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## Topic 1

In this topic you will learn how to:

- 1A Identify the potential impact of cultural factors**
- 1B Identify critical issues that influence relationships and communication**
- 1C Establish key aspects of cultural safety in consultation with Indigenous Australians**
- 1D Evaluate cultural safety in own work**

## Identify cultural safety issues in the workplace

Culture includes language, religion, beliefs, food and other shared characteristics of social or ethnic groups. Cultural awareness and knowledge provides educators with the ability to work effectively with people from different cultural backgrounds, and to meet their needs through understanding, empathy and an appreciation of the barriers they face. This topic focuses on the culture of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people.

Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people have distinct and complex cultures. Learning about these cultures, including their history, traditions and beliefs, allows non-Indigenous educators to design and implement service practices to meet Indigenous Australian individuals' needs in a culturally sensitive way. It also allows Indigenous Australian and non-Indigenous educators to work effectively together.

The following table maps this topic to the National Quality Standard and both national learning frameworks.

National Quality Standard		
	Quality Area 1: Educational program and practice	
	Quality Area 2: Children’s health and safety	
	Quality Area 3: Physical environment	
	Quality Area 4: Staffing arrangements	
	Quality Area 5: Relationships with children	
✓	Quality Area 6: Collaborative partnerships with families and communities	
	Quality Area 7: Governance and leadership	
Early Years Learning Framework		My Time, Our Place
Principles		
✓	Secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships	
✓	Partnerships	
	High expectations and equity	
✓	Respect for diversity	
✓	Ongoing learning and reflective practice	
Practice		
✓	Holistic approaches	Holistic approaches
	Responsiveness to children	Collaboration with children
	Learning through play	Learning through play
	Intentional teaching	Intentionality
✓	Learning environments	Environments
✓	Cultural competence	Cultural competence
	Continuity of learning and transitions	Continuity and transitions
✓	Assessment for learning	Evaluation for wellbeing and learning
Outcomes		
✓	Children have a strong sense of identity	
✓	Children are connected to and contribute to their world	
✓	Children have a strong sense of wellbeing	
✓	Children are confident and involved learners	
✓	Children are effective communicators	



## Deaths in custody

Death in custody is defined as ‘the death of a person in prison custody, or police custody, or detention as a juvenile’. Here are a few significant facts about deaths in custody and the criminal justice system.

### Facts about deaths in custody

The Royal Commission found that Indigenous Australian people were significantly over-represented in deaths in custody when compared with the non-Indigenous population.

According to the Australian Human Rights Commission, there were 96 Indigenous deaths in custody between 31 May 1989 and 31 May 1996.

There were 86 total deaths in custody for the 2008 calendar year. Indigenous Australian people remain more than twice as likely to die in custody as their non-Indigenous counterparts.

Indigenous Australian people remain proportionally over-represented in contact with the criminal justice system.

Statistics show that Indigenous Australian juveniles are around 20 times more likely than non-Indigenous juveniles to be detained.

## Analyse historical issues

The impact of British colonisation on Indigenous Australian people varies. Some people accept that these behaviours were in the past, while others continue to feel its direct impact on their personal identities and the development of their cultures.

As an educator, you must respect and empathise with the opinions of the families and children you are caring for. Your main focus should always be the care and development of children.

By asking questions and seeking answers, you can gain a better understanding of how these issues affect those in your workplace and the families of children in your care. You must always consider how these events may affect children in their ability to identify with their culture and how they integrate into formalised care.

As some of these events are quite recent, many Indigenous Australian families are still trying to deal with the consequences. For example, children in your service may have grandparents and other relatives who were forcibly removed from their families. When you work with Indigenous Australian people you may sometimes notice a level of mistrust or an unwillingness to cooperate. Time, patience and dedication to resolving these issues are needed.





### Yolngu

Refers to Indigenous Australian people in and from Northern Territory (north-east Arnhem Land).



### Anangu

Refers to Indigenous Australian in and from Central Australia.

