

ANTONICA ALEMAN: Hello, and welcome. Thank you for joining us for the Fostering Psychological Safety on Child Welfare Teams Podcast. My name is Antonica Aleman, my pronouns are she, her and hers and I am a Content Developer at the Capacity Building Center for States. I'll be hosting today's podcast episode about Best Practices for Honoring Differences While Working in Team Settings, along with our guests, Angelina Callis and Tiffany Haynes.

Today's discussion will be an opportunity to hear from my guests about their experience working in the child welfare space, engaging in discussions about how honoring differences can foster a sense of belonging in teams and promote psychological safety. We will also share tips and strategies to apply these concepts in practice. You will hear about the importance of honoring differences in the workplace, building healthy and supportive relationships, and reducing harm. As a disclaimer, this podcast contains sensitive information that may be upsetting to listeners. Please take care of yourself and listen at your discretion. Tiffany, do you mind starting us?

TIFFANY HAYNES: Hi, my name is Tiffany Haynes and my pronouns are she, her, hers and I am a Lived Experience Engagement Specialist here at the Capacity Building Center for States and I have direct lived experience in the child welfare system - yeah.

ANTONICA ALEMAN: Thank you so much for sharing that, Tiffany. I forgot to share that I also have direct lived experience in child welfare. Angelina?

ANGELINA CALLIS: Hi. Angelina Callis, she, her pronouns. My role at the Capacity Building Center for States is Racial Equity Subject Matter Expert. I have been a consultant for child welfare agencies for almost fifteen years, most of that work was centered in Tribal work, so Tribal organizations and supporting Tribal child welfare. Because we're talking about honoring differences, I was thinking today that it might be important to note my history in my family is from the Cayuga Nation, so I have a special place in my heart for Tribal child welfare and Indian child welfare. I'm excited to talk to you both today.

TIFFANY HAYNES: Thank you, Angelina. I'm really excited that you shared more about your ethnic and cultural background. I'm a native of Jamaica, so I was born in

Jamaica, but I've been in the States since I was about two and a half. So I bring my Jamaican American experience to the conversation as well.

ANTONICA ALEMAN: Thank you so much for sharing your culture and ethnic backgrounds. For myself, I'm bringing to the table my experience of being raised in a diverse home. My lovely foster parents, they are both elderly and they are white. So I am going to be bringing a little bit of that, how did that work growing up in that home from different culture and ethnic backgrounds to understanding one another and what does that look like when working in child welfare. So, I really appreciate you both sharing your culture and ethnic backgrounds.

So today is going to be a beautiful opportunity to really hear from our participants and to be able to engage in discussion about how honoring differences can foster a sense of belonging in teams, as an individual, and how does it promote psychological safety? And for really for us to share any tips and strategies on how we might be able to apply these different concepts in practice. What I really would like to hear first is, what does honoring differences mean to you, and why is

it so important when we are working in teams when it comes to honoring those differences? To kick off the conversation I really would like to pass this to Angelina.

ANGELINA CALLIS: So, when I think about honoring differences, right, I think about not just professionally but personally too. Like, how does honoring differences help me grow as a person, help me build better relationships that are based in trust and respect? And so when I think about honoring differences I think about recognizing that each individual I come into contact with has life experiences, identities, cultures, that are unique. And how I have an opportunity and a privilege to share space with them and learn from them, grow my own mindset on the world. And I think for me that really is about personal and professional growth.

ANTONICA ALEMAN: Thank you for sharing that, Angelina.

Tiffany?

TIFFANY HAYNES: Thank you. So for me when I think about honoring differences I think about considering what it means for people to show up as their full authentic selves, and how do we create spaces or create an

environment where people feel like they're invited to that. It's not just like honoring diversity, but curating a space that does that, in addition to honoring people's cultural backgrounds. Not just culture and race or lived expertise, but thinking about neurodiversity, things of that nature.

