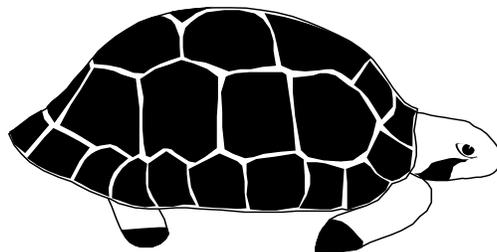


# Upon the Back of a Turtle...

*A Cross Cultural Training Curriculum  
for  
Federal Criminal Justice Personnel*

*Cultural Issues  
and  
Considerations  
in  
Delivery of Victim Services  
in  
Indian Country*



**Background Information**  
(Trainer's Information)  
for  
**Issues and Cultural Considerations in Delivery of  
Victim Services in Indian Country**

**Lecture Presentation:**

This presentation should be used to familiarize participants to some of the common cultural differences and similarities within and between Native populations. This session is important in that it is intended to be an overview of the various cultural aspects that are the foundation for Native Americans' beliefs and practices. This information is not designed to be inclusive of all Native American behavior or nuances, nor does it intend to categorize all American Indians into a single culture. Each tribe has their own culture and values that are adhered to by members, therefore this overview can only provide information for persons not familiar with Native American culture to some basic elements of culture and values when dealing with Native Americans in Indian Country.

The trainer is to address each of the topics and elaborate each point for participants to better understand the basis for behavior and how issues may evolve based on different orientations to the world. The activities and discussion questions can be used with the large group, or as smaller groups can review the questions and report back to the large group. This session will be much more effective if the presenter is willing and able to talk about his or her own culture and offer their own personal and cultural experiences.

**Materials in this section:**

The following section provides material for trainers to use in presenting the training, including trainers information, overheads, handouts, and resources and other information.

Background information (trainer information) is provided for use with each section. This information corresponds with overheads and handouts.

The overheads are indicated with a divider page and can be reproduced on transparencies.

Handouts are indicated with a divider page and can be reproduced and distributed to the attendees. Handouts are duplicates of the overheads with three overheads per page of the handout.



# Issues and Cultural Considerations in the Delivery of Victim Services in Indian Country

## Objectives:

1. Participants will recognize common cultural differences in working with American Indian victims of crime.
2. Participants will better understand the cultural differences and be able to identify and respond to them when working with American Indians.
3. Participants will identify and discuss stereotypes and characteristics of various cultures.
4. Participants will develop a better understanding of the American Indian culture by examining their own culture.

## Activities:

**PRESENTER:** *Be prepared to offer your own ideas to increase group discussion. Please remind all participants that this is an exercise to facilitate recognition of other cultures as well as their own, and that there should be honesty and openness to learning without fear of degradation of culture or characteristic associated with a culture.*

All cultures have various characteristics that are unique and it is important to recognize them to better understand ones own cultural values and beliefs before trying to understand others. The importance of this exercise is to note that everyone has a culture, some may have more awareness of their cultural and historical foundations than others. Members of ethnic minority cultures may vary in their level of knowledge and understanding just as majority culture members may. To better understand a different culture, it is helpful to first understand ones own culture and how beliefs and practices of the culture affects everyday living.

Ask participants to develop a list of things that they see as unique to their individual culture, including behaviors associated with culture, beliefs associated with culture, and attitudes associated with culture. Give them about 10 - 15 minutes. After they complete their list, break them into small groups of about 4 - 5 and ask them to discuss their list and add additional items if necessary. Give them about 15 minutes to finish.

Ask for volunteers to present to the large group the list of characteristics they identified for their culture.

Master Overheads N = 33

Master Handouts N = 12

## Discussion Questions:



1. After hearing the information in this section, can you identify any policy changes your office may need to make?
2. Identify the central beliefs of your culture. How do these beliefs complement or conflict with American Indian beliefs?
3. What "mainstream" values present the most difficulty for Native Americans?

*The terms Native American and American Indian are used interchangeably. Both terms are used to describe the Native American, American Indian, Alaska Native and Eskimo population.*

