

DCP Psychological Services Clinical Guidelines for undertaking psychological assessments with Aboriginal families

1. Purpose

The Clinical Guidelines assist Department for Child Protection (DCP) psychologists to plan and conduct psychological assessments of Aboriginal families. DCP psychologists are encouraged to use their clinical knowledge, skills and judgement when undertaking assessments and completing reports, and to seek supervision as appropriate.

2. Scope

The Clinical Guidelines apply to all DCP psychologists (referred to herein as psychologists) undertaking psychological assessments with Aboriginal children, young people and families. It is a guideline only and should not be used in isolation from, but rather in conjunction with, regular cultural awareness training and ongoing consultation with the relevant Principal Aboriginal Consultants (PACs), other Aboriginal DCP staff and local Aboriginal service providers in each of the regions. Refer to the [DCP Psychological Services Clinical Guidelines for undertaking psychological assessments](#) for guidance regarding non-Aboriginal children, young people and families.

3. Authority

3.1 Legislative context

The [Children and Young People \(Safety\) Act 2017](#) (CYPS Act) gives guidance on determining a young person's best interests and acknowledges the historically poor outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in care (in Chapter 2, Guiding principles for the purposes of this Act, Part 1, The importance to the State of children and young people). Notably:

4—Parliamentary declaration

(1) *The Parliament of South Australia recognises and acknowledges that—*

(a) children and young people are valued citizens of the State; and

(b) the future of the State is inextricably bound to the wellbeing of all its children and young people; and

(c) it is of vital importance to the State, and all of its citizens, that all children and young people are given the opportunity to thrive.

(2) *The Parliament of South Australia recognises that, as a State, we want each child and young person to benefit from (at least) the following outcomes:*

- (a) *to be safe from harm;*
 - (b) *to do well at all levels of learning and to have skills for life;*
 - (c) *to enjoy a healthy lifestyle;*
 - (d) *to be active citizens who have a voice and influence,*
- and the Parliament of South Australia accordingly commits to promoting these outcomes.*
- (3) *The Parliament of South Australia acknowledges that outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in care have historically been poor, and that it is unacceptable for outcomes for those children and young people to be any different to those for children and young people in care generally.*
- (4) *It is the intention of the Parliament of South Australia that the performance of functions in the administration and operation of this Act be done in collaboration with, and with the cooperation of, children and young people and their families rather than simply being done to or for them.*

Furthermore, the CYPs Act outlines that safety is paramount (in Chapter 2, Guiding principles for the purposes of this Act, Part 2—Priorities in the operation of this Act) and the child’s needs. Notably:

Section 7—Safety of children and young people paramount

The paramount consideration in the administration, operation and enforcement of this Act must always be to ensure that children and young people are protected from harm.

Section 8—Other needs of children and young people

- (1) *In addition to the paramount consideration set out in section 7, and without derogating from that section, the following needs of children and young people are also to be considered in the administration, operation and enforcement of this Act:*
- (a) *the need to be heard and have their views considered;*
 - (b) *the need for love and attachment;*
 - (c) *the need for self-esteem;*
 - (d) *the need to achieve their full potential.*
- (2) *To avoid doubt, the requirement under this section applies to the Court.*
- (3) *Without derogating from any other provision of this Act, it is desirable that the connection of children and young people with their biological family be maintained*

Section 9—Early intervention

Without limiting a provision of this or any other Act or law, State authorities whose functions and powers include matters relating to the safety and welfare of children and young people must have regard to the fact that early intervention in matters where children and young people may be at risk is a priority.

Additionally, the CYPs Act highlights timely decision making and the importance of the child’s views (in Chapter 2, Guiding principles for the purposes of this Act, Part 3, Principles to be applied in the operation of this Act). Notably:

Section 10—Principles of Intervention

(1) The **principles of intervention** are as follows:

- (a) *decisions and actions (if any) under this Act should be taken in a timely manner (and, in particular, should be made as early as possible in the case of young children in order to promote permanence and stability);*
 - (b) *if a child or young person is able to form their own views on a matter concerning their care, the child or young person should be given an opportunity to express those views freely and those views are to be given due weight in the operation of this Act in accordance with the developmental capacity of the child or young person and the circumstances;*
 - (c) *account should be taken of the culture, disability, language and religion of children or young people and, if relevant, those in whose care children and young people are placed;*
 - (d) *in each case, consideration should be given to making arrangements for the care of a child or young person by way of a family group conference if possible and appropriate.*
- (2) *Each person or body engaged in the administration, operation or enforcement of this Act must exercise their powers and perform their functions so as to give effect to the principles of intervention.*
- (3) *However, this section and the principles of intervention do not displace, and cannot be used to justify the displacement of, section 7.*
- (4) *To avoid doubt, the requirement under this section applies to the Court.*

Furthermore the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Placement Principle (ACPP) is reflected in the CYPs Act in the following manner:

12—Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle

- (1) *Subject to the placement principles, the objects and principles set out in this section apply to the placement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people under this Act.*
- (2) *The objects of this section include—*
- a) *maintaining the connection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people with their family and culture; and*
 - b) *enabling Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to participate in the care and protection of their children and young people; and*
 - c) *achieving the objects set out in the preceding paragraphs (as well as reducing the incidence of the removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people) by encouraging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, their children and young people and State authorities to act in partnership when making decisions about the placement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people under this Act.*
- (3) *The **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle** is as follows:*
- (a) *if an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander child or young person is to be placed in care under this Act, the child or young person should, if reasonably practicable, be placed with 1 of the following persons (in order of priority):*

- (i) a member of the child or young person's family;
 - (ii) a member of the child or young person's community who has a relationship of responsibility for the child or young person;
 - (iii) a member of the child or young person's community;
 - (iv) a person of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander cultural background (as the case requires),
(determined in accordance with Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander traditional practice or custom);
 - (b) if an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander child or young person is unable to be placed with a person referred to in paragraph (a), or it is not in the best interests of the child or young person to do so, the child or young person should be given the opportunity for continuing contact with their family, community or communities and culture (determined in accordance with Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander traditional practice or custom);
 - (c) before placing an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander child or young person under this Act, the Chief Executive or the Court (as the case requires) must, where reasonably practicable, consult with, and have regard to any submissions of, a recognised Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander organisation.
- (4) This section and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle do not displace, and cannot be used to justify the displacement of, section 7.
- (5) The Minister may, by notice in the Gazette, after consulting with the relevant community or a section of the relevant community, vary or revoke a declaration relating to a recognised Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander organisation.
- (6) The regulations may make further provision in relation to the placement of Aboriginal children and Torres Strait Islander children under this Act.
- (7) To avoid doubt, the requirements under this section apply to the Court.
- (8) In this section—
- recognised Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander organisation means—*
- (a) in relation to the placement of an Aboriginal child or young person—an organisation that the Minister, after consulting with the Aboriginal community or a section of the Aboriginal community, declares by notice in the Gazette to be a recognised Aboriginal organisation for the purposes of this section; or
 - (b) in relation to the placement a Torres Strait Islander child or young person—an organisation that the Minister, after consulting with the Torres Strait Islander community or a section of the Torres Strait Islander community, declares by notice in the Gazette to be a recognised Torres Strait Islander organisation for the purposes of this section.

3.2 Whole of Government requirements

Nil.

3.3 DCP requirements

Please refer to the [DCP Psychological Services Clinical Guidelines for undertaking psychological assessments](#) for further guidance regarding conducting assessments and writing assessment reports.

This document should be read in conjunction with other DCP policy and procedure documents.

Please refer to the [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle Practice Paper](#) for information regarding application of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Placement Principle.

Along with being up to date with current literature, knowledge and research in this area, psychologists should familiarise themselves with the following reports, resources and related recommendations:

- [Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody](#), 1991
- Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission Report: [Bringing them Home Report](#) of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families, April 1997
- [Ampe Akelyernemane Meke Mekarle: Little Children are Sacred](#): Report of the Northern Territory Board of Inquiry into the Protection of Aboriginal Children from Sexual Abuse, 2007
- [Children on Anangu Pitjantjara Yankunytjatjara \(APY\) Lands – Commission of Inquiry](#) (Mullighan), 2008
- [Apology to Australia’s Indigenous Peoples](#), The Hon Kevin Rudd MP, House of Representatives, Parliament House, Canberra (Feb. 13, 2008)
- 11th Annual Hawke Lecture: [The Greatest Injustice: why we have failed to improve the health of Aboriginal People](#), Professor Fiona Stanley AC, 2008
- The Healing Foundation [Intergenerational Trauma Animation](#)
- In My Blood It Runs (<https://www.inmyblooditruns.com>)
- Rabbit-Proof Fence (<https://www.nfsa.gov.au/collection/curated/rabbit-proof-fence>)

3.4 [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle Practice Paper](#). Principles

- The safety of children and young people is the paramount consideration.
- *“Understanding a different culture completely is not possible for those outside the culture and consequently provisions must be made to ensure that non-Aboriginal therapists undertake their work in a culturally appropriate manner.”* (Vicary and Bishop, 2005)

4. Procedure requirements

The information in these guidelines aims to support staff in giving full consideration to sensitive cultural and Community issues that may impact on assessments being undertaken with Aboriginal children, young people and families. However, noting these guidelines cannot encompass all the relevant local knowledge required to undertake an appropriate assessment, nor adequately represent the great diversity of each different cultural/Community/Clan/Skin/Nation/ Language group. Specific information in regard to each particular Community, must therefore be sought through consultation with PACs, other DCP Aboriginal staff and local Aboriginal service providers within the regions.

