

SELF-STUDY COURSE

CROSS-CULTURAL CHILD CARE: A GUIDE FOR FOSTER PARENTS

1.0 TRAINING HOUR

Revised 7/01/04

This self-study course was developed by Michele M. Conte of the University of Oregon, Cross-Cultural Education Department as a resource paper for The Ultimate Challenge Series on foster parenting.

The questionnaire at the back of this course is a way to check your understanding and a means for the Training Center to assess that you have read and understood the majority of the information provided. In order to obtain credit for this course, please forward the completed questionnaire to our office, where it will be scored, your 1.0 hour credited to your training record, and a scored copy returned to you.



Alaska Center for Resource Families

815 Second Avenue STE 101

Fairbanks, Alaska 99701

1-800-478-7307

(907) 479-7307

www.acrf.org

CROSS CULTURAL CHILD CARE: A GUIDE FOR FOSTER PARENTS

By Michele M. Conte, University of Oregon, Cross-Cultural Education Department

INTRODUCTION

For many years I have participated in the care and placement of minority children. Most often, these children are placed outside their ethnic communities, even when it is not in the best interest of the child or birth family. As child care workers (and foster parents) we know it is traumatic enough when a child is removed from his home and family. The additional separation from his ethnic culture only increases a child's insecurities. If a foster care placement can be culturally sensitive, it will lessen the fears and provide the child with a more familiar environment -- one that will be better able to meet his/her own cultural needs

I believe it is possible to raise a child outside his culture but not unknown to his culture. You as parents can help a child keep his community ties, maximize family strengths, and the realities of their lives in a positive manner. We run the risk when we remove children from cultural surroundings of making them strangers to their own people. We run the risk of cutting them off from not only their roots, but from their main sources of cultural definition and information. This is information they will need to function in our world as adults and to have a positive sense of self. It is easier for us in the mainstream of society to develop our own identity. For many minority children growing up with racism and prejudice, positive feelings of self-worth, self-esteem, and identity are very hard to come by. Ethnic families and communities can provide a myriad of positive functions for its members. As responsible parents, we will have to assume those roles when we take on the job of parenting cross culturally.

Parenting cross culturally is not an impossible task. It can even be fun! Certainly it will be a broadening and educational experience for all the family.

In the following pages, you will find some ways in which you can include the child's heritage and culture into your own home and family life. You will also find where to find the information you will need to be able to teach your child. There are many valuable resources already in place and just waiting for you to discover them.

LEARNING OBJECTIVE #1:

***Explore methods for providing comfortable living environment
for children of color.***

Providing a comfortable cross cultural home is easy. You are only limited by your imagination and ability to ferret out good artifacts.

As we have mentioned above, the object is to make your child feel comfortable and a part of your home without losing his/her own sense of uniqueness. Just as every child deserves a home of his/her own, they also need a place where they belong. One of the ways in which we feel our belonging is when we see ourselves reflected in our surroundings. Therefore, foster/adoptive parents need to include their child's heritage in the home.

For example, if your family is in the habit of putting up artwork on the walls, include a print or poster of contemporary African American or Asian American Art. Native American and Alaskan artists abound in the Southwest and Alaska. There are many ceramics, pottery, basket weaving, dance fans, masks, and ivory carving you can purchase. The same can be said for Mexican American artifacts. These purchases need not be expensive, just respected. Besides paintings and lithographs, there are a wealth of other crafts to choose from.

Additionally, you should keep in mind books and selections of music from your child's cultural heritage. Take a look around your own home today -- how does it express your family's heritage? Add ingredients from the heritage of your new child. If you collect dolls, make sure your child's culture is represented. If you collect quilts, you will find beautiful new designs from every country and ethnicity. Go with whatever you are comfortable with. Usually, this means beginning with the pre-existing cultural items in your home.

One last word on this subject: there are cultural magazines for many ethnic groups in America. A monthly subscription coming into your home will say more than you even can and will provide you with many additional resources. These magazines are often good sources for artwork, children's literature, and date/places of national cultural events and holidays.

LEARNING OBJECTIVE #2:

Explore methods for providing children with valuable background knowledge of their cultural heritage.

The next learning objective is more challenging, but can be far more rewarding. As foster/adoptive parents you might be your child's only source for information on his/her cultural heritage. It will be up to you to provide what the birth parents or community would normally do. Primarily I mean a sense of continuity or historical roots. Your child did not pop up on the lawn of life like a mushroom. They are here because of some very deliberate acts in history. Every child has a right to know that knowledge. As parents, we cannot depend on the current educational system to do this for us. We must supplement and add to the school curriculum.