### **In the training video...**

- 1) In tribal custom there is a respect for the elders who have lived a long time and are highly regarded for their wisdom and knowledge. Indians respect a person who has knowledge of the people and the natural world. The non-Indian society places a greater importance on youth, an emphasis seen daily on television and in politics, for example.
- 2) Indian people seek a balance with nature and accept the circumstances in whatever area they live. They respect the elements and the trials they have had to endure to survive. To show their appreciation of the gifts from the earth, they try to use the natural resources in a beneficial and reasonable manner that will enhance the whole tribe. Tribal people will usually place offerings in exchange for the use of food or shelter from the earth. Respect for the earth, sharing of whatever one had, and seeking harmony with each other and the surroundings formed the foundations of the teachings. Traditions were built on these values held by the tribe and were taught to children as beliefs, attitudes, and rituals.
- 3) The Indians of today, and of the past, present a picture of broad diversity of culture. It is inaccurate to state that all American Indian tribes value or practice to the same degree all traditional concepts or tribal beliefs. It is important not to assume that all Indian tribes have similar traditions. In fact, most tribes wish to maintain their uniqueness and their tribal integrity. However, respect can be given to unique tribal traditions while recognizing the overall values that seem to be held by tribal groups collectively. Tribal differences diminish when contrasted with the majority population so that these differences between tribes seem less significant when one considers the differences between values held by American Indians generally and those of Anglo-Americans.



- 4) The impact of the history of genocide and broken treaties cannot be over estimated. Many non-Indian people view the past as a separate set of events from those of the present. For many American Indian people, the past is part of the present. Historic events, particularly, the relationships between American Indian people and representatives of the federal government, impact everyday life. An American Indian person may expect federal employees not to bargain in good faith or to intentionally mislead them due to historical events. Relationships between American Indians and federal employees do not start as relationships between equals.
- 5) It is important to remember that in discussing American Indian cultures there is much diversity. There are also core values that appear to be central to Native cultures. Values are central ideas and beliefs that influence every aspect of behavior. Since most values are internalized it may be difficult for the non-Native person to fully appreciate their importance. It is not uncommon, for example, for a non-Native to make the assumption that since a specific American Indian person did not grow up on the reservation, or currently lives off reservation, that this person lacks the core values of other American Indians.



# Cultural Considerations in Delivery of Victim Services in Indian Country

## Values, Traditions, and Teachings

- **Definitions:**

*Culture* can be defined as consisting of all those things that people have learned to do, believe, value, and enjoy from their history (Sue, 1981).

*Values* can be defined as attributes of worth or esteem attached to practices, attitudes, and teachings.

*Traditions* can be defined as expressions and practices of those values, beliefs, and attitudes that are being passed from one generation to the next within the culture.

*Rituals* may be those behaviors that are engaged in to display unique aspects of beliefs but may not necessarily have a current obvious purpose or explanation, other than it has always been done this way.

- **Dominant majority values** have been applied among Native American groups based on the assumption that the dominant values were appropriate. The issue is not only that the dominant values may be inconsistent, but also the assumption that no differences exist and ethnic minority cultures automatically embrace majority culture values. The contrast in different values between cultural groups has resulted in conflict and destruction. A significant fact is that American Indian cultures have endured over 500 years of exposure to immigrating Euro-Western cultures. Within the merging U.S. culture, American Indians retain a desire to maintain a separate cultural identity. Also, American Indians and non-Indians may be unaware of how much contrast exists between some Indian cultural values and Anglo values.

### **Values and beliefs held consistent over time**

The following are core values about which some generalizations may be made. Since there are exceptions, one must allow for individual differences in behavior and personality.

#### ***Cooperation***

- Harmony is extremely important, however when conflict is inevitable, it may be addressed indirectly and by someone else. Conflict and confrontation was not unknown; rather it was acknowledged indirectly rather than being obvious and overt.
- American Indians believe in the importance of personal orientation (social harmony) rather than task orientation. This is directly evident in the relationships between family members and among social groups within communities. Everyone was to acknowledge the network of extended family



members and how individuals are connected. A visitor would “link” with a member of the group. In some cases, informal adoptions occurred.

- American Indians have a great deal of respect for an individual’s dignity and autonomy. Personal exploits and accomplishments were recognized and retold in tales. Many times namesakes were given in honor of someone’s personal traits. Shame and dishonor was considered a serious violation against the individual, the family, the clan, and the tribe. This is one reason why Native culture has experienced the depth of despair since shame has seeped into all encounters and robbed individuals of honor.
- Most Native people believe that the center of the circle is not the people but a part of the circle. Therefore people are not meant to be controlled or to direct the elements and one does not interfere in the affairs of another. Each should choose by vision or revelation the direction the Creator gives them.

### ***Competition***

- Because of group solidarity, competing within the group occurs less frequently. Competition was seen as a method of upholding the group rather than one individual. As the solidarity among families dissolved, individuals became more isolated and less reliant on group consensus. Competition has always been an integral part of Native life, but the focus was for the benefit of the whole versus a single person. One example: At a major university, several Indian boys who played basketball together in junior high and high school, tried out for the college junior-varsity team. It was a week-long elimination process, a smaller number of players remaining after each cut. The seven Indian boys made it after each cut until the last day. On that day, the coach came up to one of the Indian boys, tapped the young Native male on the shoulder and told him to “hit the showers.” A euphemism for “you’re out of here.” He dropped the ball and walked off the court. His Indian friends saw him leaving, and in unison without speaking or visibly acknowledging one another, moved off the court after him. The coach was seen running behind, telling them to come back, they were not cut (yet). These seven guys played intramural basketball for the next four years and reservation ball together until they started dying from alcohol related injuries.
- Improving and competing with one’s own past performance is approved.
- Traits discouraged in children include boasting and loud behavior.

