CHAPTER FOUR

Cross-Cultural Issues

INTRODUCTION

This monograph has previously discussed history and policy, the context of practice and basic skills in working cross-culturally. This chapter examines several types of child welfare services and addresses the specific cultural issues as they relate to Indian culture. The history, values, and lifeways discussed earlier have great impact on how specific services are viewed by the Indian community. The cultural context of Indian society -- for example, the extended family concept -- dictates changes in the way services are designed and delivered. The Indian Child Welfare Act also has an influence. If services are to be effective they must reflect the needs of the client population, in this case the unique needs of Indian families. The following sections provide the non-Indian worker with an overview of services and some pertinent issues to keep in mind.

CULTURAL ISSUES IN PROTECTIVE SERVICES

History

Protecting children from abuse and neglect so that they can thrive and mature is the most fundamental child welfare service that a society can provide. Historically, Indian communities had well-developed customs and traditions regarding child rearing that produced a natural system of child protection. This system was easily enforced within the extended family where parents and children were under the watchful eyes of relatives and elders. Responsibilities for rearing children were often divided among extended family and community members.

In traditional Indian spiritual belief systems all things had a spiritual nature that demanded respect. Children were not viewed as their parents' property, but were considered gifts from the Creator, endowed with an intrinsic value based on their relationship to the Creator. Thus, respect was extended to children as well as to the earth and creatures from the land, sea, and sky. According to Ron Lewis, mutual respect was highly valued within Indian cultures:

"This respect is the key word in the relationship between Indian children and their parents, it lies at the center of a person's relationship to nature and to the Creator, respect for the elders, respect for the child, respect for all living creatures in life. Respect is really the foundation of discipline and authority; it is basic to every kind of learning as well as to the enjoyment of life.[12]

As children were respected, so were they also taught to respect others. It has been said that Indian child-rearing methods were marked by extraordinary patience and tolerance. That is, Indian children were usually brought up without restraint or severe physical punishment. Obedience was achieved through moral or psychological persuasion, building on tribal beliefs in supernatural beings. Many tribes had stories of supernatural beings who watched children and punished them when they were disobedient. Through the telling of myths and legends, children were given clear expectations about desired behavior and the consequences for deviant behavior.

12 Ron Lewis, "Strengths of the American Indian Family," Resource Paper (Tulsa, Oklahoma: National Indian Child Abuse and Neglect Resource Center, 1980), p. 3.

Unlike the dominant society with its strong tradition of "spare the rod and spoil the child," Indian child-rearing practices emphasized self-discipline. The management of behavior came not from fear of reprisal from a parent, but from the fear and respect for something far greater, i.e., a supernatural being. Respect for children and self-discipline, coupled with an extended family system where parenting responsibilities were spread among many individuals, meant that child abuse and neglect were seldom problems in traditional tribal settings.

Despite a long history in which the natural system protected children, child abuse and neglect are serious problems in many present-day Indian families. Although there are few accurate studies that document the incidence of child abuse and neglect in the Indian community, recent studies indicate that the rate of child abuse among Indian children today is on a par with that in the non-Indian community. It is estimated that child neglect occurs within Indian communities at a higher rate than the national average. What factors can account for these findings?

Research findings strongly correlate the incidence of child abuse and neglect with socioeconomic stressors such as unemployment, alcoholism, and poverty. Many authors also argue that the problem of child abuse in the dominant society is related to its tradition of harsh physical punishment and parental ownership of children. The higher than average rates for unemployment, alcoholism, and poverty within Indian communities, as well as the disruption of traditional child-rearing practices, help to explain some of the findings.

Without a tradition of punitive child-rearing practices, however, we must consider where Indian people "learned" the concepts of child abuse and neglect. One possible answer is that Indian tribes were treated as children or as wards of the federal government, and under the wardship were abused, neglected, and exploited. Government policies, especially those aimed at assimilation, separated Indian people from the traditional supports that helped minimize social problems.

At the individual level it is well documented that children learn parenting from their parents and that abused children become child abusers themselves. We know that many Indian people have been reared outside of their tribal communities in boarding schools or foster homes. Particularly in boarding schools, discipline was often harsh and devoid of nurturing. These personal experiences, coupled with the breakdown of the extended family and the spiritual belief systems, the loss of the tribal economies, and the introduction of alcohol all served to create an environment where child abuse and neglect could appear. Whatever the cause, child abuse and neglect exist in Indian communities. Child welfare programs are a formal response for dealing with these problems.

Protective Services

The term "protective services" conveys two very basic ideas that, along with others, guides the delivery of this service. The first idea is that of protection. Agencies providing this service have a legal mandate to protect children. The second is that of service. Child welfare workers and agencies have a professional, legal, and moral obligation to provide service—a service that not only protects children but restores families. For protective services to be culturally sensitive, workers should consider several factors, including the following.