## Language diversity

Each area has a number of language groups, each with unique ancient cultural heritage that is based around their physical and spiritual connections to their local land and sea.

This website provides a map of Aboriginal Australia: <http://aspirelr.link/map-aboriginal-australia>

Here are some aspects of the diversity found in Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people's culture.

Diversity across cultures	Diversity features
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Traditions</li> <li>▶ Ceremonies</li> <li>▶ Art</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Skills</li> <li>▶ Knowledge and stories</li> <li>▶ Kinship groups</li> </ul>

## Land rights

The *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976* represents the first attempt by an Australian government to legally recognise the Indigenous Australian system of land ownership. The Act has provided a mechanism for some Indigenous Australian people in the Northern Territory to maintain or re-establish their cultural identity.

On 3 June 1992, the High Court of Australia gave Aboriginal land rights legal recognition with its famous Mabo decision. The case centred on the Murray Islands in the eastern part of the Torres Strait Islands between Australia and Papua New Guinea. The Meriam people, led by Eddie Mabo, took the action in the High Court to overturn the doctrine of terra nullius. The court found that under Australian law, Indigenous Australian people have native title rights to their land. The decisions ruled that these rights existed before colonisation and still exist under the common law.

Here is a brief overview of the family structure of Indigenous Australian people.

### The extended family

Indigenous Australian family structures have been fragmented since European colonisation, largely because of interracial marriages, the effect of assimilation and the 'child protection' policy. However, the extended family remains a strong constant in the lives of Indigenous Australian people.

### Living arrangements

Indigenous Australian people rarely live alone. Their families usually live in larger households than non-Indigenous families. Extended family share things such as food, clothing, money and housing with other family members and provide a support network, sharing the care of older people or sick relatives and children.

### Raising and educating children

Kinship also defines the roles and responsibilities family members have for raising and educating children in the community.

Children are not just the responsibility of their parents; they are the responsibility of the whole community. It is common for children to live or stay with family members other than their parents, sometimes for long periods.

### Torres Strait Islander communities

In Torres Strait Islander communities, traditional adoption – when a child is permanently transferred to another extended family member – is a widespread practice. This can be done for a number of reasons, such as to continue a family bloodline, to provide an infertile couple with a child, to strengthen family bonds or to meet the care needs of an older relative.

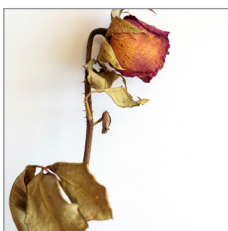
## Other aspects of cultural life

Here is a brief overview of some other aspects of cultural life in an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander community.



### Birthing and 'women's business'

Birthing is 'women's business'; only women can be present. Although a male doctor may be acceptable for consultation and information sharing, it is good practice to ensure a female doctor is available to attend the birth. It is also a good idea to consult with an Indigenous Australian health liaison officer or staff member for ethical and culturally appropriate advice.



### Attitude to death

Indigenous Australian people have a particular approach to death. To use the name of a deceased person indicates lack of respect for the deceased and for their bereaved family. Accordingly, a deceased person may be mentioned only indirectly. The name of a dead person is never mentioned and photographs or videos of the deceased have to be destroyed.

## Professional learning for educators

It is important that educators gain solid understanding of the impact of events and issues in Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander history. Knowledge of past and present issues assists you in offering accessible and inclusive service environments.

Cultural awareness training needs to be part of the induction or orientation program of new staff, and should be included in ongoing training in the education and care workforce. Knowing about Indigenous Australian culture helps provide an effective, efficient and appropriate service while minimising or eliminating cultural conflict. By educating yourself on these issues, you will feel more confident using and passing on cultural knowledge in an informed way.



## Practice task 1

1. What caused the early European settlers to declare that Australia was terra nullius, 'an empty land' or 'no man's land'?

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2. Name some practices of the European settlers that influenced the loss of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people's identity.