### ***Generosity***

- Sharing is greatly valued. Possessions are seen as a process for helping others and a way to acknowledge good works. Certain items existed for the sole use of the individual, but that was typically items that were specific for blessings or were spiritually significant for the person. If something is available it is to be used by all.
- Individual ownership exists as being in possession of items versus exclusive use and property. Initially ownership was not given prominence. As the amount of landbase diminished and individual allotments became the norm,



possession of land created a new level of ownership. The land was not valued for its economic productivity, but for the connection with the cost that occurred to be able to live on it and have a link with extended families members that paid for it with their lives.

- Stinginess is a trait that is discouraged. Teasing and taunting was typical when someone appeared stingy or possessive.

### ***Materialism***

- Acquiring material goods is not as important as being a good person. Conspicuous consumption is a recent sociological term that evolved as many Americans acquired “middle-class status” and purchased “homes with two car garages, boats, bicycles, fireplaces, etc.” Acquisition of goods within Native communities served as barter in exchanging items during ceremonies.
- Status consciousness and upward mobility are not highly prized.

### ***Saving***

- American Indians traditionally have not seen value in amassing large quantities of goods, i.e., household possessions, savings accounts, life insurance policies, etc., that would be consumed by themselves. The reality of this is that marginal and poverty stricken conditions created limited opportunity for financial security. Typically, the purpose of acquiring goods was to save them to be given away during ceremonies.
- In the past, nature’s bounty provided all necessary food, clothing and shelter. Several items, such as iron pots, blankets, canvas, etc., made living much easier and were the items valued and distributed at ceremonies.
- Certain seasons in certain locations created more of a hardship for survival. In those places food caches were essential to make it from one harvest to the next. Native people knew about drying, pickling, fermenting, and preserving food and other items to ensure sufficient substance until other food sources were available or until the next harvest.

### ***Orientation to Present***

- American Indians are more oriented to the meaningfulness of the present than to the future. This does not mean that Native people do not appreciate the past or the future, but that being in this creation today is important. American Indians are very aware of what the past has contributed and what the future can offer.
- American Indians have always been more interested in being, as opposed to becoming. Most understood that death was inevitable and was not removed from acknowledging the ebb and flow of life and death. Being born and being welcomed into creation allowed for the acceptance that the spirit would walk with the body and then walk away from it at death.
- This acceptance may have reached a point where death may seem the only outcome for many Native people and they may find it difficult to have an appreciation for living or the joy of knowing a positive self.



### ***Time***

- American Indians view time as flowing rather than as something that one can control. Increments of time marked by precision is a recent phenomena for Native people. This does not mean Native people did not recognize time and the passage of time. Native people used calendars, sticks, pictures, etc., to record events, but focus was on the event and the meaning of the event not the timeframe of the event. Today, calendars and clocks are measured by finite degrees of seconds, minutes, hours, days, weeks, months, years. The time element takes on more importance than the event for non-Native people.
- In the past, only natural phenomena that made up the elements such as the sun, the moon, and the seasons were used to mark the passage of time.

### ***Work Ethic***

- American Indians have not been ingrained with the same Puritan work ethic as most Americans have because they have not the same orientation to schedules, property, and being self-sufficient and independent. For the most part, American Indians understand the need for work and subsistence living but it was interwoven with spirituality and harmonious lifestyles.
- In the past, with nature providing one's needs, there was little need to work just for the sake of working.

### ***Courtesy***

- American Indians have always believed in polite, courteous behavior towards others.
- The avoidance of direct eye contact is based on the desire not to be rude.
- In social situations, American Indians frequently speak in a soft, slow, deliberate manner, stressing the feeling or emotional component rather than the verbal.
- American Indians are very expressive but can be very reserved if there is a history of hostility, aggression, or other questionable behavior by others.
- To avoid embarrassment of oneself or others, American Indians often mask feelings of discomfort, and when ill at ease, they observe silently while inwardly determining what is expected of them. Many would not call attention to discomfort.
- American Indians use the full range of expression available to them including conveying ideas and feelings through behavior and consequently easily perceives non-verbal messages. Verbal expression is a quality that may not be fully appreciated because for many American Indians, speech may be seen as secondary to behavior and may determine the intent by viewing the behavior rather than the words used.
- Silence is valued and most Native people feel comfortable with silence.

