

April Dinwoodie: Welcome to the NTDC Right-Time podcast, cultural humility. I'm your host April Dinwoodie. The National Training and Development Curriculum for foster adoptive parents, or NTDC, is a five-year cooperative agreement from the Administration on Children, Youth, and Families Children's Bureau. This podcast works in conjunction with the classroom based training on cultural humility. The podcast will also be a resource for parents to go back to as children in their home transition through different developmental stages. In this episode, we welcome Dr. Priscilla Day. Dr. Day is an enrolled tribal member at the Leech Lake Reservation and a tenured professor at the University of Minnesota, Duluth department of social work. In her work, dr. Day helps parents exercise cultural humility, in order to assist children as they adjust to new environments, while maintaining their cultural identity, as well as helping them develop coping and resilient skills. Welcome to the podcast, Dr. Day.

Dr. Priscilla D...: Thank you, April. Great to be with you.

April Dinwoodie: So, tell us, what does it mean to be culturally responsive?

Dr. Priscilla D...: Being culturally responsive means having awareness that cultural identity is important to all people. Cultural identity is a birthright, and can provide emotional, spiritual, social, and political connections to a child. For example, if a child is a member of a tribe, that's a political connection, as well as a racial or ethnic connection. Knowing about and maintaining those connections is important, not just in the short term, but throughout the child's lifespan. Many children return to their cultural communities and countries of origin as adults in search of their identity. So, being proactive in maintaining this is so important. Be aware that your lifestyle may be different than the lifestyle of the child's family. Let the child know there are many ways for people to live, and do not pass judgment. With cultural humility, everyone's experiences are valid and meaningful. So, being culturally responsive means giving people time and space to express themselves without judgment.

April Dinwoodie: This is so great Priscilla. Thank you. Can you give a few ideas of how parents might be culturally responsive toward children they are fostering or adopting?

Dr. Priscilla D...: Sure, April. There are many ways to be culturally responsive. Here are just a few ideas. Be open to having the child participate in cultural activities. You might want to seek out books, movies, podcasts, and TV programs, and other resources that reflect the culture of the child. Make sure to be open to listen to the child, children who are not of the majority culture may have unique experiences of persecution or being left out, whether for race, culture, religion, sexual orientation, gender expression, or economic status.

April Dinwoodie: Got it. So, help us identify some of the challenges of having a child of a different race or culture move into your home as a foster or an adoptive parent.

Dr. Priscilla D...: Yeah. One of the challenges is the child may feel out of place in your home. So, help them to embrace their culture or race and let them know that you accept and embrace their culture and/or race. Children might miss extended family, such as grandparents, cousins, aunties, and uncles. So if possible, help them maintain contact with their extended family members who might be able to help that child stay connected to their culture. They may also help you to learn more about the meaning of their culture and the rituals connected to the culture. Be aware of different hair and skin type needs and how out to help them meet those needs. Be aware of your own biases, and don't express them in front of your children. Pay attention to what the child is comfortable with and discuss and work on areas that feel uncomfortable to them.

Some additional challenges might come up with things like different foods, different traditions, for example, saying prayers at night, going to church on Sunday. And conversely, not being able to do things like smudge, or participate in ceremonies, or hear their language or songs. Another thing to note on this subject April is that there may be times when the child does not look remarkably different than the foster or adoptive family, and might be able to pass as one of them. This presents its own challenges, because the parent might not think to ask questions or to be culturally responsive. But for the child, it may be particularly important or even painful that their needs are invisible in this way. All children, should be afforded the respect of these conversations and attention to their cultural needs.

April Dinwoodie: Well, Priscilla, I could not agree more with what you're saying here. And, especially down into some of the nuances that you talk about. So, what should parents who are fostering or adopting think about as they consider opening up their homes to children from different cultures or races other than their own.

Dr. Priscilla D...: That's a really good question. Parents that are fostering or adopting really need to believe that all cultures and races are equally valid and important. They need to be culturally curious and humble about their own ways and recognize that others have equally important ways of being and doing things. They need to understand that the child they are fostering or adopting gets identity and strength from participating in their culture. They should be open to learning more, and maybe even letting the child lead the way, depending on the age of the child. They need to have an open heart to encourage ongoing connection or reconnection between the child, their family, extended family, and cultural community.

