

Indigenous Early Relational Wellbeing Practices – Early Childhood Practice (IERWP-ECP)

This version is tailored for Tribal communities in the
Great Lakes Region

A Measure of Indigenous Early Relational Wellbeing Practices for Tribal Early Childhood Practitioners

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About the Measure

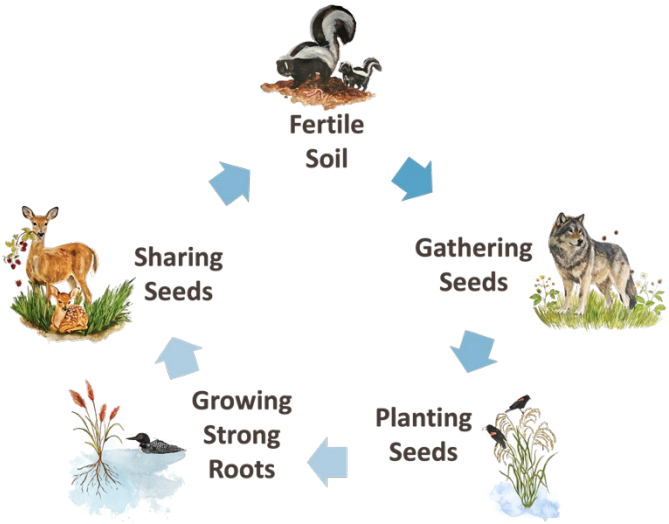
The survey of Indigenous Early Relational Wellbeing Practices - Family (IERWP - Family) was developed by the Tribal Early Childhood Research Center for families with young Indigenous (American Indian and Alaska Native) children prenatal to age 5 to help understand practices that support early relational wellbeing and young children's connections to family, multiple generations, community, and the environment. During spring/summer 2026, the IERWP - Family was adapted for Tribal early childhood educators (ECE) and programs—including but not limited to Child Care and Head Start—with support from and in partnership with the Tribal Child Care Association of California (TCCAC).

This measure, IERWP-ECP (Early Childhood Practice), is intended to be completed by ECEs of Indigenous children aged 5 and younger who work within Tribal Child Care, Head Start, and related settings. This includes center-based programs, as well as home-based care and in-home care, including family, friend, and neighbor care providers.

We recognize that Indigenous families and communities have diverse traditions, experiences, and histories. Some practices included in this survey may not reflect every Tribe, family, or community. We invite you to respond based on what is meaningful and available within your community and early childhood education care setting.

About the Response Scale

This survey uses a visual response scale that follows the lifecycle of seeds and levels of connection to each relational practice. Although 'Fertile Soil' indicates not having a connection with a particular practice, it still holds promise and readiness for planting seeds in the future. On the other end of the scale, 'Sharing Seeds' may indicate that the children in your care are involved in helping others—children, adults, elders—connect with a particular practice.



Please take a moment to review the response options below.



Fertile Soil

Our children haven't connected to this practice



Gathering Seeds

We want to connect our children to this practice



Planting Seeds

Our children are beginning to connect to this practice



Growing Strong Roots

Our children are connected to this practice



Sharing Seeds

Our children are involved in helping others connect to this practice

When answering the questions on this survey, please think about the children you care for and the experiences or opportunities they have in your care setting to connect with family, multiple generations, community, and the environment. We do not expect you to be familiar with all practices in this survey. Some may not be relevant to your care setting or not available in your community. You'll have an opportunity to share more about the reasons why you may not engage in each practice.

- Start here -

First, we'd like to know a little about you and the children in your care.