### ***Old Age***



- American Indians value wisdom, which comes with age and experience, whereas the dominant society values youth.
- The family unit is close and discourages attempts to separate older family members from the rest of the family.
- Since the family is still a strong unit, American Indians have not had as many problems contending with the generation gap.
- Elders are viewed as essential and valued for their wisdom and contribution.

### ***View of Nature***

- American Indians believe that all things in nature are for the good of all and cannot be owned by individuals.
- American Indians believe in living in balance and in cooperation with nature rather than in controlling it.

### ***Spiritualism***

- American Indians hold to contemplative rather than a utilitarian philosophy.
- Spirituality pervades all areas of lives for American Indians.
- American Indians do not believe in forcing their beliefs on others.
- Spirituality has been the protection and has provided the foundation for Native beliefs and practices.
- Native spirituality has sustained different assaults but has remained a powerful part of Native life.

### ***Criticism and Humor***

- Traditionally, criticism is communicated indirectly through another person or through non-verbal signs, whereas direct criticism is taken for granted in non-Indian culture. Criticism is also communicated through teasing and humor.
- Criticism is often communicated through storytelling, using examples to reach a point showing right and wrong.
- American Indians will often use humor instead of confrontation. This may be directly or indirectly through a third party.

## **There are some general principles of interpersonal relationships that have been identified. They include:**

**Principle of Self-Reliance** – Traditionally, American Indians were taught to rely on the Creator for assistance and that after great effort has been exerted, one could seek counsel and advise. The principle of self-reliance is based in this practice but also in the recent history of knowing that if one asks for help, that put one at a disadvantage with the majority culture. Therefore, many were hesitant to ask for or accept help. Non-Indians may perceive this as being stubborn or belligerent, however it also confirms the tendency of an American Indian not to seek help until the absolute last minute of an emergency or crisis.



**Principle of Non-Interference** – Most American Indian groups consider interference in other's lives as a sign of disrespect. They generally adhere to the philosophy of natural consequences, allowing others to make their own mistakes and decisions. This would create a situation for learning. Most expected the same attitude would be directed toward them, however when the behavior became dangerous to the group, typically someone highly respected would offer advice or counsel so the group would not be harmed. But the decision was still left up to the individual and the rest tried to minimize the negative outcomes.

**Principle of Non-Confrontation** – Many people prefer not to confront people when they disagree with them, instead they will avoid them. This is especially true of Native people. Much of Native people interpersonal interactions were symbolic and ritual based, so that direct confrontation was highly irregular. In today's society, this may be interpreted as inappropriate, passive-aggressive, belligerent, stubborn, non-cooperative or immature behaviors. It is important to understand the dynamic in inter-personal relationships and that confrontation has not been beneficial for Native people.

**Principle of Diversity** – In many prayers, offerings are given to the two-legged ones, the four-legged ones, the crawlers, etc., this demonstrates the principle of diversity. This is a principle that American Indians understand and respect. Not only is there diversity in creation but among the different tribes and villages that make up Indian Country. It is important that non-Indians understand so that they do not generalize American Indians inappropriately, or assume they are all one large category or definition.

**Principle of Respect for Elders** – American Indians traditionally revere elders in their society. It is believed that elders have a broader perspective of life because they have had a longer experience with it and more time to adhere to the philosophical constructs of their society. It is expected that years and age will increase wisdom and understanding of life and the methods to make life more harmonious.

**Principle of the Extended Family** – The kinship bonds in most American Indian groups extend beyond the blood relatives on both sides, to non-related friends and members of the tribe or clan. Adoptions and taking of relatives is a very critical and meaningful way of acknowledging kinships and obligations.

*Revised from an article written by Eddie Brown, DSW and Tim Shaughnessy, PhD, Education for Social Work Practice with American Indian Families. Arizona State Univ. (undated)*

### **Traditional Teachings –**

- **Most traditions are passed down from the elders to the young children through the use of storytelling.**



Young children learn early in life the traditions of their tribe by listening to the elders. The older generations often occupy a position much closer to the young children than their parents do.

- **Learning by watching and then by doing.**

Elders take the responsibility very serious of teaching the young, as they know that if the young are not taught the tribal traditions and how to carry them out, the traditions will eventually die. This is a very real threat to each tribal member as most traditions are passed down through the use of stories and very few, if any, are in written form.

### **Extended Family Systems –**

- **American Indian extended family is very close knit.**

All cousins are treated as siblings, and although children are aware of a special relationship to their biological parents, aunts and uncles share parental functions. Grandparents, and great aunts and uncles are often much closer to the younger children than their parents.

