

Cultural Connection Planning for Indigenous Children and Youth

Policy no.: 3.17

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Date Revised:

Policy Cross References: **2.19** Application for a Subsequent Order; **3.5** Sharing of Information Relevant to the Care of a Child or Youth; Plan for the Child; **3.8** Consulting and Informing a Child or Youth

Legislative References: **s.29** Plan for the Child; **s.36** Subsequent order; **s.65** Placement Considerations; **s.103** Monitoring Plans

Purpose: To outline the process to ensure a Cultural Connection Plan is developed and included in, or attached to, the Plan for the Child when an Indigenous child or youth is removed from a parent(s). This also includes ongoing development, review and monitoring of the plan.

Definitions:

Cultural Connection Plan: is a description of the arrangements made or being made to foster an Indigenous child or youth's connection with their culture, heritage, traditions, community, language and spirituality, to preserve their cultural identity.

In Care Planning Team: A team of individuals involved in planning for a child or youth in care. The team must include the social worker for the child or youth and the social worker for the child or youth's parents; the child or youth (where developmentally appropriate); the parents of the child or youth (if they are actively involved), the foster care providers (e.g. foster parents, caregivers, residential staff); and may also include other professionals working with the child or youth, extended family, significant others, or other community partners. For an Indigenous child or youth in care who belongs to an **Indigenous government or organization** prescribed in Schedule A under the CYFA, the respective Indigenous representative will be invited to be part of the in care planning team.

Indigenous child: is a child who is Inuit, Metis, Innu, Mi'kmaq or other First Nation, a child who has a parent who considers the child to be Indigenous, or a child age 12 years of age but under the age of 16 years who considers themselves to be Indigenous.

Indigenous youth: is a youth who is Inuit, Metis, Innu, Mi'kmaq or other First Nation or a youth who considers themselves to be Indigenous.

Indigenous representative: means a person designated by an Indigenous government or organization as prescribed in the schedule of the CYFA.

Kin: Family and other persons who are significant to a child or youth or with whom the child or youth has a connection.

Policy:

1. A Plan for the Child filed with the court for an Indigenous child or youth who has been removed from their parents shall include a Cultural Connection Plan as outlined in the Plan for the Child policy.
2. The Cultural Connection Plan shall include a description of the arrangements made or being made to foster an Indigenous child or youth's connection with their culture, heritage, traditions, community, language and spirituality to preserve their cultural identity.
3. Where the child or youth is an Indigenous child or youth belonging to an Indigenous government or organization prescribed in Schedule A of the Act, the Indigenous representative shall be asked to participate in the development of the plan.
4. The Cultural Connection Plan shall be reviewed at minimum **every 6 months**.

Procedures

1. Where an child or youth is removed and they are an Indigenous child or youth belonging to an Indigenous government or organization prescribed in Schedule A of the CYFA, a social worker shall make contact with the respective Indigenous representative to request that they participate in the development of a Cultural Connection Plan and that they assist the social worker in identifying kin or others who could assist to develop the plan.
2. When an Indigenous child or youth is removed and they do not belong to an Indigenous government or organization prescribed in Schedule A of the CYFA, a social worker shall identify a planning team as outlined below to assist in the development of the Cultural Connection Plan.
3. The social worker shall work with the child or youth (based on age and development), the child or youth's parents, if they are willing and available, the placement provider, and where willing and available, **kin** and/or other community partners who are part of, and understand the child or youth's culture and can assist to develop a plan to support the child or youth's cultural connections.
4. The Cultural Connection Plan shall be either documented in, or attached to, the Plan for the Child submitted to the Court as outlined in the **Plan for the Child** policy. The plan shall include a description of the arrangements made or being made to foster the child or youth's connection to their culture, heritage, traditions, community, language and spirituality, to preserve the child or youth's cultural identity.