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3. What are some aspects of the cultural life of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people that it is important for an educator to know about?

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## Identify the impact of cultural factors on service delivery

Supporting the culture of Indigenous Australian families and children is a practice that many educators in children's services now adopt. To provide this support successfully, you need to understand the effects past and current events have on Indigenous Australian families. You also need to understand how your own cultural values affect the way you interact with Indigenous Australian people.

This means understanding your own culture and cultural practices, and the power relationship that exists between you and the service you work for, and Indigenous people, families and communities.

Education and care service providers can contribute to cultural safety by fostering an environment where educators can reflect on personal and organisational cultural values and how these affect Indigenous Australian families.

## Cultural identity

The cultural identity of many Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people is defined by the relationship they have with their land, people, belief systems, traditions, society and many other factors.

Your own identity is also a product of many factors, such as your family history and educational background. Your cultural identity and values can affect how you treat others.

### To explore your cultural identity further, consider these questions:

- ▶ What aspects of your life or immediate environment influence your world view?
- ▶ Does the way you view the world affect your judgments of how others live their lives?
- ▶ Do you think other people's world views affect the way they view you?

## Respect cultural identity

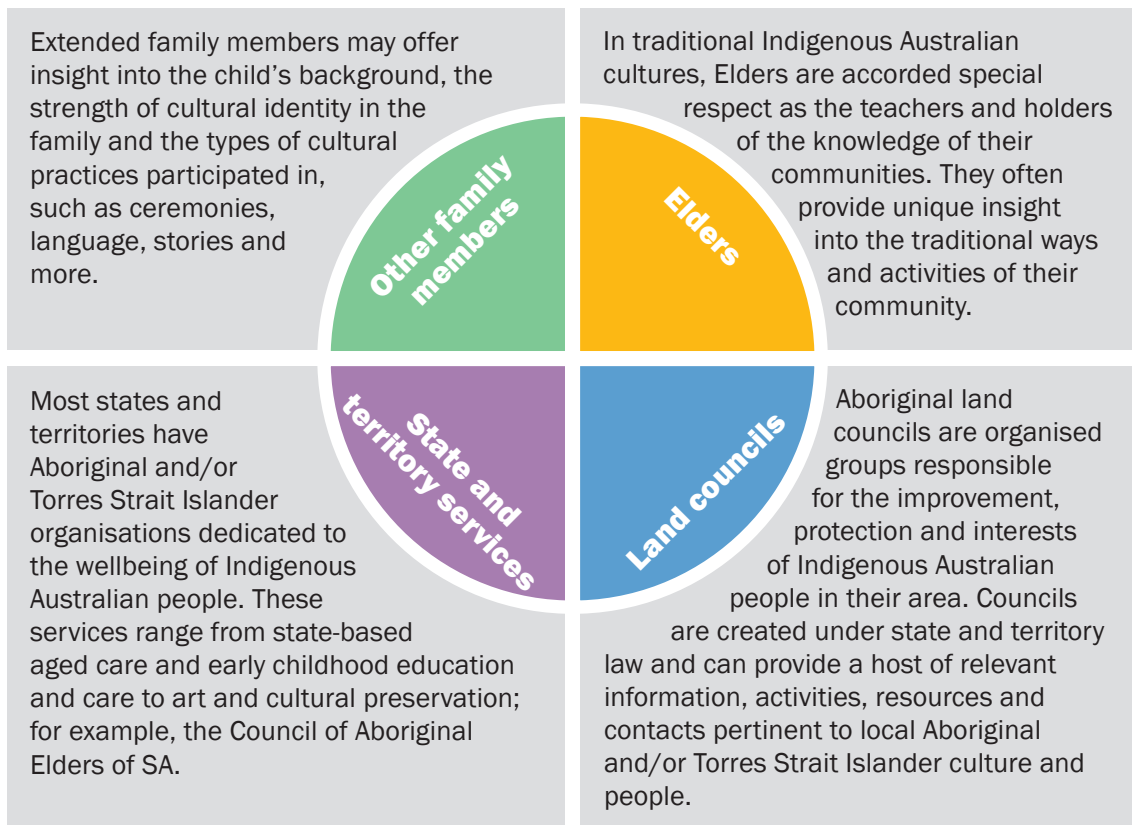
You should also be aware of and respect important cultural factors, such as:

- ▶ the historical events and issues that continue to shape the lives of Indigenous people today
- ▶ the importance and role of Elders in making decisions on behalf of the group
- ▶ the complex kinship rules about how each person relates to, and should interact with, everyone else in and outside the group
- ▶ the need to respect a deceased person and their family by not directly talking about or naming the person, and destroying any images of the deceased person
- ▶ being invited to use terms such as 'uncle' and 'aunty' as a sign of respect for older people in the community, even when they are not blood relations.

Watch this video for more information about respecting Indigenous Australian culture and identities.







## People with appropriate cultural knowledge

Identifying colleagues, professionals and community members who have knowledge of Indigenous Australian culture enables organisations to provide more effective education and care, and create a culturally sensitive and inclusive workplace. For example, without adequate cultural knowledge it is possible for an educator to misinterpret an Indigenous Australian individual's silence and avoidance of eye contact as a refusal to cooperate, when other cultural factors may be at play.

In an education and care service setting, the following human resources may be drawn on for their cultural knowledge.

### Human resources

- ▶ Community leaders, spokespeople and Elders
- ▶ Designated individuals and family through ancestral rights
- ▶ Inclusion Support Programmes and Inclusion Agencies
- ▶ Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander interpreters
- ▶ An appropriately trained Indigenous Australian staff member
- ▶ Indigenous Australian liaison or adviser

## Consult with appropriate people

When consulting with people about the cultural needs of a child, it's important not to have any preconceptions about the type of information you might gather. Ensure any discussion is open; use open questions that permit the person to provide you with extended answers and opinions.

2. What are some signs that would tell an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander individual that the service was culturally safe?

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3. What signs would tell you that an education and care service is working towards cultural safety at an organisational level?