- **Extended family has existed among American Indians since their beginning and has always been an important part of their social and religious/spiritual life.**

The emphasis of the extended family is very different from the non-Indian's nuclear family, which includes only parents and children and defines extended and nuclear as two different parts. In recent times, the traditional extended family has been harder to keep together because many families have been unable to stay within their reservation and/or tribal area due to limited employment opportunities. When the family removes itself from an extended family environment and becomes more nuclear, the change can have drastic effects; confusion can result about the nature and utilization of existing support systems.

- **The American Indian extended family interdependence is a part of life.**

Family roles are well defined and provide for the immediate identification of needed resources. The person in need can determine which family resources should be available to them by comparing the closeness of the relationship to the severity of the need.

- **The extended family network is seen most effectively at work in the child rearing practices of most groups.**

Parents, especially new parents, are not expected to assume complete responsibility for raising their children. All adult members of the family and community serve in parental roles - elders as educators, cousins and friends as child caretakers, aunts and uncles as teachers and disciplinarians. Therefore, it is not unusual or considered abandonment for a child to be left in the care of grandparents or other relatives for an extended period of time.



## **Spirituality –**

- **Spirituality is a broad term.**

Spirituality encompasses religious beliefs and practices as well as a sense of self in relation to the natural world. Spirituality, especially as conceptualized in terms of religion, has been a controversial area. Religion has historically been used as a means of “civilizing” Indians. Missionaries expended great efforts to “save” the savage Indians indigenous to the United States.

- **Conversion from “heathen” traditional religious practices to Christianity formed the basis of much federal policy during the past 500 years.**

Indian children were forced to attend boarding schools run by various Christian denominations. Often Indian children were taught that their spiritual beliefs were evil and that Christianity would be the key to their salvation. Forced religious conversions were commonplace.

- **The forced removal of Indian children to boarding schools meant that children were not able to participate in their spiritual traditions at home.**

Adolescents could not be initiated into their tribal religious societies because they were living off-reservation and did not receive the lessons necessary to fulfill their obligations. The punishment of Indian children for speaking their Native languages led to children unable to speak their language. Participation in traditional religious ceremonies typically requires an ability to speak one’s language.

- **Spiritual beliefs form the foundation of their entire way of life.**

Service providers who do not understand either the centrality of spirituality or the importance of participation in certain ceremonial events may cause their clients additional trauma. Workers at a domestic violence shelter, for example, may not understand why a woman insists on returning home to participate in a specific spiritual activity. Shelter rules may prohibit her from returning to the shelter if she leaves overnight, yet her responsibilities within her community may demand that she perform certain tasks over a period of days. She may find herself in the position of having to choose between the safety of the shelter and her religious and spiritual obligations at home.

- **Spirituality is an often ignored aspect of assisting victims to heal.**

Non-Indian service providers may not be aware of the importance of integrating spiritual healing into their services. Native victims of crime may feel that a program that does not address their spiritual needs is not going to be helpful to them. Non-Indian service providers who understand this need may feel that they are not competent to address the spirituality issues and therefore they ignore this dimension.



- **Integration of traditional healing practices into victim services program may pose difficulties.**

It is incumbent upon victim service providers to work with their local Native American communities to develop effective, comprehensive programs for their Native American clients. This is an important part of the healing process in Native life.

- **Integrate spirituality initiatives into programs.**

This initiative has both improved services and identified the difficulties of attempting to integrate programs developed by non-Indians into Indian communities. Traditional values have enabled Indian people to survive for thousands of years. These values must be respected. The challenge for non-Indian service providers, grant monitors, program developers and decision makers, is to educate themselves and to learn how to respect vital components of tribal life, such as sovereignty and spirituality and how to integrate the sometimes competing demands of federal mandates and tribal values.

### **Time Consciousness –**

- **Indian cultures conceive of time in the sense of the natural order of things.**

There is an appropriate time for all activities and all activities will take place in the appropriate time. “Life’s purposes are accomplished by the right action at the right time” (Greyeyes, 1995). While this logic may appear circular to the non-Indian, it is a guiding principle for many American Indians. Religious ceremonies, for example, are scheduled in accordance with the time of year as marked by lunar events, not dates on a calendar. A Native American may believe that there is always time to accomplish things even if the tasks are not completed today (Brown, 1997).

- **Timeframes are perceived differently from the non-Indian.**

The majority of Indian Country represents remote, geographically isolated communities, often lacking in effective public transportation. Meetings, including court appearances, cannot necessarily be scheduled overnight. Many families include young children. Childcare is often unavailable on an immediate basis.

Very often American Indians living in rural communities will not have access to transportation, childcare, telephone services and other resources, which are readily available in urban communities. Whenever possible, timely notice of mandatory appearances should be provided. Some federal employees, especially those working with victims may have to expand the services they usually provide to facilitate transportation, childcare, check-cashing services, provision of meals, shopping, etc. for American Indian clients.