- Protective services in Indian child welfare are based on legal codes and cultural traditions that sanction and mandate the protection of children. It is usually not a voluntary service.

- Services should respect the dignity of the child, recognizing the right to adequate care and a continuing relationship with parents, extended family, tribe, and culture.

- The ultimate aim of protective services is to maintain families.

- Strengthening families strengthens culture. Families can be strengthened through protective services.

- Services should recognize the right of Indian parents and extended family to fulfill their role in being responsible for their children, and to have available services that enable them to parent or that can clearly determine that they are unable to give their child adequate protection.

- Most Indian parents desire to be good parents; parental neglect and abuse are more likely symptoms of social problems, personality disturbances, depression, and alcoholism, rather than willful behavior.

- Many Indian parents have been deprived of opportunities and role models to learn adequate parenting skill, life skills, and/or basic principles of child development.

- Protective services are family-centered and child-focused. The child's primary need is f or his or her own parents, or extended family.

- Culturally sensitive protective services recognize and work to enhance cultural traditions that tend to prevent child abuse and neglect.

Cultural Issues

There are several cultural issues that must be considered in protective services. A protective services investigation is by its nature an intrusion into the privacy of the family. This intrusion is contrary to a value of many Indian people of "non-interference." The worker must be careful to respect the dignity of those involved. This approach should be a demonstration of concern and an active implementation of a desire to be helpful to both parents and children.

Most often reservation communities are small, and everyone knows everyone else. Neighbors are often unwilling to provide information. Extended family members may also be reluctant. Those suspected of abuse may have a respected status in the community. There is also historic distrust of social workers. In the past, contact with a social worker meant the loss of children.

To overcome these and other barriers to providing this service, the workers for an agency must be able to present themselves clearly to the community as helpers. They provide services that respect those involved and guard confidentiality.

Many abusive parents were significantly and consistently deprived of emotional support as children. Their own needs to be parented were essentially unsatisfied. These unmet needs often carry over into adulthood. Fear, frustration, and anger are associated with these unmet needs. In addition, some characteristics of the abusive Indian parent are specifically related to cultural issues. Immaturity and dependence are complicated by a history of government programs that foster dependency. Low self-esteem is usually connected in part to a position of racial inferiority imposed by the dominant culture.

Also, adjustment to the demands of the dominant society contributes to frustrations and identity problems. Feelings of powerlessness and hopelessness result from confronting poverty, unemployment, and prejudice. Many Indian parents are reluctant to seek help based on the values of self-reliance and non-interference. For some, especially less assimilated parents, a value of non-confrontation may be interpreted as passivity or weakness. When assessing families, the workers must keep in mind the larger context of cultural values, patterns of interaction, and history.
In cases of child sexual abuse the worker must keep in mind the kinship structure of the client's family. In many cases separating the victim from the offender is difficult due to the value placed on kinship and on not severing emotional ties. This is an issue that communities must deal with because it is a community issue. The worker should be aware of the extreme difficulty of these cases in the context of small communities.

Workers must also keep in mind the cultural concept of child and elder competency. In many Indian tribes children are viewed as competent to care for themselves at a much earlier age than in the dominant society. In part this is due to the practice of all adults having child-rearing responsibility for children, not just biological parents. Elder competency refers to the belief that elders are seen as capable of caring for children at a more advanced age than in the non-Indian world. Both of these values may be misinterpreted by the non-Indian as child neglect. The non-Indian worker should look at the context of the practice and only intervene if the child is endangered and then only so far as will allow the family to solve the problem.

Summary

While the process of investigation, documentation, and court action remain the same in all cases the cultural issues involved in protective services can lead the non-Indian worker into incorrect assessments of the client's problems. The effective cross-cultural worker maintains respect for the client and for cultural differences.

CULTURAL ISSUES IN SUBSTITUTE CARE

When biological parents arc unable to fulfill their role, children need substitute care. Alternatives to family care include foster care, receiving homes, shelter care, group homes, institutional care placements, and family group homes. Each of these alternatives is more appropriate for some children than others. This section focuses on the cultural issues in out-of-home care.

History

Most Indian languages contain no words that translate into "foster care," yet the extended family and clan system in traditional Indian culture provided a wealth of substitute care resources for children when death or disability claimed their parents. The responsibility to assume care of relatives' children was both implied and expressly stated in the oral tradition and spiritual teachings of most tribes.

Indian culture has long been a culture of interdependence based on sharing and cooperation. Special, spiritual significance was accorded to children in need. In some Indian groups it was taught that the Creator was saddened when children in need were not cared for. Oral traditions passed down taught Indian people that the care of their brothers' and sisters' children was their responsibility should the parents be unable to provide care. Often people who were as distant as second or third cousins became a substitute sister, brother, or an auntie, and assumed the responsibilities for dependent children.

