrealistic goal.

In the place of cultural competence, cultural humility encourages child welfare workers to admit their lack of knowledge about different cultures, learn from the people with whom they interact, reserve judgment, and work to bridge the cultural divide between their perspectives and those of others. Within Safety Organized Practice, exhibiting cultural humility means asking as many questions as necessary to better understand the context of the children and families they are working with, as well as sharing the context of the agency with the family openly and honestly. This transparency, especially when presented during initial or early interactions with the family, can build trust and set the tone for collaboration and partnership moving forward. More importantly, it will help to guard against many of the natural fears families in care often bring with them to their first meeting with child welfare, including a fear of being pre-judged, oppressed, and/or disrespected.

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Given the inherent call for curiosity and openness in cultural humility, there may never be one set way to practice it or measure its complete success. Indeed, the cultural humility perspective requires a willingness to make mistakes and admit those mistakes openly and immediately when they are made (e.g., when a child welfare worker asks a question that includes an assumption that proves false). Recognizing one's own culture (or the agency culture) and how that culture informs one's own perspective and guides their questioning is just as important as any other element of cultural humility, and calling it out early and often will help children and families understand that they are involved in a collaborative effort -- one that will include agreements and changes over time, but one they are ultimately as much a part of as the child welfare worker. When this collaborative, partnership-based spirit is achieved, families will be more engaged to participate in their own safety planning.

TEN PRINCIPLES OF CULTURAL HUMILITY

1. Embrace the complexity of diversity
2. Be open to individual differences and the social experiences due to these differences
3. Reserve judgment
4. Relate to others in ways that are most understandable to them
5. Consider cultural humility as a constant effort to become more familiar with the worldview of the children and families we serve and the agency staff and community partners who serve them
6. Instill a collaborative effort in help-giving
7. Encourage staff and community partners to offer help that demonstrates familiarity with the living environment of children and families being served, building on their strengths while reducing factors that negatively affect the goals of safety, permanency, and well-being
8. "Know thyself" and the ways in which biases interfere with an ability to objectively listen to or work with others, including children and families, agency staff, and community partners
9. Critically challenge one's "openness" to learn from others
10. Build organizational support that demonstrates cultural humility as an important and ongoing aspect of the work itself

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