



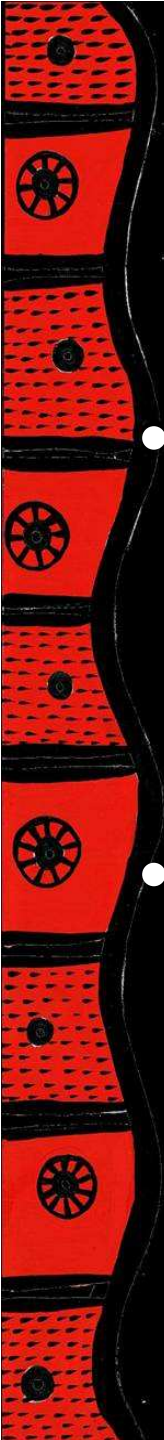
***Aboriginal Cultural Competence:
Working with Aboriginal children,
families and agencies***

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VACCA

The Great Divide: Cross-cultural Cross-over

Aboriginal	Non-Aboriginal/Western
Economics based on environmental sustainability	Economics based on production and consumption
Spirituality based on the land and waters	Spirituality (in most cases) based on sacred, written texts
Law 'written' in the land, passed through ancestral story telling, unchanging	Law established by common law (past judicial judgements) or parliament, constantly changing
Politics based on consensus of Elders	Politics based on representative democracy and power elites
Child rearing involves extended family and whole community	Child rearing based on nuclear family
Disadvantaged by process of colonisation	Advantaged by colonisation
Minority cultures	Dominant culture



Acknowledging the past and its impact on the present

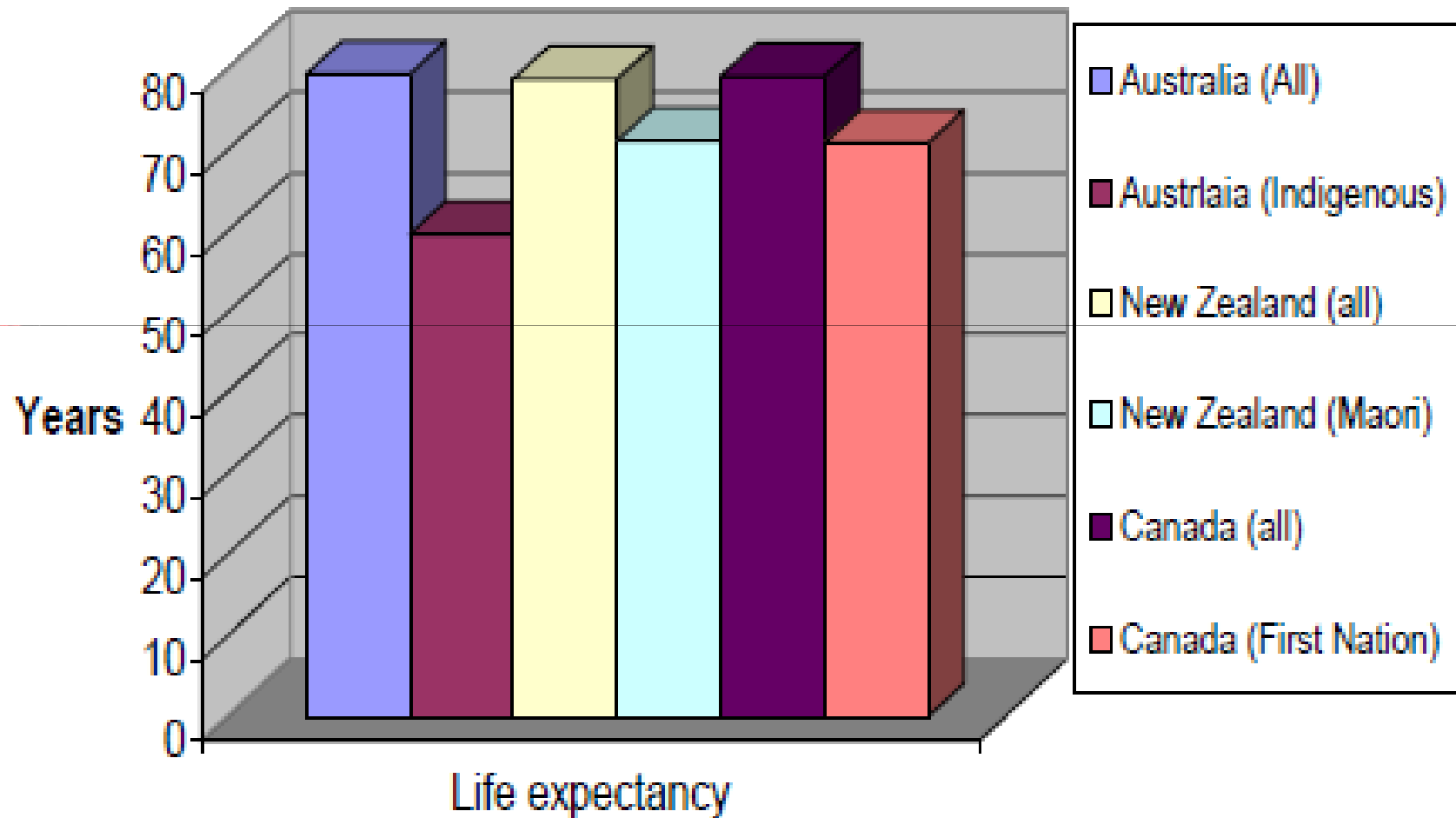
- Acts of disempowerment
 - Invasion
 - Change in economics, ecology and law
- Acts of disconnection
 - From the land
 - From community
 - From culture
 - From family (Stolen Generations)