5. Where the Cultural Connection Plan is documented in, or attached to, the Plan for the Child filed with the court before the Presentation Hearing, a social worker shall include as much detail as possible in the Cultural Connection Plan. If this section only includes a description of the arrangements being made as additional time and planning is required to fully develop and implement the plan, a more comprehensive Cultural Connection Plan shall be developed **within 30 days** and documented on the Cultural Connection Plan form.
6. Where a more comprehensive Cultural Connection Plan is developed prior to the conclusion of the Protective Intervention Hearing this should be included in a revised Plan for the Child that is filed with the Court as outlined in the **Plan for the Child** policy.
7. When an Indigenous child or youth is in the care or custody of a manager, the social worker shall work with the In-Care Planning Team, to further develop, implement, review and monitor the Cultural Connection Plan. This Cultural Connection Plan shall be attached to the In Care Progress Report and shall be reviewed as needed, but at minimum, every 6 months as part of the In Care Progress Report.
8. The social worker shall include the most current Cultural Connection Plan in the Plan for the Child being submitted to the Court when filing an Application for a Subsequent Order as outlined in the **Application for a Subsequent Order** policy.

Cultural Connection Plan:

9. The development of a Cultural Connection Plan is significant, as it promotes cultural permanency for Indigenous children and youth and supports the development of a healthy identity. Planning needs to focus on preserving a child or youth's unique cultural identity, significant relationships and community connections.
10. The Cultural Connection Plan includes a description of the arrangements made or being made to foster an Indigenous child or youth's connection with their culture, heritage, traditions, community, language and spirituality to preserve their cultural identity. This plan shall outline the persons responsible for following through on the activities and tasks associated with the plan, including timelines.
11. In developing the Cultural Connection Plan for children or youth, the social worker, in partnership with the other In Care Planning Team members shall gather information about:
 - a) Where age and developmentally appropriate, the child or youth's views and wishes in relation to their connection to their family, Indigenous community and culture and what they feel they need to encourage their connection to their parents, kin, community and culture.
 - b) The family's (parent and kin) views and wishes on how to strengthen and maintain the child or youth's connection to their family, community and culture.

- c) The role that the Indigenous representative, kin and other identified community partners can play in supporting the child or youth's connection to their family, community and their culture;
 - d) Family/cultural traditions including how family, cultural or spiritual events are acknowledged or celebrated;
 - e) Cultural activities the child or youth likes to participate in and ongoing opportunities for future engagement;
 - f) Food, clothing, toys, etc. that are meaningful to the child or youth and part of the child or youth's culture;
 - g) Child or youth's linguistic heritage, including their first language and preferred language if it not their first language;
 - h) Cultural values and norms of the child or youth's Indigenous group;
 - i) The child or youth's family tree; and
 - j) The availability of Indigenous mentors who can engage with and support the child or youth and the placement provider.
12. The social worker, in partnership with other members of the child or youth's In Care Planning Team, including the Indigenous representative, shall support the implementation of the Cultural Connection Plan, which includes, but is not limited to, the following areas:
- a) Maintaining family and community connections by facilitating, where possible, regular visiting for children and youth in their home community to maintain a sense of belonging and identity as an Indigenous person, including opportunities to engage in cultural activities and celebrations that are occurring in and/or organized by their family and community (e.g. land-based activities, ceremonies, retreats, etc.);
 - b) Identifying Indigenous mentors, where available, who can engage with and support the child or youth and the placement provider;
 - c) Creating positive representation and reflection of the child or youth's culture in their current placement;
 - d) Acknowledging the importance of and exploring ways to preserve the child's language (e.g., visiting their community, music, videos, recording of elders speaking, resources that may be available);
 - e) Supporting the child or youth's spiritual development; and
 - f) Incorporating traditional foods into the child or youths day-to-day life in the placement.
13. The social worker, in partnership with the In Care Planning Team, shall develop the Cultural Connection Plan that is meaningful because it:
- a) Is culturally appropriate, taking into consideration the unique aspects of both the child or youth and their specific Indigenous community and culture;
 - b) Contains achievable opportunities for socialization activities and direct cultural contact (e.g. visits to the child or youth's family and community);
 - c) Ensures reasonable steps are taken and responsibility is shared to complete the

- d) Identifies any barriers to completing the plan and ensures that barriers are appropriately managed;
 - e) Ensures that goals and tasks are realistic and achievable, and the appropriate people are responsible for their implementation; and
 - f) Ensures that timelines are established for implementing and reviewing all aspects of the Cultural Connection Plan.
14. The Cultural Connection Plan shall be documented on the Cultural Connection Plan form and be reviewed and updated as part of the In Care Progress Report (IPR). The social worker shall request that the Indigenous representative sign the plan to indicate their agreement.
15. The social worker shall also request that other individuals involved in developing the plan sign and indicate their agreement with the Cultural Connection Plan.

