Child welfare work involves serving people from a range of individual, familial and socio-cultural experiences. Backgrounds and beliefs can both differ and converge in many ways. Professional integrity and honesty in the interventions, interactions and involvements with families begin with a curiosity toward the enigmas within one’s own world-view as well as with an inquisitiveness toward the differences and intersecting similarities within the world-views of others.

Irrespective of cultural moorings, differing attitudes and beliefs, familial and personal experiences, we share a kinship under a canopy of certain truths. It is, for example, corrosive to authentic human interaction to view oneself or others as either over-privileged or under-privileged. These kinds of constructs engender division and militate against egalitarianism, cultural curiosity and genuine interest in the distinctiveness of persons. Common ground exists in the following truths and encourage cross cultural empathies:

*Regardless of cultural differences, all people want—*

✓ To be treated with dignity & shown respect.
✓ To be asked rather than told to do something.
✓ To be given explanations as to why they are being asked to do something.
✓ To be offered choices and honest options rather than threats and ultimatums.
✓ To be given a second chance to hold one’s own efforts in high esteem.
Tasks:

- Talk with your supervisor about the populations, communities and sub-cultures with which you may be working in your catchment area.
- Ask about any training needs associated with working in your catchment area.
- Talk with your supervisor about any common themes or needs for communities in your catchment area.
- Notice whether service avenues are lacking for less represented or less served groups in child welfare (e.g. non-custodial fathers who may need peer consultation groups, parenting and chemical dependency services).
- What can you do to make connections in the community to create or enhance services for underrepresented populations?
- Find out how your office staff arrange for interpreters or translation services.
- Observe an interview conducted in a foreign language.

Discoveries:

✔ What are the unique services available in your community for the varying needs of your clients?

✔ Consider the meanings of sub-culture:

- Subgroup differentiated by status, ethnic background, residence, religion, or other factors that functionally unify the group and act collectively on each member. (American Heritage Dictionary)
- A subgroup with a distinct integrated network of behavior, beliefs, and attitudes. (Collins English Dictionary)
- A group having social, economic, ethnic, or other traits distinctive enough to distinguish it from others within the same culture or society. (Random House Kernermerman Webster's College Dictionary)

✔ How would having an interpreter affect your interview with a client?

✔ What is local practice for clients who do not speak or read English?

✔ What is the general practice for clients who do not read or write?
Cultural Issues continued...

Increase your Social Awareness

- If and when world-views differ between yourself and a family with whom you are working, ask some social awareness questions:

  - What power dynamics are at play in your first contact?
  - Sense how comfortable or anxious are family members?
  - Estimate who has significant influence in the family and then consider which 3 words describe this family member’s experience of your presence.
  - What are other family members’ key concerns, or unasked questions?
  - When you discern that a family may unconsciously sense that you are not engaged with them, ask yourself how I can show real interest in them now, or how can I best meet their needs in this brief exchange.

Increase your Relationship I.Q.

- When differences feel unmanageable or exasperating with families or co-workers, ask some questions that build upon your relationship I.Q:

  - When differing beliefs exasperate, how do you progress beyond an initial lack of rapport?
  - What do each gain when you ask to use the other’s ideas?
  - Even amid stressed interactions, consider how your decisions will affect the others involved.
  - Ask yourself what attributes each “side” brings to the discussion or resolution.
  - When communication breaks down, ask yourself what is the other’s preferred sensory channel, i.e., do they prefer to talk it over, have time to think, see the big picture or walk through it in their own words.
  - When you have considered the sensory channel idea, consider what you can learn for others involved in the exchange.
  - Finally, when differences seem like a chasm between you, ask yourself what the common aim is and what might be considered the best provisional, yet mutual outcome.

Discoveries:

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*adapted from RevealSolutions 2013