NICWA
National Indian Child Welfare Association
Protecting our children • Preserving our culture

Achieving Health Equity for Native Children: The Role of Families, Community, and Culture

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Early Childhood Development: Investing in Our Children and Our Future
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Culture

"…at its core, culture is far deeper and complex than the outward physical trappings or even language. It is at the level of worldview, values, patterns of interaction, and methods of problem solving that distinguishes it from other cultures." (Deloria, 1979, p.151)

Agenda

- Culture
- Native Child Development
- Health Disparities
- Historical Trauma
- Role of Families, Community and Culture in Achieving Health Equity

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Native Child Development

"…different cultural worldviews and values forecast differences in developmental processes, challenges, and outcomes." (Cross, 1997, p.2)

American Indians and Alaska Natives in the United States
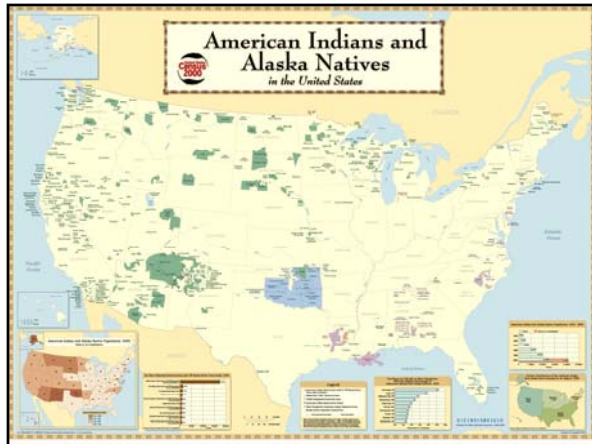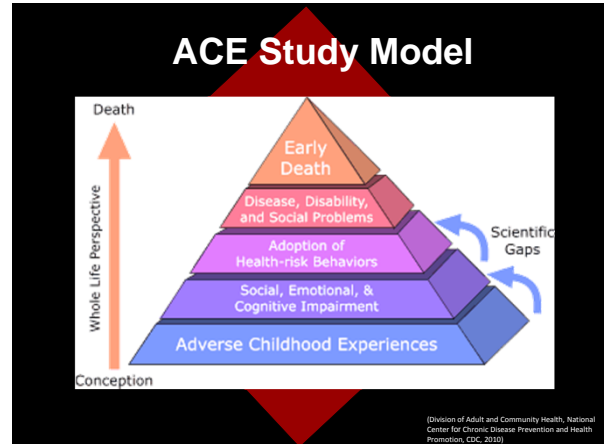

Native Child Development

- Mainstream models of development are based on a cultural bias toward individuality
- There is no existing Western theory regarding healthy interdependence
- Developmental stages and the ultimate objective are different
- Normal development geared toward healthy interdependence can be mistaken for pathological

Native Child Development

The goal of Native child development is "the emergence of healthy interdependence while maintaining individual autonomy." (Cross, 1997, p. 8)

ACE Study Model

(Division of Adult and Community Health, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, CDC, 2010)

A Healthy Native Youth

- Healthy relationships
- Connecting with resources
- Service
- Safety
- Coping capacities—emotional health
- Focus and determination
- Personal capacities
- Personal qualities
- Education
- Employment
- Cultural knowledge
- Identity

- Finances
- Fitness
- Health care
- Healthy lifestyle
- Housing
- Balance
- Connections to Native ancestry
- Spiritual understanding and practices
- Knowledge/skills in traditional cultural practices

What is an Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE)?

