

CULTURAL COMPETENCY

Cultural competency means being aware of your own cultural beliefs and values and how these may be different from other cultures. Practicing culturally-competent child advocacy entails being aware and respectful of the cultural norms, values, traditions and parenting styles of those with whom you work.

Practicing culturally-competent child advocacy is important because it:

- Ensures that case issues are viewed from the cultural perspective of the child and/or family to help sustain their culture and heritage;
- Ensures that the child's long-term needs are viewed from a culturally appropriate perspective;
- Prevents cultural practices from being mistaken for child maltreatment or family dysfunction, while also ensuring attention is paid to cultural practices that may be harmful;
- Assists with identifying when parents are truly not complying with a court order and when the problem is culturally inappropriate or a result of non-inclusive service delivery;
- Contributes to more accurate assessment of the child's welfare, family system, available support systems, placement needs, service needs and delivery;
- Decreases cross-cultural communication clashes and opportunities for misunderstandings;
- Allows the family to utilize culturally appropriate solutions for problem solving;
- Encourages participation by family members in seeking assistance or support;
- Recognizes, appreciates and incorporates cultural differences in ways that promote cooperation; and
- Allows all participants to be heard objectively.



HELPFUL REFLECTION TIPS

Here are a few tips to help you become a culturally competent advocate:

- Learn about your culture and values, focusing on how they inform your attitudes, behavior, and verbal and nonverbal communication.
- Do not think that “good” and “right” values exist in your own culture exclusively. Acknowledge that the beliefs and practices of other cultures are just as valid.
- Question your assumptions; check the reality rather than immediately acting on them.
- Accept cultures different from your own and understand that those differences can be learned.
- Learn to assess whether differences of opinion are based on style (communication, learning or conflict) or real substance (issue).
- Practice the communication loop; don’t rely on your perceptions of what is being said.
- Continue to read and learn about other cultures. Do your homework: Know something about another culture group prior to approaching them.
- Understand that any change or new learning experience can be challenging, unsettling, and draining; give yourself a break and allow for mistakes.

In order to avoid institutional bias while working your case, ask yourself:

- What assumptions have I made about the cultural identity, genders, and background of this family?
- What is my understanding of this family’s unique culture and circumstances?
- Have reasonable efforts been made in an individualized way to match the needs of the family?
- Are there family members and/or other important people who have not been contacted who should be involved in this process?
- Have relatives been fully explored as preferred placement options as long as they can protect the child and support the permanency plan?
- What services are being offered to allow the child to remain at home or reunify the family (as applicable)?
- Are this child and family receiving the same level and tailoring of services as other children and families?
- What evidence has supported the recommendations I have made? Would I make the same recommendations if this were a white child or a white family versus an African American, Latino, Asian American or Native child or family?

