

Tips for Working with Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) Communities

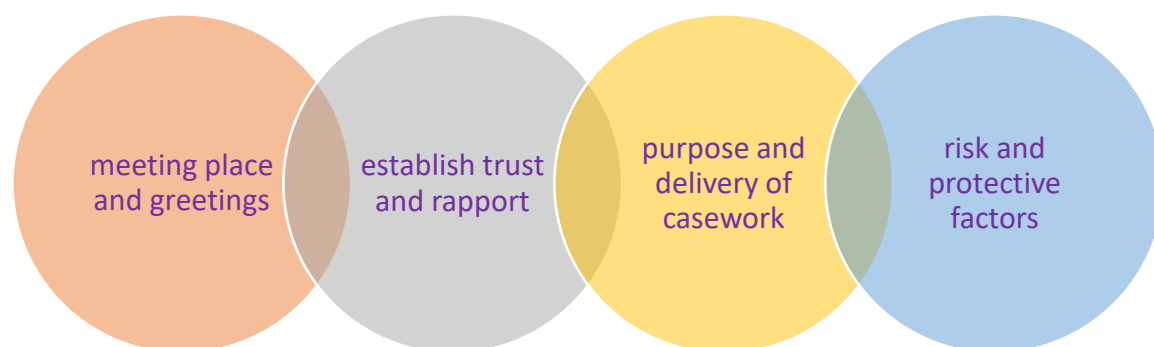
This factsheet provides tips on how casework staff in the Permanency Support Program (PSP) can work effectively with children, young people (child) and their families from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communities.

The term CALD is commonly used to describe people who have a cultural heritage different from that of the majority of people from the dominant Anglo Australian culture.

When you work to understand a CALD family's culture, values and beliefs, your practice will be more responsive and tailored to the child and family's individual needs. Always bring culture to the forefront of your work, to explore and talk about it, and to see it as a source of strength and connection.

Key Areas to Consider when Working with CALD Children and Families

There are **four** key areas to consider when working with CALD children and families:



Meeting Spaces and Greetings

It is important to promote a feeling of safety and openness when meeting and talking with families. You may be meeting them in their home, the office or talking to them over the phone. Children and their families may be nervous, unsure or even fearful when meeting you. Children may not understand why you have come into their lives.

First interactions

First interactions are important. Take the time to plan these interactions carefully to ease their stress and anxiety. Consider the following factors:

- **Meeting spaces and environments** – if meeting in a family's home, find a comfortable space where you won't be interrupted. Consider which room in a home is best and if a conversation is sensitive and requires privacy. Avoid interview rooms with closed-in spaces or barred windows, they may trigger flashbacks and fearful reactions. Ensure spaces are child friendly, with age-appropriate toys. Also ensure there are no triggering or inappropriate posters on the walls, e.g., many human rights posters illustrate images of torture that could be re-traumatising for CALD families with experiences of war.
- **Time** – some CALD communities have different concepts of time, e.g., some cultures place less value on punctuality. Families may not realise that lateness might suggest a lack of commitment or have serious consequences. You can respectfully address this by making clear the importance of punctuality and working with them to manage this.
- **Participants** - ask the family who should be at the meeting, or if they require an interpreter or a community support person.
- **Greetings** - check the [SBS Cultural Atlas](#) on how to address children, their parents or family members in terms of handshake or eye contact.
- **Names** – consider how family members would like to be addressed and, if you are unfamiliar with a name, how to pronounce it. Some family members may use Anglicised or alternative names to official records.
- **Family time** – when choosing a location for family time, include locations that address a child's cultural needs. For example, a community centre with a cultural focus, place of worship or a cultural event.

- **Children** – when meeting with a CALD child, consider finding a space familiar to them such as school, their home, or a local park. This can help reduce anxiety and ensure a more trusting start to the relationship. Consider allowing trusted people to be present at the interview if the child would like this. It's likely they may feel very scared and confused about why they have been removed from their parents.