In one instance, a witness and her daughter, who was the victim, was informed the night before that they must show up in federal court the next morning. The federal courthouse was several hundred miles away. They were offered the choice of traveling by bus or by plane. However, they both had



infants in their care. Either transportation arrangement required them to leave their home very early the next morning. They had no opportunity to arrange for any type of childcare for the babies. In the end, they traveled by plane with two infants.

In the example above, the victim and her mother had no money when they arrived in the state capitol where the courthouse was located. They needed to purchase formula and diapers for the babies. A check for witness fees was useless because no one would cash their check and they had no form of transportation to get to the store. The purchase of baby formula and diapers may be out of the ordinary for an FBI Agent or a Victim Witness Coordinator, but it may also be very necessary in some circumstances.

### **Ritual –**

- **The importance of ritual cannot be overstated.**

The need to participate in a religious/cultural ritual can surpass the importance of any other commitment. Some view rituals as a means of protecting a person's spiritual connection to the Creator (Greyeyes, 1995). Appointments or meetings that are scheduled during the time of a ritual, including preparation for the event, may be disrupted or simply ignored. Most rituals require preparation time, some taking from one week to several months. Some of these preparations require that certain actions must take place at certain times. Any other appointment scheduled during this time may be disregarded.

- **Although a person does not have a specific role in a ritual or religious event that does not mean that they do not have an obligation to attend.**

One former employee of a residential treatment facility for emotionally disturbed adolescents, recalled that when the young men of a certain tribe told the staff that they had to go home to the reservation to attend a specific event, the staff would not give them passes to leave the facility unless they were direct participants. They were not direct participants. The young men then went AWOL from the program to go home and attend. As a result of going AWOL they were dropped from the program. It was not until years later, when this counselor worked for the tribe that she truly understood that the young men were in fact, obligated to attend this ceremony.

- **Lack of understanding of the central role of spirituality and active involvement in cultural events can lead to mistaken interpretation of actions.**

A witness who does not show up for a scheduled interview may be viewed as "hostile" or "uncooperative." In reality, the person may have a competing priority. Religious cultural events may not be scheduled as far in advance as an appointment with a prosecutor. Similarly, unexpected events, such as deaths, may demand that a person change their plans to fulfill their cultural/family obligations.



- **It is difficult to differentiate between “social” events and events with cultural/spiritual significance.**

Events that are referred to as social (e.g., pow-wows, social dances) may also have a significant cultural component. The language utilized to describe an event may not reveal the full nature of the event to an outsider. If a person mentions some type of event or “doings” it is important to ask for additional information to assess the person’s level of involvement in the upcoming event. It is important not to make assumptions regarding someone’s availability without gathering sufficient information from the people themselves. Many times pow-wows are social events. However, there are often times that they must be attended because of close relatives being honored during the event. It of course, is not mandated that all family members attend, but it shows respect for the person that is being honored and will be remembered and appreciated by them and their families.

### **Priorities –**

- **American Indian people may not be accessible at precisely the date and time of a scheduled appointment.**

Since events will occur in their natural time it is not out of the ordinary for someone to show up for an appointment several hours late, or even the next day. If some event interfered with the person’s ability to be at their appointment they may show up at a different time expecting to be able to talk with the person they were scheduled to meet with. It is important to note that this type of behavior does not necessarily reflect disrespect. Rather, a person’s priorities may not allow them to attend a scheduled meeting. If a loose horse is sighted and needs to be caught, this event must take place right away while the opportunity is available. A meeting with a person can take place anytime.

- **American Indians feel that things happen when they are supposed to happen.**

It is also important to remember that many American Indians living in rural, isolated areas do not have phones, and there usually aren’t phones within several miles. Therefore, as a non-Indian would typically contact the person they were to meet to let them know they will be late or not be there until the next day, this is not a common activity for American Indians. They will show up when they can and most scheduled appointments are not ignored. American Indians typically have a more informal and casual attitude toward the attendance of such meetings.

### **Comfort Level –**

- **A service provider must feel comfortable interacting with American Indian families.**

Some people are uncomfortable interacting with people of another culture. In many cases there is a particular mystique in dealing with American Indians by non-Indians. Respecting a family’s offer of hospitality, for example, is a way to



show acceptance. Offering food or drink is an important sign of comfort. While many American Indian families may not have much money, the offer of coffee or a soft drink should not be refused. If a person is offended during the first set of interactions, it may be difficult to develop a positive working relationship.