In addition to the diversity between Aboriginal Communities, individual variations will also occur, dependant on each Aboriginal person/family’s connectedness to their culture and Community/Land, spoken language, place of residence and personal history. Therefore, care and sensitivity must be taken not to over-generalise the information contained in this document and to consult appropriately in relation to each assessment

undertaken. The specific processes and language required to engage individuals, families and Communities may vary considerably and careful consultation, prior research and respectful and purposeful planning must occur for every case.

Torres Strait Islanders

The following document does not make specific reference to those people from the Torres Strait Islands. While much of the information contained in this document may also be applicable to Torres Strait Islander families, children, young people and Communities, specific consultation with appropriate Torres Strait Islander Consultants/Communities is strongly recommended, to ensure that the following information and guidelines are culturally relevant. If required, PACs may be able to assist in identifying appropriate Consultants.

4.1 Historical context

Providing a thorough account of the history of Aboriginal people, the impact of European invasion/colonisation/settlement and past government policies on Aboriginal people is not within the scope of this document. Within the department it is recognised that the actions of the past that contributed to the destruction of Aboriginal culture will continue to have an impact on the lives and social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal Communities for many years to come (Australian Indigenous HealthInfoNet, 2020). It would be useful to read [The removal of many Aboriginal children: A brief history of the laws, policies and practices in South Australia](#) for more information.

Psychological assessments with Aboriginal families must take into account the long-term impact of European invasion/colonisation/settlement on families being assessed, in particular the forcible removal of children through the Stolen Generations. As well as the direct effects these policies and practices have on children, young people and families, the broader impact on the Communities and ongoing intergenerational effects have significant repercussions for families being assessed.

The forcible removal of Aboriginal children disrupted family relationships and structures (including kinship, language, connection to language and country, knowledge and participation in cultural business, initiation processes etc). The lack of opportunity to develop a strong sense of belonging, identity and self-worth; learn parenting skills and maintain culturally defined roles has resulted in clinically significant levels of trauma, loss and grief (Swan & Raphael, 1995). This has been referred to as 'cultural trauma' due to damage to the sense of strength and identity that occurs at both a group and individual level when beliefs, language and culture are lost (Halloran, 2004). The disruption of opportunities to observe/learn parenting skills is of particular significance. The intergenerational effects of these processes are complex.

4.2 Social context

The health and wellbeing of Aboriginal people are affected by the social determinants of health including housing, education, employment, access to resources, experiences of racism, environmental factors, income and their overall position in Australian society, in which there are documented disparities between Australian Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal populations (Commission on Social Determinants of Health, 2008; Herring, Spangaro, Lauw & McNamara, 2013). Aboriginal people demonstrate significantly higher levels of mental health problems, suicide rates (Trewin & Madden, 2005), substance abuse and gambling problems, lower school completion rate (Herring, Spangaro, Lauw & McNamara, 2013), greater involvement with the criminal justice systems and are over-represented in the welfare and child protection systems. Colonisation/invasion underpins the inequalities in access to social determinants of health, and contributes to ongoing trauma for Aboriginal people (Czyzewski, 2011). The adverse social and health impacts experienced by Aboriginal people are a reflection of *"systemic and pervasive traumatisation over several*

generations” (p. 242, Ober, Peters, Archer & Kelly, 2000). Positively, connectedness to culture and caring for country have been identified as positive determinants of Aboriginal health.

Many of the individuals being interviewed during assessments may have themselves been removed, or directly affected by this process of forced removal. Consequently, consultation and extreme sensitivity is required when discussing family history, connection to culture, knowledge of language, cultural processes and so on.

For children and young people, the potential impact of these policies on their identity formation, self-esteem, and general functioning (social, emotional, cognitive and behavioural), along with their experiences of racism (both direct and indirect), may be significant factors in any assessment undertaken. The term ‘social and emotional wellbeing’ is often used by many Aboriginal people to describe the social, emotional, spiritual and cultural wellbeing of an individual as it fits with a more holistic model of health (Australian Indigenous HealthInfoNet, 2020). A holistic and integrated approach to viewing children and young people’s social and emotional wellbeing necessitates the consideration of social and cultural factors that influence outcomes and contribute to disparities between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal population.

4.3 Cultural awareness/knowledge

The process of Aboriginal cultural awareness is recognised as a continual process of increasing knowledge and skills acquisition in relation to Aboriginal culture. Components of cultural awareness include cultural knowledge; clinical and cultural skills and abilities; beliefs and attitudes; access to resources and Community links, as well as structures and procedures at the organisational level (Westerman, 2001).

Improving knowledge, understanding and familiarity with the general history of Aboriginal people, their changing legal status over time, the processes and effects of forced removals, Aboriginal conceptualisations of mental health, relevant Government initiatives and the specific shortcomings of psychological approaches and assessment techniques in relation to Aboriginal people are all elements of developing cultural awareness. It is also important to be aware of the role psychology, as a discipline has served (through action and/or inaction) in past government policies that have resulted in trauma for Aboriginal people (*please see [Australian Psychological Society \(APS\) apology to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People](#) for further details). While some of these issues will be addressed in these guidelines, ongoing commitment will be required to develop a thorough understanding of these factors and how they might relate to the individual assessments undertaken.

It is recognised that many psychologists are not provided with the opportunity to work with Aboriginal families, either as part of their training, or in the course of their employment. Within DCP Psychological Services, however, between 30 – 35% of all assessments undertaken involve Aboriginal families (as at 2020). Reports produced should clearly demonstrate that assessments have taken account of an individual’s cultural and familial context. In addition to the compulsory three modules of the Aboriginal Cultural Footprint training undertaken when joining DCP, it is expected that all psychologists will complete the fourth module of this training and make continued efforts to increase their knowledge and skills in working with Aboriginal families and communities throughout the course of their employment.

In consultation with a PAC, you may also wish to consider establishing a Mutual Learning Contract or undertaking cultural supervision with a relevant Aboriginal colleague to support your ongoing learning.

4.4 Maintaining professional independence

All psychologists working within DCP Psychological Services are covered by the following statement:

Statement of professional independence

Registered psychologists are bound by the Code of Ethics of the Psychology Board of Australia to maintain professional independence and integrity, and risk sanction and possible de-registration if they do not comply with the Code.

In light of this, although psychologists are employed by the Department for Child Protection, psychologists must maintain their professional independence at all times and it should be clearly understood that psychologists' utility to the Department for Child Protection in regard to legal proceedings depends upon their ability to maintain their objectivity.

In practice, this means that while the Department for Child Protection psychologists will consult with social work and other staff and consider previously acquired information when making decisions, psychologists must and will form their opinions independently and without coercion.

The importance of appropriate cultural consultation will be emphasised throughout this document. While it is recognised that the level of cultural awareness, training and experience in working with Aboriginal families will vary for individual clinicians, achieving and maintaining cultural awareness is considered to be an ongoing process. Equally, the diversity across Aboriginal Communities dictates that specific information may need to be sought for each individual/family being assessed.

To ensure the cultural appropriateness of the assessment processes, as well as the accuracy of any interpretations of culturally related information, it may be necessary for considerable consultation to occur. The recording of any culturally related information in reports or other records should be as accurate as possible and expressed in a culturally sensitive manner wherever possible. Confidentiality must also be appropriately maintained (see Confidentiality section).

It is anticipated that culturally relevant information will be embedded throughout all sections of reports relating to Aboriginal children, young people and families. Therefore, for PACs to provide constructive and well-informed feedback on the cultural appropriateness of psychological reports, it is important they are able to read any draft reports in their entirety, when feedback is sought. This will enable the PACs to identify any omissions or misinterpretations, as well as commenting on culturally specific information included in reports.

However, in accordance with the need for professional independence, the overall clinical interpretation and any subsequent recommendations must be made independently and without undue influence. Once the accuracy of the cultural aspects of the assessment has been assured, it therefore remains the ethical responsibility of the psychologist to determine the appropriate recommendations.