For example, look at your child's history book. What does it say about his people? What part did they play in the development of our nation? If you do not find anything -- add it. You will need to go through the book chapter by chapter. Where were the African Americans during the Revolutionary War? Crispus Attucks was alive and leading the revolt on the Boston Commons. An African American accompanied Lewis and Clark on their expedition into the Northwest Territory, the North Pole with Admiral Bird, and the Exploration into space. All African American children have a right to know and be proud of their many contributions to our society. I have used them by way of example, but you will find many examples like these for all minority groups in America. You will need to avail yourself of the many fine resources at our local public libraries or University libraries in your area. There are many good social history books that will give you much of the information you need.

The same can be done with English texts. Usually children's reading books are divided into sections like Fables and Legends, Short Stories, Fantasy, Drama, Poetry, etc. Again all major ethnic groups in America have published fiction -- you just need to locate it and use it. There is a wealth of material in children's literature section. Librarians have a current list of all the ethnic publications, just ask them for help in locating what you need. They can direct you to the age appropriate books. (In Alaska, schools, daycare centers, and Headstart programs are excellent sources for referrals to a variety of culturally relevant books.)

One way of assembling the information is to photocopy or type out a story or poem and paper clip it to the appropriate section of the book. This method can be used for augmenting historical information, religious, or musical, also information about scientist, political leaders, and artists.

You might consider sharing this information with your child's teacher at school. It could well be that they would like to share it with the entire class, and this would go a long way in giving your child a sense of pride and accomplishment.

LEARNING OBJECTIVE #3:

Explore methods for maintaining cultural and ethnic community ties and for providing role models.

As we discussed in the introduction, there are many reasons for maintaining community ties. The primary reasons are for role models and for a sense of identity. As a family, you can provide the child with a stable consistent environment, but you cannot become something you are not (such as Asian-American, African American, etc.) If your child has some existing family living in the home community, see if you can meet with them. If the social services agency agrees, perhaps your caseworker could set up an appointment for you. Often times there is an Aunt or Grandmother alive that can provide you with information about the culture, history, and family heritage that is invaluable. It will also ensure that your foster child continues to have a sense of belonging to the culture group.

If you find yourself in the position of having no viable family to call upon, your next best resource is the closest same race community. Contact a church in the community and speak with the pastor. Perhaps there is a youth group that your child could join. The Minister might also know some families that have children the same age that could provide positive peers' companionship. (If you are fostering a Native Alaskan child, contact the nearest Native corporation or social service agency for activities and gatherings that are happening in your area.)

For those families that live near a college or University, contact the Student Affairs Center. Almost all Universities today have ethnic clubs on campus; for example, the Black Student Union, the Asian American Club, Hispanic Club, and the Native American Student Union. All of these organizations can provide good role models for foster children. The clubs also put on cultural events, fairs, musicals, film festivals, etc. As to be put on the mailing list and keep informed of all cultural events. Your whole family can benefit from observing and participating in these community affairs. Most of all, your child will receive invaluable cultural information along with making same race friendships that will aid him in personal growth and understanding.

LEARNING OBJECTIVE #4:

Explore methods for locating and using resource for cross-cultural learning skills

Start your trip to your nearest library. Locate the ethnic or minority texts. Check out a few books in the areas you are most interested in. Remember to check out the author's bibliography. (Use interlibrary loan if you are in a small community.) Usually an author gives a list of references or additional reading at the back of the book. Try to familiarize yourself with a broad field or knowledge. Check out books on food, music, literature, history, holidays, or whatever you feel would give you greater insight to your child's background. I would suggest that you read books written by the authors of the same race or culture as your child, and perhaps a few written about the group. Often you will find these two views to be divergent. You should consider reading fiction by ethnic authors. Very often, minority writers describe with great accuracy the real conflicts and emotions involved in growing up ethnic in America. Reading these novels could give you a clear insight into your child's world.

As I have stated before, if you live near a University or College, check out the library, bookstore and any secondhand bookstores in the area. All these locations can be good resources. Also, remember to ask people! Seek out people in the ethnic community, teachers, and ministers. Ask them to suggest good books or resources for information. I have never found this to be a bother or to have offended anyone -- usually the person is pleased and provides you with mounds of material!

Many libraries have audio-visual departments. They have musical recordings along with recordings of literature and poetry. Occasionally you will also find videos of plays and documentaries that you can check out. Your local PBS station will usually devote some of its air time to minority issues and art. Watch these with your children or keep blank videos on hand and watch the TV guide in your newspaper. I know of many families to start their own cross cultural video library this way. With care and attention, you can record a wealth of information, plays, docu-dramas, and musical productions in a very short period of time. (Don't forget the video store or video section in the store. Often they will have television series or relevant films on various cultural issues.) Do not forget the children's literature section of the library. Depending on the age of your child, you will need to have story books and read-aloud books on hand. These sections also carry a sampling of cultural heritage books. Besides checking them out, be sure to read the bibliography for titles of other works. Another heading you might consult is folklore. This is an area rich with information and could prove very worthwhile.