Examples of What You Could Say and Ask

In the meeting, you could say and ask:

- “Hello. My name is xxx. I am here today to talk to you about (topic) and my role in this meeting today is to....”
- “I have found a private space for you and your child/children to do some activities while we have a conversation regarding xxx.”
- “Would you like any other family members or your interpreter to be present throughout this meeting?”
- “How do I pronounce your name? Thank you, that’s a lovely name” (repeat their response).
- “Is there any other name you like to be referred to as?” (If yes or no, confirm which name you will use).
- “How are you finding the room? Is there anything we can do to make it more comfortable for you or your children?”
- “If you have any questions during or after our conversation, please let me know.”
- “I understand that it can be uncomfortable sometimes to share private details with me throughout the meeting. How will I know if this is the case and how is this usually addressed within your family or culture? I want to make sure that you feel comfortable talking with me and if a topic is making you uncomfortable, how we can move to the next topic?”
- “I will be taking notes about some of the conversations we have today in my notebook (or laptop). This information is then filed on my work system so we can help you and your family get access to xxx services.”
- “What day of the week works best for you for our next appointment?” (Agree on a day, then a time).

- “Is there any reason you could be late for this appointment? I am just checking to make sure you can get here on time as we will book out a space for our meeting and I want to make sure this room is available for us to have another conversation. Here is my number, you can call me if you need to change our appointment or are running late.” (Adapted from the Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2015).

Establish Trust and Rapport

When building trust and rapport with a child and their family in PSP:

- **Allow time for responses** - don't rush a child, their family, carer, or community member to tell their story. Silence is okay. All children and families will need time to build trust, especially CALD and Aboriginal people. Don't expect many answers or large parts of their story on the first meeting.
- **Be transparent** - explain your role, your organisation, and your purpose. You may need to explain how child protection and out-of-home care work (OOHC).
- **Be empathetic and open-minded** - acknowledge how different Australia may be to where they come from and ask them about how children are cared for in their culture.
- **Read body language and eye contact** - CALD communities give different meaning to communication, expression, and emotions. See the [SBS Cultural Atlas](#) for information on this. Many communities have different views about eye contact and when it is appropriate. In some cultures, it is disrespectful for children to directly look at adults.
- **Be curious and truly listen** - when you use a respectful, caring manner, people are more likely to feel safe and trust you with their life story, struggles, challenges, and strengths.
- **Avoid jargon** – many CALD children and their families may have limited or even no English. Use simple, everyday language. Always check that you are understanding each other. Many concepts may need extra explanation, like children being removed from parents and returned home, foster care, guardianship, and adoption.
- **Be prepared for personal questions** - families from collective cultures are more likely to be curious about your personal life and use this information to establish trust and credibility.
- **Watch your interview style** – be mindful of your behaviour and avoid coming across as interrogatory. Let children and families steer the process. Many torture and trauma survivors feel helpless as a result of experiences of torture and settlement.

- **Avoid assumptions** - ask children and their families about the meaning of information and practices.
- **Acknowledge a child's connection to culture** - and how important that is, especially if they are living with carers from another culture.
- **Avoid asking families and children to repeat traumatic stories** - make comprehensive case notes. Also get the client's consent when you inform referral services of their background to avoid so CALD families do not have to repeat their stories to each service or worker.

When Speaking with Children

- Establish trust and connection with younger children or children with limited English through play, drawing, or body language. Find common ground through hobbies or interests. This is especially relevant if you are speaking through an interpreter.
- Acknowledge that children, particularly older children, may have a more active role in handling family issues. They may feel responsible for “fixing” family issues or it is their fault the family is involved with the child protection system.
- Ask the child about their views on their family and culture and if they are different from their family's views.

For more information see: [Tips for Talking to Children And Young People](#).

It's Normal for Families to Feel Worried

Keep in mind that some families may initially be wary of your work with their family. This is nothing personal towards you as a caseworker. Families may have experienced oppression, torture, or other trauma.