April Dinwoodie: So very important, such a good piece of advice there. Thank you. What kinds of thoughtful and tactful questions might parents who are fostering or adopting ask to learn more about a child's culture?

Dr. Priscilla D...: So, all of this depends on the age of the child. For younger children, the adoptive or foster parent might ask what kinds of food the child ate with their family? What games they like to play? Books they like to read? Music they like,

or maybe heard, played where they lived before? Things like this. Ask about routines and activities around their house and community. How they would describe the people they went to school with, did ceremonies with? What language, hairstyles, and clothing and things like that were common? What were their favorite things to do with their family? And ask questions about grandparents or other extended family members as well. For older children, they might ask more direct questions about culture. Again, asking about cultural foods, activities, and cultural events, such as rite of passage, or coming of age ceremonies, like Quinceanera for Latinx youth, and Holly day traditions, like the festival of Kwansaa, or lighting of candles.

Ask if they have cultural practices they want to continue. If the child has not had much exposure to their culture, ask if they would like to. And then, follow through, with finding cultural resources. Learn to make positive comments about the strength and resilience of the child's family or ancestors. Demonstrate to the child that you want to know more about their family and culture. And always validate their experience in order to build trust. Some families have chosen to move closer into communities where children can have access to participating in activities and interacting with people who look like them and have similar backgrounds.

April Dinwoodie: Such important information and things to consider and think about. So, what things can parents who are fostering or adopting do to demonstrate that they will be nonjudgmental in learning more about a child's life, culture, and connections, prior to coming into foster care or being adopted.

Dr. Priscilla D...: I think that's a really important question. I think showing a genuine interest in a child's life, culture, and connections, prior to foster care or adoption can make such a difference for a child and help to build strong bonds from the beginning. Demonstrating this, can start with asking questions, of course not to many at first, and talking directly with children. If you have access to the child's parents, this is a great place to start, in terms of gaining important knowledge and information. Parents that are fostering or adopting can also learn about the child's background, including cultural elements by talking with social workers or other professionals who have had contact with the family. Another important element is having the parent who is fostering or adopting, think about their own racial identity, and cultural elements, and experiences past and present. This will help them to better understand similarities and differences with the child, and also to develop empathy.

Parents that are fostering or adopting can also show genuine interest in learning about the child's cultural history and understand the cultural legacy and strength of the child and their family. Once you have some of the basics, the internet can be a great and practical tool to learn more about a child's community or tribe. And lastly, parents that are fostering or adopting should be able to act and talk with respect and compassion for the child, the family, and

their community. For all children who are fostered or adopted, maintaining a relationship with family members will help to maintain cultural connections.

April Dinwoodie: So, this might be a really good time to discuss how connections with a child's extended family can be a help related to gaining knowledge about a child's culture. Would you please share some of your thoughts with us?

Dr. Priscilla D...: Yes. I'd be happy to. Help the child maintain contact with their siblings, if they're not in your home. Likewise, it will be important for the children to maintain connections to their birth parents, and/or other family members, if at all possible. For kinship families, does the child have relatives on both sides of his or her family, who can safely stay connected to the child? If so, try to foster these relationships.

April Dinwoodie: Priscilla, this is so important. And, it's also important to remember that contact with child's relatives needs to be done in accordance with approved visitation plans, and with the approval of case managers. What are some more things we need to be thinking about here, Priscilla?

Dr. Priscilla D...: Learn about some of the traditions the child recalls, or learn from others who have similar cultural roots to incorporate these traditions into your family. For families who have adopted, via the inner country process connections with a diaspora community, other similar formed adoptive families, and cultural activities is a good way to start. Looking for opportunities to incorporate art, food, et cetera, into the family's life can be a good way to begin. Traveling back to their country of origin for cultural heritage trips is encouraged for children, youth, adolescents, and older children, and adults. For American Indian, Alaskan native foster, and adoptive parents, they can learn about the child's tribe through resources, attending the tribal community events, such as pow wows, and reaching out to the child's tribe, if it's different than your own. If the parents live close to a reservation, there may be resources available through Headstart or the school system, specifically for tribal children. Have the child participate in cultural activities, such as beating, drum groups, and cultural ceremonies, which may be offered through the school or in the community.