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## Summary

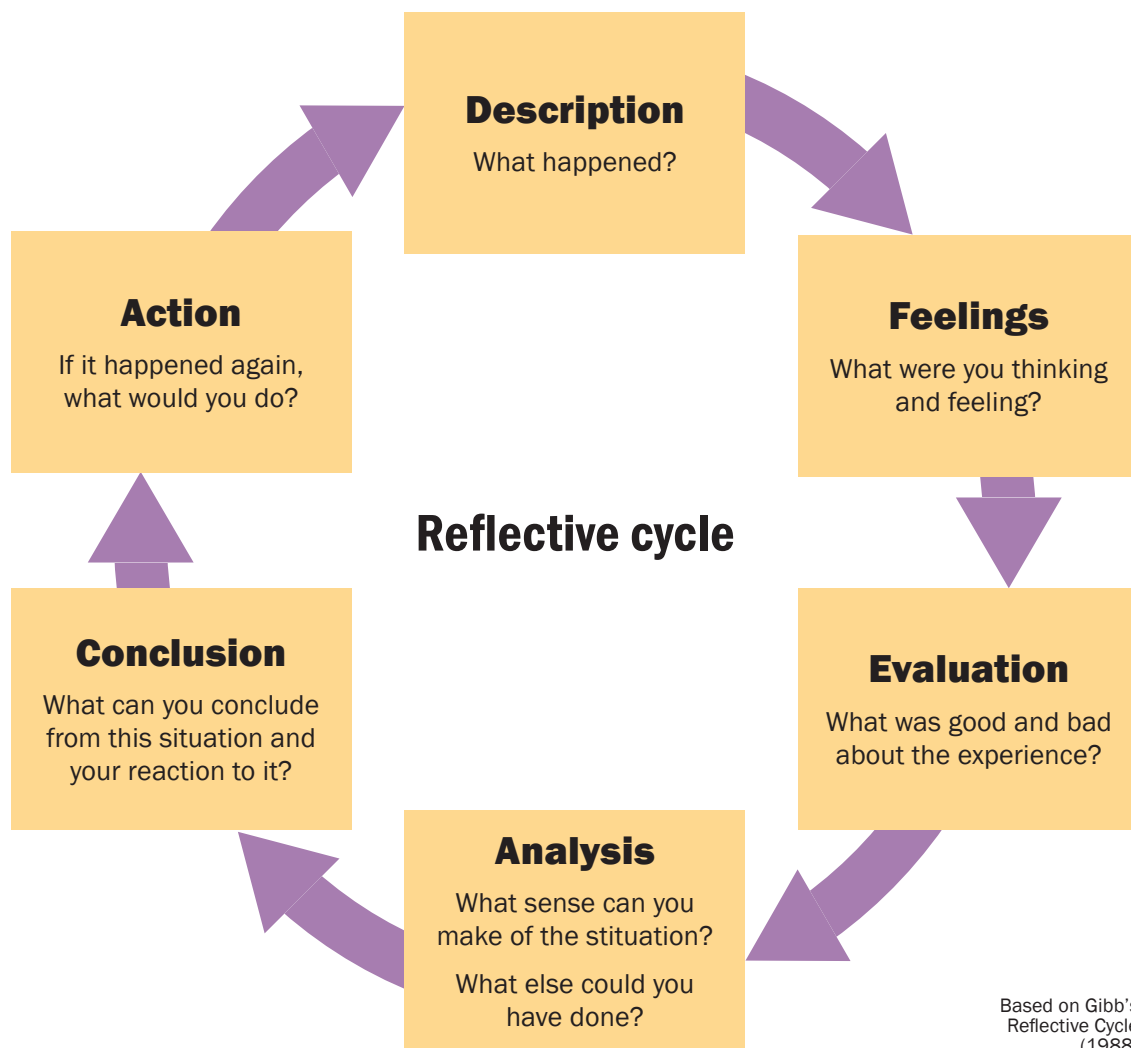
- ▶ The impact of colonisation on cultural practices, together with the experiences of Indigenous Australian individuals in western institutions, can have a significant impact on the way Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people participate in education and care services.
- ▶ It is important to understand and respect the impact of events and issues in Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander history, such as post-colonisation history, legislation, health and land rights, as these factors help shape the lives of Indigenous Australian people today.
- ▶ The effects of the stolen generations remain with many Indigenous Australian people even today, so it is necessary to practise sensitivity and acknowledge the emotional, mental and social effects on the victims.
- ▶ The history of European occupation is a key feature behind many of the critical issues that influence workplace relationships and communication with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people.
- ▶ It is important that Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Elders and community leaders are consulted, and work in collaboration to develop and maintain cultural safety in the organisation.
- ▶ Cultural safety is a broad concept that describes an environment that is accepting of all people and is free of discrimination. Cultural safety allows people to promote, develop and maintain distinctive customs, traditions, procedures and practices.
- ▶ Education and care services and individual educators need to evaluate their cultural safety work practices on a continual basis.

## 2B Reflect awareness of own and other cultures in work practices

When you work in an early childhood service environment, you need to recognise and respect diversity, and understand that everyone must be treated with courtesy and respect regardless of their race, religion, gender, beliefs or culture. People have a right to be different and everyone must be treated equally. You need to recognise and understand different cultures and how cultural differences can affect your work.

Keeping a reflective journal is a good way to examine your personal experiences of working with culturally diverse groups of people, and to reflect on your own social and cultural bias.

Here is a reflective cycle that is commonly used to help people think about and make sense of their personal experiences.



### Levels of social awareness

#### My way is the only way

People are aware of their way of doing things, and their way is the only way. They ignore the impact of cultural differences.

#### I know their way, but my way is better

People are aware of other ways of doing things, but still consider that their way is best. Cultural differences are seen as a problem and usually ignored or downplayed.

