

Capacity Building Center for Tribes Prevention Brief

Introduction

Prevention-centered practices are rooted in the belief that a child's connection to their family and tribal communities keeps the community whole. Honoring our stories, Indigenous ways of knowing, and belief systems when developing prevention practices can help programs increase protective factors, strengthen family systems, and create connections for children and families. Tribal child welfare programs across Indian Country have unique governments, governing documents, and cultural beliefs.

The 2023 challenge to the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) at the United States Supreme Court intensified conversations about how to ensure that tribal children remain with their families or within their communities. In response to these discussions, the Capacity Building Center for Tribes (Center) has created the following brief on family-strengthening prevention practices and definitions.



Culture of Prevention

Prevention can take many forms at the community and individual levels and is embedded in the fabric of tribal child welfare family preservation. The focus of prevention includes limiting risk, harm reduction, and increasing protective factors to empower families with the ability to navigate challenges with unity and strength. Prevention in tribal child welfare can occur in more than one way and can look differently from tribe to tribe.

Many prevention services in this brief focus on preventing families' involvement in the child welfare system (or preventing the child's removal from their home) by offering services focused on harm reduction or minimizing risk factors within the family. This includes behavioral health, mental health, substance use disorder (SUD) treatment, financial aid, and housing supports. Other efforts include collaboration and connections with community programs for integrated service delivery to families in need of strengthening.

A prevention-focused culture reduces removal rates by strengthening and promoting wellness within the family. Activities that promote thriving Native families are:

- proactive (e.g., taking place before system involvement),
- strengths-based, and
- culturally relevant.

At the systems and community levels, this may include community outreach and education. For individual families, this includes parenting education and classes on prevention of child abuse/maltreatment and SUD.

Native programs consider culture to be an essential part of all prevention efforts. Put simply, culture is prevention. Through cultural engagement, families are strengthened, which promotes preservation and reunification.

The Prevention Services Continuum – Tribal Definitions

Prevention services fall upon the primary, secondary, and tertiary continuum. These services will be discussed in the following sections, and we will provide examples of what these look like in tribal settings.

Primary Prevention

Primary prevention services provide information, activities, and resources to the community with the objective of cultivating resilience, bolstering family relationships, and educating parents on how to create a nurturing environment to act as a defense against emergency situations. This service approach allows for everyone in the community to participate in these types of activities and programs. The term “concrete support services” is used here to refer to supports available to families for basic needs. Primary prevention services examples are listed in the table below.

Primary Prevention Services

Concrete Support Services & Family Support	Community Engagement & Activities	Education & Skill Development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Basic needs provision (e.g., childcare or transportation) • Family preservation / Family navigation¹ • Family healing circles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultural events and activities • Youth services • Community programming 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community education • Parenting classes • Employment support • Youth education

¹ A process intended to improve outcomes for children and families by linking families to necessary resources and supports based on need



Secondary Prevention

Secondary prevention services are available for tribal families who may be at risk for child maltreatment and who might benefit from preventative or therapeutic support. These services support Native families who are experiencing challenges, in order to reduce or eliminate the risk of harm to their children and cultivate nurturing home environments.

Tribes offer a variety of resources for families, including referrals to other programs. Also, secondary prevention services overlap between community-wide and family-focused approaches, with families often weaving back and forth between primary and secondary definitions of prevention. Secondary prevention services examples are listed in the table below.

Secondary Prevention Services

Concrete Support Services & Family Support	Health and Well-Being Services	Child Services	Education & Skill Development	In-Home & Household Services
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Referrals/ Linkages • Concrete support services provision • Family preservation • Housing assistance • Needs assessments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Behavioral health and SUD services • Mental health (counseling, group therapy) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Childcare • Children's advocacy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education • Parenting classes • Community and cultural programming • Employment support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Home assessments • Home visitation • In-home services • Household management

Tertiary Prevention

Tertiary prevention services are available to homes where child maltreatment has occurred and focus on harm reduction, stopping maltreatment so that therapeutic interventions and family reconnection can begin. These services support Native families who have already experienced child removal from the home—families in the process of reunification with their children, kinship caregivers, or adoptive parents. Tertiary prevention services examples are listed in the table below.