Colonisation as an ongoing reality

- Loss of self-determination (disempowerment)
 - Treated as client communities
- Loss of economic and social capacity (disadvantage)
 - Unemployment (15%)
 - Incarceration (8.9% more likely)
 - Life expectancy (17 years less)
- Pervasiveness of racism and cultural abuse

Life Expectancy- Indigenous and non-Indigenous people



'Close the Gap', Oxfam Australia, Table I



Addressing the causal factors

The problem

- No self-determination
- Little respect for culture
- Fear and mistrust

The answer

- Self-determination, capacity building, partnerships and cultural competence



Victorian Aboriginal Children Policy

- Self-determination
- Best interests of the child
 - Acknowledgement of importance of Aboriginal culture and connection for the child
- Aboriginal Child Placement Principle
- Transfer of authority to Aboriginal agencies
- Cultural plans
- Cultural competence

Cultural Competence Continuum

Cultural Destructiveness

Cultural Incapacity

Cultural Blindness

Cultural Pre competence

Cultural Competence

Cultural Proficiency

Towards cultural competence

Characterised by
Intentional attitudes policies & practices that are destructive to cultures and consequently to individuals within the Culture

Characterised by:
Lack of capacity to help minority clients or Communities due to extremely biased beliefs and a paternal attitude toward those not of a mainstream culture

Characterised by:
The belief that service or helping approaches traditionally used by the dominant culture are universally applicable regardless of race or culture. These services ignore cultural strengths and encourage assimilation

Characterised by:
The desire to deliver quality services and a commitment to diversity indicated by hiring minority staff, initiating training and recruiting minority members for agency leadership, but lacking information on how to maximise these capacities. This level of competence can lead to tokenism

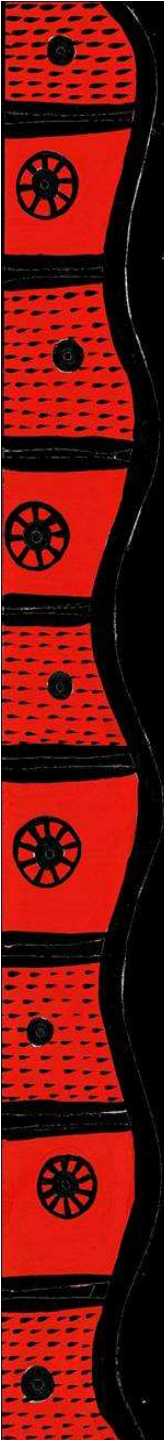
Characterised by:
Acceptance and respect for difference continuing self assessment, careful attention to the dynamics of difference, continuous expansion of knowledge and resources, and adaptation of services to better meet the needs of diverse populations

Characterised by:
Holding culture in high esteem: seeking to add to the knowledge base of culturally competent practice by conducting research, influencing approaches to care, and improving relations between cultures Promotes self determination