I know for me as a neurodivergent person, showing up in space, like in my work life and in my personal life, I recognize that it takes the people that are around me to be intentional about how they engage with me, to be intentional about how we communicate with each other. And I think that I value being able to do that myself. And so I think that the way that I engage with people on a day to day basis, I do try to invite people to do the same and model that behavior so that other people know that it's okay and it's safe to do that.

ANNOUNCER: Thank you both for sharing. Beautifully said. In the following section, Angelina Callis and Tiffany Haynes discuss how honoring differences relates to feeling psychologically safe. First, we hear Angelina discussing what it looks like to be your authentic whole self at work and the importance of trust. Then,

Tiffany talks about the need to listen and see people as they are and how psychological safety relates to racial equity.

ANTONICA ALEMAN: That leads me to think about how does honoring differences help someone feel safe, because this also ties back to psychological safety. You know how can honoring differences foster that sense of belonging or that sense of psychological safety that is so important in a workplace, or working in child welfare or working in child welfare teams.

ANGELINA CALLIS: I've been thinking a lot lately about authentic selves and whole selves and what those two things mean, whether they're the same or whether they're different. And I think in both of those instances whatever your opinion is, there's a level of trust that's required in order to feel safe. I can walk into a room and as soon as there's positive intent of every person that's sharing that space with me.

So I come in with a specific kind of level of trust, right? And then as relationships grow, hopefully that trust builds and my sense of safety builds and then my ability to bring my authentic and potentially whole

self to that space is greater. And I think a lot of times, especially in government systems when there's big pushes to get work done really fast, we don't always create the time that it takes to build those relationships so that trust and that feeling of safety to bring my whole and authentic self to that space is there. Every time we show up in that room, every time I share safe space with somebody, no matter who it is, we're building on that trust, hopefully.

And then we're also showing up recognizing that we're putting a little bit of ourselves at risk, too. I can't just come in and trust everybody the same way I trust my parents or the same way I trust my kid or my aunties, uncles, my best friend. I need time to know that at the same time the trust is building, my sense of risk is going down because I have to rely on that as an opportunity to build up that psychological safety.

I don't think psychological safety is anything that should be assumed just because we're in teams, right, just because we've worked together before. Things always change. People are always unique and different.

So I think, again, like tying back to honoring differences, building those relationships gives me an opportunity to know and better understand those people I'm working with and that builds the relationship building trust, reducing risk.

ANTONICA ALEMAN: Thank you for sharing that, and that nugget of reducing the risk. When I'm thinking about honoring differences, I'm also thinking about what does it look like when we are not honoring differences. And it can be harmful. There might be this lack of sense of belonging you might have when you're in your friends circle, your family or even in workplaces. You feel like you're out of box now because you're not being respected, you're not being honored in some form or way. When we're thinking of terms of risk and harmful effects, if we're not honoring differences, then we're minimizing the voices or the potential that could come from when we're all united as a team.

TIFFANY HAYNES: Yeah. So when I think about how honoring differences, how it fosters a sense of psychological safety, I also think about it as an opportunity to listen and to see people for who they are. I think when we talk about honoring differences, we're thinking

about what can we pour into a thing to create this environment, but it's also listening and seeing and observing and taking it in. Approaching engagement with curiosity. Being transparent in your engagement and your communication.

So when I'm thinking about how that impacts the psychological safety within the team, I'm thinking that for me I know I feel more respected. I feel like when you're creating a space that honors differences, you're also giving people that permission to communicate and set boundaries as they need to. The safety allows people to feel courage and confidence and trust within the team. And I think what's really important is not utilizing psychological safety as a weapon.

When we're thinking about advancing like racial equity and all of these other pieces, it's important to think about what behaviors inhibit growth and progress in those other essential areas that we're shielding ourselves behind for the sake of psychological safety of the team. And I've seen it where racial equity, racial justice efforts are slowed down or hindered

because people hide behind that. So the kind of environment that we're trying to cultivate so that people can feel brave and feel like not only they can show up as their authentic self, but they're not having to suppress pieces of their identities in order to exist in the space.