Psychologists should be particularly aware of the General Principle A, APS Code of Ethics (adopted by the Psychology Board of Australia):

General Principle A: Respect for the rights and dignity of people and peoples

Psychologists demonstrate their respect for people by acknowledging their legal rights and moral rights, their dignity and right to participate in decisions affecting their lives. They recognise the importance of people's privacy and confidentiality, and physical and personal integrity, and recognise the power they

hold over people when practising as psychologists. They have a high regard for the diversity and uniqueness of people and their right to linguistically and culturally appropriate services. Psychologists acknowledge people's right to be treated fairly without discrimination or favouritism, and they endeavour to ensure that all people have reasonable and fair access to psychological services and share in the benefits that the practice of psychology can offer.

Please see Appendix 1 for the Australian Psychological Society Guidelines for the provision of psychological services for, and the conduct of psychological research with, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people of Australia.

4.5 Context of child protection

DCP recognises that significant emphasis must be placed on preserving and strengthening the family, to maintain the child or young person at home. For Aboriginal families this means that extended family should, where possible, be included in assessments and that meaningful consultation must occur with significant members of the kinship/clan group structures.

However, the safety, wellbeing and best interests of the child or young person must be the primary consideration and at times this may result in the child or young person being placed out of home. For Aboriginal children and young people, placement within the kinship/clan group in consultation with extended family is of vital importance.

4.6 General considerations prior to the assessment

The following guidelines are intended to provide direction when undertaking assessments of Aboriginal children or young people and their families (including the engagement of Communities). It is recognised that time constraints, or other matters, may prevent every recommendation from being followed in relation to each assessment conducted. However, where particular recommendations cannot be followed, psychologists are encouraged to consider the impact of these omissions. If the subsequent assessment is compromised in any way, as a result of failing to follow the guidelines, this should be clearly recognised and documented. It would be useful to consult the [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle Practice Paper](#) in addition to information contained in these guidelines.

Confidentiality

The complex interrelationships between Aboriginal people can make maintaining confidentiality in relation to child protection matters difficult at times. It is important to be conscious of the issues of men's and women's business, shame, and kinship relationships when asking questions or consulting with other Aboriginal people about particular cases (see below).

At times the choice of Aboriginal interpreter (language or cultural) can also be complicated. While a particular individual may seem ideally placed to assist with understanding a person's language or relevant cultural issues, they may not be considered by the person being assessed as an appropriate option because of their relationship and links with the Community. It is important to check whether a family feel comfortable with the choice of consultant/interpreter before discussing any details outside the family. Asking the person being assessed to nominate someone to act as an interpreter may also increase confidence in the confidentiality of the process. However, clear information must be provided as to the types of questions and information that will be discussed at interview, to ensure they are comfortable sharing such detail in front of their nominated person.

Careful consideration must also be given to the information included in any documentation or reports. Historically, Government records and documentation in relation to Aboriginal people have been a source of considerable distress to some individuals and families. Care must be taken to ensure information is accurate and its source clearly identified. Personal details that do not have specific relevance to the child protection matters being addressed should not be included. If you are uncertain, it may be helpful to clarify with the person specifically (for example, *“What you have just told me sounds like it could be important for my report...is it okay for me to write it down?”*).

Connection to country and safety

“The collectivist nature of Aboriginal society dictates that family obligations and responsibilities take priority over individual interests...This can have significant implications concerning “the best interests of the child”... In more traditional sections of Aboriginal society the best interest of the child is more likely to be considered in the context of how Aboriginal culture is to be protected and promoted...although the interests of children are accorded a very high value in Aboriginal society ‘the best interest’ principle is likely to be over-ridden in some situations by the broader consideration of how Aboriginal culture and family life is to be promoted. (Ralph, 1997, pg 46)

The beliefs outlined above may well underlie discussions with some Aboriginal people, when attempting to ascertain what might be considered to be in the best interests of the child or young person. While due attention must be paid to the protection and promotion of Aboriginal culture, the **safety of the child or young person takes precedence** under the CYPS Act.

However, in accordance with the ACPP any recommendations regarding placement (and contact) of Aboriginal children and young people must consider their cultural and spiritual needs and it is important to reflect this in assessments and reports in relation to Aboriginal children, young people and their families.

Content and process

Psychological assessments conducted by Psychological Services typically focus on obtaining large quantities of information, directed towards answering specific questions for court related purposes. This is usually achieved through intensive interviews and observations, over a relatively short period of time. This largely “content” focussed approach can be an unfamiliar experience for many Aboriginal people.

Aboriginal culture (and, therefore, the interactional style of many Aboriginal people) often places considerable emphasis on the “process” of interaction with others. As a result, the way in which interviews are arranged, who is included in the assessment and so forth can assume more significance for Aboriginal people than the need to provide certain specific information within a set time frame. Where the process issues are not appropriately attended to, the clinician may, in turn, fail to obtain the necessary content required to complete the assessment. The information outlined below is therefore a guide regarding the process issues that might need to be considered in planning and undertaking an assessment of an Aboriginal family.

Consultation prior to planning the assessment

It is strongly recommended that psychologists consult with relevant individuals and both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal services before beginning to arrange the assessment. Information provided through such consultation may have significant impact on [REDACTED]

Within DCP, PACs generally provide the first point of

contact for such consultation. [Appendix 3](#) provides a list of frequently asked questions that may serve as a guide to such consultation.

Cultural vouching

Cultural vouching occurs within many Aboriginal Communities and refers to the process that *“ensures that there are no cultural, family conflicts, or alliances that may impede upon the clinicians capacity to provide consultation”* (Westerman, 2001). In addition to this “vouching” that occurs within and between individuals from Aboriginal Communities, a similar vouching process can occur between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. Partnering with cultural Consultants (such as the PACs, other Aboriginal staff from DCP or other organisations) to “vouch” for you may be of considerable benefit to your assessment. For example, a Consultant or interpreter may be able to vouch for you prior to your arrival or involvement in an assessment, resulting in family members being more open and willing to participate in the process. In order for this to be possible however, strong and ongoing relationships must be established with those Aboriginal staff and organisations best placed to fulfil this role. Vouching can only occur where genuine relationships and respect are maintained. A shared understanding of the assessment process and appropriate consultation in relation to cultural issues and their impact on your assessment will support the development of these relationships. Mutual learning contracts (between yourself and relevant Aboriginal staff) may also assist in the development and maintenance of a shared understanding of roles and assessment purpose.

Genograms/ecomaps

In addition to the general background information obtained prior to undertaking an assessment (from background documents and consultation with the DCP case worker), wherever possible accurate genograms (or kinship maps) of Aboriginal families should be obtained, to inform the assessment process and identify cultural and familial connections. The standard three generational genogram does not describe a culture’s family and kinship structures (see Family structures). Genograms in relation to Aboriginal families are often complex, with large sibling groups, reflecting the cultural relationships between individuals as well as, or instead of, biological connections. This may mean, for example, the genogram includes several individuals identified as primary caregivers (for example might include several mothers) of the child or young person being assessed. In some Communities the primary caregiver (mother) is in fact a person nominated from within the Community, who may have no biological relationship to the child or young person. It is also possible the individuals or families not biologically related will be included in the family, while others are omitted. Non-Aboriginal families may also have a significant role and be included in family genograms. The use of some family labels (such as sister, cousin, father, mother, etc) may, therefore, refer to different familial connections than those in non-Aboriginal families and assumptions should not be made without clarification (see factsheets on [Genograms](#) and [Ecomaps](#) for further information).

Access to above information may be very informative in terms of which family decision makers need to participate in the assessment process and, therefore, should be obtained early in the process, if possible. Consultation with a PAC or Aboriginal gazetted organisation should occur to ensure the genogram is accurate and reflects the major relationships to be considered as part of the assessment. This will also allow an opportunity to ensure the correct terms are being used to describe various relationships at interview, minimising potential confusion or inaccuracies. Such consultation will also assist in how best to undertake culturally difficult conversations, for example discussing family relationships without requiring the family to name a deceased person.

Consultation beforehand will hopefully reduce the likelihood of causing offence during this part of the assessment.

Family structures

Skin groups, moiety and clans

“There are a number of skin groups within language groups, and all Aboriginal people are born with a skin name. Skin groups govern social behaviours and interaction, determining those with whom individuals can (and cannot) talk to, marry and trade with, as well as identifying their natural enemies.” (Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency, VACCA).