1. Please share the age(s) of the children in your care setting. **You may select more than one answer.**
   - ☐ Infants (birth to 18 months)
   - ☐ Toddlers (18 months to 3 years)
   - ☐ Preschoolers (3 to 5 years)

2. What role(s) as an early childhood educator do you play in the care of young children? **You may select more than one answer.**
   - ☐ Program administrator
   - ☐ Center-based educator, teacher, aide, or provider
   - ☐ Home-based family, friend, or neighbor teacher or provider
   - ☐ Other: please specify role(s) _____

Next, we'd like to know about the children you care for and how they are connected with family, multiple generations, community, and the environment within your care setting. Each subscale (pages 3-14) explores a different domain of Indigenous Early Relational Wellbeing Practices.

Subscale 1: Connections to Cultural Foods and Practices

Below is a list of practices that might happen within your classroom or care setting that help children to learn about and build connections with cultural foods and practices. Connection and learning can happen through playing, storytelling, watching, listening, doing, comforting, and teaching about cultural values.



Fertile Soil

Our children haven't connected to this practice



Gathering Seeds

We want to connect our children to this practice



Planting Seeds

Our children are beginning to connect to this practice



Growing Strong Roots

Our children are connected to this practice



Sharing Seeds

Our children are involved in helping others connect to this practice

What best describes the way children are connected to each practice within your classroom or care setting?

In our classroom or care setting, children are:	**Fertile Soil**	**Gathering Seeds**	**Planting Seeds**	**Growing Strong Roots**	**Sharing Seeds**
a. learning about hunting and fishing activities.	○	○	○	○	○
b. learning about preparing food for ceremonies or gatherings (e.g., feasts, wakes, potlatches).	○	○	○	○	○
c. learning about how cultural foods nourish us.	○	○	○	○	○
d. included in meal planning and preparation.	○	○	○	○	○
e. learning about the process of preserving cultural foods (e.g., canning, smoking, making teas).	○	○	○	○	○
f. learning about growing and harvesting food.	○	○	○	○	○
g. learning about foraging or gathering cultural plants and medicines (e.g., berry picking).	○	○	○	○	○
h. learning gratitude for the important roles of hunters, fishers, gatherers, cooks, and servers in harvesting, preserving, and sharing cultural foods.	○	○	○	○	○

If you selected 'Fertile Soil,' please share the reason(s) why children in your classroom or care have not yet connected to this practice. You may select more than one answer.

- ☐ Our early childhood education setting is not currently focusing on this topic.
- ☐ I'm not aware of opportunities for this where I live/work.
- ☐ I don't know how to connect my care setting with opportunities to do this.
- ☐ My care setting would like to participate, but we don't have the resources to do this.
- ☐ This practice is not appropriate for the child/ren's age.
- ☐ This practice is not appropriate for the child/ren based on cultural gender roles.
- ☐ This is not relevant to my culture or Tribe.
- ☐ Other (Please write in.): _____
- ☐ I prefer not to answer.

Would you like to know more?

- ☐ Yes, I would welcome support identifying opportunities or resources related to this practice.
- ☐ No, not at this time.

Subscale 2: Connections to Land and the Environment

Below is a list of practices that might happen within your classroom or care setting to help children learn about and build connections with land and the environment. Connection and learning can happen through playing, storytelling, watching, listening, doing, comforting, and teaching about cultural values.



Fertile Soil

Our children haven't connected to this practice



Gathering Seeds

We want to connect our children to this practice



Planting Seeds

Our children are beginning to connect to this practice



Growing Strong Roots

Our children are connected to this practice



Sharing Seeds

Our children are involved in helping others connect to this practice

What best describes the way children are connected to each practice within your classroom or care setting?