Situations in which extended family members were unable to assume care of a child in need were extremely rare. Even today these natural systems are an important part of substitute care.

Foster Family Care

Today many Indian people have negative, even bitter, feelings toward formal foster care, based on the practices described elsewhere in this monograph. While the traditions of interdependence and sharing help sanction the concept, formal foster care services are still foreign to the Indian culture. Yet, Indian foster family care is a necessary and useful part of Indian child welfare services. Delivered effectively in appropriate situations this service can support the overall Indian child welfare goal of maintaining and strengthening Indian families. Effective Indian foster family care is based on several assumptions that are listed here:

- The primary right and responsibility for child rearing lies with the parent and/or extended family.

- Indian foster family care is temporary and planned with the aim of reuniting the family as soon as possible.

- Indian children in need of care are best served in Indian foster homes.

- Indian foster family care is a less desirable alternative for children than maintaining family units or extended family care.

- A wide variety of child-rearing standards and styles exist among Indian parents and are dependent on tribal identity, degree of assimilation, and other factors.

- The selection of Indian foster parents involves the recognition of the cultural and social standards prevailing in Indian communities and families.

Extended Family Care

While placement with extended family members may not be considered "foster family care" in the non-Indian child welfare system, it is the backbone of substitute care with Indian clients. Rules of preference under the Indian Child Welfare Act and under the codes of most tribes demand the use of extended family whenever possible. It is also sound child welfare practice. Many skills can be employed in facilitating extended family care. Several are discussed here.

Casework with Extended Family

The first task of the Indian child welfare worker in an extended family situation is to determine the level of agency involvement necessary in the case. In court-ordered situations it is necessary for the worker to have a close working relationship with the extended family members providing care. Some situations are less formal and demand little more than monitoring the care and providing whatever services may voluntarily be requested. The level of involvement may also depend on the age of the child, or the long-range plan for care. Each situation must be evaluated individually. It should be determined if the relationship between the child welfare program and the extended family is formal or informal, and proper documentation should be kept. The worker should keep in mind that:

- The extended family is the primary support network for most Indian people.

- Extended families have their own rules, norms, values, and traditions that govern how they help and care for their members. These should be respected.

- Extended families need to be included in creating and implementing a plan so that parents, extended family, and agency can work as a team.

- Extended family members deserve enough information about the situation in order to be prepared for any problems in the child's behavior, and to understand their role.

- Extended family members need to be made aware of financial assistance available to them.

- Extended family members need the assistance of the worker in gaining access to the resources necessary to help children with special emotional, physical, or mental needs.

- Supportive casework services can aid the extended family in coping with problems that arise as a result of the placement.

- Intertribal or interracial marriages may present unique problems regarding differing values or traditions.

Knowing the Community

In facilitating extended family care, it is extremely important that child welfare workers know the patterns of family relationships in the community. In part, this includes knowledge of who is considered part of the extended family. This may differ in each local area. Further, it is important to be aware of who the extended family leaders are. Frequently, access to extended family care comes through grandmothers, great-grandmothers, uncles, aunts, or others who are

held in respect by other family members. The worker should be aware of the proper way and time to approach such individuals. Casework with the extended family must respect the values and traditions of the local community. Knowing the community comes from careful observation over a period of time.

Confidentiality

Working with the extended family presents the worker with some important concerns about confidentiality. While the extended family needs to have enough information about the situation to make a good decision about caring for a child, the worker still must guard confidentiality. Sharing of information should come from the parents if possible. The parents' and child's degree of willingness to share information should be respected. Extended family members, like the foster care family, should also be helped to understand and appreciate the need for confidentiality. The Indian child welfare worker must work to counter negative labels that are sometimes attached to parents of children in foster care. Exhibiting a non-judgmental attitude and respecting confidentiality help to avoid negative labels.

Cultural Issues

Since extended family care is the historical means by which substitute care has been provided it is the more desirable option when placement is necessary. Several factors often get in the way of extended family care. These barriers can be overcome through use of a thoughtful casework approach.

Many parents in trouble feel a great deal of shame about placing their children. They may be reluctant to have children placed with extended family members due to this shame. Helping the parents deal with these feelings in the planning process and discussing the options can be an important step in getting past this barrier. Helping the clients map out their extended family may uncover acceptable resources that might otherwise go untapped.

Extended family members may not feel equipped financially or physically to take on the care of another child. They may also resist accepting financial support or exhibit a distrust of paperwork. Helping the extended family members understand and receive foster care payments or other financial assistance can help overcome these barriers.

The worker should be aware of local values and traditions concerning the relationship between helping and financial assistance; he or she should be alert to situations in which irresponsible family members exploit traditions of helping.

