

## Frequently Answered Questions – Cultural planning [deadlystories.com](http://deadlystories.com)

**NOTE:** It is important to acknowledge the diverse nature of Aboriginal culture in this country and how definitions, terminology, cultural practices and symbols can differ considerably across clans, regions and states. Family, Elders and community are always the best source of information when working with Aboriginal children and young people. It is essential that cultural generalisations are avoided, and individual and unique significant cultural customs are always explored in the cultural planning process.

### Culture

#### Why do I need to do a CSP for Aboriginal children?

For Aboriginal children and young people, his or her family, community, clan, traditions and customs are integral to the development of their sense of identity and overall wellbeing. Connection to community and culture have a significant impact on a child or young person's social, emotional, health, educational and psychological development and help shape their journey into adulthood as strong, resilient and connected people.

In Victoria, it is a Legislative requirement that all Aboriginal children in out-of-home care are to be provided with a cultural support plan that is aligned to their case plan. This requirement is outlined in the Children, Youth and Families Act. The same act s.10(3) (c) also states “the need, in relation to an Aboriginal child, to protect and promote his or her Aboriginal cultural and spiritual identity and development by, wherever possible, maintaining and building their connections to their Aboriginal family and community. “

The cultural support plan ensures that every Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander child in out of home care retains his or her connections to family, community and culture by mapping out an individualised plan that captures key cultural information about the child or young person and ensures that the child's culture is acknowledged, nurtured, supported and strengthened.

## Where can I get Aboriginal resources for children to help them learn about their culture?

Connecting a child to their family group, mob, clan group and traditional Country is a key to helping them learn about their culture. The best resource for information is always the child's parent/s, grandparents and extended family. Respectfully engaging family members is always the first and most important step of the child's cultural journey. Whenever possible, family members should control and navigate the child's cultural journey, and an Elder from the child's family or local community should be a key informant for a child's cultural plan.

Where family cannot be consulted, contacting the local Aboriginal co-operative, community centre or land council connected to the child's mob, can connect you with extended family members, Elders and relevant cultural information.

It may take time to establish these networks or to establish the right connections, so building relationships and trust is key. Taking time to build relationships helps lay the groundwork for interaction with extended family, Elders and community members to contribute meaningful information for the cultural plan that includes language, totems, family history, significant cultural sites, ceremonies and rituals.

It is also important to build relationships with Aboriginal community controlled organisations (ACCO's) in your area such as VACCA who frequently hold community activities and host cultural events for children of all ages.

Other resources that can help children learn about their culture are Aboriginal cultural centres, websites, Libraries and museums such as the Koorie Heritage Trust and Bunjilaka. Most clan groups and Land Councils have their own websites providing a great source of information as well as Traditional land owner information and people you can contact for further information. Websites such as [deadlystory.com](http://deadlystory.com), [snaicc.org](http://snaicc.org) and [yarnstrongsista.com](http://yarnstrongsista.com) provide great resources to help children learn about their culture. Social Media sites such as Facebook can also be an excellent source of information as many traditional owner groups and other cultural services have their own Facebook pages often providing cultural information, community events as well as connections to elders and other community members.

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For further information on family history, there are Aboriginal family history services that can assist the research process, some of these services include but are not limited to AIATSIS, The National archives of Australia ( includes the Bringing them home index), State Library of Victoria, Norman Tindale genealogies, Link-up, Births, Deaths and Marriages, the Alick Jackomos Aboriginal Resource Centre and The Victorian Archives Centre Public Records Victoria (PROV) which has a Koorie Records Unit with the Koorie Index of names.

Depending on the age, stage and development of the child, subscribing to Aboriginal newspapers and Magazines such as Koori Mail and signing up to local community organisations mailing lists are also a great way to connect children to their culture. There are also some great Aboriginal televisions shows including cartoons to watch on the National Indigenous Television Network (NITV).

Connecting with your Senior Advisor, cultural planning will help guide you to the right services and programs for the child you are working with.

## **Why is it important for a child to know about their totems?**

Totems connect a child on a spiritual level, providing a deeper connectivity and understanding to their clan, their traditional land and the dreaming. The significance and symbolism of Totems is something that is complex and multi-dimensional and varies depending on region and clan.