Towards cultural competence

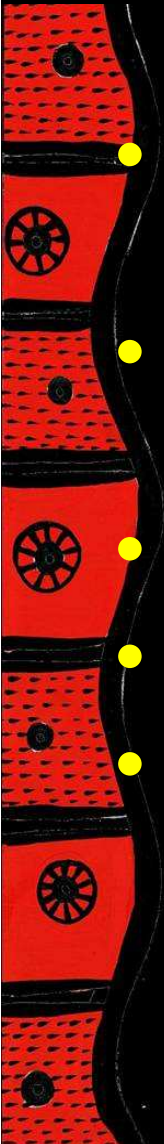
- Recognise that culture and connection to community is in the best interests of the Aboriginal people
- Being a culturally safe organisation
- Respect and understanding of culture
- Understanding the impacts of our racist history
- Addressing your 'inner racist'



White privilege – is this true for you?

- I can arrange to be in the company of my race most of the time
- If I need to move to rent or buy or if I need credit my skin colour will not be an obstruction to getting the property
- I can turn on the telly and see my race widely represented
- I can swear, get drunk, dress in second hand clothes, not answer letters without people saying how typical of my race
- I can do well without being called a credit to my race
- I am never asked to speak for all people of my race

Conceptual Framework

- 
- **Cultural Awareness** Knowledge with Understanding
 - **Commitment to Aboriginal Self-determination and Respectful Partnerships** – the Ground Rules
 - **Cultural Respect** - Attitude and Values
 - **Cultural Responsiveness** – Ability and Skills
 - **Cultural Safety** – Environment and Client Experience

Culture – meaning and identity



Culture frames the identity of all people

Our senses see, hear, taste, feel and smell the world through culture

Culture is as necessary to a sense of meaning and identity as air is to living.

Culture is the air our minds breathe.

Culture is our eyes onto the world.

Culture explains the world to us and us to the world



Culture Abuse

When the culture of a people is ignored, denigrated, or worse, intentionally attacked, it is cultural abuse.