“As well as skin groups, all people belong to one of two basic divisions, or moieties. Children belong to the same moiety as their father; their mother belongs to the other moiety. Everything – Spirit Beings, plant and animal species, clan groups, areas of land and water – belong to one of these two moieties. Within each moiety, people belong to smaller groups called clans. A clan usually consists of two or more family groups that share an area of land over which they have ownership. Clan boundaries are passed from one generation to the next, generally through the father”. (VACCA)

Skin groups may also determine who might be available to care for the child or young person, outside of immediate family. Refusal to participate in an interview with others present, provide support, or offer a placement, may sometimes occur because the child or young person is from a different skin group. Consultation must occur to ensure protocols pertaining to skin groups are not being breached during the course of an assessment.

Gender differences

In most Aboriginal Communities, at least some aspects of cultural knowledge are maintained strictly along gender lines (for example, men’s and women’s business), with those from the opposite gender not permitted to have access to such information. An individual’s responses to particular questions during an assessment can, therefore, be strongly influenced by the gender of the psychologist and the person being interviewed. While every effort should be made to minimise the impact of gender on the assessment process, it is recognised that it may not always be possible to conduct assessments along gender lines. In particular, where a female psychologist is interviewing an Aboriginal male, the following suggestions are made to minimise the impact of gender differences on assessment outcomes.

- **Prior consultation with PACs, and other relevant local service providers, regarding the specific questions to be asked during the assessment**

This will allow any inappropriate, culturally related questions to be identified. It is recognised that in some cases, because of the nature of specific abuse allegations, it may not always be possible to avoid addressing culturally sensitive issues in an assessment. However, early identification of those questions that might require an Aboriginal person to breach their cultural protocols, in order to respond, may assist the psychologist to ensure they do not misinterpret responses (or the refusal to respond).

- **Inclusion of an Aboriginal interpreter/translator in the interview**

Psychologists are obliged to involve an interpreter whenever there are communication barriers, as the result of either language differences or cultural awareness. In addition to assisting with language, inclusion of an interpreter may also assist in identifying those questions being asked that are transgressing men’s business (or women’s business, in the case of a female client) or other

culturally specific elements of the process. Even where the client speaks English fluently, an interpreter may be of considerable assistance in this regard.

It is essential that, if an interpreter is to be involved, the client has either personally nominated them, or agreed to their involvement in the process. It is also essential that any interpreter is informed of the nature of the assessment and the types of questions to be asked, prior to the interview. This allows the interpreter to indicate, in advance, if there are any potential topics that are culturally inappropriate for them to discuss, or questions that might require them, or the person being assessed, to breach cultural protocols. Establishing good rapport with the interpreter, prior to commencing the interview process, will assist in ensuring the accuracy of any culturally based interpretations in your assessment.

Interpreters may be available via Aboriginal Health Services, DCP (PACs or other relevant Aboriginal staff), Nunkuwarrin Yunti, or may be someone of the person's own choice. Confidentiality issues must be considered (see Confidentiality section).

- **Appropriate attire**

Consultation should occur as to appropriate clothing to be worn when interviewing Aboriginal males. For initiated men in particular, certain colours, styles of clothing or revealing attire may be considered highly offensive.

- **Empowering the client**

Prior to commencing the interview, it may be appropriate to negotiate a process/signal that the client can use to alert you to the fact you are asking about matters they are unable to discuss, because of their cultural significance. For example, a male may prefer to raise his finger, or perhaps shake his head, if responding to a particular question would require him to reveal men's business, thereby breaching cultural protocol. It is your responsibility to ensure that any refusal to respond to particular questions is correctly interpreted within a cultural framework and not misrepresented as non-compliance on the part of the participant.

Impact of funerals and Sorry Business on timing of assessments

Grief and loss within Aboriginal Communities plays a significant role. When an individual dies, there are a number of cultural obligations which must be fulfilled and take precedence over any other demands on a person's time. In addition to attending the funeral, Aboriginal people spend Sorry Business with their family members and grieve with them. Sorry Business is very important Aboriginal business, with no set finish time. It is very individual (Austin Health, 2006).

Therefore, assessments may need to be re-scheduled if they fall during this period of mourning, or Sorry Business. A person, family or Community's ability and/or willingness to participate in any assessment process will be severely affected by such loss. If the time restraints of the Court impact on efforts to reschedule an assessment, consultation with the appropriate PAC and or services must occur as to the best way to proceed.

* In some Communities Sorry Cuts may occur during this mourning period. This process is considered to release pain and assist the person to resolve their grief. These acts should be distinguished from self-harm through the use of a cultural interpreter or consultant.

4.7 Cultural awareness

Specific knowledge of each cultural group may need to be sought, however the following provide some general areas for consideration whilst acknowledging that diversity precludes a 'one size fits all' approach.

Community/social/emotional/spiritual view

It is important to understand that many Aboriginal people have a holistic view of the world that does not enable easy separation of components of their existence. Mental health, for example, may not be considered or understood separately from a person's spiritual health or connection to their country.

Making appointments

"Within Aboriginal culture, reliability is determined upon a person's willingness to help out a relative in need or spend time with a relative or friend who arrives to visit. Thus, an Aboriginal person's ability to keep an appointment is frequently conditional upon family and social obligations that may arise."
 (Ralph, 1997, pg 50)

Failure to attend an appointment should not be viewed as a lack of commitment to the matters at hand. Some flexibility when setting appointment times may be required.

Entering a home

It is inappropriate for a person to cross over the threshold of an Aboriginal person's home without being invited. It is important to remain outside until invited in. If the individual does not invite you inside, you might say *"We need to have a yarn/chat about some things...is there anywhere we can sit?"* Interviews may well be conducted outside, sitting on the ground or maybe in the car.

Greetings

If a group of Aboriginal people are present, it is important to greet or acknowledge the Elders first, even if you are there to talk to others from within the group. This greeting shows respect for those members of the Community.

Aboriginal people may be embarrassed to offer their name. When wanting to know a person's name, it may be more polite to offer your own name first and very politely ask, for example *"I hope you don't mind me asking this question but could you tell me your name?"* or *"Sorry to ask this question but can you tell me your name?"* Aboriginal people will often give their full name including title (for example Mr/Mrs) (von Sturmer, 1981, pg 2). When an Aboriginal person introduces another Aboriginal person they tend to use kin terms. For example they may say *"this is my aunty"* or *"this is X's aunty"*. It is important to seek permission before using such terms yourself, however, even when the person is introduced in a particular way.

Naming deceased

When meeting or working with an Aboriginal person where there has been a death in the family, there must be some acknowledgement that the death has occurred. One can say something like *"Sorry to hear your bad news"* or *"Sorry for your loss"*. Do not specifically refer to the deceased person by name, even indirectly by referring to another person of the same name or the relationship (for example your father) (von Sturmer,

1981, pg 4). Instead one should say something like “*the dead person*” or “*the old man/lady before*” (von Sturmer, pg 4). It is thought that speaking the deceased person’s name may elicit the spirit to come (Pitjantjatjara English). The avoidance practice is common all over Australia but varies in length and intensity. Where a person has the same name as that of the deceased person, they may be expected to change their name. Care must therefore be taken when questioning any name change for an Aboriginal person.

Body language/seating positions

Body language is a significant means of communication for Aboriginal people and includes:

- dropping head, shuffling and smiling as signs of embarrassment or when in trouble
- lowering eyes or looking away when being spoken to, as a show of respect to older people (or people in authority)
- body contact, such as friendly touching or jostling (Pitjantjatjara English, pg 2).

It is often more acceptable to sit side by side when interviewing, rather than facing each other. This allows for a sense of some closeness, without intimidation, and so the individual does not feel they are being stared at. If a family chooses to sit on the ground, it is preferable to join them, rather than looking down on them from a chair. This demonstrates a willingness to respect their ways.

Men and women usually sit apart from each other. Those in a particular relationship will maintain a certain distance and sometimes actively avoid contact or speaking directly to each other (for example, husband and mother-in-law, or sometimes brother and sister). When interviewing family groups it is important to be aware of these customs and allow the family to choose their own seating positions.

Pay attention to body language and ask for feedback if you sense the client is not comfortable. In general, it is important to maintain an open posture during the interview.

Eye contact

It is a well-held view that making direct eye contact with Aboriginal people is inappropriate. For some groups and individuals this is indeed true. As with many global assumptions, however, this is not always the case, with some Aboriginal people less concerned regarding levels of eye contact than others. It would be reasonable to assume that most Aboriginal people will not be comfortable with intense eye gaze, staring or focussed eye contact. While in other cultures such eye contact indicates an interest in what a person is saying, for Aboriginal people holding their gaze for sustained periods can make them feel uncomfortable or threatened. Staring at one individual, when in a group setting, is also considered inappropriate, even if you do not believe they are aware they are being watched. If the assessment process requires intense observations (contact observations, for example) it may be important to explain prior to the session that you will need to watch the person very closely, so as not to inadvertently increase their anxiety during the process. While looking away from the person, a fixed, unobtrusive gaze may be appropriate (for example, looking at the ground or one’s own hands), as a wandering gaze can give the impression one is disinterested. Extended eye contact between males and females may hold particular significance and should be avoided. Particularly for female psychologists, consultation about the appropriate level of eye contact should occur, prior to speaking with Healers, Elders or Lawmen.