A totem is a natural object, plant or animal that is inherited by members of a clan or family as their spiritual emblem. Clan groups have caretaking responsibilities over their totems. Traditionally, totems defined peoples' roles and responsibilities and their relationships with each other and creation.

Depending on where a child is from, they could have four or more Totems which represent their nation, clan and family group, as well as a personal Totem. Nation, clan and family Totems are predetermined, however personal Totems are individually appointed.

It is important that an Elder or family member is consulted around the Totem of the child as the child may have several totems.

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## What is the difference between mob, clan, tribe, language group?

\*\*\*These terms could differ depending on area. The term Nation e.g. Yorta Yorta nation is becoming a more common term to define Aboriginal mob. In some resources “language group” is used to determine state groupings such as Koorie, Nunga and Murri\*\*\*

### Mob

‘Mob’ is a colloquial term identifying a group of Aboriginal people associated with a particular place or Country. It is used to connect and identify who an Aboriginal person is and where they are from. Mob can represent your family group, clan group or wider Aboriginal community group.

### Clan/Language group

Indigenous nations cover wide geographical areas, and have distinct borders. Within these nations there are clan groups. Clans are larger than a family but based on family links through a common ancestry. Clan groups share a common language and kinship system, which is based on either patrilineal or matrilineal lines of descent. A clan can also be referred to as a language group. For example, the Yorta Yorta nation has several clans including Bangerang, Moira and Ulupna. Gunditjmara comprises the following language groups – Dhauwurd Wurrung, Wooloowoorroong, Kee woorroong, Koornkopanoot, Peek woorroong, Keerray woorroong, Tyakoort Woorroong and Gadubanud.

### Tribe

Tribe refers to a culturally distinct group of people associated with a culturally defined area of land or Country. A tribe, in the Aboriginal context, is a group of people related by genealogy, a common language and occupying (or traditionally occupying) a recognised area of Country.

‘Tribe’ is a European word that tends to imply western preconceptions developed from colonial experiences. ‘Nation’, ‘community’, ‘people’, ‘mob’ or the local language or culture group name is usually preferable to ‘tribe’.

([https://www.ipswich.qld.gov.au/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0008/10043/appropriate\\_indigenous\\_term\\_inoloy.pdf](https://www.ipswich.qld.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0008/10043/appropriate_indigenous_term_inoloy.pdf), n.d.)

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## Why are the names on the Aboriginal Australia Map different if you look at different maps?

The spoken Aboriginal Languages were recorded using the Roman alphabet, as used in English. Therefore, Aboriginal language sounds were interpreted in many different spellings. This means that the same words – including language groups and place names can be spelt in two or three different ways. For example, Yorta Yorta can also be spelled Jotijota, Jodajoda, Joti-jota, Yodayod, Yoda-Yoda, Yoorta, Yota, Yoti Yoti, Yotta-Yotta, Youta.

## Do we reference Elders, older family members as Aunty, Uncle?

Elders are highly respected Aboriginal people held in esteem by their communities for their wisdom, cultural knowledge and community service. They have gained recognition as a custodian of knowledge and lore. Age alone does not determine whether someone is recognised as an Elder in their community.

Aboriginal people refer to an Elder as 'Aunty' or 'Uncle'. However, it is recommended that non-Aboriginal people check the appropriateness of their use of these terms as referring to an Elder or leader as Aunty or Uncle may not be appropriate for an outsider unless a strong relationship has been established.

## Where you come from

### I feel uncomfortable asking families where they are from, like I 'm intruding. How can we ask this question respectfully?

Like all authentic and productive relationships, consulting with Aboriginal communities needs to be based on respect. Respect must be offered to be earned, particularly in engaging with community Elders and leaders and especially when dealing with the emotional impact and the trauma associated with colonisation, Stolen Generations and historical policies such as the forcible removal of Aboriginal children. Workers must always engage with family being mindful of these factors.

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Workers must always be mindful of power imbalances and recognise that the Aboriginal family are the best source of cultural connection for a child and consultation should always empower family to drive and control the cultural process for the child. Respect, acknowledge, actively listen and respond to the needs of Aboriginal families in a culturally appropriate manner.

While remaining respectful and mindful of the above, it is important for workers to not be intimidated to ask identity questions but instead have a respectful curiosity that allows family to feel inclusive and safe always. Family should always be made aware of the workers commitment to the child's cultural plan and working in their best possible interest which is keeping the child connected to their Aboriginal family, culture and community.