In our classroom or care setting, children are:	**Fertile Soil**	**Gathering Seeds**	**Planting Seeds**	**Growing Strong Roots**	**Sharing Seeds**
a. learning about the seasons.	○	○	○	○	○
b. learning about how to care for plants.	○	○	○	○	○
c. learning about how to care for the natural environment.	○	○	○	○	○
d. learning about themselves and the world around them.	○	○	○	○	○
e. learning about how their wellbeing is connected to the environment.	○	○	○	○	○
f. learning about tribal connections to land.	○	○	○	○	○
g. told stories about family connections to local places (e.g., lands, waters, mountains, ancestral homelands)	○	○	○	○	○
h. learning about how to care for our non-human relatives (e.g., land, water, plants, animals).	○	○	○	○	○
i. learning about how to care for animal relatives.	○	○	○	○	○
j. given opportunities to observe how our non-human relatives work together.	○	○	○	○	○
k. given opportunities to be immersed in a natural environment (e.g., playing, learning, watching, listening in a forest, prairie, desert, near water).	○	○	○	○	○

If you selected 'Fertile Soil,' please share the reason(s) why children in your classroom or care have not yet connected to this practice. You may select more than one answer.

- ☐ Our early childhood education setting is not currently focusing on this topic.
- ☐ I'm not aware of opportunities for this where I live/work.
- ☐ I don't know how to connect my care setting with opportunities to do this.
- ☐ My care setting would like to participate, but we don't have the resources to do this.

- ☐ This practice is not appropriate for the child/ren's age.
- ☐ This practice is not appropriate for the child/ren based on cultural gender roles.
- ☐ This is not relevant to my culture or Tribe.
- ☐ Other (Please write in.): _____
- ☐ I prefer not to answer.

Would you like to know more?

- ☐ Yes, I would welcome support identifying opportunities or resources related to this practice.
- ☐ No, not at this time.

Subscale 3: Connections Through Everyday Activities

Below is a list of practices that might happen within your classroom or care setting that help children to learn about and build connection through everyday activities. Connection and learning can happen through playing, storytelling, watching, listening, doing, comforting, and teaching about cultural values.



Fertile Soil

Our children haven't connected to this practice



Gathering Seeds

We want to connect our children to this practice



Planting Seeds

Our children are beginning to connect to this practice



Growing Strong Roots

Our children are connected to this practice



Sharing Seeds

Our children are involved in helping others connect to this practice

What best describes the way children are connected to each practice within your classroom or care setting?

In our classroom or care setting, children are:	**Fertile Soil**	**Gathering Seeds**	**Planting Seeds**	**Growing Strong Roots**	**Sharing Seeds**
a. given opportunities to laugh with others.	○	○	○	○	○
b. offered comfort and affection that aligns with family values and children's preferences.	○	○	○	○	○
c. given opportunities to experience both verbal and non-verbal communication.	○	○	○	○	○
d. learning about crafting (e.g., sewing, drawing, weaving, beading, making tools or instruments).	○	○	○	○	○
e. given opportunities to play music, songs, or instruments.	○	○	○	○	○
f. given opportunities to sing and hear cultural songs and drum.	○	○	○	○	○
g. given opportunities to watch and practice dance.	○	○	○	○	○
h. given opportunities to build on their interests.	○	○	○	○	○
i. given opportunities to experience focused time with early educators (e.g., small group activities, one-on-one play).	○	○	○	○	○
j. given opportunities to share meals with others.	○	○	○	○	○
k. given opportunities to spend time learning with Elders.	○	○	○	○	○
l. surrounded by early educators who are mindful of language, actions, and thoughts (e.g., positive thinking, interactions with the environment).	○	○	○	○	○

If you selected 'Fertile Soil,' please share the reason(s) why children in your classroom or care have not yet connected to this practice. You may select more than one answer.

- ☐ Our early childhood education setting is not currently focusing on this topic.
- ☐ I'm not aware of opportunities for this where I live/work.
- ☐ I don't know how to connect my care setting with opportunities to do this.

- ☐ My care setting would like to participate, but we don't have the resources to do this.
- ☐ This practice is not appropriate for the child/ren's age.
- ☐ This practice is not appropriate for the child/ren based on cultural gender roles.
- ☐ This is not relevant to my culture or Tribe.
- ☐ Other (Please write in.): _____
- ☐ I prefer not to answer.