Silence

Silence is valued in Aboriginal cultures. Often Aboriginal people take longer to respond during conversation than you may be used to. Silence does not automatically indicate a reluctance to be interviewed or a refusal

to cooperate. It may mean the listener is considering the topic and forming an opinion or it may mean they are struggling to find the correct English to express their opinion or feelings clearly (Ralph, 1997, pg 48).

Shame

“The concept of shame is very important within many Aboriginal Communities and can be a barrier to help seeking. Shame may also be caused through not practicing cultural safety. Be aware of what language and behaviours cause shame within the person’s Community...In some Communities, for instance, talking about mental illness can cause individuals to feel shame and, therefore, it might be helpful to stick to discussing behaviours and feelings, rather than talking about labels such as “depression” or “psychosis”. Also understand how the Community in which you are helping might feel shame...insisting that the person go and see a non-Aboriginal health worker might be shameful to the Community, as it implies their own ways of healing are inferior to others. Also be aware that Aboriginal people might feel societal shame...as a result of historical factors such as dispossession...and domination of culture...even if you don’t do anything to offend the person, shame might affect their behaviour.” (Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) Guidelines, 2008)

“One of the most powerful personal emotions felt by Aboriginal people is that of shame. It is not the same as shame experienced by Europeans and is difficult to describe succinctly, but embarrassment, disgrace and humiliation are some of the feelings involved. Aboriginals can respond to that shame by refusing to talk and also with aggressive behaviour.” (Pitjantjatjara English, pg 2)

“Shame...being singled out so that the individual is unduly the focus of attention, of the inexplicable, of deep feelings for which there are no words, a fear of trespassing across boundaries that may be sacred, a sense of being powerless and ineffectual....How does shame differ from the dictionary meaning?...It does not arise from a sense of an act by oneself or another, more it comes about due to attention or circumstances...No wonder that shame results in silence and a lack of power. Shame is a form of social control that directly targets personal dignity and it is more than emotion (Horton, 1994). Shame is linked to the importance of kinship ties and the extended family and is one of the most painful and powerful experiences for Aboriginal people.” (Vallance and Tchacos, Conference Paper, 2001)

Shame can often be triggered when Aboriginal people feel they are being “placed in the spotlight”. The very nature of many aspects of the assessment process (one to one interviews, observations and so on) may, therefore, trigger a shame reaction. It may be appropriate to highlight at the commencement of your assessment that you are still learning about Aboriginal culture and invite the individual to let you know if anything you do causes them shame or distress. If you believe some aspect of your assessment has caused a person shame, it is important to apologise.



Pace and loudness

Speaking too fast or rushing through an interview may interfere with the process. As noted above, silence must be respected. It is also important to remember that, while a person may appear to speak English well, they may be translating the questions before responding and require additional time to do so to ensure they understand what is being asked of them. Tone of voice is also important in some cases, for example, when speaking with Elders. Psychologists should be careful not to speak too loudly when addressing Aboriginal people.

Humour

Humour is valued in Aboriginal Communities. Although dealing with very serious issues as a child protection psychologist, it is important to be able to adopt humour where possible.

4.8 Assessment guidelines

“Non-indigenous agencies and workers need to ‘listen the silenced into speech’ and hear and see the stories and perceptions of the indigenous community” (Bamblett and Lewis, 2007, pg 51)

4.8.1 Interviewing process

There are many aspects of engaging Aboriginal people in conversation that are different than the standard interviewing style adopted by psychologists. Below are some general considerations. If you are uncertain, you are encouraged to develop an interview plan and discuss this with your PAC or other cultural consultant prior to the interview. They may be able to assist in wording specific questions in a more culturally appropriate manner.

4.8.2 General considerations – the Talking Circle

As mentioned elsewhere, Aboriginal people are unlikely to respond well to the standard assessment process used by psychologists.

[Redacted text block]

Time required

In recognition of the process issues involved, as well as many of the cultural differences that must be considered when engaging and assessing Aboriginal people,

[Redacted text block]



Questioning style

[Redacted text block]

[Redacted text block]

Aboriginal people often prefer a non-intrusive “story telling” type of interaction, rather than the typical question and answer style of interviewing widely adopted by psychologists.

[Redacted text block]

[Redacted text block]

[Redacted text block]

[Redacted text block]

[Redacted text block]

[Redacted text block]

[Redacted text block]

[Redacted text block]

Response style

“Aboriginal people may be reluctant to express firm opinions, especially if the opinion conflicts with that of another... Expression of opinion will take into account the opinions of other family members and may change during negotiations as opinions of other family members are glimpsed.” (Ralph, 1997.pg 48)

[Redacted text block]

[Redacted text block]



[Redacted text block]

Consultation prior to the interview is, again, important here. If there are local organisations that might offer support,

[Redacted text block]

4.8.4 Explaining the assessment process

It is critical that you carefully explain the purpose of your assessment to all those taking part. Many Aboriginal people and their families may have a prior history of contact with psychologists that was not positive and, as a result, they may be highly suspicious of this type of involvement. Some may not understand what a psychologist does or how the information you are collecting will be used.

When asked to participate in a psychological assessment of any kind, many Aboriginal people may assume this implies that others believe they have serious mental health issues. Therefore, it is important to clarify at the outset the specific nature of your assessment, within a child protection context. Unless this is made clear, there may be considerable reluctance to participate, with the individual fearful they will be labelled or stigmatised as a result of taking part.

It is important to be mindful of the language used when describing the assessment process, avoiding technical or complex language at all times.

[Redacted text block]

It is important to also let the client know that you have been provided with some information already, so that when you later question them in relation to specific information they do not feel they have been misled.

Recognising that some difficult issues are going to be discussed and that the client can ask for a break at any time is also important.

4.8.5 Cultural connections

It should not be assumed that Aboriginal families living in urban areas have lost their cultural identities, or that behaviours observed in those families in more remote areas are culturally determined. In order to accurately understand and interpret Aboriginal people’s interview responses, parenting capacity,

relationships and interactions it is important to determine the level of connection they have with their culture.

In addition to the direct influence this might have on the assessment process, an individual's cultural understanding, beliefs and connection will have ramifications for all aspects of their life. The strength of such connections may dictate the level of influence that is maintained by the broader Aboriginal Community within the family, the significance of cultural protocols (moiety, men's and women's business, etc), parenting practices and beliefs, behavioural/verbal interactions between family/Community members and so on. Without discussion of the impact and importance of cultural beliefs for those being assessed, the risk of misinterpretation is high.

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

many

Aboriginal people were prevented from using their own language and may have now lost the opportunity to learn their language, having been separated from their families and Communities. For some people this, along with other aspects of their history, is a source of personal shame, as well as distress.

Implications of the CYPs Act/Principles for psychological assessments

In line with the CYPs Act psychological assessments of Aboriginal children, young people and families (in consultation with the relevant Community wherever possible) must give paramount attention to the safety of the child or young person. In line with the ACPP consideration must be given to the child or young person's connections to their family and Community, and the ongoing development and/or maintenance of their cultural and spiritual identity. Information regarding the family's cultural beliefs and sense of identity is, therefore, required.

In turn, where children or young people are placed outside of their family, connections to their family and Community, as well as the preservation of cultural identity must be maintained. In any placement of the child or young person outside of their family or Community, the carer's capacity to maintain and support culture and identity must also be considered.

In order to make appropriate recommendations, therefore, psychological assessments must consider cultural and spiritual identity within the family and any alternative care environments. Therefore, cultural connections, cultural awareness and understanding must be addressed in the assessment, alongside issues of safety, parenting capacity and so on. (see also Complexities in the application of the ACPP section).



Potential areas to be considered in relation to cultural connectedness

Questions of assistance in understanding a person’s cultural connectedness might include:

Interviewing Parents

Family

[Redacted content]



[Redacted text block]

Organisation involvement, in place of family

If transient:

[Redacted text block]

Language

[Redacted text block]

Children and young people and culture

[Redacted text block]



[Redacted text block]

Placement and culture

[Redacted text block]

Interviewing children and young people

[Redacted text block]

Cultural connection and identity formation

It is important to gather information about the child or young person’s perceptions of being Aboriginal and their culture connections, as this information is relevant to their identity formation, sense of self-worth and resilience. For those children or young people who have experienced racism and/or who hold a negative



view of their own Aboriginality, for example, specific recommendations addressing these concerns may be required.

