

# BUILDING HEALTHY FAMILY DYNAMICS



## What are Family Dynamics?

Family dynamics describe the shared ways Native families relate, communicate, and care for one another in everyday life. These dynamics include how relatives speak to one another, show respect, resolve disagreements, and fulfill their roles within the family, as well as how the family interacts with the broader community. Many of these patterns are learned early in life and are shaped by cultural teachings, lived experiences, and family history. Often, they operate quietly in the background, influencing behavior without being consciously recognized.

In Native American families, these relational patterns may be passed down across generations through storytelling, observation, and tradition. At the same time, historical experiences such as forced relocation, boarding schools, and cultural disruption have also shaped family roles and communication styles. As a result, some patterns reflect deep resilience and connection, while others may develop as survival responses to past harm.

## What Can Affect Family Dynamics?

Like all families, Native families strive to maintain balance and stability. This balance is often guided by both spoken and unspoken expectations rooted in cultural values such as respect for Elders, collective responsibility, and harmony within the family and community. Families may have clear rules about communication, decision-making, or emotional expression, alongside quieter understandings that are rarely discussed but strongly felt.

An important aspect of family dynamics is how families respond to change. Life transitions, such as the birth of a child, the loss of a loved one, changes in employment, experiences of trauma, or moving between communities, can challenge a family's sense of balance. Many Native families draw on cultural strengths, kinship networks, and community support to adapt over time. Others may resist change as a way of protecting familiarity and stability, even when those patterns are no longer serving the family's well-being.

## How to Build Healthy Family Dynamics:

### Effective Communication

- Practice active listening without interrupting
- Encourage open, respectful conversation
- Pay attention to tone and body language
- Set clear boundaries and express needs honestly

### Healthy Conflict Resolution

- Approach disagreements with empathy and respect
- Acknowledge different perspectives
- Identify the issue and work toward shared solutions
- Use calming strategies, such as pausing or deep breathing, to de-escalate

### Healing Intergenerational Trauma

- Recognize the impact of historical trauma, including forced assimilation
- Honor family and cultural resilience
- Seek culturally grounded supports and community resources
- Engage in trauma-informed and culturally humble care



For  
Relatives  
living in  
Nebraska:

### ALL NATIONS CRISIS TEXTLINE

Text "Support" to 33464 to chat with an All Nations team member.

We are here seven days a week from 8:00am-Midnight.

#### SOURCES:

<https://www.nicwa.org/resources-for-families/>  
<https://mywellbeing.com/mental-health-dictionary/family-dynamics>