- **Some people hide their discomfort by avoiding dealing with sensitive topics.**

Such avoidance can doom a relationship. In one instance a crisis response team was visiting the survivors of a multiple homicide. The team included three non-Indian males, two of whom were federal employees. The team entered the home, commented on the view, and never asked the victim how she or her mother, who was also in the home, were dealing with their loss. The purpose of the crisis response team was to provide counseling but their initial interaction with the family of the survivors was a disaster and they were never able to accomplish their task.

- **Social customs may govern interpersonal communication.**

The non-Indian may feel out of place within the American Indian's social or physical environment. Aspects of communication such as gestures, personal space, eye contact, and how a question is answered differ among various cultural groups. Lack of familiarity with social customs may make a non-Indian uncomfortable. A law enforcement officer who is trying to gather information about a crime may become frustrated by a victim who will not look him/her in the eye, uses gestures to convey information, and "tells a story" full of "irrelevant" details instead of providing a direct answer to a question. Protocol about how to approach a home, what type of information is to be presented as part of a greeting, how to show respect, etc. may all be foreign to the non-Indian provider. Many of these rules are informal and are best learned by watching and learning from respected members of the local community.

- **Cultural or religious clashes can inhibit a person's ability to be comfortable.**

Some religious teachings suggest that American Indian spiritual beliefs are "evil" or unchristian. A service provider with such a belief system may have a difficult time feeling comfortable with an American Indian person discussing aspects of their spirituality or may be dismissive of the importance of spiritual/religious practice in the person's life. Some people may have religious beliefs which require them to challenge "evil." Religious beliefs are always a controversial topic and are usually not included in casual conversation. The centrality of spirituality for many American Indians may make it impossible to avoid this topic when working with Indian clients.

## **Generosity and Sharing –**

- **Native cultures include the concept of gift giving or "giveaways" for visitors.**



Federal employees face a unique conflict regarding the acceptance of gifts. It is particularly true for those who are in the Native community to offer help to community members. It is not uncommon for a tribal person or group to present a gift to a person upon completion of an on-site visit or training event. Federal law limits the ability for federal employees to accept such gifts for personal use. Refusal of such a gift would be a major insult to those offering the gift.

- **The simple act of refusing an offered cup of coffee may set the tone for an entire relationship.**

Federal employees who fail to appreciate the importance of sharing may offend an American Indian person by not making such an offer, such as offering coffee or some other drink to the American Indian person who comes into their office.

## **Humor –**

- **American Indians will often use humor instead of confrontation.**

American Indians use humor in many ways, and most common is when they are around strangers and are nervous or uncomfortable. It is important that you only return humor when you know the person well and are aware that he/she is making jokes because they are your friend. Humor is freely used among family and friends, and typically strangers will not be included until they know you well and can trust you.

## **Issues of Cultural Perspective**

*The following piece is adapted from the National Organization for Victim Assistance*

### **Culture and crisis**

Most literature on trauma and appropriate intervention strategies is based on theoretical and philosophical paradigms drawn from a white, Anglo-Saxon, Judeo-Christian perspective in the United States. Yet it is clear that people with different cultural backgrounds, including those backgrounds that are drawn outside of race, ethnicity, nationality or religion, may perceive trauma and appropriate treatment differently. Native people have been in trauma for several generations and many families will respond to crisis on a routine basis.

“All ethnicity focused clinical, sociological, anthropological, and experimental studies converge to one central conclusion regarding ethnic America: Ethnic identification is an irreducible entity, central to how persons organize experience, and to an understanding of the unique “cultural prism” they use in perception and evaluation of reality. Ethnicity is central to how the patient or client seeks assistance (help seeking behavior), what he or she defines as a ‘problem,’ what he or she understands as the causes of psychological difficulties, and the unique, subjective experience of traumatic stress symptoms.

“Ethnicity also shapes how the client views his or her symptoms, and the degree of hopefulness or pessimism towards recovery. Ethnic identification,



additionally, determines the patient's attitudes towards his or her pain, expectations of the treatment, and what the client perceives as the best method of addressing the presenting difficulties."

*E.R. Parsons, "Ethnicity and Traumatic Stress: The Intersecting Point in Psychotherapy," in Trauma and Its Wake, ed. Charles R. Figley, Brunner/Mazel: New York, 1985.*

## Cultural Assessment

For purposes of illustration on how an assessment might be made, the following is a 'checklist' for determining the level of ethnic identification that a Native American victim may have.