Would you like to know more?

- ☐ Yes, I would welcome support identifying opportunities or resources related to this practice.
- ☐ No, not at this time.

Subscale 4: Connections with Family and Community

Below is a list of practices that might happen within your classroom or care setting that help children to learn about and build connection with family and community. Connection and learning can happen through playing, storytelling, watching, listening, doing, comforting, and teaching about cultural values.



Fertile Soil

Our children haven't connected to this practice



Gathering Seeds

We want to connect our children to this practice



Planting Seeds

Our children are beginning to connect to this practice



Growing Strong Roots

Our children are connected to this practice



Sharing Seeds

Our children are involved in helping others connect to this practice

What best describes the way children are connected to each practice within your classroom or care setting?

In our classroom or care setting, children are:	**Fertile Soil**	**Gathering Seeds**	**Planting Seeds**	**Growing Strong Roots**	**Sharing Seeds**
a. honored and celebrated at cultural and developmental milestones (e.g., finishing pre-school, naming ceremony,).	○	○	○	○	○
b. given opportunities to watch or participate in community events (e.g., field trip, sports game).	○	○	○	○	○
c. given opportunities to watch or participate in community cultural gatherings and events (e.g., potlatches, powwows, dancing, singing, games).	○	○	○	○	○
d. given opportunities to experience supportive and positive relationships with adults in their lives.	○	○	○	○	○
e. given opportunities to engage with people from the community within the care setting (e.g., visit from a local Elder, Tribal Council, cultural center, health center).	○	○	○	○	○
f. involved in classroom gatherings (e.g., parties, feasts, ceremony) with family and other community members.	○	○	○	○	○

If you selected 'Fertile Soil,' please share the reason(s) why children in your classroom or care have not yet connected to this practice. You may select more than one answer.

- ☐ Our early childhood education setting is not currently focusing on this topic.
- ☐ I'm not aware of opportunities for this where I live/work.
- ☐ I don't know how to connect my care setting with opportunities to do this.
- ☐ My care setting would like to participate, but we don't have the resources to do this.
- ☐ This practice is not appropriate for the child/ren's age.
- ☐ This practice is not appropriate for the child/ren based on cultural gender roles.
- ☐ This is not relevant to my culture or Tribe.
- ☐ Other (Please write in.): _____
- ☐ I prefer not to answer.

Would you like to know more?

- ☐ Yes, I would welcome support identifying opportunities or resources related to this practice.
- ☐ No, not at this time.

Subscale 5: Connections Through Cultural Identity & Spirituality

Below is a list of practices that might happen within your classroom or care setting that help children to learn about and build connections through cultural identity and spirituality. Connection and learning can happen through playing, storytelling, watching, listening, doing, comforting, and teaching about cultural values.



Fertile Soil

Our children haven't connected to this practice



Gathering Seeds

We want to connect our children to this practice



Planting Seeds

Our children are beginning to connect to this practice



Growing Strong Roots

Our children are connected to this practice



Sharing Seeds

Our children are involved in helping others connect to this practice

What best describes the way children are connected to each practice within your classroom or care setting?

In our classroom or care setting, children are:	**Fertile Soil**	**Gathering Seeds**	**Planting Seeds**	**Growing Strong Roots**	**Sharing Seeds**
a. exposed to smudging.	○	○	○	○	○
b. given opportunities to make cultural crafts (e.g., beading, weaving, sewing).	○	○	○	○	○
c. given opportunities to make cultural toys (e.g., cornhusk dolls, rattles, drums).	○	○	○	○	○
d. given opportunities to connect with spiritual teachings and practices (e.g., sharing dreams, meals, practices, ceremony, prayer, connecting to ancestors).	○	○	○	○	○
e. exposed to others regularly expressing prayer or blessing and gratitude out loud.	○	○	○	○	○
f. surrounded by educators whose practice is informed by language, ceremony, and cultural practices.	○	○	○	○	○
g. learning about kinship terms.	○	○	○	○	○
h. learning about creating extended family relationships through embracing adopted relatives.	○	○	○	○	○
i. given opportunities to connect with family members throughout their extended family.	○	○	○	○	○
j. learning about Tribal creation stories.	○	○	○	○	○
k. learning about ceremony so they can understand its importance and meaning.	○	○	○	○	○
l. exposed to books, videos, cartoons, or movies centering Indigenous characters, languages, and communities.	○	○	○	○	○