#### My way and their way

People are aware of both ways of doing things. They realise that cultural differences can lead to both problems and benefits, and use diversity to create new solutions.

#### Our way

People from different backgrounds come together to create a shared culture. They talk with others to create a new solution to meet the needs of a particular situation.

## Have the right attitude

You may not know everything about the socially or culturally diverse children in your care, but you can still build bridges by having the right attitude. It is well known that the right attitude can form a strong link between people of different backgrounds, no matter what your work role.

Here are some useful suggestions (adapted from Quappe and Cantatore, 2007, *What is cultural awareness anyway? How do I build it?*).

### Admit that you don't know

Admit that you don't know everything. This is part of the process of becoming culturally aware. Assume differences, not similarities.

### Suspend judgment

Suspend your judgment. Collect as much information as possible so you can describe the situation accurately before evaluating it.

### Have empathy

Try standing in another person's shoes. This is the best way to learn more about how other people would like to be treated.

### Don't assume

Don't assume anything. Ask your colleagues for feedback. Constantly check your views to make sure that you clearly understand the situation.

### Don't seek to control

Acknowledge that other people are also resourceful and that their way may add to what you know.

### Celebrate diversity

Celebrate diversity within your organisation. Find ways to share the different cultures of children and colleagues. There is much to learn from other people and their diverse ways of life.



**Example****Become culturally aware**

Rohini has just started working in a childcare centre. Although she is aware of her own cultural background, she has little understanding of the other cultures represented in the service and how they might impact on the behaviour of the children. To improve her cultural awareness, she asked her manager if there were any resources on Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander cultural information available for her to read. She was pleased to find out that not only were there resources, she was also about to complete some cultural competence training as part of her induction.

Watch this video for more information on becoming culturally aware.

**Context of awareness**

When working with Indigenous Australian people, it is important that you are aware of your own cultural beliefs, attitudes and values. This awareness prevents you from thinking that a person is doing something for the same reasons that you would. For example, a western person would consider a lack of eye contact to be disrespectful, whereas an Indigenous Australian person may think direct eye contact is disrespectful. A person's culture is so ingrained that they may not notice it; their thoughts and behaviours may have become automatic. When you reflect on your own attitudes and beliefs it helps you to develop strategies to manage your work with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people.

**Systems, structures and engagement with services**

Many Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people have had a negative experience with government and private education services and schools. Because of this, they may consider many service providers to be part of a non-Indigenous system with an ineffective one-size-fits-all approach to education.

Successfully working in partnership with Indigenous Australian people requires their full participation, consultation and involvement in decision-making about issues affecting them. Education and care services should be more flexible when dealing with Indigenous Australian people, as they may not be familiar or comfortable with the structured, highly organised system.

**Programs and services that most benefit Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander communities are those where:**

- ▶ the partnership is based on the concerns of the whole community and is not imposed from outside
- ▶ the arrangement meets the whole community's needs
- ▶ the community owns the service and the way it is delivered
- ▶ communication is effective and information is freely available.

## 2D Engage with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander interpreters and colleagues

The introduction of Indigenous Australian interpreters and liaison officers in education and care services delivery has had a positive influence on professional relationships with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander colleagues, families and communities. Indigenous Australian liaison officers, in particular, are a vital resource for bridging cultural gaps. They provide cultural, emotional and social support to Indigenous Australian people accessing services.

Interpreters help break down the language barriers frequently faced by Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people when dealing with health, social welfare and legal systems.



You need to be discerning when using a family member to interpret. They may only tell you what they want you to hear, not what the person actually says or means.

An official service, however, employs registered interpreters who are bound by a professional code of ethics. They are required to maintain strict confidentiality, interpret accurately and impartially, and act professionally at all times.

### Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander interpreters

Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander interpreters can improve communication with people who may be parents or colleagues. One example is the Aboriginal Interpreter Service (AIS) in the Northern Territory. The AIS has more than 400 registered interpreters and covers over 100 languages and dialects.

#### Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander interpreters provide:

- ▶ Aboriginal interpreter service
- ▶ face-to-face interpreting interviews
- ▶ telephone interpreting
- ▶ interpreting at community meetings
- ▶ regular rostered sessions (for example, in meetings with educators)
- ▶ audio recordings.

## Cultural brokers

As well as using the services of an interpreter, Indigenous Australian liaison officer or a colleague with specialised skills, there are other professionals and specialists who can help you meet your duty-of-care responsibilities to children and families. People such as healthcare workers, teachers, community workers and your colleagues can act as effective cultural brokers, bridging the gap between Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander cultural practices and western culture.

## Role of cultural brokers

A cultural broker is a person who mediates between people of different cultural backgrounds for a particular purpose, such as reducing conflict or producing some kind of change. Nurses and teachers are sometimes thought of as useful cultural brokers because of the following characteristics.

### Characteristics of nurses and teachers as cultural brokers

- ▶ They have experience in dealing with conflict situations between cultural groups.
- ▶ They are often seen as having an affinity with/understanding of the two cultures.
- ▶ They can cultivate varied social relationships and mediate between people/systems or act as a go-between.
- ▶ They can translate interests and messages between groups.

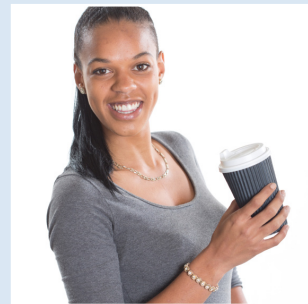
### Example

#### Interpreters and cultural brokers

Carrie Parker is a health coordinator at a medical centre and works with young women at risk.

As an Indigenous Australian person and trained nurse, Carrie also has a community role and is often called upon by educators to act as a cultural broker when interviews are being conducted with parents who find it difficult or confusing to deal with educational professionals.

'They don't understand the language of educators, so I act as the liaison for the community. When the teacher is talking, I go through the language and put it into community language that the people can understand.'



Watch this video for more information on interpreters and cultural brokers.







## Ongoing learning for staff and children

Culturally appropriate learning programs are an essential component for providing an inclusive and relevant education and care setting for Indigenous Australian children. Your service can do this by:

- ▶ enabling all staff to build knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander cultural practices through professional learning
- ▶ ensuring induction programs provide relevant education about Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander cultural practices
- ▶ developing the skills of educators to include Indigenous Australian history and cultural practices in programs and learning experiences.

Be aware that many Indigenous Australian people respond well to primary caregiving strategies where one educator remains the main educator for their child throughout the education and care process. This allows parents to develop a strong relationship of trust and understanding with the educator.

### Example

#### Effective partnerships

In the mid-1980s, the Nganampa Health Council introduced a strategy to improve antenatal care for women in Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara lands, South Australia.

The strategy involved developing a care record system for antenatal patients to be used in all Nganampa Health Council clinics. It introduced standard protocols for antenatal care, birthing and child healthcare.

When performance information from 1984 to 1996 was reviewed, the success of the strategy was revealed by a decrease in perinatal mortality and the proportion of low-birthweight babies, but an increase in the recorded mean birthweight.



## Practice task 9

1. Make a list of potential health issues that you think an educator should be aware of when caring for children from Indigenous Australian families.

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2. Make a list of the cultural issues an educator should be aware of when working with families to address the health needs of children in their care.

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## Accessibility

The distance a child has to travel impacts on preschool and school attendance. Proportionally more Indigenous Australian people live in remote areas than non-Indigenous Australians. It can be difficult to access a preschool or school in remote areas, simply because there are fewer services available and because of the time and distance required to travel. Many Indigenous Australian communities are located more than 50 km from their nearest primary school.

Providing culturally appropriate care and programs provides incentive for Indigenous Australian people to access and participate in education services.