In accordance with the ACP, there is a requirement to encourage, preserve and enhance the child or young person’s sense of racial, ethnic, religious, spiritual and cultural identity. In order to do so, a clear understanding of the child or young person’s own views of their identity must be established.

Questions for younger children

[Redacted text block containing questions for younger children]

Questions for older children

[Redacted text block containing questions for older children]



Placement

In addition to the general assessment, [redacted]

Aboriginal carers

[redacted]

Non-Aboriginal Carers

[redacted]

4.8.6 Parenting capacity assessment

Understanding the cultural differences in child rearing practices between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal families is critical before undertaking an assessment of an Aboriginal person’s parenting capacity (see Conducting an Observation). [redacted]

Contextual information about the parent’s experiences of their own childhood may take on particular significance when interviewing Aboriginal people. The impact of the history of the Stolen Generations is still current today, with many parents having limited access to opportunities to learn parenting skills when young.

In addition, the other issues described in the [Historical Context](#) section may also have influenced an individual’s capacity to parent, with many families experiencing multigenerational abuse, drug and alcohol dependence and disruptive care environments.

[redacted]

Adult mental health assessment



Culture bound syndromes

Without competent understanding and assessment of culture bound syndromes, the likelihood of misdiagnosis is high in Aboriginal families, particularly for those individuals with a strong connection to their culture of origin. When evaluating a parent's mental health (as part of the parenting capacity assessment), or assessing a young person with regard to mental health issues, it is therefore critical that culture bound syndromes be considered.

DSM-V considers a culture bound syndrome as being comprised of three distinct but related concepts:

1. *Cultural syndrome* – a cluster or group of co-occurring, relatively invariant symptoms found in a specific cultural group, Community, or context.
2. *Cultural idiom of distress* – a linguistic term, phrase, or way of talking about suffering among individuals of a cultural group referring to shared concepts of pathology and ways of expressing, communicating, or naming essential features of distress.
3. *Cultural explanation or perceived cause* – a label, attribution, or feature of an explanatory model that provides a culturally conceived aetiology or cause for symptoms, illness, or distress.

“There is seldom a one-to-one equivalence of any culture bound syndrome with a DSM-V diagnostic entity. Aberrant behaviour that might be sorted by a diagnostician using DSM-V into several categories may be included as a single folk category, and presentations that might be considered by a diagnostician using DSM-V as belonging to a single category may be sorted into several by an Indigenous clinician.”

DSM-V provides a formulation outline that requires a systematic review of an individual's cultural background, the role of the cultural context in the expression and evaluation of symptoms and dysfunction, and the effect that cultural differences may have on the relationship between the individual and the clinician. They suggest consideration must be given to the individual's degree of involvement with both the culture of origin and the host culture before formulating a diagnosis. Cultural explanations of the illness, cultural factors related to the psychosocial environment and cultural elements of the relationship between the individual and clinician need to be incorporated into any assessment. The process for gathering relevant information is outlined in the [Cultural connections](#) section.

Examples of culture bound syndromes specifically related to Australian Aboriginal populations are not provided in DSM-V. However, some possibilities are noted below:



"A mental illness might be perceived as payback for a previous transgression that may also be related to other family members' transgressions.

The Aboriginal perception of the cause of illness might be due to being:

(a) "sung" by an aggrieved party;

(b) married "wrong way";

(c) "caught out" at law time;

(d) Law business and


(e) other cultural factors...a cultural or other spiritual reason for mental illness would most likely be considered before other explanations

Connection to country was another important determinant of mental health identified...individuals who are away from their country (place of birth/Dreaming) for extended periods of time might experience episodes of depression due to their weakened spiritual link with country and Community...important for Aboriginal people to return home on a regular basis so that they could remain connected with their country." (Vicary & Bishop, 2005, pg 11)



Additional issues

Co-sleeping

Recent studies of infants' deaths in some Aboriginal Communities (Queensland) have found a connection between infant mortality and co-sleeping where drug/alcohol abuse is an issue. 



Interviewing family members regarding any concerns about the parents functioning





[Redacted text block]

Interviewing other professionals involved with the family

[Redacted text block]

4.9 Assessment of attachment and family relationships

4.9.1 Conducting an observation of parent/carer – child interactions

Issues to consider

Location

[Redacted text block]

[Redacted text block]

Impact of participants

[Redacted text block]

Inclusion of grandparents, aunts and other adults

Often grandmothers, in particular, may play a significant role in care giving in Aboriginal families and, therefore, may have been included in contact arrangements. There may also be other significant adults who take on parenting roles for the child or young person within the extended family (see [Cultural connections](#) section).

[Redacted text block]



[Redacted text block]

Inclusion of older siblings

As with adult members of some Aboriginal families, older siblings of the child or young person being assessed may also be expected to take on significant parenting roles with the child or young person.

[Redacted text block]

Selection of participants

Given the above issues, consideration must be given, prior to the assessment, as to who will participate in the contact being assessed.

[Redacted text block]

[Redacted text block]

Behaviours observed

As outlined elsewhere, there are a significant number of behaviours that may present differently for Aboriginal children, young people and adults, when compared to non-Aboriginal families. It is essential that any psychologist assessing an Aboriginal family is familiar with these potential differences in presentation, to ensure their assessment (and subsequent interpretation) is accurate and culturally appropriate. Questions related to an individual’s cultural connection (see [Cultural connections](#) section) may provide some insight into differences in perceptions and practices between families.

[Redacted text block]



[Redacted text block]

[Redacted text block]

Equally, when assessing attachment relationships,

[Redacted text block]

4.9.2 Assessment of family contact arrangements

Recommendations in relation to family contact

[Redacted text block]

In addition to those contact issues typically assessed, arrangements for Aboriginal children and young people need to consider the opportunities provided for cultural and Community connections. Access to the broader family network or other Community members may need to be considered. At times determining how to develop or maintain cultural connections can be complicated, for example where parents are unfamiliar with or negative about their own culture. Consultation with the relevant Aboriginal staff and agencies may be required when formulating recommendations in these circumstances.

Contact with Elders while away –Aboriginal business

Elders are often required to spend significant periods of time away from their home in order to undertake Community related business. While direct contact with these individuals may be difficult during these times, maintaining some link between these family members and children or young people may be possible via other family or Community members. Recommendations may therefore include suggesting letter writing or

sending photographs/drawings/paintings, via family or Community members, during periods when face-to-face contact cannot occur.

4.9.3 Placements

Relatives

Assessments regarding the appropriateness of Aboriginal relatives as carers

This connection with culture should not be assumed purely because the person is Aboriginal.

Contact between different skin groups may be forbidden in some cases.

Assessment of carer's willingness to participate in culturally appropriate activities

Placement of an Aboriginal child or young person outside of their family must also consider the opportunities for cultural/Community connection. There will undoubtedly be variation in cultural connectedness between families and alternative Aboriginal placements. Information regarding these aspects may assist in appropriate plans for the child or young person's long-term wellbeing.

In accordance with the ACPP, placement of a child or young person within a non-Aboriginal family should only occur if the carer(s) are able to ensure the child or young person maintains contact with their family, Community and culture. In addition to assessment of the attachment relationships/parenting capacity etc between an Aboriginal child or young person and their non-Aboriginal carer, therefore, assessment of the carer's willingness to uphold this aspect of the ACPP should be evaluated.

Issues to consider in carer assessment

4.10 Formal assessment/psychological testing

General

Validation of results

The APS Guidelines for provision of psychological services for, and the conduct of psychological research with, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people of Australia specifically address the complexities of psychological testing. Psychologists must familiarise themselves with these Guidelines prior to undertaking any formal assessment of Aboriginal people (see [Appendix 1](#)).

In particular, psychologists must consider the following recommendations, stating:

Cultural considerations

Triangulation of data



[Redacted text block]

[Redacted text block]

[Redacted text block]

Aboriginal learning styles

[Redacted text block]

[Redacted text block]

[Redacted text block]

[Redacted text block]

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[Redacted text block]

[Redacted text block]

[Redacted text block]

[Redacted text block]

[Redacted text block]

[Redacted text block]

[Redacted text block]

Such learning styles may have significant implications for performance in formalised testing environments.

[Redacted text block]



Constructs/concepts

In addition to learning styles, some tests and protocols focus on constructs of concepts that may not be valid, accepted or understood within Aboriginal culture.

Every care should be taken to ensure any tools being used are clearly understood.

Assessment processes

Given the above considerations, psychologists are encouraged to consider alternative means of gathering information about an individual's competencies.