Supporting the Foster Care Placement Provider:

16. Where a child or youth in care is placed outside their culture, the social worker in consultation with other members of the In Care Planning Team, including the Indigenous representative, shall identify ways to support the placement provider in caring for an Indigenous child or youth. The social worker shall discuss with the placement provider their need to respect the child or youth's culture and support their developing cultural identity. This discussion should include the many ways foster care providers can support the well-being of an Indigenous child or youth including:
- a) Engaging directly with the Indigenous representative, kin and/or other community partners who are part of and understand the child or youth's culture and can assist the placement provider in understanding the cultural values, norms and unique history of the Indigenous child or youth and how they can support the child or youth's cultural connections.
 - b) Asking the Indigenous child or youth and their families about their lives and culture, as this is the best way to get to know them and what is meaningful to them. The more placement providers understand a child or youth's Indigenous culture and experiences, the better they will be able to support the Indigenous child or youth.
 - c) Supporting children and youth to stay connected with their family, culture and community to promote a sense of belonging and identity as an Indigenous person (e.g. supporting a child or youth to visit their family and community so they can participate in land-based activities, ceremonies, retreats, etc.);
 - d) Working to develop positive relationships with parents and kin as relationships help people understand each other and promotes greater collaboration. Parents and kin are an important source of information and can often provide insight about children and youth and about the hopes or concerns they might hold for them. Positive relationships and supporting families conveys respect for a child or youth's culture and fosters the social and emotional well-being of children and youth;

- e) Where possible, visiting the child or youth's Indigenous community and meeting with members of their culture to learn more about the specific values and norms of the child or youth's culture.
 - f) Being thoughtful about communication when English (spoken or written) is a barrier. Interpreters or translated material can help placement providers and families communicate with one another.
 - g) Continually trying to convey respect for the Indigenous child or youth's culture. This could include providing opportunities for the child or youth and/or their family to tell their own stories and remaining open to the different ideas and ways of seeing the world that may be shared. Placement providers show respect for the child or youth's Indigenous culture when they can acknowledge cultural differences in parenting and other ways of living. When placement providers are sensitive to issues faced by Indigenous families and are aware of historical and other kinds of power differences, this shows respect for the child or youth's culture and helps support the development of positive relationships with the Indigenous child or youth and their families.
 - h) Participating in training opportunities and availing of other resource materials on topics such as Residential Schools and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report, the impacts of intergenerational trauma, and material on the child or youth's specific Indigenous culture and history are ways to further support meaningful cultural connections for the Indigenous child or youth.
17. When an Indigenous child or youth is placed within their culture of origin, a Cultural Connection Plan is still required. The social worker, in partnership with the In Care Planning Team, including the Indigenous representative, shall work with the placement provider to continue to support the child or youth's connection to their culture and family. This shall include a discussion with the placement provider about their knowledge of their Indigenous heritage, as some placement providers may have a strong knowledge of, and connection to, their Indigenous community and culture, where as some may have more limited connection to, or knowledge about, their culture.
18. Where at the Presentation Hearing, Protective Intervention Hearing or a Subsequent Hearing under s.36, the judge places an Indigenous child in the temporary care or custody of a person other than the parent from whom the child is removed under the supervision of a manager, the social worker shall work with the person(s) who has been granted temporary care or custody in implementing the Cultural Connection Plan.

Exceptions: None

Relevant Documents:

- Plan for the Child
- In Care Progress Report
- Cultural Connection Plan