Many Indian people place a high value on non-interference. Many extended family members fail to come forward to avoid being seen as meddling in the affairs of others. Efforts to help the parent initiate the extended family placement are often helpful in avoiding the creation of animosity between family members. Active recruitment of extended family members by the worker with the permission of the parent can also be helpful. It is the inclusion of the parent in this process that helps overcome the desire to avoid meddling.

The Indian child welfare worker should avoid being the cause of family divisions. Extended family placements made without the parents' awareness or acceptance can cause deep divisions in families. Family divisions fade slowly and can be barriers to placements. Workers should be sensitive to already existing family divisions and work to avoid new ones

that can be created by the placement process. One way to avoid creating division is to be aware of and respect the roles of different family members such as decision makers or advisors.
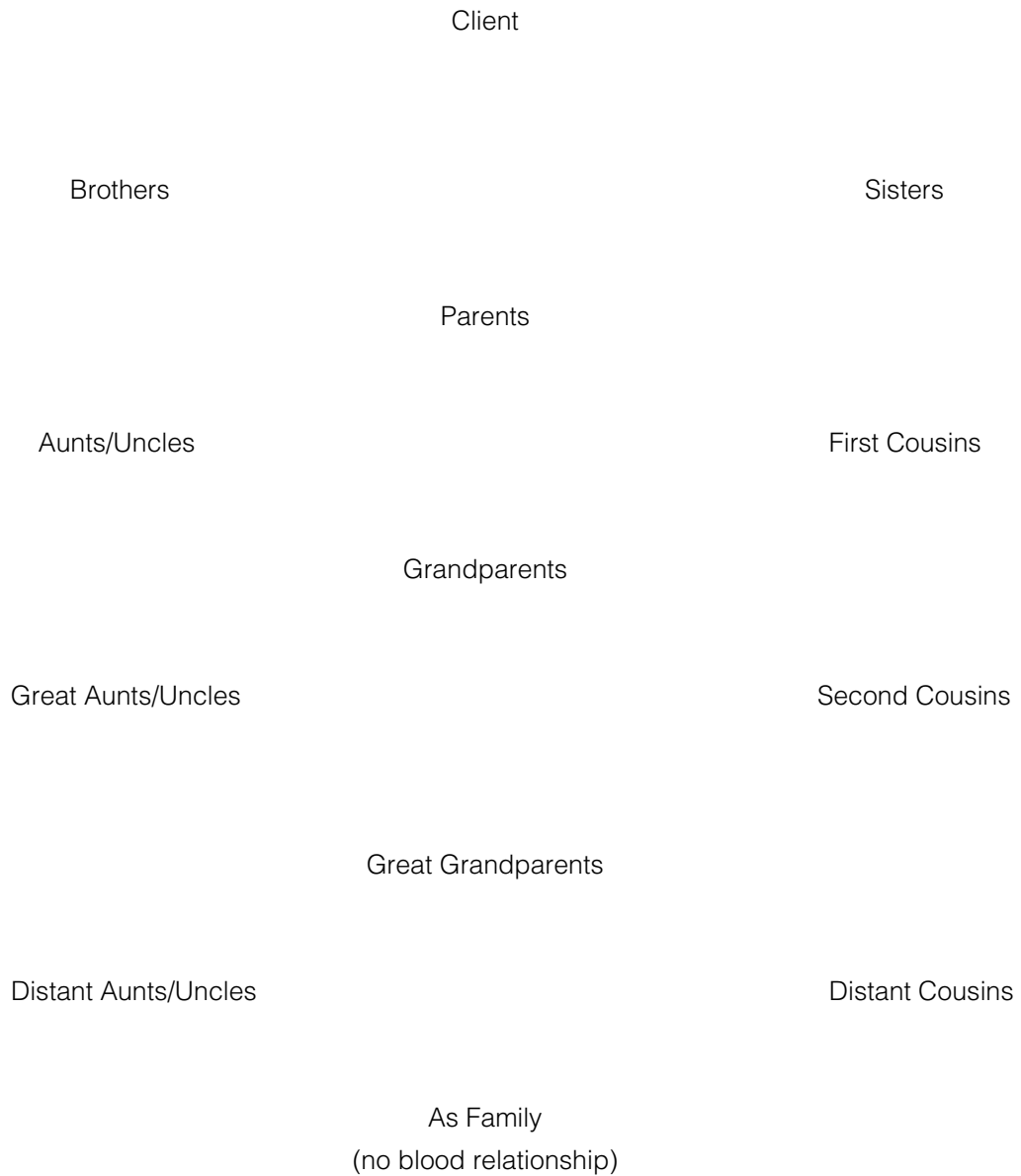
In the past, taking a child into care brought a service and a value to the extended family. It added to the number and made the family stronger. Parents paid their relatives at least in kind, making sure that everyone had enough. The entire extended family shared the burden. Today the extended family concept is sometimes exploited, as when one family member is expected to assume responsibility for all of a child's needs without help from the parents or the rest of the extended family. With today's demands and the loss of some of the traditions of family interdependence, the formal system must help meet the needs. Figure 2 is an example of a tool that workers may use to help a client figure out how to use the extended family resource.