Tertiary Prevention Services

Family Support	Housing and Inpatient Services	Law and Safety
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extended tribal family support • Foster care support • Financial assistance • Sober living facilities • Kinship support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing assistance • Emergency shelters 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reunification efforts • Safety planning • Case management • Legal advocacy • Legal support

Prevention Services Available Through Tribal Programs

Through our work across the country, we know there are many services provided by tribal service providers in their prevention efforts. Some of these services and how they are delivered is outlined below. These include therapeutic cultural traditions and practices.

Concrete Support Services

The concrete support services provision includes physical and financial resources. These services are often made available to the tribal community and support the mission of helping families before any system involvement or a removal occurs. Examples of concrete support services are:

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|---------------------------------|------------------------|---------------------------|
| ✓ Food vouchers | ✓ Car seats | ✓ Utility bill assistance |
| ✓ Water | ✓ Baby formula | ✓ Furniture |
| ✓ Housing/Rent assistance | ✓ Diapers | ✓ Transportation |
| ✓ Clothing or clothing vouchers | ✓ Baby supplies | ✓ Gas vouchers |
| ✓ General gift cards | ✓ Groceries | ✓ Cleaning supplies |
| | ✓ School supplies | ✓ Household supplies |
| | ✓ Financial assistance | |

Healing Circles and Family Navigation / Family Preservation

In Native communities and programs, healing circles are offered to support and strengthen tribal families. Family navigation and family preservation activities can be used for early intervention and service referrals to reduce risk and help keep families together. These may also include pre-adjudicative processes to help avoid court involvement.

Strengths and Needs Assessments

Formal and informal needs assessments can help identify families who are at risk for child abuse and neglect and connect them to direct services or referrals to partnering programs. Assessments can be used to identify strengths within the family, as well as specific needs.

Cultural and Community Events and Activities

Cultural and community events and activities are available to all members of the community. These events and activities integrate culture as prevention into their mission, promote healing through traditional ways, and ensure that families have opportunities to reconnect with their community and culture.

Cultural events include the following:

- Seasonal traditional activities
- Sewing and beading
- Drum making
- Sweat lodges
- Beach activities
- Community arts and crafts
- Language classes
- Drum circles

Youth Services and Education

Youth services and education range from health and safety promotion to recreational activities and skill building, such as:

- Seasonal camps (river and fishing)
- Anti-bullying groups
- Tobacco cessation
- Educational planning
- Driver's education
- Youth healing circles
- Youth camps
- Vehicle passenger safety information
- Abstinence education
- Goal setting and life skills
- Connecting youth with elders

Housing Assistance

If a family is experiencing an emergency event (e.g., eviction, loss of home, domestic violence, etc.) that involves the loss of housing, programs may refer them through an emergency assistance application process for housing help. Short-term emergency housing, along with other resources and services, can prevent removal and keep families together. Another option is to establish a children's group home to keep children housed on the reservation.



Referrals and Linkages

Tribal programs often refer families to other programs that provide concrete family support services, behavioral health, housing assistance, education programs, and the tribal court for legal issues and questions. Some examples of these services include therapeutic treatment for SUDs, equine therapy, outpatient programs for adults and adolescents, inpatient programs, recovery support programs, mental health programs (group and individual therapy), and domestic violence support programs. Tribal child welfare programs also receive referrals from other programs and state agencies.



Community Education and Training

Community education and training may include:

- **Child abuse and neglect:** Partnering with programs to provide training on how to identify signs of neglect and how to file reports; this can also include education on preventing unnecessary reports
- **Human trafficking awareness project:** Created to raise awareness, educate, and train community members on issues such as sexual exploitation and internet safety basics
- **Language:** Language programs offered in conjunction with community cultural activities
- **Parenting classes/presentations:** Parenting classes on building healthy attachments; culturally appropriate classes such as “Triple P” from the title IV-E Prevention Services Clearinghouse and Positive Indian Parenting
- **Finance:** Money management and budgeting skills
- **Domestic violence prevention training:** Increasing awareness and promoting safety
- **Stress management:** Teaching parents how to recognize and cope with stressful situations at work and home

Home Visits / Home Assessment Services

Tribal child welfare professionals provide home visits to families to conduct assessments, identify family strengths and needs, and support parents in developing plans to safeguard the well-being of their children. Some caseworkers provide informal



education and resources for families about a variety of topics during home visits, such as safety, parenting resources, and financial guidance. In general, home visits are separate from home visitation where the court is already involved.

