

TOPIC:

Understanding Historical and Generational Trauma

March 2018

Micro Training Course Developed

By Teisha Simmons, Rural Outreach Coordinator, Alaska Center for Resource Families

INSTRUCTIONS FOR FOSTER PARENT TRAINING CREDIT:

*Read through this self-study.

*Fill out the "CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING" Questionnaire

*Return to ACRF for 1.0 hour of training credit.

There is a very high rate of Alaska Native and Native American children in foster care. Many children come from families that have experienced historical trauma. Understanding historical trauma makes it easier for us to understand why the families of the children in foster care may be participating in unhealthy behaviors. The negative psychological impact of historical trauma on Native American People is similar to other massive generational group traumas. Past examples include: the Jewish holocaust, slavery of the African people in the United States, and treatment of the Japanese Americans in the U.S. during World War II.

Historical trauma is generational and dwells deep in the lives of Alaska native and Native American individuals and communities. As a result, many people in these same communities experience higher rates of mental and physical illness, substance abuse, and erosion in families and community structures. The persistent cycle of trauma destroys family and communities and threatens the vibrancy of entire cultures. For any healing to take place, one must take a close look at the root cause of historical trauma. Historical trauma is not just about what happened in the past. ***It's about what's still happening.***

The focus of this training is to gain an understanding of what historical trauma is and what you can do to help minimize the effects of it on the children in your home.

Let's look at nonfictional example of what historical trauma might look like in a family.

Martha and John were both born in traditional camps in the early 1900s. The only language spoken was their Alaska Native language. As they are growing up, gold miners, trappers and missionaries begin introducing Western culture. With this came the introduction of permanent villages, boarding schools, the English language, alcohol, influenza, Christianity and new ways of doing things. Fast forward to 1920, Martha and John are now married and have five children. As a result of their binge drinking style they learned from the miners, the children are often neglected. Eventually, the children are sent to boarding school where they are no longer allowed to speak their language; have no access to their traditional foods; can no longer participate in their traditions; and, have experienced a variety of abuses. The children have grown up with unresolved trauma and developed unhealthy coping mechanisms such as abusing substances, expressing anger in abusive manners, and having suicidal ideation. Martha and John's children become parents and their children also begin experiencing trauma and unhealthy coping mechanisms. By this time, the Alaska Office of Children's Services has been formed and Martha and John's grandchildren are taken into custody and placed with a foster family. The children also come across forms of micro-aggression at school and in the community. (Micro-aggressions are current events involving discrimination, racism and daily hassles that are targeted at individuals from diverse racial and ethnic groups.) The cycle that began in the early 1900s continues today in 2018.

While historical trauma, recent trauma and micro-aggressions affect many families, the good news is that children and families can overcome these things with the right resources and supports. As a foster parent, you can play a role in helping the child in your home heal from these.

How can I help a child in my home overcome the personal effects of historical trauma on him or her?

1. Talk with your caseworker to see if the child you have in your home has experienced trauma prior to placement and find out which resources are available for you in the child to access.
 - a. Some children may need therapeutic treatment while others may not.
 - b. Participate in or request trainings from the resources in your community, region or state. For example, The Alaska Center for Resource Families (ACRF) has numerous trainings that can be made available to you. To see a list of the trainings available to you through ACRF, visit the following links:
 - i. Teleconference and audio courses: <https://www.acrf.org/resources-teleconference-audio-trainings.php?tn=5>
 - ii. Videos and webinars: <https://www.acrf.org/resources-self-study-video.php?tn=5>
 - iii. Written courses: <https://www.acrf.org/resources-self-study-written.php>
 - iv. Full listing of self-study courses available to send out to you: <https://www.acrf.org/assets/publications/Catalog3.pdf>
2. Accept that culture and race are important. It doesn't make you bad if you are not the same race or culture, but it does put more responsibility on you to integrate the child's culture into your home and the child's life
3. Help the child develop a sense of resilience. Resilience can be learned by cultivating:
 - a. Focusing on the positive, maintaining a hopeful outlook.
 - b. Making meaningful connections with others.
 - c. Keeping things in perspective (not viewing crises as insurmountable).
 - d. Meditating, praying and other spiritual / cultural practices.
 - e. Exercising, including walking in nature.
 - f. Being adaptable and accepting that change is a part of living.
 - g. Moving toward goals and taking decisive actions.
4. Cultural identity and connection increase children's resilience and self-esteem.
 - a. Connect the child with a mentor who can teach them traditional skills and values and give them the opportunity to practice them if you are unable to.
 - b. Bring the child to or give the child opportunities to attend traditional activities and ceremonies.
 - c. Understand that spirituality may mean something very different for the child in your home or his or her culture. Traditional healing practices are important protective factors against historical and contemporary trauma.
 - d. For a list of cultural resources available by distance, see last page of this training.
 - e. Find out everything you can about the culture of the child in your home and educate yourself on what you might need to learn to do differently.
 - f. Have books, artwork, music, items or toys that reflect the child's race or culture.

For more information on historical and generational trauma, go to our bibliography for more resources and videos.

To Earn 1.0 Hour Foster Parent Training Credit (Alaska Foster Parents Only) COMPLETE [QUESTIONNAIRE](#)