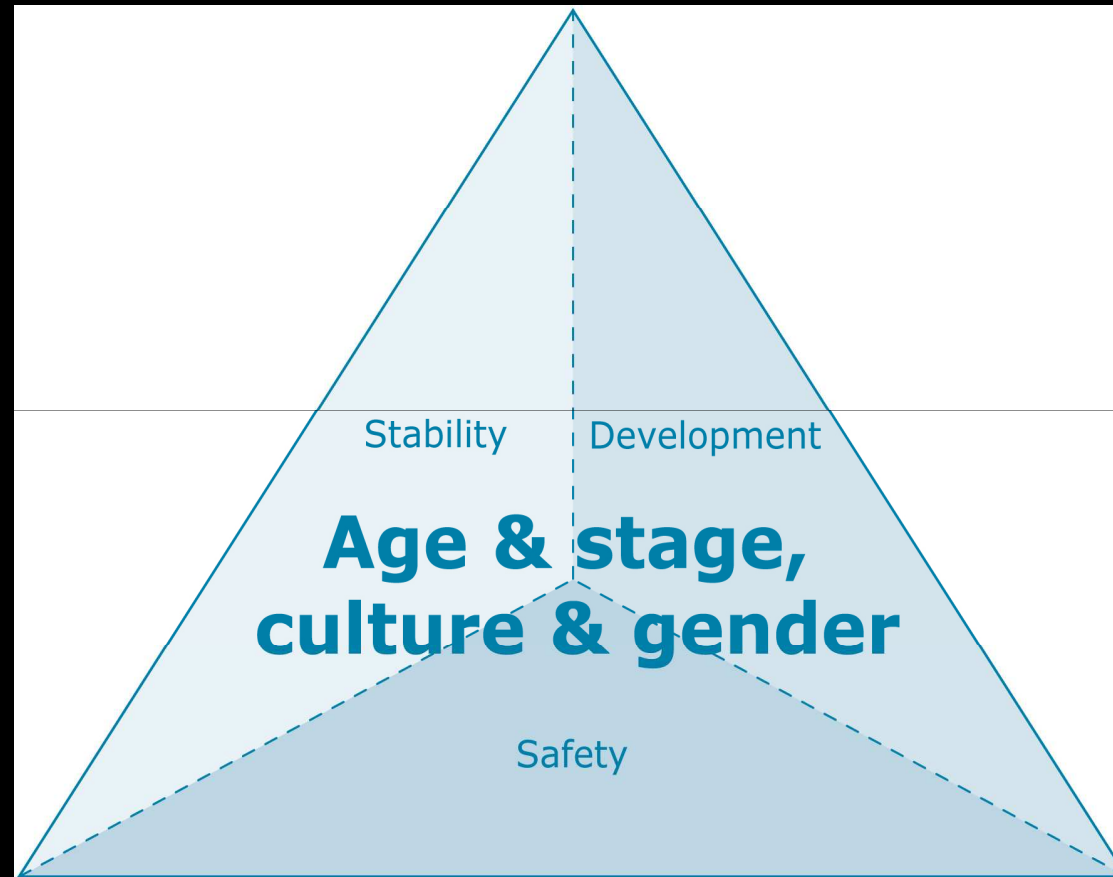
It is abuse because

- it strikes at the very identity and soul of the people it is aimed at;

- it attacks their sense of self-esteem,

- it attacks their connectedness to their family and community.

The Children's Best Interests Framework



Protect children from harm, protect their rights, promote their development



The lens of age and stage, culture and gender

- ***Safety***

- basic care and protection from current and future harm.
- For Aboriginal children, the protection of the child from cultural abuse.

- ***Stability***

- requires positive relationships and connectedness with parents, families, carers, friends and significant adults.
- For Aboriginal children, culture and community connectedness.

- ***Development***

- health and growth, emotional and behavioural development, education and learning, family and social relationships, identity, social presentation and self-care skills.
- For Aboriginal children, community connectedness factors which promote health development and Aboriginal understandings of emotional and behavioural development and approaches learning.

