

Cultural Awareness Tips for Volunteers Working with Little Sisters of a First Nations Culture

Is your Little Sister of First Nations culture? The following cultural practices and differences may be useful for you to be aware of in your match. Please note that there are many different First Nations cultures, and the following information is meant to be general in nature, and may or may not be relevant to each culture. Different cultures and Nations may have different protocols.

- ❖ **Eye Contact-** In First Nations culture, it is customary to keep your head down during a conversation with someone. It is believed that the spirit transcends through your eyes and thus when two people make eye contact, the spirits do not like it because it causes conflict. This shows respect and allows for listening, being thoughtful and developing a response. If your Little Sister or her parent/guardian does not look you in the eye during conversation, try to not misperceive this as being disrespectful or withdrawn.
- ❖ **Silence-** Silence is a sign of respect in First Nations culture and is not viewed as negative. One may take a moment before responding to someone during conversation to think about their response and make sure it is respectful and meaningful.
- ❖ **Relationship-Building-** Due to a history of broken trust and maltreatment of many First Nations people, it is very important to take the time to build a relationship. If your Little Sister or her family is reserved, be patient and try to build rapport with them. Eventually this will barrier will go down. Using humour helps!
- ❖ **Greeting-** In many First Nations cultures, people greet each other by giving a handshake and nodding their head. This is to acknowledge and show respect.
- ❖ **Gratitude-** This is an important aspect in First Nations cultures. People will show gratitude in different ways not just for tangible items and favours, but for sharing knowledge and space.
- ❖ **Family structure-** It is believed in First Nations cultures that a community raises a child. Extended family members play an important and large role in the care and raising of a child. If your Little Sister tends to spend a lot of time with various family members or at other homes, this is not a sign of neglect on the parent's part, but a day-to-day norm in First Nations families.
- ❖ **Flexibility-** Take time to think about what will work on both sides of the relationship- what is the Little Sister and her family comfortable with? Try to be understanding of the current family situation.
- ❖ **Knowledge-** Your Little Sister may or may not know a lot about her culture. Encourage her to learn about her identity and culture by taking an interest in it yourself, and showing a willingness to learn from her, or with her.
For example...
 - ask her which Nation/Band she belongs to and call the Band Office and ask if the two of you could speak to an Elder.
 - Research cultural events going on in the community that you two can participate in (i.e. at the Friendship Centre).
 - Attend events put on by Big Sisters' First Nations Activities Committee.
 - Ask questions!

For more ideas on how you can learn about First Nations culture, and help your Little Sister learn about and be proud of her culture- call your Counsellor at Big Sisters and she can help guide you in the right direction!