April Dinwoodie: Wonderful. Can you give us some specific examples of actions parents can take who are fostering or adopting, to incorporate a child's culture or race?

Dr. Priscilla D...: Sure. For those adopted as infants or young children, the adoptive parents will likely be informing the child of their history. As children get older, they're likely to have more questions and adoptive parents need to think about how they'll answer these questions over time. Be open and willing to have conversations about the child's race. For children with African American descent, one thing we need to be sure to address is hair. Hair holds a lot of value, symbolism, and cultural connection, especially in some cultures. Going to a hair stylist who is familiar with a child's type of hair can be a positive way to show that you understand and value what is meaningful to them. You may want to consult

other people who are African American that can teach you how to do hair. And, think about skin care for the child. If possible, this could be a meaningful way to reach out to birth parents or grandparents for help. Your expressing the desire to learn what is needed for the child's personal care could be a nice connection with the birth family. And, may be comforting to the child.

For some American Indian children wearing their hair long is appropriate in their cultural community. Explore putting artwork up that reflects the child's cultural into your home, or play music that is culturally based. For young children, find toys that represent their culture. For older children, look for culturally appropriate books and movies. Find public role models from the child's culture that can provide positive examples of their cultural heritage. Find out some of the food the child is used to eating, and try to cook it, or find a restaurant in your area that serves that food. Connect the child with people in the community who are from the same race or culture and connect them to cultural events.

Often, children who are adopted via the intercountry process have less cultural exposure. So, they're less familiar with their customs. In these cases, parents can offer to help the child learn, explore, and even do research. Support the child in continuing their own religious traditions, which could include going to a specific place of worship, praying, clothes that are worn or not worn, and the use of traditional ways of self care. Seek out cultural mentors, both for you and your child.

April Dinwoodie: All of this resonates so much, and there are really practical things that you can do. So, I appreciate all the detail and the ideas here. Can you give a few more examples to paint the picture even more fully?

Dr. Priscilla D...: Sure, April. I know of one adoptive family that has maintained a close relationship to the child's grandparents. The child sees the grandparents on a regular basis and even spends overnight there. This has really helped to bridge that transition to adoption. Even though the grandparents could not take care of the child full time, they have been able to continue in their role as grandparents. And this is a win-win for everyone. Another example is one adoptive family who takes their child back to their country of origin and has found extended family for the child to communicate with in their home country. They made sure the child learned their language and participated in cultural events, so they can ensure the child has positive identity development. This family is very open and positive about their child's cultural identity.

April Dinwoodie: Again, so many important points here. So now, can you provide a specific example of how families have successfully embraced diversity?

Dr. Priscilla D...: Sure. Some families have embraced a child's culture and retained or developed relationships with extended family by going to the community and inviting those relatives to events that the child has. They might also seek other resources for their child, such as language or cultural events and summer cultural camps. You

might consider having the child play sports or do activities in a community of people who share their racial or cultural background. All of these activities help children feel culturally connected and better able to adapt to the changes that are occurring. Maintaining cultural connections help them grow into healthy adults who feel good themselves and their culture. Supporting a child's language development and social connections to their culture or race is so important.

April Dinwoodie: Well Priscilla, I can't think of a better way to end this podcast on this very note. I want to thank you for a very important and rich conversation, and for sharing so much of your knowledge and insight.

Dr. Priscilla D...: You're welcome. Thank you.

April Dinwoodie: The NTDC was funded by the Children's Bureau Administration on Children, Youth, and Families, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, under grant number 90CO1132. The contents of this podcast are solely the responsibility of the authors, and do not necessarily represent the official views of the Children's Bureau.