## Affordability

Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander communities are generally in a poorer economic position than non-Indigenous Australian communities. Affordability of services is therefore an important issue, particularly for Indigenous Australian people on low incomes. With limited economic means, access to all but the most basic health, welfare, education and community services is often denied. Even transport can be a significant issue for people who do not have access to concession public transport fares or who live in remote areas. The cost of medication can also be a deterrent to participation in health programs. Affordability can be an important factor influencing preschool access for children from Indigenous Australian families.



Some ways the Aboriginal-specific preschool sector in New South Wales responded to access and affordability issues were through:

- ▶ low fees
- ▶ a bus service to promote access and participation.

(Source: Aboriginal Early Childhood Support & Learning Inc. Information Sheet, August 2013)

## Accountability

Fundamental to the success of any partnership arrangement for delivering services to Indigenous Australian people with support needs is the accountability of all parties for the service.

A coordinator can support the development of effective partnerships by helping to establish accountability between Indigenous Australian communities, a reference group and other partners to the service. Accountability relates to maintaining aims and objectives, ensuring that financial requirements are met, following project plans and reporting on activities.

### Equal opportunity

#### ***Equal Opportunity Act 2010 (Vic.) and Equal Opportunity Act 1984 (WA)***

The *Equal Opportunity Act 2010* (Vic.) makes it against the law to discriminate against a person based on their personal characteristics. It is also against the law to sexually harass someone, or victimise them for speaking up about their own or someone else's rights.

The *Equal Opportunity Act 1984* (WA) has the objectives of eliminating discrimination on the grounds of sex, marital status, pregnancy, family responsibility, family status, race, religious or political conviction, impairment, age or, in certain cases, gender history, and eliminating sexual and racial harassment. It also aims to promote recognition and acceptance of the equality of men and women, and the equality of people of all races, ages, abilities, and religious and political convictions.

## Culturally appropriate guidelines

In consultation with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander community leaders and workers, educators should develop culturally appropriate guidelines for education and care. Guidelines give a source of direction and a behaviour code that ensures culturally appropriate services are offered.

### **Culturally appropriate guidelines**

- ▶ Show respect for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander cultures and languages.
- ▶ Be sensitive to Indigenous Australian people's relationship with the land.
- ▶ Learn how to pronounce names correctly.
- ▶ Speak clearly and in plain English.
- ▶ Communicate openly, honestly and with sincerity.
- ▶ Establish rapport to build trust and respect.
- ▶ Be supportive and non-judgmental.
- ▶ Observe the fundamentals of nonverbal communication and active listening.

## Workplace code of practice

Negotiating a workplace code of practice, based on your knowledge of Indigenous Australian workers and with community consultation, is a good way to ensure that all employees operate from an agreed framework of understanding.

Here are some points to consider.

### **Professional and ethical behaviour**

Educators must ensure they do not do or say things that are unprofessional or detrimental to the health, and emotional and mental wellbeing of colleagues, children and families. This could include culturally unsound practices, such as being judgmental, or failing to acknowledge an Indigenous Australian worker's family obligations in the event of a death in the extended family.

### **People's rights**

It is vital that a code of practice recognises people's rights, including those that are protected by law. People have a right to participate in traditional cultural practices and have their cultural heritage recognised.

**Example**

**Document a culturally safe delivery service**

Philip has been given the task of improving the delivery of education and care in a service that has a majority of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children. Philip arranges to speak with a support worker to contact the main decision-makers in this community. He visits some Elders and with the help of the support worker, gains an understanding of the needs of the community. Philip will use this information in developing the next stage of his program.

He records the processes he has undertaken so that he can reflect on how they worked and provide information to colleagues about successful processes and relationships.



## Practice task 11

1. You have been asked to participate in a reference group at work to come up with a draft code of practice for the workplace. Your group has been given a list of guidelines to consider when writing the code to encourage cultural safety for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children and families.  
Complete this table by writing down a workplace example that explains the guidelines provided.

Professional and ethical behaviour
People's rights
Empathy