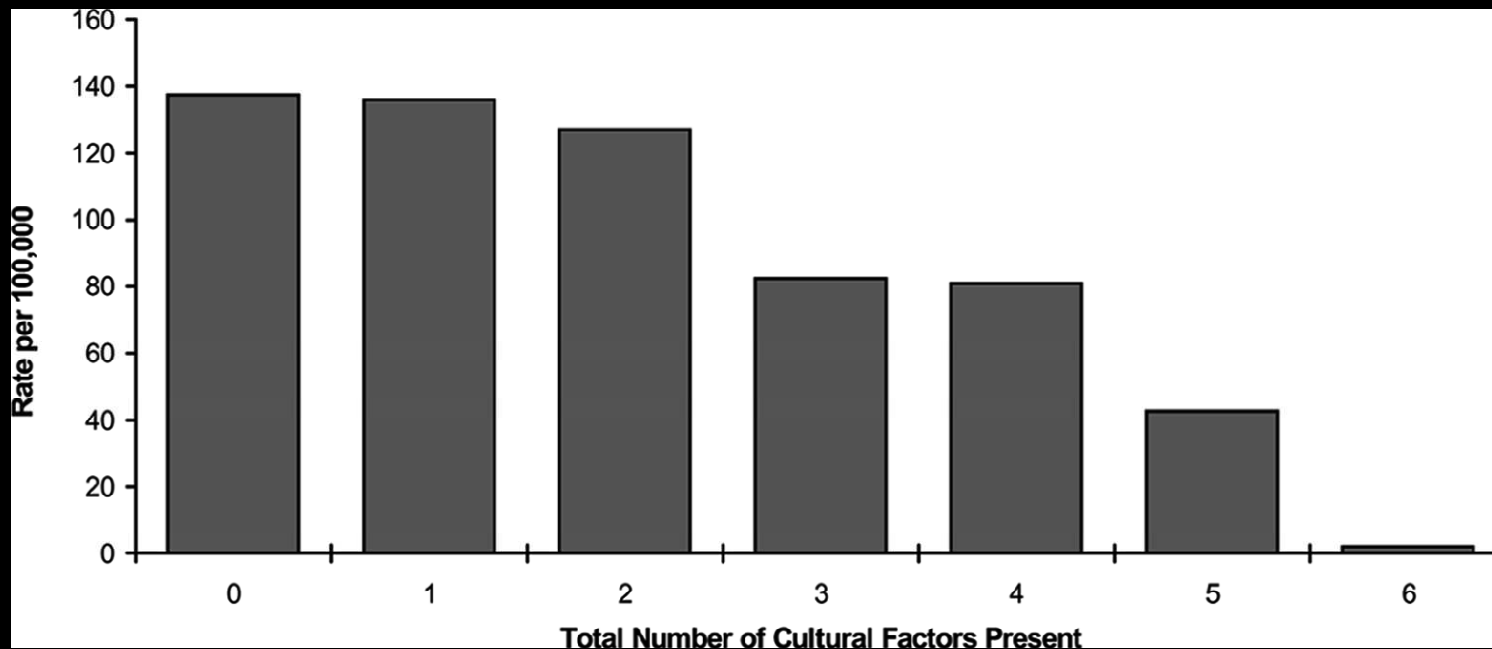


Rights and addressing disadvantage

- Issues of disadvantage in Aboriginal communities are best addressed by taking seriously a **human rights framework** which respects Aboriginal communities' rights to self-determination.
- Fundamental to providing for Aboriginal self-determination and respecting Aboriginal governance, is also working with Aboriginal communities to
 - **restore their capacity to exercise their rights, freedoms and responsibilities** in the context of the dominant culture.

EXAMPLE OF COMMUNITY-LEVEL INDICATORS AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP TO A HEALTH OUTCOME –

An index of “cultural continuity” comprised of six marker variables: degree to which each of B.C.’s individual bands have already secured 1) some measure of self government; some control over the delivery of 2) health, 3) education, 4) policing services, and 5) cultural resources; and 6) are otherwise at work litigating for Aboriginal title to traditional lands.



Suicide rates by number of factors present in the community (1987–1992). (Taken from Chandler M and Proulx T. Changing selves in changing worlds: youth suicide on the fault lines of colliding cultures. *Archives of Suicide Research* 2006; 10: 125-140. 2006).

Ground Rules: A Partnership Approach

- Aboriginal Agencies First
- Commitment to the principle of self determination/Aboriginal community controlled processes
- Processes towards protocols
- Negotiating reconciliation/commitment statements



Today Self-determination means:

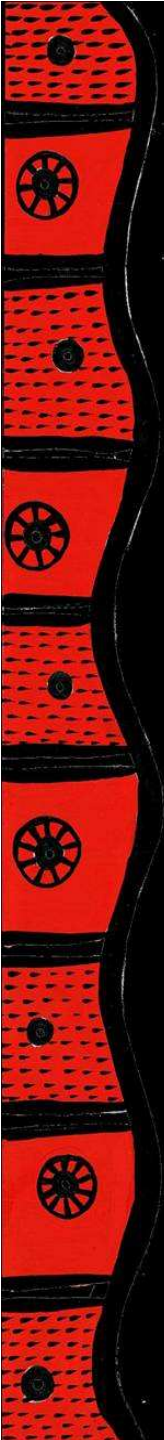
The right of Aboriginal people to have an influential and decisive voice in how services are delivered.

Recognition that the knowledge, understanding and cultural expertise of Aboriginal organisations gives this voice credibility and wisdom.




So when you:

Involve Aboriginal children and families in decision-making and provide an environment where Aboriginal children and families feel comfortable to speak up.



Turn to Aboriginal organisations for advice and guidance at a program development and case specific level because Aboriginal organisations know their families and communities.

Trust that advice rather than putting it through the lens of the dominant culture.



At an organisational level cultural competence means:

Your practice, programs and policies are consistent across all levels of your organisation.

For example, your Code of Conduct would include statements about respecting cultural differences and outline responses to inappropriate conduct such as racism or discrimination.

You would also take action against racism.

Cultural Safety

Commitment to Self-Determination & Respectful Partnerships

Culture

Respect

Responsiveness

Safety

Cultural Awareness



Cultural Stability



Development – growing through culture



Working With Aboriginal People

Values That Are Important To Aboriginal People

Sharing

Elders

Identity

Respect

Family

Culture

Community

Children

Honesty

Our Land

Humor

Self determination

Connecting





Swimming against the mainstream

To be able to provide culturally appropriate and responsive services, workers need to be aware of how the dominant mainstream culture:

- Provides privileges and power
- Affects values and cultural understandings – dangers of culture abuse and racism
- Affects how practice is conducted and affects what is seen as the central concern of practice
- Impacts on service recipients who are not of the dominant culture.