Summary

Extended family care is the most valuable substitute care resource available to Indian child welfare programs. It requires a special set of skills and sensitivity to facilitate this process. Providing supportive services, knowing the community, and being sensitive to Indian family values are all necessary parts of the extended family placement.

Figure 2 - The Extended Family

The worker may use this extended family chart to help the client determine the resources in their extended family. Members may be blood relatives or relatives by marriage. Clients can f ill in the names, indicate choices regarding who would provide the best care for their child, and also consider who would be involved in the decision.

Client

Brothers   Sisters

Parents

Aunts/Uncles   First Cousins

Grandparents

Great Aunts/Uncles   Second Cousins

Great Grandparents

Distant Aunts/Uncles   Distant Cousins

As Family
(no blood relationship)

Recruitment of Indian Foster Homes

One of the problems that state agencies experience in compliance with the Indian Child Welfare Act is a lack of Indian homes. State agencies have not been able to attract Indian families into foster care for a number of reasons. At least part of the failure is due to a lack of understanding of the barriers to recruitment, the related cultural issues, and lack of coherent approach to the task. Agencies should determine how many Indian families they need, set recruitment goals, and consult with the Indian community about recruitment strategies. A recruitment plan should be part of an overall Indian child welfare plan of any agency. Below some of the barriers and strategies for Indian foster home recruitment are discussed.

Barriers to Recruitment

Barriers to recruitment efforts for Indian foster parents take two forms. First, there are factors within Indian culture that may contribute to the reluctance to come forward. Second, there are factors in the child welfare system that are roadblocks to effective cross-cultural recruitment.

Cultural Barriers: Several of the issues of cultural value differences have previously been discussed, but their impact on foster home recruitment is important. The issue of historic distrust of state agencies is an important factor. Because of extensive past removals of Indian children there are few Indian families that have not experienced negative associations with child welfare agencies. Indian families may be reluctant to become part of a system that is perceived as hostile. The value on non-interference in Indian culture adds another dimension. People may be reluctant to be part of an intrusive system or to open their lives up to study. Home studies, while essential, are intrusive by nature and resistance may be strong to many probing questions. Because of the value placed on non-competition, Indian families may be concerned that by becoming foster parents they set themselves above others, a declaration of being better. The potential for social isolation contributes to a reluctance to come forward. Many Indian people simply do not believe that they would be considered. Seventy-five percent live below the poverty level, many share living accommodations with relatives, and few are untouched by social problems related to unemployment, alcoholism, and family disruption. People may fear being seen as inadequate by dominant culture standards. Finally, foster care is not an Indian concept and is new to most Indian families. In most cases Indian families are unfamiliar with agency expectations. They may not know how long foster care is expected to be or how to work with any agency. They may be unaware or worried about liability, or how to get help when they need it. They may also be unclear about the types of problems that bring children into care and unaware that they are providing a service that is part of reuniting a family.

System Barriers: A number of system barriers contribute to the difficulty in securing Indian foster homes. A primary barrier is a lack of cultural awareness of non-Indian workers. Without adequate information workers tend to misunderstand lifestyle differences, child competency values, extended family networks, time concepts, work orientation, and other cultural variables. Decisions about the adequacy of an Indian home may be based on culturally-biased assessment. Further, the non-Indian worker may carry stereotypes about Indians that can prejudice home studies. When a worker of one culture is studying a family of another culture many dynamics function as a result of those differences. Another system barrier is that licensing standards and requirements may be prohibitive for Indian families. Exceptions can usually be made in specific cases, but they can also be used to exclude people. Often the state's standards are higher than the prevailing standard of living in an Indian community. Indian families often fail to

follow through with an application when they learn the requirements. In addition, the paperwork requirements of many agencies may be overwhelming for Indian families who may not have the writing skills or who distrust forms.

Worker and agency attitudes contribute to the barriers. To overcome barriers requires time and effort. Non-Indian agencies and workers who do not understand the intent and purpose of the Act may be reluctant to go beyond normal activities to make it work or to commit scarce resources to the task. Limited access to the Indian community can be a barrier. Non-Indian workers may not know where to find Indian families, whom to ask for help, or how to get out the message. Public service announcements, newspaper ads, and posters have not done the job, in part due to a lack of Indian focus. Finally, most agencies simply do not have the resources necessary to do a proper job of recruitment.

Overcoming the Barriers

A number of approaches to overcoming these barriers are possible. First and foremost is to develop knowledge and skills in cross-cultural services. Such knowledge and skills bring a more positive outlook toward Indian families, a better understanding of the intent of the ICW Act, and better access to Indian communities. Improved cross-cultural skills can help overcome the dynamics that occur because people are different. Respect and valuing are communicated and communication is enhanced. Some specific approaches may be useful.