ANTONICA ALEMAN: In the next section, Tiffany Haynes brings up professionalism and Angelina Callis shares a powerful personal story of how dishonoring differences can be tied to ideas about professionalism in the workplace. Then Tiffany reflects on her experiences with racism and how differences can be used against people in the workplace.

TIFFANY HAYNES: I think there's conversation that comes up when we think about what does it mean to be professional. I would like to say that it's important to examine which components of professionalism we're lifting up because by nature, some aspects of what we have carried on as professionalism are implicit racism, like behaviors of implicit racism. So it's really important to think about what are we meaning when we're talking about professionalism? How does that play into psychological safety and being able to honor

differences, right? Because traditional white centered aspects of professionalism strips people of color of their identities. So how are we creating space for that not to happen and how are we having that dialogue and rewriting what it means to show up, to be inclusive.

ANGELINA CALLIS: Can we talk about that for a minute? Those were all constructs we have to break down and we want people to feel safe. To have psychological safety to show up as themselves, there shouldn't be any sort of expectation on the outfit I'm wearing, or how my hair looks that day. I remember like a couple of years ago I was working as a research coordinator and I had straightened my hair that day. So I was like oh, you know, I'm bored, whatever, so I straightened my hair and went into work.

And my boss was like - oh your hair looks so good today. You look really put together. I was like oh yeah, that feels real icky, you know? So I didn't do it again, right, because I'm like that just feels bad when you compliment me in that way. So even something as little as like that, what she felt was a compliment, but I felt like was a micro-aggression, I'm like I

don't want to share space with you anymore. This makes me now uncomfortable.

So even those little things where other folks might think they're complimentary, really it's like oh yeah, you're not seeing me as a whole and recognizing who I am. You're seeing that now I fit into this box of like white supremacist professionalism. So I think that's so important. I'm really happy you brought that up. And hearing you talk about it, Tiffany, like you were, as you know, one of my favorite people to have these discussions with.

We say it all the time, but growth and progress is uncomfortable. And I think recognizing that there's a difference between oh, this is me growing and this is me having the privilege of learning new things versus oh, I'm uncomfortable and I'm not safe. Right? So internally each of us as individuals has to be able to recognize for ourselves what that difference is.

Otherwise, we're never going to grow, we're never going to honor differences, we're never going to create that space of psychological safety unless we're recognizing

it ourselves what makes me uncomfortable because of growth and what is actually potentially harmful to myself.

ANTONICA ALEMAN: In the following segment Tiffany Haynes tells of her experiences with racism in the workplace and what it feels like to be implicitly excluded from work spaces. Then Angelina Callis talks about how physical spaces can encourage or honor differences.

TIFFANY HAYNES: And you know what Angelina, what I'm hearing you say is people have to have a level of mindfulness, a level of self-awareness to be able to cultivate spaces of psychological safety. I really appreciate you sharing some of those moments reflecting back on your experiences, even thinking about my job search experiences. I maybe was 19 years old at the time and I remember looking for one of my first jobs, like legal jobs, because I was an undocumented immigrant up until right until my 18th birthday. So I couldn't work a legitimate job prior to that.

And I remember at the time my hair was short, my natural hair. And I went, you know, I put on decent clothes and I went to ask for an application at this

nursery because I really was interested in working in horticulture at the time. And I remember the feeling that I got asking about working at that organization. I think that what people don't recognize is that racism inhibits the growth of psychological safety in spaces. And I remember going there, and it wasn't the exact words that were said that made me feel like I did not belong in that space. It was how I was looked at. It was potential stereotypes about how I appeared. Like I did not look gender conforming because of what people, you know, consider because of how my hair was or how my body was built and how I showed up.

At the time of asking, I felt a sense of dismissiveness. I felt a sense of you don't belong here. Most of the people there were fair-skinned or white. I felt this sense of don't come back, like that's what I felt in my engagement with the people when I went to just put in a job application and inquire about being able to work there.