Engaging with Aboriginal People

You need to consider:

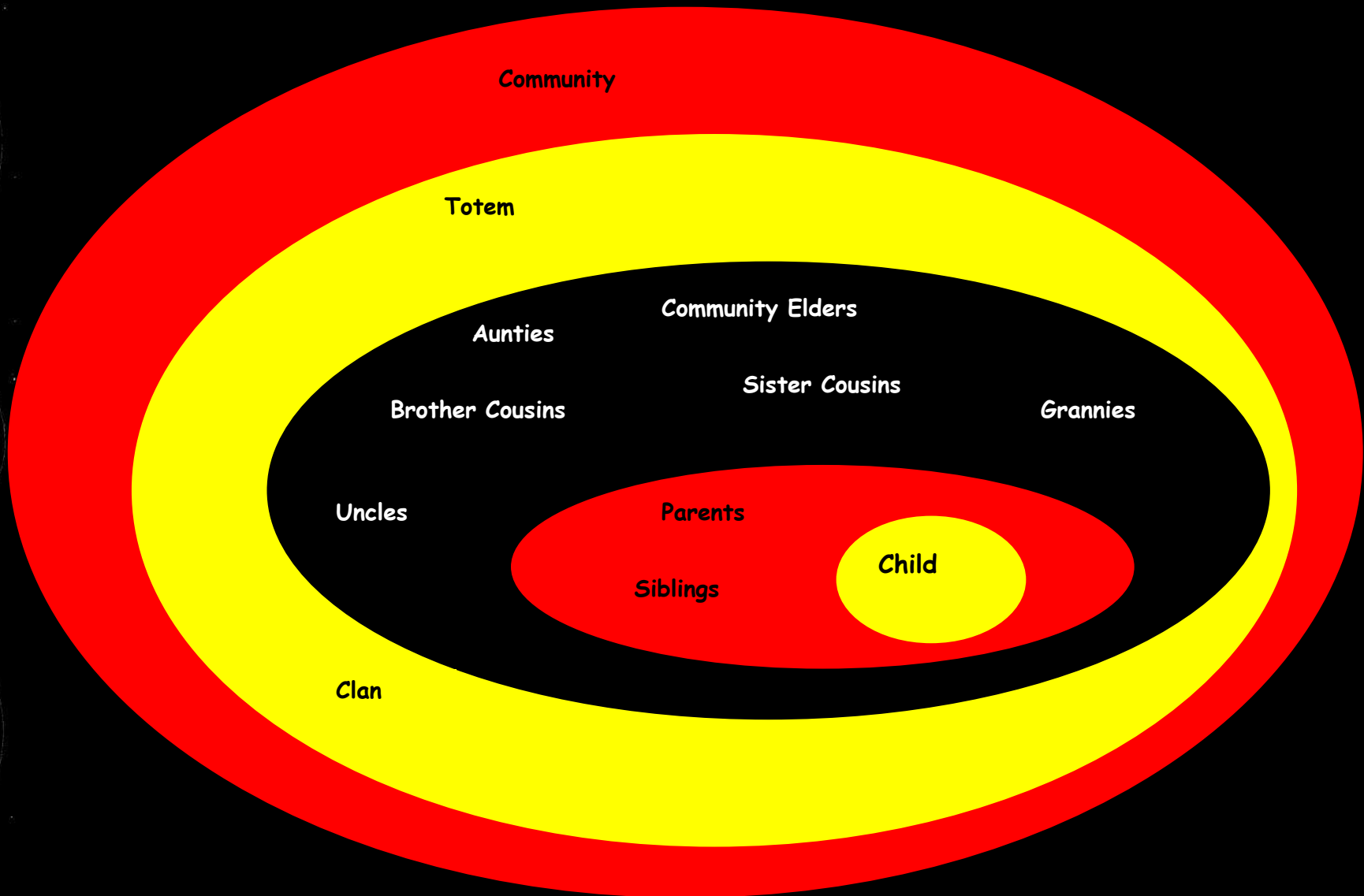
- Our words and actions are culturally different to other Australians
- Time is needed to develop a trusting relationship
- Our culture in terms of family traditions, values and beliefs and especially child rearing practices.
- That some areas are sensitive such as:
 - Funerals and respect for the deceased

There is no reference to part or full blood Aboriginal – there is no measuring cup in our culture in terms of Aboriginality.