## **How quickly can I ask families about their identity?**

Where appropriate, families should be asked as soon as a child enters care about their identity in a respectful, appropriate and mindful way so that the cultural planning process can begin immediately.

As a cultural support plan needs to be developed and endorsed within the first 19 weeks of a child entering care, it is important that the worker meets with the family as a priority to ensure that the child's cultural information and needs are recorded. This information will then inform the case plan process and enable the cultural plan to be implemented as soon as possible by all care team members and carers.

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## How do we get information on country/mob if the child's parents don't know or won't tell me?

There are many variables that can lead to parents not being able to contribute to the child's cultural information and it is really a case by case situation to determine how best to proceed with obtaining information. The first action step would be to have a discussion with the child's care team to discuss and determine the best course of action.

Although there are many variables in this situation depending in the circumstances, some suggestions for action include:

- Development a genogram to includes names of grandparents or great-parents that can then be used to consult with a Senior Advisor or ACCSASS worker to help determine Aboriginal family connections and mob.
- At a care team meeting, identify an Aboriginal worker that may be able to accompany the worker to meet with the parents. Aboriginal families may be reluctant to talk with non-Aboriginal workers about cultural matters.
- If parents are not willing to share information, identify grandparents and other extended family members that may be able to assist.
- Make a referral to the AFLDM program for and AFLDM meeting to occur which will encourage family to come together to not only discuss the child's possible placement options but also the child's identity and culture.
- If mob/Country is known, the local co-operative, land council or Aboriginal community controlled organisation (ACCO) may be able to give you further information about the child's mob as well as provide contact with local Elders and extended family members.
- If Mob/Country is not known discuss services that may be able to work with them such as Link- Up if they grew up in Care or the Koorie Heritage Trust for general family research assistance.
- Most importantly work in close partnership with the Senior Advisor for Aboriginal Cultural planning in your area, who will guide and assist you through the process.

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## **What do I do if the family doesn't want the child to identify as Aboriginal, but they have Aboriginal heritage?**

While it is important that the family's desires for the child are taken into account and respected, if the child has been identified as Aboriginal to child protection and is in the care of the state then there is a responsibility to act in the best interests of the child and develop a cultural plan that reflects their Aboriginal heritage. Cultural information to inform the cultural plan may have to be sought from the child's Aboriginal grandparents, extended family, or community Elders.

The plan should still include a plan to connect the child to family, community and culture which will then allow the child to make an informed choice around their identity when and if the time comes.

## **If a parent doesn't identify as Aboriginal, can a child identify as Aboriginal?**

Yes, however if the parent does not identify as Aboriginal it will be important, where possible to consult with other Aboriginal family members and Elders for the child to have a cultural mentor and be guided in their cultural journey.

It can be a complex situation for the child when a parent does not identify as Aboriginal, however your Senior Advisor, Cultural planning will be able to provide further guidance on this as it will vary from case to case.

## **If we meet Link Up criteria, where do we go to find family information?**

Link-up works with adults over the age of 18 who are members of the Stolen Generation or as children spent time in state care. If the child's parent/s or grandparents agree to work with Link-up then a Link-up referral should be made directly with the Link-up Service of the state they are originally from. Information for Victoria and Tasmania can be found on their website.

<http://linkupvictoria.org.au/our-services/>





## **Cultural Support Plans**

### **Should we include information as to why children can't be with family i.e. protective concerns?**

No, this is not relevant to the cultural plan. The goal of a cultural plan is to provide details of the child's Aboriginal culture and to clearly map out how a child is going to remain connected to their family, community and culture. The plan should always be strengths based and in the best interests of the child, and should only focus on cultural information, family contact plans, cultural and identity specific goals and a return to country planning.

Cultural plans are for the child, so information included should not only represent the voice of the child but should also be written in a child-friendly format. Information should be objective and not include protective concerns, personal opinions and other information that is not relevant to the cultural well-being and development of the child.

### **Do we use first person as I or you?**

As the cultural plan represents the voice of the child and where applicable it is completed in consultation with the child, it should be written in first person.

For younger children or other children who are not able to contribute to the plan, it may be more appropriate to use "you".