

## **Unanswered Questions from An American Indian/Alaska Native Perspective on Mental Health, Disability, and a Greater Understanding of Native Culture webinar**

*The following are questions from the webinar that we did not have enough time to answer. We sent these unanswered questions to our speakers who provided their feedback. We have compiled their responses and wanted to share it with those interested.*

- 1. How can I, as a white woman, cross cultural barriers to help our Native population with services? I do not want to create cultural issues or block Native folks from wanting to be helped because I am white.**

**Dr. Chuck Foster:** I believe being respectful and listening to the client is a great tool. Many clients are making a breakthrough to communicate with the professional world. I also believe it doesn't make any difference if the therapist is from another race, as long as the professional is sincere.

**Erica Ficklin:** I would recommend getting involved in the community! Building relationships and connections is a great way to build trust. I would also recommend practicing cultural competence skills, such as empathy, perspective taking, and listening. It would be great to try to learn more about the specific tribes in the area you are working.

- 2. Do American Indians want to be asked questions about their culture?**

**Dr. Chuck Foster:** I believe the American Indian people would like to talk about their culture and share their culture because this would allow for a better understanding between races. I have been to many ceremonial settings and have seen more races at these gatherings and a few would also participate.

- 3. Coming from a mental health perspective, how can those of us in urban areas be more welcoming and supportive of our Native clients/patients?**

**Dr. Chuck Foster:** Providing resources and services would be a kind gesture. Investigate what is and may be available in the community. Many times, the client doesn't know what is available and how to start the process of becoming involved.

**Erica Ficklin:** This is a great question. Native clients/patients in urban areas may have ancestors from tribes from across the country. I would recommend listening to what cultural and traditional practices are important to your clients/patients. As mentioned above, I would also recommend practicing cultural competence skills, such as empathy, perspective taking, and listening.

- 4. The pressure on American Indian individuals to "choose a culture" sounds exhausting. There seem to be so many consequential decisions and how does one know which**

**way to go? What are some support systems we can refer individuals to and what can we do to lessen the cognitive load for individuals as they pass through our services?**

**Dr. Chuck Foster:** The pressures are tremendous to become bicultural, especially if your culture has been marginalized for years. Many people will gravitate back to their comfort zone and if their culture offers that comfort, they'll disappear from society. I see this quite often in schools. I believe education is the best avenue to go. Learn all you can about the community and adjust your outlook accordingly.

There are resources in the community such as the Urban Center for American Indian/Alaska Natives in Salt Lake City, Utah. Many urban cities have centers, however if they do not, reach out to neighboring states and build a consortium for better understanding and services.

**Erica Ficklin:** I think the decision on which way to go and what cultural identity is most salient depends on the individual. I would recommend gently asking about individuals' cultural background and what is most meaningful to them. I would suggest giving each individual the space to process what means the most to them. Identity formation can be a lifelong process, so meeting individuals where they are and giving them space to think through their identity is key.

**5. Do speakers have any social media that I can follow to learn more and hear you speak again?**

**Dr. Chuck Foster:** I don't have any social media, but I occasionally present at the National Indian Education Association (NIEA) Convention in October, Utah State Counselors Conference in June, and at professional development sessions for many school districts during the year.

## **Recommended Resources from Speakers**

- [Honoring children, mending the circle: cultural adaptation of trauma-focused cognitive-behavioral therapy for American Indian and Alaska Native children](#)
- [Cultural Adaptation for Therapy With American Indians and Alaska Natives](#)
- ["Weaving Balance into Life": Development and cultural adaptation of a cancer symptom management toolkit for Southwest American Indians](#)