- Avoid derogatory terms and watch your body language.

Aboriginal Family Structures

Relationships With Aboriginal Children



Source: Based on NSW office of the Children's Guardian Indigenous material www.kidsguardian.nsw.gov.a



Aboriginal Family Structures

Relationships With Aboriginal Children

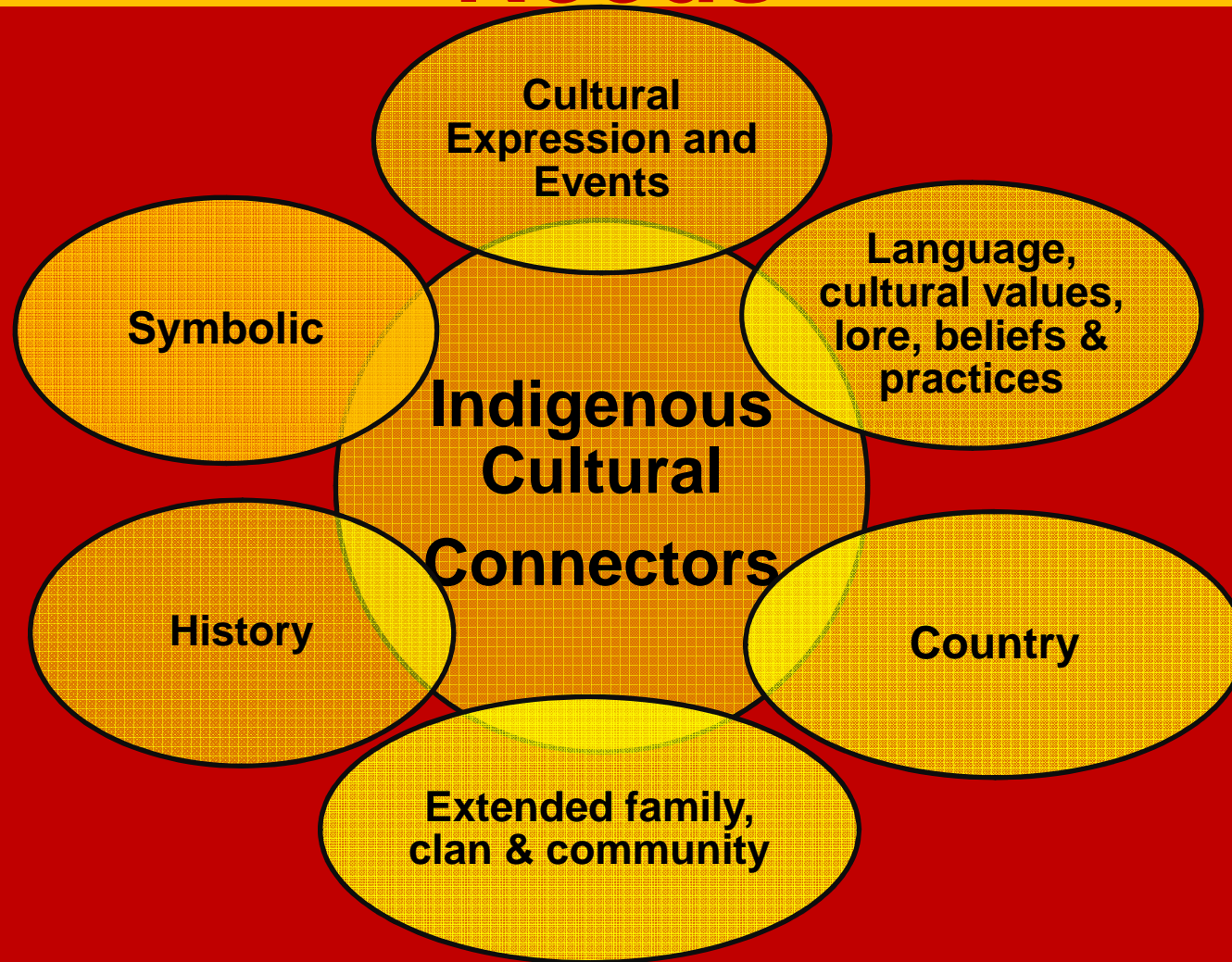
Parents and siblings - Birth mother, birth father, spiritual mother and father, brothers and sisters, including the children of one's sister (if female). Half brothers and sisters hold the same importance as full brothers and sisters.