- **Determine the extent that the traditional language is spoken in the home:** this will determine the need for an interpreter. In determining how well English is spoken it is important to keep in mind that many people who speak English as a second language will go back to their traditional language when under stress or when they are trying to explain a traumatic event. Many times there is no English word for what they are trying to say.
- **Determine the stresses of the community as a whole:** this will help in determining the coping skills of individuals and the community as a whole. This will help in assessing how the community will react to violent crime within their community.
- **Determine the community make up and the closeness of the neighbors and extended family:** Indian communities tend to be very close knit and long time neighbors and friends, if not related. Often, Indian communities will pull together and assist each other when in crisis. However, they will not always identify a perpetrator if this person is the son/daughter of a relative, neighbor or good friend.
- **Determine the level of acculturation of the family and how well they are prepared to seek assistance from family, friends and other resources:** often, American Indians are reluctant to seek help from family and friends because they do not want to trouble them with their problems.
- **Determine the degree of spirituality of the individual or the community:** in many Indian communities the community as a whole is very spiritual and is typically practiced as a community. These communities will often come together very quickly and are willing to assist each other in times of crisis.
- **Determine the degree of traditional values the family adheres to:** if the individual practices traditional customs they will most often be willing to seek



help from traditional healers and/or medicine persons. This will help them, their family and the community to work through their trauma.

- **Determine prior victimization and how that was handled, i.e., was the victim willing to testify, willing to identify the perpetrator, seek assistance:** in talking with and asking family members, friends and neighbors to determine any prior victimization, you can determine how the individual or family handled any prior crisis. Did they seek help from family and friends? Did they seek help from traditional healers? Were they willing to assist law enforcement? Did the community assist and how? Was it effective?
- **Determine prior victimization to assess if family is in a continual grieving process:** if the family or individual has had previous victimizations, how many and how long ago? American Indian families may respond to a crisis in a routine way due to the number of crisis they encounter.



Discussion Questions  
for  
**Cultural Issues and Considerations in  
Delivery of Victim Services  
in Indian Country**

**FEDERAL VICTIM/WITNESS COORDINATORS:**

Use examples from your experience to illustrate the concepts that have been discussed today.

- How have you dealt with issues such as spirituality, language, generosity, extended family, etc.?
- Prior to today's training, what types of training did you receive in working with American Indian clients?
- Please discuss the types of training situations which you have found to be the most useful and the situations you have handled for which you were unprepared.

**FBI/LES:**

Many of the traditional ways that American Indian people communicate involve more time than the communication styles of Anglo-Americans (e.g., time, storytelling, non-interference, non-verbal communication). When it is necessary to interview a victim or witness, such interviews may take a long period of time because victims, especially children, rarely tell what happened concisely from beginning to end.

- Discuss how your interviews of Indian victims are similar and different to those of non-Indians.
- Discuss cultural factors (as outlined in this section) you have encountered and how you have dealt with these factors.

**U.S. ATTORNEY'S OFFICE (PROSECUTORS):**

- Please discuss how you sensitize your staff and jurors to cultural considerations relevant to American Indian people.
- As prosecutors, how do cultural values (such as orientation to present, spirituality, principle of self-reliance, principle of non-interference, extended family, ritual, and priorities) impact your interaction with American Indian victims?

**IHS:**

- For non-Indian service providers, please discuss the types of training or orientation you received prior to working in a tribal community.
- Include a discussion of how you became aware of different cultural issues and considerations discussed today.



Upon the Back of a Turtle... A Cross Cultural Curriculum for  
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- Discuss how your professional training prepared you to work with a culture different from your own and what you wish that your training had included to better prepare you.
- What type of information/training would be helpful to new employees who will be working in Indian Country?

**BIA:**

- As an agency with a long history of working in Indian Country, how do you train new, non-Indian employees to work with American Indian people?
- What types of cross-cultural training initiatives have been the most successful?
- Please discuss how the BIA incorporates cultural considerations in their social services and educational programming.
- When a tribal cultural issue is in conflict with Bureau policy, how is such conflict resolved?



# Worksheet for Cultural Issues and Considerations in Delivery of Victim Services in Indian Country

## *Exercise One:*

Ask participants to think about their culture. Do they participate in any cultural activities with their family or community?

Ask participants to develop a list of things that they see as unique to their own culture. Give them about 8 - 10 minutes. After they complete their list, break them into small groups of about 4 - 5 and ask them to discuss their list and add additional items if necessary. Give them about 15 minutes to finish.

Ask for volunteers to present to the large group the list of characteristics they identified for their culture. Discuss each of these characteristics and why they are identified with a specific culture. Are these typically positive or negative toward the culture? Why?

## *Exercise Two:*

In a small group, discuss:

1. What are some American Indian tribal beliefs and values?
2. What are some positive aspects of American Indian traditional lifestyle?
3. What "mainstream" values or expectations seem to present the most difficulty for American Indians?
4. What assumptions are made by mainstream society about contemporary Native persons who choose to live by their "traditional" values?
5. What historical events and factors altered the Native world?

Reporting back to large group:

1. What affected the answers in the small group discussion?
2. Was it experience, personal observation or knowledge acquired from other sources?