I had to think about, at the time, like racism is rampant, but they're not always as overt with their

acts of racism out here. Growing up, there's been constant experiences that I've had where I've felt like because of my identity, because of being a dark skinned Black young lady, that I felt like did not create psychological safety within myself, right? Because I feel like we talk about what spaces can do, but we don't really talk about what that means for people to do their individual work internally to create a space where you have that internally, and now you can pour that into another space or another person.

I distinctly remember experiences where features that I had as a Black woman, like my Afro-centric features, my high cheek bones, big lips, dark skin, my hair. Like the things that were physically visible to people were critiqued because they were not European-style features. I distinctly remember how that impacted how safe or confident I felt entering into spaces. How welcomed and included I felt going into spaces, even in my professionalism. And how I had to do a lot of self-unpacking before I was able to be receptive of the efforts that other people poured into try to make me

feel comfortable or confident, to basically undo the harm that was done.

So it's not just about hair, but in child welfare work specifically, we're thinking about how professionals are able to show up. We're thinking about teaming. For me when I think about teaming, you're thinking about who's not in this space. You're thinking about who needs to be in the space. And you're thinking about what's going to make these people want to be in space with us. You're not just thinking about who is present and this is enough, or we're just going to go with what feels comfortable, because psychological safety is not just about comfortability, as Angelina so eloquently broke down.

ANGELINA CALLIS: Like I think so much and so often about like how not just our psychological space is being built, but how our physical space is being built. What have we done in actual physical space to make people feel like they can join us. When are we hosting our meetings? Are they only during the day when people are working? Are we offering sessions at night or on the weekends? But even, do we have comfortable chairs for

everybody. Is there access for folks with disabilities, do we have a sign language interpreter?

Language access is such a big one. Right, to your point earlier, about like neurodiversity, how we write things or how we facilitate and then if there is someone to help us interpret those things, so that way it's not an if-needed thing. All of those things help build that sense of oh, I'm wanted here. I am accepted here. People are interested in hearing from me because they've created a space that's for me.

ANNOUNCER: In the following segment, Antonica Aleman and Angelina Callis share some strategies for honoring differences on teams to build psychological safety. And Tiffany discusses the role of leadership and intentional teaming and building psychological safety.

ANTONICA ALEMAN: What I am really hearing is several different things. One is when we are not honoring difference, we are taking the chance and risk of increasing harm, but when it comes to psychological safety, one of the goals is to help reduce the harm. Another thing I hear is that growth is uncomfortable, which is very true.

And for the third thing that I'm hearing, besides racism and implicit biases is really the gaps of what it looks like when we are not honoring differences in a team setting or in child welfare. What are some of those gaps that might come up. What can we do? How can we apply this to practice?

I have one beautiful example. Ice breakers are a great way to honor differences because it encourages all to participate. It encourages us to be able to feel comfortable enough to share our different answers coming from our cultures, coming from our backgrounds. I enjoy, when we have questioned this, what is your favorite place to go to vacation? I have learned that some people like to freeze, you might want to go to Antarctica. I learn that some people who like to go to the beach.

These are ways that we get the chance to create a welcoming space for us to be able to share those experiences and those thoughts and perspectives. And so that's one way I think that child welfare agencies can

do to help encourage honoring differences. How can we be more team-encouraging, we like to say. So relationship building, not just showing up in spaces where we're just going to work. There's also going to be an intention of scheduling the coffee chat times is something that I've noticed that folks are starting to do. That way we can get to know each other. Are there any other examples you two might can think of that child welfare agencies or teams could start doing of how they could help start to begin honoring differences?

ANGELINA CALLIS: If I'm thinking about how can child welfare professionals honor differences, and what does that look like in practice. I think a lot about no matter my title or role at the Center or really anywhere else, I always try to keep in the back of my head and remind myself that I am not an expert. I might have some knowledge and skills that are helpful, but I am never an expert when I walk into a new space. The folks who are there in that room who are making the decisions, the folks with lived experience, the folks with different cultures.