m. given opportunities to watch or play cultural sports and games.	○	○	○	○	○
n. learning about using Native language(s) to build respect and knowledge of environment (e.g., plants, water, fire, animals, place names).	○	○	○	○	○
o. given opportunities to learn and share their Native language(s).	○	○	○	○	○
p. given opportunities to learn by listening and observing.	○	○	○	○	○
q. learning from local knowledge holders (e.g., Elders, Tribal community leaders, language and traditional practice teachers).	○	○	○	○	○

If you selected 'Fertile Soil,' please share the reason(s) why children in your classroom or care have not yet connected to this practice. You may select more than one answer.

- ☐ Our early childhood education setting is not currently focusing on this topic.
- ☐ I'm not aware of opportunities for this where I live/work.
- ☐ I don't know how to connect my care setting with opportunities to do this.
- ☐ My care setting would like to participate, but we don't have the resources to do this.
- ☐ This practice is not appropriate for the child/ren's age.
- ☐ This practice is not appropriate for the child/ren based on cultural gender roles.
- ☐ This is not relevant to my culture or Tribe.
- ☐ Other (Please write in.): _____
- ☐ I prefer not to answer.

Would you like to know more?

- ☐ Yes, I would welcome support identifying opportunities or resources related to this practice.
- ☐ No, not at this time.

Subscale 6: Connections Through Cultural Knowledge

Below is a list of practices that might happen within your classroom or care setting that help children to learn about and build connections through cultural knowledge. Connection and learning can happen through playing, storytelling, watching, listening, doing, comforting, and teaching about cultural values.



Fertile Soil

Our children haven't connected to this practice



Gathering Seeds

We want to connect our children to this practice



Planting Seeds

Our children are beginning to connect to this practice



Growing Strong Roots

Our children are connected to this practice



Sharing Seeds

Our children are involved in helping others connect to this practice

What best describes the way children are connected to each practice within your classroom or care setting?

In our classroom or care setting, children are:	**Fertile Soil**	**Gathering Seeds**	**Planting Seeds**	**Growing Strong Roots**	**Sharing Seeds**
a. given opportunities to hear stories about the history of their tribal community or communities.	○	○	○	○	○
b. learning to be thoughtful and considerate of others.	○	○	○	○	○
c. learning about how to be a good relative.	○	○	○	○	○
d. learning about kinship and who their relatives are.	○	○	○	○	○
e. learning how to introduce themselves in a cultural or tribal way (e.g., tribal name, relatives, clans, ancestry, community).	○	○	○	○	○
f. learning how to respect Elders.	○	○	○	○	○
g. learning when to listen and observe and invite curiosity.	○	○	○	○	○
h. given opportunities to make choices for themselves when appropriate (e.g., not forcing anything).	○	○	○	○	○
i. learning how to identify emotions in themselves and others to help them cope with their feelings in a good way.	○	○	○	○	○
j. exposed to storytelling to teach them about cultural values and knowledge (e.g., honor, respect, reciprocity, relationality, love, humility, generosity).	○	○	○	○	○
k. given opportunities to develop responsibilities to care for themselves and others from a young age.	○	○	○	○	○
l. told they are important contributors to community wellbeing.	○	○	○	○	○

m. learning about generosity by doing things for others.	○	○	○	○	○
n. given opportunities to learn about cultural values and ways at an early age.	○	○	○	○	○
Our children receive:	**Fertile Soil**	**Gathering Seeds**	**Planting Seeds**	**Growing Strong Roots**	**Sharing Seeds**
o. support when working through hardship, loss, or sadness.	○	○	○	○	○
p. support when working through conflict (e.g., difficulties with others).	○	○	○	○	○

If you selected 'Fertile Soil,' please share the reason(s) why children in your classroom or care have not yet connected to this practice. You may select more than one answer.

