ARIZONA
DEPARTMENT
of CHILD SAFETY

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Preserving a Child's Connections to Family, Tribe, Culture, and Community

Seek opportunities to support the child's development and preservation of a cultural identity.

Shared cultural values, customs, and histories shape the child's view of the world, and their thinking and behavior. A shared cultural heritage bonds members of the group together, creating a sense of identity and belonging through community acceptance. Children in out-of-home care often leave behind much of their cultural heritage and enter into new settings with different values and customs.

Identify aspects of culture important to the child and actively work to keep connections that will maintain a sense of identity and belonging.

- Sibling relationships can uniquely sustain a child's sense of both their personal and family history.
- Gather information about the characteristics of a child's culture, friends and their backgrounds, school and neighborhood activities, celebrations and special events, language preference, religious affiliation, and support networks.
- Talk with the child and parents about their cultural beliefs and practices, and share the information with caretakers, services providers, and others.
- Acknowledge celebrations/events within the child's culture of origin, and allow and encourage the child to participate. Respect the child's choice of religious affiliation and help the child participate.
- Ensure that the child spends time with individuals who share the child's culture; include family members, neighbors and community members if appropriate.
- Seek caregivers and service providers who can speak the child's primary language.
- Provide books, toys, and games about the child's culture of origin.
- Celebrating holidays and providing familiar food can be soothing to a child.
- Identify individual and community networks that should and be involved with a child while the child is in care..

Work as a team to actively support the child's important connections.

- Keep children with siblings and relatives whenever possible and safe.
- Place children in close proximity to the parents' home/neighborhood, within the child's own school district, and with caregivers who can communicate in the child's language.
- Include a parenting time plan in the case plan, designed with the family and child, describing how the family network and team will keep the child in contact with important people and involved in the activities the child/youth enjoys.
- Frequent, in person, and meaningful contact with family is best, and can be enhanced through additional contact by telephone, mail, email, and/or virtually, if available and appropriate to the child.
- Include other team members, especially the out-of-home caregivers, in the plan to maintain the child's connections and interests.

- Be encouraging and patient while youth explore who they are or want to become. Encourage them to try new experiences and interests.

Connections give a sense of belonging, continuity, and emotional comfort that support healthy social development and general well-being.

- A child's sense of belonging helps to mitigate feelings of loneliness that can happen after separation from family and friends.
- Familiar activities are comforting and provide an emotional respite/comfort zone. Does the child like music, sports, crafts, reading, animals, or other activities?
- When identifying important connections, look beyond relatives. There may be friends, neighbors, or others in the child's community that he/she would like to contact. Encourage contact through phone, letters, or email.
- A child's ongoing supportive relationships and their sense of community are protective factors that can mitigate risks of harm to the child and help keep the child safe. Often, these people can be part of the child's supportive network after reunification, which promotes safety.

"Efforts to support healthy relationships both reduce and mitigate the impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences." Arizona ACE Consortium

- Genuine, lasting, and positive connections to family, siblings, and relatives/kin also help the child heal from the maltreatment experienced and improve life-long wellbeing. Relatives who cannot be a placement may still be able to provide a safe and supportive connection.
- Seek opportunities for the child to build cultural awareness and involvement. A child's ability to identify with the child/youth culture, motivation to explore culture, and level of cultural awareness can provide a sense of belonging.

Refer to DCS Policy Manual Chapter 4: Section 11, Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standard.

Birth to 3: Babies and young children need to develop a secure attachment to nurturing, responsive parents/caregivers while in safe and structured environments. Secure attachment and positive interactions are the foundation for social competence.

Early Childhood, Age 3-5: Same as above, plus children begin to develop social relations with others. They also develop behaviors such as cooperation. Childhood, Age 6-11. Peer relationships and positive/supportive relationships with adults outside of the family increase in importance. Actively reinforce the child's positive engagement with others and their world.

Early Adolescence, Age 12-14: Peers assume a more central role. Social interactions and peer connectedness becomes more important as self-concept and identity is developing. Connections to others can help mitigate risk for development of harmful, unhealthy, or undesired behaviors.

Adolescence, Age 15-19: Decisions and choices gradually shift from adults to the young adult; personal morals and values are developed; friendships help develop a sense of intimacy, loyalty, and trust. Allow participation in normal social activities. Allow and encourage participation in normal adolescent activities, like spending time with friends and getting a job.

Some children will have needs associated with an earlier age or developmental stage due to experiencing maltreatment, trauma, and/or multiple placement disruptions. Therapeutic intervention or support may be needed.