They may have had negative experiences with government systems or be wary of outsiders having a say on their family. This can lead to mistrust of the child protection system and their involvement in the PSP. It is your role to address these issues and build a relationship that best supports the child and their family.

For further information see [Language, Language: The Words We Use – Practice Tips, Dignity Driven Practice](#) and [Relationship-Based Practice](#).

Purpose and Delivery of Casework

By providing context to the child protection system and the PSP, a child and their family will better understand your casework and service delivery.

When you first meet with a child and their family, consider the following:

- Have you provided the family with an overview of PSP and your service provider's role in a way they understand?
- How will you explain confidentiality, privacy, and duty of care in language that families and children understand? Remember, some refugee clients may not understand the concept of confidentiality. They may also be reluctant to trust interpreters and service providers, particularly those from their own community.
- How will you explain the way you gather information about the family's journey and story and how you document, store, and access it?
- What visual and written information will you use to explain their obligations, rights, and responsibilities in the PSP?
- Are children and families able to express their view of the child protection system and the reason they are in the PSP?
- Are children and families' culture supported, and are there factors hindering this?

Examples of What to Say to Help You Gather Information

When talking with families you might say:

- "When I have worked with other refugee and migrant families, I heard about their frightening or traumatic experiences. I do not want to upset you by asking questions about the reasons you have come to Australia, but it is important to understand a little bit about your history so that we can work towards your children staying with you".
- "It is not my intention to take (child's name) from your family. I am here to look at ways for you to live safely with your family and if that is not possible, how you can still have close connections with your family and your community?"
- "How can I help your child reconnect with your community?"

When talking to children you might say:

- “What do you think I can do to make things better for you?”
- “Is there anything that you are worried about?”
- “What roles do your father and mother have at home?”
- “Who is in your family?”
- “What language do you speak at home and outside your home?”
- “What do you do to connect to your culture? Are you interested in attending cultural celebrations, community events or a place of worship?”

Documenting Casework with a Child or Family

When documenting casework with a child or family:

- record a child’s full story and their views accurately – ask open-ended and specific questions that demonstrate respect, compassion, and cultural sensitivity to achieve better outcomes for a child
- use strengths-based language in all documentation
- explain why you document a child’s story and parents, carers and family circumstances and views
- explain confidentiality and privacy – CALD communities may feel less scrutinised or anxious when they know their rights and why you document their lives.

Keep in mind that CALD communities may find your questions and investigative work into their family histories and personal matters disrespectful, culturally inappropriate, interrogative, authoritative or daunting.

A child’s connection to family, culture, and community is a significant protective factor in nurturing their overall wellbeing. This must be recognised and supported whether a child’s permanency goal is preservation, restoration, guardianship, adoption, or long-term care

Risk and Protective Factors

CALD families face unique challenges related to culture and migration that intersect with the common risk factors faced by all families such as domestic violence, substance abuse, mental illness, and socio-economic disadvantage. It is important to work holistically in understanding the factors that lead to their involvement with the child protection system.

When determining risk and protective factors in a CALD child's life, consider:

- traditional cultural practices
- impact of migration, acculturative stress
- intergenerational trauma and conflict
- their English proficiency
- lack of awareness of the Australian system and local services available
- loss or lack of available extended family and/or social community supports
- differences in child centred family functioning
- parental capacity, especially when there was an exposure to trauma
- different parenting styles and how they are affected by culture
- roles and responsibilities within the family structure
- traditional patriarchal family structures
- lack of information about appropriate Australian parenting practices (Kaur, 2012).

Children in PSP need to live in a safe, predictable, and secure environment. When determining risk and protective factors in your casework, consider:

- how your casework may affect children and families, especially where protective factors are recognised
- how to involve children in problem-solving and decision-making that affects them
- how to avoid stereotypes and assumptions about the challenges children are experiencing
- how to support children to have a voice and express what is important to them.

References

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