As many Indian people may be reluctant to come forward due to cultural values most are also reluctant to say no to a request for help. Recruitment efforts can rely on the values on sharing and interdependence by reaching out to potential families.

This approach requires going to the community and asking who would be good candidates. Elders, community leaders, and other Indian foster parents are good places to start. Volunteers may be very helpful in this process. The Casey Family Program, a private foster care agency, has found this approach extremely useful. Developing a network that gives the worker access to the community is the key.

Once potential candidates are found, several things can be done to facilitate the process. Distrust can be overcome through the development of relationships and through informal education. Workers should clearly communicate their commitment to securing Indian homes for Indian children, talk about the role of foster parents and the agency, and be ready to explain why the intrusion of a home study is necessary. Potential foster parents should have ample time to discuss their fears, concerns, and questions. Other Indian foster parents may be very helpful. They can help discuss standards, the study process, and the job itself.

Someone should be available to help with forms if necessary. If the licensing process bogs down, the worker should explore why and what can be done to help. Workers should be alert to the cultural issues and aware of potential barriers.

By recognizing barriers and working to overcome them, workers can provide better services to Indian children in need of out-of-home care. As mentioned before, avoiding placement is the priority under the law and in good practice, but when this fails and when extended family cannot fulfill the need, Indian foster homes are essential to good services.

Matching the Child and the Home

The process of selecting a specific home for a particular child has a great effect on the potential success of the placement. Research and experience have shown that there is no formula that tells us who will be good or successful foster parents. It is rather the match between foster family and child that contributes most to the success of the placement. Factors such as values, cultural identity, social status, and lifestyle all contribute to the concept of matching. The greater the child's comfort with the substitute family's everyday life, the easier the adjustment.

Child welfare workers do not always have the resources to have different foster homes to choose from, but keeping the concept of matching in mind can help the worker better understand the adjustment issues of children entering care. For Indian children there are some specific cultural issues to keep in mind. Because of the diversity of Indian identity and experiences of being Indian, the Indian child and potential foster home may be very different. Adjustments are more difficult when an Indian child comes from a family that is toward one end of the identity continuum and the foster family is on the other end. An example is the child from a traditional family being placed with an assimilated family and vice-versa.

Placement in an Indian home is still the best plan, but the worker should be aware that adjustment issues might arise when the identities differ. In addition to adjustment issues for the child the foster family may experience some judgmental attitudes from natural parents or other members of the child's extended family on the basis of their cultural orientation. This may be especially true in intertribal or interracial marriages. Workers can avoid difficulties by using the concept of matching when possible.

Summary

Workers are encouraged to remember that many Indian people have negative feelings about foster care. Being alert to that issue and aware of cultural differences, the worker can better overcome the barriers to effective cross-cultural practice in substitute care. It is not enough to find any Indian home but rather an Indian home that meet the needs of the child. A good cross-cultural working relationship is an integral part of helping and ensures that the needs of the child are met.

CULTURAL ISSUES IN PERMANENT PLANNING

While permanent planning is a rather new development in the field of child welfare, the concept of belonging--the heart of permanent planning--is central to Indian culture. Society is based first and foremost on the family. In Indian culture, family membership means much more than being the child of given parents; it means belonging to an extended family or interdependent, nurturing support network. In many tribes, these extended family networks are organized into larger groups or clans that offer individuals another point of reference in their sense of belonging. The tribe offers formalized group recognition of belonging that goes beyond family and clan. Beyond this level of tribal identification is the sense of belonging that comes from Indian spiritual belief systems, most of which recognize the interdependence of all things--each having its place in existence and a relationship to all other things. It is this sense of relationship with all things in one's physical and spiritual environment that reinforces the sense of identity and belonging and goes beyond the physical or tangible world.

When these reference points are intact, they offer the individual a sense of trust over a period of time, which is a crucial aspect of permanency. The group, or interdependent nature of Indian society, offers the individual strength, a sense of purpose, and a sense of commonality with other members of the group. This sense of commonality promotes the individual's commitment to the group, as well as the group to the individual, and is reinforced by tribal custom and the oral tradition. It is unfortunate that over a period of time this cultural system has eroded somewhat and there are Indian families who have lost the ties that bind them to extended family, tribe, and culture.

While it can be said that not all Indian people are served by the cultural system in the way they were historically, it is also true that these reference points for belonging still exist and can be sought out and enhanced as resources for even those estranged from their culture. The Indian Child Welfare Act embodies this belief in its order of placement preferences for Indian children: first, with the extended family; second, with another tribal member; and, third, with another Indian family, not of the child's tribe. Permanent planning in Indian child welfare, therefore, has as much to do with maintaining children's connection and sense of belonging to the extended family, clan, or tribe as with their biological parents.

