



# Engaging with Aboriginal Children and Young People toolkit

## Aboriginal communication styles

Communication Style	Comment
Being reserved when meeting people, often staying silent and making minimal eye contact.	In Aboriginal culture, extended periods of silence during conversations may be considered the 'norm' and valued as an opportunity for reflection. Silent pauses may be used to listen, show respect or consensus. Silence itself may be part of the response and should be allowed to take its course. For Aboriginal people, avoidance of eye contact may be a gesture of respect, making insistence on eye contact inappropriate.
Relying on body language to understand what is being said.	Think about the messages you are sending through your non-verbal communication. Are you open to engagement? Interested in the speaker? Paying attention?
Only revealing part of the problem or story until trust has been gained.	Ask open-ended, non-judgmental questions to extract additional information.

<p>Using he/she (and other pronouns) interchangeably.</p>	<p>This is common in Aboriginal English (AE), dialects of English that are spoken by Aboriginal people and that differ from Standard Australian English in systematic ways. It is not lazy or poor English, but rather its own distinct dialect.</p> <p>Heavy AE is spoken mainly in the more remote areas, where it is influenced by Kriol, while light varieties of AE are spoken mainly in metropolitan, urban and rural areas.<sup>1</sup></p>
<p>Saying 'yes', which could mean many things, including not understanding the question.</p>	<p>Aboriginal peoples may say yes to avoid conflict or disagreement, rather than truly agreeing with your proposal. Open-ended questions such as, "What do you think about..." "How would you..." may be more effective than questions limited to a "yes" or "no" response.</p>
<p>Preferring to engage in a non-confrontational manner, such as standing side-by-side or sitting together, rather than facing each other directly.</p>	<p>Yarning circles are a great example of an engagement method that allows everyone to be on the same level, not be placed in the spotlight and to participate equally.</p>

---

<sup>1</sup> Eades D 1993, *Aboriginal English*, viewed 29 May 2017, <[http://www.naalc.org.au/cb\\_pages/files/Aboriginal%20English%20in%20the%20Legal%20System%20-%20Diane%20Eades.pdf](http://www.naalc.org.au/cb_pages/files/Aboriginal%20English%20in%20the%20Legal%20System%20-%20Diane%20Eades.pdf)>.