Even in an internal team, right, everybody's different and they all bring something amazing and wonderful to the table and my experience and my expertise is no better or worse than theirs. I think that's one of the things. So just recognizing that I am not an expert, and that's okay. I also think it's really important at least for me to remember that as an individual who's sharing space with other people, I have the power to cause harm.

And that's heavy, right? I need to recognize that just being a person in a space that I share with other folks, I can cause harm. And having a plan and knowing that I can apologize if I do cause harm. And I think this ties back to practice because the time that I have caused harm in community and shared spaces, when I have dealt with the internal pain of recognizing that I caused harm to somebody else and then apologized, that has given my practice an opportunity to grow. I learned from that person. They are gracious enough sometimes to teach me and tell me what I did wrong, so that the next time when I'm sharing space with them or anyone else, I can be better. So I think in terms of like practice and

honoring differences, those are some of the most important things to remember as I'm going into child welfare work spaces.

ANTONICA ALEMAN: Thank you so much for sharing that, Angelina. Tiffany?

TIFFANY HAYNES: In terms of leadership, considering power dynamics when you're in spaces. So I even think about some of the work I do here. I'm in, do a lot of racial equity work here at the Center. And one of the things that I noticed was in one of the spaces that I was in, is how safe I felt even though we had people who were literally heading a program, or team lead, or people who were above my caliber in terms of my role/title. But when I was in that space I didn't feel like that because leadership didn't make me feel like that my role was any less important than their role.

And so I feel like what it means is understanding that each of our roles are important, regardless of the title or how we prioritize the level of that role. So we each have an important part in this, right? And so, one thing is just being mindful so that you aren't leading with your role or title, but you're leading

with person first. You're leading with, why are we here together? Like, what is the goal of us being in space together? What are we trying to accomplish together? You know, acknowledging the human aspects.

The other thing is, when thinking about teaming, when thinking about who is leading a project, or who needs to be a part of a team project, not going to your default, to be able to curate that team. And I think we weren't even intentional about this process when we were creating this, you know, psychological safety materials, thinking about who needed to be reviewing the material. Who did we want to invite and create opportunity to be on the podcast? Who did we want to be able to be thought partners?

When I think about, you know, policy level changes, are those policies reflective of the people and influenced by the people who will be impacted by said changes? That is one way to honor differences. I remember reviewing material, and it was race equity specific, and thinking, a lot of times in racial-related conversations in spaces that are really polarized it

really turns into like a Black/White conversation and not truly a racial equity conversation.

And so I think that can also be reflective in tools and materials and resources that you create. So, unpacking that and being aware that diversity and DEI, REI efforts in honoring differences also requires you to not bring a polarized lens, and to open your minds about what it means to honor differences. Also, what are unique pieces or things that people bring to spaces that's needed? The people who are put in position to be able to review these documents, make these decisions. You know, think about developing trainings, being leadership, oftentimes is not the entire population of people who are impacted.

And so it's like Angelina said, you have a lot of power, you have a lot of responsibility in being able to do those things and to be in the space. So, how are you leveraging that power and leaning into your responsibilities as an individual to contribute to psychological safety and diversity in that space.

ANTONICA ALEMAN: Thank you both for sharing. This was such a beautiful discussion. And Tiffany, when I thought of power, I thought of Uncle Ben's famous quote, "with great power comes great responsibility." I felt that you two really embodied what it really means of honoring differences. Thank you both.

ANNOUNCER: Thank you all for tuning in to today's podcast episode, Honoring Differences, which is a part of the Fostering Psychological Safety in Child Welfare Teams series. Please tune in to our second podcast episode to hear what personal healing and growth can look like in the context of child welfare teams.

Additionally, you can explore the Center's other resources in the Fostering Psychological Safety in Child Welfare Teams series by visiting the Center for States website at capacity.childwelfare.gov/states. This podcast was created by the Capacity Building Center for States, funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Children's Bureau, under contract number HHSB 233201500071-I.

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