- ☐ Our early childhood education setting is not currently focusing on this topic.
- ☐ I'm not aware of opportunities for this where I live/work.
- ☐ I don't know how to connect my care setting with opportunities to do this.
- ☐ My care setting would like to participate, but we don't have the resources to do this.
- ☐ This practice is not appropriate for the child/ren's age.
- ☐ This practice is not appropriate for the child/ren based on cultural gender roles.
- ☐ This is not relevant to my culture or Tribe.
- ☐ Other (Please write in.): _____
- ☐ I prefer not to answer.

Would you like to know more?

- ☐ Yes, I would welcome support identifying opportunities or resources related to this practice.
- ☐ No, not at this time.

Here are a few final questions about you.

13. How old are you? _____ years

14. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
    - ○ Less than high school
    - ○ GED
    - ○ High school
    - ○ Some college, vocational, or technical training
    - ○ Associate's degree
    - ○ Bachelor's degree
    - ○ Advanced degree
    - ○ I prefer not to answer

15. What is your race/ethnicity? **You may select more than one answer.**
    - ☐ American Indian
    - ☐ Alaska Native
    - ☐ Asian or Asian American
    - ☐ Black or African American
    - ☐ Hispanic or Latino
    - ☐ Middle Eastern or North African
    - ☐ Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
    - ☐ White, Caucasian, European
    - ☐ Other (Please specify_____)
    - ☐ I prefer not to answer

16. How do you describe yourself? **You may select one answer.**
    - ○ Female
    - ○ Male
    - ○ Transgender
    - ○ I do not identify as female, male, or transgender
    - ○ I prefer not to answer

- End -

Many thanks!

You have finished this survey on practices that support relational wellbeing among young Indigenous children. Many thanks for sharing your time with us.

About the Visual Response Scale

We collaborated with Chiffon Lark, an Indigenous artist, illustrator, and children's book author, to develop a visual response scale that shows different stages of connectedness with relational practices. Every stage is valuable and experiences are unique to each family, child, and community. We think of engaging in these relational practices as "planting seeds of connectedness" that help young children understand who they are, where they come from, and how they belong. Here are some stories behind each picture.

Great Lakes



Fertile Soil
Adult female skunk with offspring, foraging for insects and aerating the soil naturally.



Gathering Seeds
Adult wolf carries seeds of the white avens plant on its fur, illustrating the hitchhiking method.



Sharing Seeds
Adult female white tail deer and her offspring eating wild raspberries.



Growing Strong Roots
A loon swims nearby the roots of a red reed plant.



Planting Seeds
Two red-wing black birds feasting on Monoomin (wild rice), dropping seeds into the water and planting them.

Acknowledgements

This User Guide and measure draw on the expertise, relationships, and collective wisdom of the Tribal Early Childhood Research Center's (TRC) Steering Committee and Community of Learning on Indigenous Early Relational Wellbeing from which this work emanates. While grounded in and flowing from the work of the TRC, the Indigenous Early Relational Wellbeing Practices – Early Childhood Practice measure *(IERWP – ECP)* was adapted for Tribal early childhood education and care settings through a partnership with and generous support from the Tribal Child Care Association of California (TCCAC). This partnership will remain a reciprocal relationship with the TRC's Steering Committee and Community of Learning to share lessons learned and together nurture this evolving body of work.

User Guide and Recommended Citation

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Learn More | Stay Connected

For more information about research and tools to support Indigenous early relational wellbeing contact:

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