

23. CULTURAL CONSIDERATIONS

Advocates and parents often deal with children and families from other cultures.

Culture can be defined by an individual's race or ethnic group and by family and community attitudes, beliefs and values.

Prior personal experience, or the experiences of family members and friends, can also influence an individual's "cultural" attitudes. These attitudes can affect the individual's expectations of themselves and others.



For example, a person may identify with a culture that has a history of oppression by government organizations (such as Native Americans). This individual may have an automatic and strong distrust for any "helping" agency such as social services or CASA. This response, developed over a hundred years of community experience, may have nothing to do with the current situation or people involved. It can also be hard to change. The parent or advocate can help this situation by remaining respectful of others' opinions while acting in ways that encourage trust.

Recommendations for dealing with cultural differences.

The parent or advocate can:

- Treat people as individuals.
- Try to recognize stereotyped expectations of certain racial and ethnic groups.
Stereotypes—oversimplified or generalized opinion of an individual or group based on what one has heard, learned or experienced with other people of the same "group".
- Treat everyone with respect. Maintain a professional attitude even when values, attitudes and beliefs differ.
- Openly discuss expectations and fears to find a way to work with them if they cannot be eliminated.
- Learn about other cultures. Ask questions and be open to new ways of thinking.
- Apologize when mistaken or offensive.

- Be aware of prejudices (it is the only way to change them).
- Ask questions if confused, don't know or understand something.
- Try to learn about cultural strengths and norms. If extended family is important in the culture, the advocate can use that as a resource. If family privacy is valued above all else, this should be accommodated whenever possible.

Incorporate cultural activities, etc. into the child's life whenever possible to communicate respect and the value of different cultures.

For more information:

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