Dynamic assessment/Testing the Limits



[Redacted text block]

[Redacted text block]

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[Redacted text block]

[Redacted text block]

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Some follow up post-test assessment might include:

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[Redacted text block]

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Where such procedures have been used, this must be clearly noted in any report to ensure inappropriate assessment by another psychologist does not occur.

Use of short forms

[Redacted text block]

Tests to consider



4.11 Report writing

Consultation

Upon completion of an assessment, consultation should occur regarding any cultural information obtained during the assessment process. Every effort should be made to ensure accuracy of any culturally based interpretations/information included in the report. Psychologists may also wish to take the opportunity to debrief and evaluate their assessment process with a PAC and their Principal Clinical Psychologist as part of their ongoing development of cultural awareness and knowledge.

Use of Cultural advice cover sheet

Psychological reports are often widely distributed. Aboriginal Services are often involved in case conferences, along with members of the child or young person's extended family, PACs and other Aboriginal staff. At times the information contained in a report may cause distress to these individuals. Information related to men's or women's business may also be inappropriate for some readers. Care should be taken to include only information relevant to the specific issues being assessed.

It is recognised, however, that on some occasions information may need to be included despite its culturally sensitive nature. A Cultural Advice paragraph has been designed to be added at the beginning of Psychological Services' reports to alert Aboriginal family members and service providers to this possibility.

Cultural advice

This document may contain sensitive information pertaining to Aboriginal families and Communities, including mention of deceased individuals and details of Men's or Women's business. Any mention of deceased individuals or Aboriginal cultural business is done so respectfully and with the intention of discussing the best interests of the above mentioned children and young people. Please ensure that this document is disseminated appropriately and the information contained within this document is treated respectfully.

If verbal feedback is being provided, care should be taken to alert those present, beforehand, if sensitive information is to be disclosed.

Note: use of names (verbally or in writing) of deceased persons is particularly inappropriate. Consultation as to the appropriate identifying information that can be used in relation to these individuals must occur.

Information included

As per the Confidentiality section, the specific information included in a report must be considered carefully.

It is also important to consider the broader audience for such written reports. While the Cultural advice paragraph alerts readers to the potential for distressing information to be included,

Terminology

Use of term *Aboriginal* in preference to *Indigenous*:

It has been agreed within DCP (and commonly across South Australia) that the term **Aboriginal** will be used in preference to the term **Indigenous** in relation to describing a person's identity and culture.

Aboriginal is defined as: "*existing in a place from the earliest known period*" (Collins Dictionary) or "*inhabiting or existing in a land from the earliest times, or from before the arrival of colonists*" (Oxford Dictionary).

Indigenous refers to: "*originating or occurring naturally in a country or area*" (Collins Dictionary) or "*Originating or occurring naturally in a particular place, Native.*" (Oxford Dictionary).

"*The use of the word indigenous to describe Aboriginal Australians is, therefore, not exclusive...anyone born in Australia is indigenous to this country*" (Austin Health, 2006).

For some Aboriginal people being called Indigenous, rather than being identified as Aboriginal removes their clear sense of identity as Aboriginal people. Psychologists are therefore asked to use the term Aboriginal in any conversation, written report or other reference made in relation to Aboriginal people.

(* the use of the word Indigenous in this document has only occurred when directly cited from other texts)

Additional terminology

[Appendix 5](#) provides a list of other appropriate (and inappropriate) terminology for use in reports. This list has been provided in consultation with DCP PACs and is not exhaustive.

There may also be occasions where, despite efforts to minimise offence, terms used are not acceptable to local Communities or family members. Any specific terms used by family/Community members during the assessment should be recorded and used in reports as appropriate.



Recommendations

Reports should clearly reflect that the ACPP have been considered in relation to any recommendations made. Any recommendations regarding future care arrangements must give consideration to the child or young person’s cultural needs. It should not be assumed that family contact alone is sufficient to maintain the child or young person’s cultural identity. In some cases the family may have little knowledge of their culture (perhaps as a result of Stolen Generations, forced removals and/or being raised in non-Aboriginal care themselves) and additional support will be required for the child or young person to access relevant Cultural information. Each Aboriginal child or young person in care should have an Aboriginal Cultural Identity Support Tool (ACIST) and Aboriginal Life Story book. Where these have not been completed for a particular child or young person, this should be recommended as part of the overall development and maintenance of the child or young person’s cultural identity.

[Redacted]

Where cultural information has been included in the body of the report, it is important to explain the significance of this information in regard to any recommendations being made.

[Redacted]

Complexities in the application of the ACPP

Although seemingly clear cut, there are many complexities inherent in complying with the ACPP. These include, but are not limited to:

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

Where such circumstances arise in the course of an assessment, consultation with the PAC is strongly recommended

Contact

Recommendations regarding improving the quality of contact need to take into account the learning style of the parent.

[Redacted]



For Aboriginal children and young people, recommendations regarding contact must also give consideration to contact with other family members and the child or young person's Aboriginal Community as part of developing and maintaining their spiritual and cultural identity.

5. Compliance, monitoring and evaluation

These Guidelines will be subject to review and updated as required, in alignment with the DCP policy review cycle. Consultation with relevant Aboriginal staff and services will occur as part of the review process.

Document control

Reference No./ File No.	<i>(Please complete all ** fields)</i>		
Document Owner	Lead Writer (name, position)		
Directorate/Unit: Quality and Practice	Acting Manager, Psychological Services		
Accountable Director: Director, Quality and Practice			
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Risk rating	Consequence Rating	Likelihood	Risk Rating
Risk Assessment Matrix	moderate	unlikely	moderate

REVISION RECORD		
Approval Date	Version	Revision description
3 March 2023	V2.0	Final
June 2009		Review

6. References

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7. Appendices

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7.2 Appendix 2: Frequently asked Questions when consulting with PACs

Prior to consulting a PAC, please give some consideration to the potential interview processes and assessment structure, participants and the information you wish to obtain from the assessment. This preparation will maximise the value of the consultation process.

Things to consider might include:

[Redacted text]

The PAC may then be able to provide you with the following relevant information:

[Redacted text]

For the PAC to be of greatest assistance it is important they are provided with all relevant information, including why the case was referred for a psychological assessment.



7.3 Appendix 3: Information on Aboriginal families and communities

Community	Region	Cultural/Clan group	Background info	Family Names
Poonindie	North of Pt Lincoln	Initially Kurna/River Murray – Adelaide Native Schools	Christian schooling/Arranged marriages/‘half caste’ children sent there. Authoritarian management/tyranny. Most had left by 1894 - sent to Pt Pearce or Pt McLeay	[REDACTED]
Nepabunna	Flinders Ranges (Leigh Creek area)	Adnyamathanha	People worked on stations for rations. United Aborigines Mission tried to force abandonment of ceremonies (survived til 1940’s). Remained in contact with their land. 1977 Nepabunna Council assumed control	[REDACTED]
Koonibba	Ceduna	Wirangu, Mirning and Kokatha	Lutheran Children’s home – children eventually placed with white families in Eyre Peninsula and other areas. Church abandoned farms – no work for the men. Handed to Community Council in 1975	[REDACTED]
Oodnadatta	Oodnadatta/Quorn	Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara	Started at Oodnadatta. In 1927 Children’s home moved to Quorn (Colebrook Children’s Home). Matron Hyde and Sister Rutter much	[REDACTED]



Community	Region	Cultural/Clan group	Background info	Family Names
			<p>loved. Children came from northern stations.</p> <p>1944 Colebrook moved to Eden Hills (Adelaide). Closed in 1981 – 350 kids involved.</p>	
Pt Pearce	Yorke Peninsula	<p>Narungga Adelaide Plains (Kurna) and Murraylands people also sent there.</p> <p>Poonindie missions residents transferred – 1889.</p>	<p>Mix of Kurna and Murray peoples undermined Narungga language and culture.</p> <p>Farming/domestic service. 1915 control transferred from Mission to government. 1972 handed to Council.</p>	
Umewarra (Davenport)	Pt Augusta	Adnyamathanha and Dieri	<p>Children's home – some children removed from, others remained with, families.</p>	
Ernabella (1960s &70s – additional settlements at Fregon, Indulkanna, Amata and Mimili)	Homelands	Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara	<p>Established to prevent contact with settlers. Allowed ceremonies to continue. Children taught language until 1957.</p>	



Community	Region	Cultural/Clan group	Background info	Family Names
Ooldea (Closed 1952 and relocated to Yalata)	Near Maralinga/Woomera test site	Wirangu displaced by Pitjantjatjara, Kokatha, Antakarinja and Ngalea	Transcont. Railway disrupted. United Ab. Mission to "train children". Some sent to Gerard – not allowed language. 1984 Maralinga Tjarutja Land Rights Act returned land	[REDACTED]
Swan Reach (1946 – new site at Gerard)	Riverland	Ngarrindjeri and Nganguraka	Poor health, seasonal work. Flooded site. Gerard improved conditions. Ooldea people moved to Gerard after it's closure	[REDACTED]
Raukkan (Pt McLeay)	Narrung – Lake Alexandrina	Ngarrindjeri	Lack of work for men. Children apprenticed with local farmers. Land given back to Ngarrindjeri Council in 1974.	[REDACTED]