Termination of parental rights is a key factor in the dominant society's child welfare system; in Indian child welfare, however, it has the potential of severing the child's connection to an extended family or tribe.

In Indian child welfare cases one must ask if termination of parental rights serves a viable function in a system where connectedness and belonging go far beyond emotional bonds with biological parents. Only careful decision making, which is highly individualized, can answer this question. Termination of parental rights, while still an option, should be closely examined and conservatively applied. Within the rich cultural heritage of Indian people permanence is a highly valued concept, and it extends beyond the concept of permanent planning as defined by the dominant society and its child welfare system.

The perception of permanence must come from the child, and his or her sense of belonging over a period of time to a family, extended family, tribe, and cultural group. The child welfare worker must ensure that children who come into foster care maintain this perception of permanence. Each case must be carefully examined in this regard, considering not only the child's continuity of relationships with parents but also her or his sense of belonging to the extended family, clan, or tribe.

Permanent Planning

Permanent planning has been described as the intent to provide children with a sense of connectedness and continuity, or a sense of belonging that lasts over a period of time. It is not, nor should it be thought of as, a separate child welfare service. Rather, it is a core concept that guides the delivery of all child welfare services. It is the basis for programs that maintain families and enable children to remain within their own homes, as well as programs that provide permanent family resources when a child's parents cannot be expected to ever provide adequate care for him or her. But in addition, in Indian child welfare it also means maintaining ties with extended family and tribe.

Permanent planning implements the intention to provide children with continuity of relationships and a sense of belonging over a period of time. It underlies all facets of child welfare practice. It provides the legal and practical means

by which a child can know his or her family. Following are several assumptions that contribute to effective cross-cultural services in permanent planning.

- The primary right and responsibility for child rearing lies with the parent and/or extended family.

- Permanence can be said to exist only if the child perceives security and a sense of belonging to a family, extended family, clan, and tribe.

- The best permanent plan for an Indian child is usually to grow up in his or her own family or extended family.

- Indian culture respects the thoughts, feelings, and rights to self-determination of Indian children.

- Indian parents have the right to culturally sensitive services that enable them to be a permanent resource for their child.

- Indian child welfare practice recognizes that a sense of permanence for Indian children involves extended family and tribal ties, as well as ties with parents.

- Permanent planning in Indian child welfare practice recognizes the wide variety of family and extended family relationships that exist for Indian people, as influenced by tribal identity, degree of assimilation, and other factors.

- A sense of permanence enhances the child's ability to form a healthy relationship, a clear identity, and satisfying adjustments to society.

Cultural Issues

In making decisions regarding permanent plans for Indian children, several important cultural issues arise. The Indian concept of time, identity, and extended family, among others, all have an impact on the decision-making process. Workers in child-placing agencies must examine these issues as they are reflected in the local communities. Policies and practices in permanent planning are dependent on these cultural issues. Following is a discussion of a few of those issues.

Time

In the dominant society's child welfare system permanent planning is based on set timelines. Usually if a parent does not show that he or she can resume care for a child after a period of one year, the case is considered for a permanent alternative. Timelines are a linear concept. Historically, the Indian concept of time has been cyclical and not linear. Change occurs not so much on a line with a starting and ending point, but rather it is a constant process that occurs in its own time. People experience change in cycles much the same way in which they experience time. Length of time in the Indian culture receives less attention than the experience of time. Traditionally, patience regarding change is evident because change is inevitable. In the Indian community the knowledge that people change is unquestioned. The time it takes for change is less relevant than the experience that brings about the change.

Permanent planning with its concept of linear time challenges this cultural view of time. How much time is enough time for a parent to make changes? How long must children wait for changes to occur before they can return home? Local agencies, courts, and Indian communities must decide these questions based on cultural values and local norms. What is a reasonable amount of time in one community may be different in another community. Adjustments must be made in non-Indian agencies' policies to allow for cultural differences.

Drawing on the strength of this traditional concept of time, the child welfare worker concerned with making a permanent plan can focus on the experience of the parents during the process, instead of on the length of time. If more time seems appropriate, then this need should be acknowledged and the extension conducted in a planful way.

Identity

As discussed in previous sections, Indian people come from a variety of backgrounds with many different experiences of being Indian. The great diversity that exists among Indian people, even in the same community, is an issue that must be considered. In permanent planning the Indian child welfare worker must also consider how the cultural values about identity affect decision-making.

Vine DeLoria and others have commented on the traditional concept that an Indian person's identity changes with growth and development. This is evidenced by the fact that in some tribes an individual might have several different names at different points in his or her life. Baby names, adult names, and nicknames change, as does identity. Even relatives' names change with marriage or death. This community recognition of identity change is an important concept in permanent planning.