**ALASKA CENTER FOR RESOURCE FAMILIES
SELF-STUDY QUESTIONNAIRE FOR FOSTER PARENTS**

**COURSE: CROSS CULTURAL CHILD CARE: A GUIDE FOR FOSTER
PARENTS
1.0 HOUR TRAINING CREDIT**

Please read the above-entitled self-study. Then complete the questionnaire found on the following pages. Try answering the questions first from your understanding of the material before referring back to the reading. These questions pertain specifically to the course, which you have read.

After you have answered all the questions, please **send your completed questionnaire to the Alaska Center for Resource Families, 815 Second Avenue Suite 101, Fairbanks, AK 99701**. We will score your answers, credit 1.0 training hour to your training record, and return a scored copy to you. A score of 50% correct or better will entitle you to receive training hours credit. In the event your score is less than 50% correct, we will contact you to determine if you wish to review the material and retake the questionnaire. If so, the book will be returned to you with a new questionnaire.

If you have questions or concerns about this self-study course, please call us on our **toll-free line 1-800-478-7307**. If you are calling from the **local Fairbanks/North Pole area dial: 479-7307**.

The following section is an evaluation of the self-study materials. Please fill it out upon completion of the questionnaire, and return this page to us with the rest of the course materials. Thank you for your time and comments. It helps us provide appropriate training to meet the needs of foster parents.

*******EVALUATION OF SELF-STUDY MATERIALS*******

Please complete the following questions.

1. Did this self-study course meet with your expectations? YES NO

2. How would you rate the written presentation of information on the topic?
 Excellent Good Fair Poor

3. Did this course add to your knowledge and/or skills?
 YES If so, how?
 NO If not, why?

4. If you have additional comments or concerns, please use the back of this page to write them.

NAME: _____ **PHONE NO.:** _____
Only one person per questionnaire. Feel free to make additional copies if needed.

ADDRESS: _____
Street or Post Office City/State Zip

EMAIL: _____

Yes! I would like to receive ACRF's upcoming training and the quarterly newsletter by email.

Are you a foster parent? YES NO If YES, what is your Foster Home License #: _____

If NO, please check one: Pending Foster Parent OCS Birth Parent Adoptive Parent

Residential Treatment Facility (License #: _____) Agency: _____

Other (*please specify*): _____

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

COURSE: CROSS CULTURAL CHILD CARE: A GUIDE FOR FOSTER PARENTS

Text and Test by Michele Conte, University of Oregon, Cross Cultural Education Department

Check or fill in the appropriate answer to the following questions. First try to answer from your understanding of the material before referring back to the course. These questions address information specifically stated in the reading.

1. Foster care can lessen the fears of minority children if it is:
 a. In town
 b. Culturally sensitive
 c. Bi-lingual
 d. Affluent
2. When we remove children from their cultural surroundings, we run the risk of them becoming:
 a. Dissatisfied with life
 b. Assimilated into white society
 c. Strangers to their own people
 d. Happy in their new surroundings
3. Good locations for finding positive role models are:
 a. Television
 b. Basketball teams
 c. Church youth groups/ethnic clubs
 d. Recording artists
4. One of the ways in which we feel our sense of belonging is when we:
 a. See ourselves reflected in our surroundings
 b. Watch television
 c. Go shopping
 d. Read the newspaper

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING
PAGE 2 - CROSS CULTURAL CHILD CARE...

5. Cultural artifacts that you can include in your home are:
- a. Books and records
 - b. Paintings and prints
 - c. Yarn art, pottery or sculpture
 - d. All of the above
6. As cross cultural parents, we cannot depend on the schools to provide a:
- a. Traditional Western European curriculum
 - b. Cross Culture History and Literature
 - c. Shakespeare
 - d. American History
7. A main resource for cultural historical materials is the:
- a. University library
 - b. Movie theater
 - c. Public library
 - d. A and C
8. Reasons for maintaining community ties are:
- a. Recreation
 - b. Role models and sense of identity
 - c. Clothes and paraphernalia
 - d. Reading material
9. If there is no viable family to help provide you with cultural information, the next best resource is:
- a. Ethnic community in another state
 - b. Radio and television programs
 - c. Closest same race community
 - d. Any ethnic community
10. One of the most important sections to read in a book for additional information is the:
- a. Footnotes
 - b. Table of contents
 - c. Index
 - d. Bibliography

11. Family members can provide foster parents with:
- a. Cultural and family heritage
 - b. Grief
 - c. Recipes
 - d. Photographs
12. Besides providing a stable consistent environment, a foster parent should try to:
- a. Become ethnic themselves
 - b. Learn several languages
 - c. join a new church
 - d. Provide a culturally sensitive home

FOR SCORING AND CREDIT OF 1.0 TRAINING HOUR, MAIL THIS TO:

**Alaska Center for Resource Families
815 Second Avenue Suite 101
Fairbanks, AK 99701**

*****OFFICE USE ONLY*****

_____ **TOTAL SCORE** _____ **PERCENT (%) CORRECT**