Summary of Nunkuwarrin Yunti Posters - Mission Information



Family Name	Community
	Pt Pearce
	Swan Reach
	Poonindie
	Ernabella
	Pt Pearce
	Colebrook
	Umeewarra
	Pt Pearce
	Umeewarra
	Nepabunna
	Umeewarra
	Ernabella
	Ooldea
	Colebrook
	Koonibba
	Ooldea
	Koonibba
	Koonibba
	Koonibba
	Nepabunna
	Colebrook
	Colebrook
	Umeewarra
	Colebrook
	Ernabella
	Poonindie
	Pt Pearce
	Koonibba
	Ernabella
	Umeewarra
	Raukkan
	Koonibba
	Ooldea
	Poonindie
	Pt Pearce
	Oodnadatta
	Nepabunna
	Swan Reach
	Koonibba
	Koonibba
	Colebrook
	Swan Reach
	Colebrook
	Nepabunna
	Colebrook
	Umeewarra
	Umeewarra
	Colebrook

Family Name	Community
	Koonibba
	Ooldea
	Oodnadatta
	Ooldea
	Umeewarra
	Swan Reach
	Umeewarra
	Colebrook
	Raukkan
	Umeewarra
	Koonibba
	Pt Pearce
	Ernabella
	Nepabunna
	Swan Reach
	Nepabunna
	Oodnadatta
	Raukkan
	Swan Reach
	Pt Pearce
	Raukkan
	Pt Pearce
	Ooldea
	Oodnadatta
	Koonibba
	Pt Pearce
	Swan Reach
	Ernabella
	Ernabella
	Nepabunna
	Umeewarra
	Raukkan
	Oodnadatta
	Swan Reach
	Swan Reach
	Swan Reach
	Raukkan
	Colebrook
	Raukkan
	Koonibba
	Oodnadatta
	Ernabella
	Oodnadatta
	Koonibba
	Oodnadatta
	Pt Pearce
	Swan Reach
	Raukkan



Family Name	Community
[Redacted]	Raukkan
[Redacted]	Raukkan
[Redacted]	Koonibba
[Redacted]	Ooldea
[Redacted]	Oodnadatta
[Redacted]	Umeewarra
[Redacted]	Umeewarra
[Redacted]	Ernabella
[Redacted]	Colebrook
[Redacted]	Colebrook
[Redacted]	Ernabella
[Redacted]	Pt Pearce
[Redacted]	Swan Reach
[Redacted]	Colebrook
[Redacted]	Raukkan
[Redacted]	Swan Reach
[Redacted]	Ooldea
[Redacted]	Raukkan
[Redacted]	Oodnadatta
[Redacted]	Nepabunna
[Redacted]	Colebrook
[Redacted]	Umeewarra
[Redacted]	Oodnadatta
[Redacted]	Umeewarra
[Redacted]	Poonindie
[Redacted]	Pt Pearce
[Redacted]	Umeewarra
[Redacted]	Koonibba
[Redacted]	Ooldea
[Redacted]	Ooldea
[Redacted]	Koonibba
[Redacted]	Oodnadatta
[Redacted]	Koonibba
[Redacted]	Colebrook
[Redacted]	Umeewarra
[Redacted]	Poonindie
[Redacted]	Pt Pearce
[Redacted]	Colebrook
[Redacted]	Pt Pearce
[Redacted]	Colebrook
[Redacted]	Pt Pearce
[Redacted]	Colebrook
[Redacted]	Umeewarra
[Redacted]	Koonibba
[Redacted]	Koonibba
[Redacted]	Nepabunna
[Redacted]	Poonindie

Family Name	Community
[Redacted]	Koonibba
[Redacted]	Ooldea
[Redacted]	Ernabella
[Redacted]	Raukkan
[Redacted]	Oodnadatta
[Redacted]	Poonindie
[Redacted]	Koonibba
[Redacted]	Swan Reach
[Redacted]	Swan Reach
[Redacted]	Raukkan
[Redacted]	Poonindie
[Redacted]	Nepabunna
[Redacted]	Pt Pearce
[Redacted]	Koonibba
[Redacted]	Swan Reach
[Redacted]	Pt Pearce
[Redacted]	Colebrook
[Redacted]	Ernabella
[Redacted]	Umeewarra
[Redacted]	Umeewarra
[Redacted]	Nepabunna
[Redacted]	Swan Reach
[Redacted]	Raukkan
[Redacted]	Poonindie
[Redacted]	Colebrook
[Redacted]	Ernabella
[Redacted]	Colebrook
[Redacted]	Raukkan
[Redacted]	Koonibba
[Redacted]	Swan Reach
[Redacted]	Poonindie
[Redacted]	Pt Pearce
[Redacted]	Poonindie
[Redacted]	Pt Pearce
[Redacted]	Koonibba
[Redacted]	Pt Pearce
[Redacted]	Umeewarra
[Redacted]	Pt Pearce
[Redacted]	Ernabella
[Redacted]	Poonindie
[Redacted]	Pt Pearce
[Redacted]	Ernabella
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[Redacted]	Swan Reach
[Redacted]	Raukkan
[Redacted]	Nepabunna
[Redacted]	Ooldea

OFFICIAL



Government of South Australia
Department for Child Protection

Family Name	Community
	Oodnadatta
	Koonibba
	Poonindie
	Poonindie
	Ernabella

OFFICIAL



7.4 Appendix 4: Terminology

Aboriginal child: In accordance with the CYPS Act, an Aboriginal child or young person is any child or young person who is a descendant of the indigenous inhabitants of Australia and regards themselves as Aboriginal or, if they are a young child, is regarded as Aboriginal by at least one of their parents (CYPS Act, Chapter 3, section 16(1)).

Aborigine: although grammatically correct, this term has negative connotations for some Aboriginal people...“Aboriginal” or “Aboriginal people” are considered more appropriate alternatives. Never abbreviate the term Aboriginal as this is offensive. Be aware the term Aboriginal is not inclusive of Torres Strait Islander people and reference to both should be spelt out where necessary.

Community: There are many different perspectives on what a Community is. As many Aboriginal people were forcibly removed from their ancestral lands the term does not simply refer to a geographical location. An Aboriginal person may belong to more than one Community (where the person comes from, where their family is and where they work). Community is, first and foremost, about country, family ties and shared experience.

Elders: refers to someone who has gained recognition within their Community as a custodian of knowledge and lore, who has permission to disclose cultural knowledge and beliefs. Recognised Elders are highly respected within Aboriginal Communities. Age alone does not mean one is recognised as an Elder.

Mob: identifies a group of Aboriginal people associated with a particular place or country, identifying who they are and where they are from. Mob is generally used by Aboriginal people and between Aboriginal people...it may not be appropriate for non-Aboriginal people to use this term.

Traditional Owners: an Aboriginal person or group of Aboriginal people directly descended from the original inhabitants of a culturally defined area of land or country and has a cultural association with this country that derives from the traditions, observances, customs, beliefs or history of the original Aboriginal inhabitants of the area.

Terms to be avoided:

The following terminology is considered highly offensive and should be avoided in reports or any other communication:

- ATSI
- Native
- Mixed blood
- Full blood
- Half caste/quarter caste
- Part Aboriginal (including 25%, 50% Aboriginal etc)
- Them
- Those people/You people.

Quoting derogatory terms used by others in reference to Aboriginal people can also cause offence. Reflecting that a person has expressed inappropriate or racist views should be done, wherever possible, without the use of direct quotes of such comments.



Being Sung: being sung refers to a cultural process, whereby people from the individual's Community sing the required punishment/reaction, usually in response to a person's cultural transgressions. Such interventions may result in the person becoming unwell or, in extreme cases, dying.

Married wrong way: refers to marrying someone considered to be culturally inappropriate (from the wrong Community or, perhaps, someone who is considered to be related according to cultural connections). Sometimes, children or young people born from such unions may not be considered a part of either Community, with some family members refusing to provide a placement option for them as a result for example.

Law Business: Aboriginal Communities have complex rules and expectations of the members of their Community. Where a person fails to abide by these rules, illness may result. Specific details of Law Business cannot be provided to others outside the Community.

"Communicating Positively – A guide to appropriate Aboriginal terminology" NSW Health, www.health.nsw.gov.au provides additional information and examples.