The experience of "significant abuse or household dysfunction during childhood"

Specific Indicators:
- Recurrent physical abuse
- Recurrent emotional abuse
- Contact sexual abuse
- An alcohol and/or drug abuser in the household
- An incarcerated household member

- Someone who is chronically depressed, mentally ill, institutionalized, or suicidal in the household
- Mother is treated violently
- One or no parents
- Emotional or physical neglect

(Division of Adult and Community Health, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, CDC, 2010)

Child Well-Being, 2008

	National Average	White (Non-Hispanic)	Black/African American	Asian & Pacific Islander	American Indian & Alaska Native	Hispanic/Latino
Infant Mortality Rate	6.7	5.6	13.2	3.7	8.8	5.7
% of Children in Poverty	18	11	34	12	31	28
Teen Death Rate	62	58	83	33	87	58
Teen Birth Rate	43	27	64	17	59	82

(Source: The Annie E. Casey Foundation (2010) *2010 Kids Count Data Book*. Available at http://datacenter.kidscount.org/DataBook/2010/OnlineBooks/2010DataBook.pdf)

ACE scores and health/well being

In the mainstream population, as an ACE score increases, the risk for the following health problems increases in a strong and graded fashion:

- Alcoholism and alcohol abuse
- Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease
- Depression
- Fetal death
- Health-related quality of life
- Illicit drug use
- Ischemic heart disease
- Liver disease
- Risk for intimate partner violence

- Multiple sexual partners
- Sexually transmitted diseases
- Smoking
- Suicide attempts
- Unintended pregnancies
- Early initiation of smoking
- Early initiation of sexual activity
- Adolescent pregnancy

(Felitti et al., 1998)

For more information, or topic-specific studies, please see:
http://www.cdc.gov/ace/index.htm

Are ACE findings relevant to Native people?

ACEs among 7 Indian tribes were compared with participants in the Kaiser Permanente/CDC ACE study :

- Natives have a significantly higher rate of ACEs/exposure to any trauma (86% vs. 52%)

- Five times more Native people have been exposed to 4 or more categories of ACEs (33% vs. 6.2%) (Koss et al., 2003)

What is a Protective Childhood Experience (PCE)?

The experience of positive family life, participation in traditional practices, involvement with activities and interests, and engagement with spirituality.
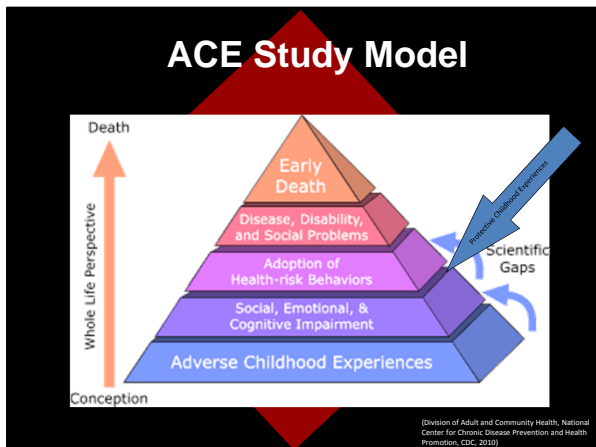
Specific Indicators:
- Close family relationships
- Positive peer groups
- Spiritual/religious connection
- Learning a tribal language
- Connection with tribal elders
- Safe and strong community

Historical Trauma

- Assimilation
- Relocation
- Termination of tribal status
- Adoption
- Boarding schools
- Language and traditions punished and discouraged
- Checkerboard of treaties, laws, and decisions

Role of Families, Community, and Culture

"Resources vary from community to community as do strengths, challenges, and political climates. Each community needs to use its own knowledge of its assets and limitations, its culture and characteristics, its values and beliefs, to build policies and programs that are congruent with the community's characteristics and meet the community's needs." (Thurman et al., 2012)

ACE Study Model

(Division of Adult and Community Health, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, CDC, 2010)

Role of Families, Community, and Culture

What's working?

- **Positive Indian Parenting**- a culturally-based parenting curriculum adapted and implemented in community
- **Positive Youth Development Approaches**- key strategic interventions
- **Systems of Care**- weaving together fractured services to more effectively serve children in a resource-challenged environment

Role of Families, Community, and Culture

"Colonization dismembered our
people. Our job is re-membering."
(Theda New Breast, Blackfeet Nation)

Let's remember why we are really here
today…

Healthy Native Children (and Adults)!