Legal Advocacy and Support

Many programs provide legal support or advocacy by helping families manage and prepare for legal proceedings. Some tribes follow title IV-B² guidelines for supporting pre-adjudicative processes to avoid court. Legal advocacy could mean that programs attend court with families or provide transportation to court appointments. Tribes may create Family Preservation Courts to address and resolve barriers. Adoptive families receiving secondary support services also receive extended tribal family support geared toward setting up new parents for the lifetime commitment of parenting.

Kinship Support and Reunification Efforts

Kinship support services involves supporting relative care providers with resources (e.g., furniture) and support to prevent the breakup of families.

Through title IV-B-funded programming, programs can support reunification by helping to resolve challenges in families whose children were placed in foster care. These program services can support a safe and stable reunification process.

Capacity Building Center for Tribes

The implementation of these tribal service programs can benefit from support from technical assistance providers such as the Center for Tribes. The Center believes every child is sacred in tribal communities and belongs in the circle of protection of their tribal nations and communities. Honoring this belief, the Center's services and supports are available to direct title IV-E-funded tribal programs in developing Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) plans and for title IV-B-funded programs to strengthen prevention services for families aimed at all levels of prevention.

The Center's website, the [Tribal Information Exchange](#), hosts multiple resources, with [a webpage dedicated to prevention resources](#), including:

² To learn more about IV-B funding and how it can support prevention, please visit <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/programs/state-tribal-cfsp/tribal-toolkit>



- A complete listing of Center prevention services and supports ([Path to Prevention](#))
- Understanding levels of prevention of child abuse and neglect ([Levels of Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect: Strategies and Resources for Tribal Communities](#))
- Strategies and resources for tribal communities to build their prevention program including:
 - Incorporating tribal culture as prevention efforts ([Culture is Prevention Resource List](#))
 - ICWA active efforts ([ICWA Active Efforts as Prevention Webinar](#))
 - External resources that can be provided as support for prevention programming

We now will look at an example of tribal prevention services in the next section, which highlights the Ho-Chunk Nation and their work using culture as prevention.

Spotlight on Prevention: We Have Always Been Here

The Ho-Chunk Nation Child and Family Services (CFS) team has committed to building program capacity within a culture of prevention, sharing the same mission and values for their work. Ho-Chunk Nation CFS has deep experience, dedication, and staff longevity in their program with in-depth knowledge of all areas of the child welfare system. Staff have developed their working definition of prevention and their levels of prevention: primary, secondary, and tertiary. In collaboration with the Capacity Building Center for Tribes, they also completed an eagle mapping of all their prevention services. Staff collaborate and have passion and energy for the work, supported by a work environment that promotes self-care and staff safety. Through this model, Ho-Chunk Nation CFS encourages life-long learning, staff training, and development.

The Ho-Chunk Nation engages in community prevention through their Third Annual Family Healing Camp, which takes place in August. The Family Healing Camp is a culturally centered community event that offers wellness activities, morning walks, healing circles, traditional games and foods, a movie night, and learning circles with the following topics:

- Identity and Beading and Bones
- Tobacco and Pouches
- Learning Peyote Stitch
- Language and Emotion Session (with Behavioral Health staff)
- Ciporake (Round House) Building
- Healthy Relationship Building (youth ages 12-17 and adults)
- Peer Support Groups
- Coping Skills
- Stories of a Family
- Grief/Loss Session (with Behavioral Health staff)
- Impacts of Substances on Families (with Behavioral Health staff)

Participants in these learning circles take part in activities from traditional jewelry making to engaging in the Clan Mother's Program through a talking circle. The Clan Mother's Program brings together female elders who are positive role models from each of the 12 Ho-Chunk clans to work with female participants who are referred to their services by other tribal programs. Examples of the interactions and teachings they provide to participants are: identifying and sharing clan information, providing kinship information, discussing relationships, identifying relatives, engaging in prayer, providing emotional support, sharing wisdom and guidance, and sharing invitations to traditional ceremonies. Each clan mother has their own sacred spiritual path that they refer to when working with participants. During the Family Healing Camp, young men also are guided by others to build a Ciporake, while others prepare harvested corn for their cooking activities. The Tribal President, along with other community members, helps to prepare traditional foods for the evening meal. Though these activities can be viewed as formal prevention efforts, the Ho-Chunk would view it as a regular part of their traditional way of life, in which culture is and has always been prevention.

We would like to acknowledge that the Family Healing Camp was a Ho-Chunk Nation endeavor, with the Ho-Chunk Department of Social Services taking the lead. The activities included our Tribal Chief and other male and female role models telling their personal motivational stories and leading talking circles for males and females.