Parents who now cannot meet the minimum sufficient level of care for their child will be different people at some point in the future. An alcoholic parent now may be a respected elder later in life. Given this cultural context, the child in need of a permanent alternative now may have a valuable resource in her or his parents sometime in the future. Thus, permanent planning in Indian communities often reflects this belief in a capacity for change. Permanent options that hold open the possibility of contact and identification with parents are, in many situations, culturally appropriate.

Extended Family

The extended family is the primary support network within the Indian culture. As discussed earlier, it is important that permanent planning in Indian child welfare consider the child's sense of belonging and connection with the extended family. In situations where an alternative permanent plan must be considered, the extended family must be given primary consideration. Even when the extended family is unable to provide direct care on a permanent basis, they should be considered in the planning. When children become adults their support network is still the extended family. Contact with the extended family throughout their childhood years helps to keep such support networks intact. A child can benefit in terms of identity and future support when the extended family is a resource that remains open to them. Options in permanent planning that hold open this possibility usually are more culturally appropriate than options that sever those ties.

While the extended family remains the primary support network, for Indian people each case must be assessed individually with regard to the role of the extended family. The task of the Indian child welfare worker is to determine the extent to which the extended family can provide the necessary support and then to facilitate the natural helping process. To accomplish this, the worker should keep in mind that:

- The extended family is the primary support network for most, but not all, Indian people.

- Extended families have their own roles, norms, values, and traditions, which govern how they will help and care for their members. These should be respected.

- The extended family concept is a concept of interdependence, which implies that family members have reciprocal responsibilities as well as a support network.

- Extended family needs to be included in creating and implementing a plan, so that parents, extended family, and agency can work as a team.

- Extended families need supportive services and access to resources that will enable them to support the family.

The key to involving extended family is to know the community and to gain access to the natural helping system. The worker can best accomplish extended family involvement through active efforts to identify them and include them.

Culturally Appropriate Options

As previously stated, the best permanent plan for a child is usually with his or her own family. However, this option is sometimes impossible and alternative permanent plans must be arranged. Several options exist and some have greater advantage in Indian cases than others. Cultural considerations give the worker a different set of priorities. For example, in non-Indian cases, termination of parental rights and adoption are usually seen as the most desirable option in permanent planning due to the stability of the legal situation. In most

Indian cases this is the least desirable option due to the priority on maintaining permanence in the context of the extended family and tribe. Options that guard this aspect of permanence include:

Guardianship

Guardianship is a legal relationship that is established by the court. It has the advantage of being less disruptive than long-term foster care and fits culturally with the extended family concept.

Formalized Long-Term Foster Care

This plan formalizes a foster care arrangement through a formal, non-legal written agreement. The advantage is that this plan allows the child access to his or her parents and extended family. The disadvantage is that it may be less stable than other options.

Extended Family Adoption

In this arrangement extended family members become legal parents of the child. The advantage to the plan is its stability and the maintenance of the child's relationship with family.

Open Adoption

An open adoption is one in which the child and natural parents continue to have a relationship even after the biological parents' legal rights have ended. Particularly useful for older children, this option has the advantage of giving the child access to extended family even when they cannot provide care. Also, in small communities the option is more realistic than closed adoptions.

Closed Adoption

This is usually the least desirable option for Indian children. It is best used for very young children who have few extended family resources or whose parents desire anonymity and where tribal identity can be maintained.

Termination of Parental Rights

Adoption requires that the child be legally free--that is, the rights of the parents must be terminated in some way. This may be through voluntary consent or through legal action that terminates the parents' rights involuntarily. A decision to seek termination of parental rights must carefully consider the factors in each individual case. The cultural issues and values that influence this decision must be fully considered.

In the context of these cultural issues termination of parental rights is an extreme action and should be reserved for only the most severe cases, when permanency can be provided by no other means. No termination should occur unless a plan can be arranged that is culturally appropriate for the child and that safeguards both the child's identity and his or her tribal status.

Summary

Permanent planning is perhaps the one aspect of child welfare service where cultural differences are the most poignant. Cultural issues demand that the priorities and procedures concept of permanence is an important one for Indian children but one that takes on a larger meaning in the context of an interdependent culture.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has reviewed several specific services and provided the non-Indian worker with an overview of the issues relevant to service provision in Indian child welfare. Each service has been discussed in the context of Indian culture. Non-Indian workers can provide effective services when they adapt services to fit the cultural context of the Indian child welfare case.

SUGGESTED READING

Northwest Indian Child Welfare Institute, *Heritage & Helping: A Model Curriculum for Indian Child Welfare Practice, Module II: Protective Services for Indian Children, Module III. Indian Foster Family Care, Module IV.- Services to Indian Children at Home, and Module V.- Permanent Planning for Indian Children,* Portland, Oregon: NWICWI, 1984.