Extended family - Aunts, uncles, great uncles and aunts and first, second, third, fourth and fifth cousins (and their children).

Grandparents - Paternal and maternal grandparents, spiritual grandparents.

Spiritual relations - People not necessarily related by blood, people given to a child to act as a parent, grandparent, or an Elder of one's tribe and community.

Aboriginal Cultural Wellbeing Needs



A decorative border at the bottom of the slide featuring traditional Aboriginal art motifs, including stylized figures, footprints, and patterns in orange, red, and blue.



Working with Aboriginal Children

- Families may have several adults living in a household, all whom share responsibility for the child.
- It is more usual for an Aboriginal child to touch an adult to communicate a need rather than to verbalise what they need.
- Sharing of possessions such as money, toys or food is common.
- Children will be more prepared to co-operate or undertake a task out of desire to please you rather than responding to your role.
- Formal situations are likely to stress the child and not indicate their real capacities.



Working with Aboriginal Children

- In seeking to put an Aboriginal child at their ease, it would be appropriate to consider:
 - Is the physical environment culturally safe?
 - Is the child clear that you are supportive of them, including their culture?
 - Traditional skills are taught through repetition, not verbal instruction, A more 'hands on approach would be appropriate.
 - Each Aboriginal family has its own particular history and stories. Recognising this will assist you to both understand and put the child at ease.



VACCA's vision

A community that is strong in culture, values their children and young people and recognises the importance of the whole community in raising children and keeping families together.



Aboriginal child and family services principles

- Enabling self-determination for Aboriginal communities,
- Respect for Aboriginal cultures and embedding culture into all aspects of service delivery – both in organisational structure and practice,
- Positive and mutually respectful engagement between Aboriginal agencies and services and mainstream services.
- Providing services which are premised on Aboriginal child and family principles which focus on a holistic and strengths based approach



Aboriginal Services

- broad objectives include
 - cultural advancement and community development,
 - Indigenous rights,
 - the alleviation of poverty and
 - service delivery.
- differences include
 - origins in political action and activism;
 - aspirations for self-determination and the assertion of Aboriginal Indigenous status through these organisations;
 - culturally-based value systems;
 - culturally-based kinship systems;
 - the way they relate to, and are influenced by the disadvantage of the Indigenous population they serve.
- Indigenous services operate precisely because of access and equity issues in relation to mainstream services



Balancing expectations

- To have Aboriginal Services engaged in meaningful partnerships with mainstream and government services will require services to:
 - Acknowledge and accept the Aboriginal communities role to self determine and participate in all aspects of decision making
 - Show high levels of respect in all aspects of engagement
 - Be premised on equity and careful consideration
 - Acknowledge that Aboriginal Services do not enter into partnerships with the same finance and resource capacity
 - Undertake a community development approach to the partnership



Our Aboriginal professionalism is based on the following:

Understanding the impact of the Stolen Generations on all Aboriginal people and incorporating this into risk assessments and best interest decision-making.

Aims of Koorie Playgroups

1. Provide activities which promote healthy development and enrich the lives of Koorie children.
2. Strengthen identity and cultural awareness.
3. Strengthen families by
 - connecting them to Community
 - Strengthening inter-generational links.
 - Providing parenting advice and support
4. Link children and families to universal services where required.





Conclusion

- Disconnection is a critical risk factor that mitigates against resilience.

Therefore we need to develop strategies which

- re-connect the child with the family and the extended family,
 - re-connect the child with social networks of care and
 - re-connect the child with their culture.
- Our children live in a hybrid world which is both Indigenous and post-invasion Australian.
 - We need to tell our Indigenous kids that they are valued and loved and that their culture is valued and respected.
 - Culture can provide that sense of belonging and through that belonging, resilience and better health outcomes.