

This guide will help you keep your Native American or Alaskan Indian foster child connected to their heritage. The Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978, which addressed out-of-home placements and tribal affiliation, requires foster parents to keep a child connected to their tribe and culture. When a child stays connected to their tribe and culture, they gain awareness of their identity and develop better self-esteem. Maintaining your respect for the Native American child, family and tribe leads to more successful outcomes for the child.

Ask the OKDHS child welfare (CW) specialist the following:

1. Ask which tribe the child belongs to.
2. Ask who the Indian Child Welfare (ICW) worker (also known as tribal worker) is and for their contact information. If the CW specialist does not know, contact an OKDHS Tribal Coordinator to assist you.
3. Ask for a copy of the child's tribal membership card and Certificate of Indian Blood (CDIB) card.
4. If the child does not have a tribal membership card or CDIB card, ask the CW specialist or ICW worker to help you obtain the cards.
5. If the child/children are eligible to be members of more than one tribe, it is up to the child's parent/custodian to decide membership. If the parents are not involved, refer to the tribes involved in the case.
6. Each tribe offers different resources for tribal children, such as cultural camps during the summer or online language classes. Please refer to their website for more information.
7. Completing the Circle is an annual event planned by tribes and OKDHS that aims to connect children to their tribe, culture and heritage. Visit the event's website for more information: <https://events.oucpm.org/ctc/>

Adoption of an Indian Child:

1. There must be a Good Cause Hearing for or all placements-kinship, tribal and non-tribal and adoption.
2. The tribe must agree to the adoption and sign documents stating such.
3. If the child is eligible to be a member of two or three or however many tribes, then please ensure this is in the adoption papers. This is important because as the child becomes an adult they may identify with one of the other and choose to enroll or unenroll in such tribe.



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Navigating the OKDHS and tribal world can be challenging. Here are a few tips to help you along the way.

Thank you for fostering our Native American and Alaskan Indian children!





Ask an ICW worker (also known as a tribal worker):

1. Ask what programs or resources are available to the child and how to access them. Some tribes have cultural packets they can send to you.
2. Some tribes will require the child to live in their tribal jurisdiction to access programs or resources.
3. Ask about customs or ceremonies you should be aware of to ensure the child stays connected to their culture.
4. If an ICW worker is not assigned to the case, locate the tribal website and go to the Culture tab on the site. There should be a contact number or email to ask the above questions. Some tribes will have Elders who can advise you.
5. If you are unable to locate tribal information on their website, contact an OKDHS Tribal Coordinator to assist you.

If you live in Tulsa County:

1. The case will be heard in the new Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) Court. The ICWA Court is set to hear all Native American child welfare cases on one specific day and by a specific judge. Tulsa County also has

OKDHS ICWA units that are assigned cases. An ICWA unit is simply a unit that works more closely with tribes.

2. If you have additional concerns or questions, ask your OKDHS Specialist or an OKDHS Tribal Coordinator.
3. You can find contact information at: <https://officemgmtentserv.sharepoint.com/sites/CWS/SitePages/Tribal>.

Things to know:

Every Tribe is different and unique. There are 38 Federally Recognized Tribes in Oklahoma. The majority of these tribes only have one or two ICW workers on staff to serve the entire United States.

Tribes are Sovereign Nations and can choose to become involved or not involved at any time during the life of the case. Think of a Tribe as if it is a Country with their own policies and laws.

If a child does not live in their Tribal jurisdiction to access programs or resources, but lives in another Tribe's jurisdiction, you can contact that tribe to see if they serve Native American children who are not members of their

tribe. Not all tribes do this, so please contact the Tribe in which you live in their jurisdiction.

****IMPORTANT* Hair Care:*** In several tribes, a person's hair can represent a close cultural identity. This close identity to culture promotes self-esteem, a sense of belonging and self-respect. As part of practicing self-respect, Native children are taught to take good care of their hair and to let it grow. ***DO NOT cut a child's hair until it has been approved by the child's parents or custodians.*** Contact a Tribal Coordinator if you have any questions or concerns.

Foster Care placement of an Indian child:

Each tribe may have their own placement preferences which must be followed for compliance with ICWA. The general rules apply (if no tribal preferences are available).

1. Placement with relative/kinship
2. Placement in a tribally approved foster home
3. Placement in a tribal foster home approved by a non-tribal agency
4. Placement in a tribal facility (More on back)