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Acknowledgement & safety

### Before we begin

A quick moment to locate ourselves and to care for the room

**Acknowledgement of Country (Bundjalung Country)**

I acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the lands on which we meet today, and pay my respects to Elders past and present. I extend that respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples here today.

**This session mentions trauma**

- You can step away at any time.
- Take breaks, stretch, drink water.
- If you notice yourself getting activated, slow your breathing and ground (feet on the floor, notice 5 things you can see).

Leadership includes caring for staff wellbeing — not "pushing through".

Tip: use chat to share reflections if you'd rather not speak.

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Today's map

### What you'll leave with

- 1) A clear picture of how cultural disconnection shows up for children (in their own words)
- 2) A practical "constraints & enablers" framework you can use with your team
- 3) Leadership moves: policies, routines, relationships, and partnerships that create belonging
- 4) A 7-day action plan template for your service

40 minutes • interactive • built for leaders who want practical next steps

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Evidence base (and why it matters for OOH/HC)

### Where these insights come from

Three connected papers (TRC research) → translated into everyday leadership in early childhood settings

**First Nations voices (NSW)**

16 First Nations young people (12–18) in Therapeutic Residential Care (TRC) describe what supports wellbeing and what constrains it.

Themes include relational stability, cultural affirmation, agency — and cultural disconnection as harm.

**Relational practice (broader sample)**

Qualitative: 38 young people describe “recognitional practice”: being cared for, respected, and valued. Also identifies organisational/system conditions that enable or block this (e.g., stability, staff retention).

Quantitative phase: 140 completed surveys (publication *in press*)

**Trauma-informed research & wellbeing**

A practical framework (pre / during / post) for working ethically with trauma stories — also useful for leadership: supervision, debriefs, and team support.

Why OOH/TRC? Because leadership choices (relationships, routines, partnerships) shape belonging long before a child ever meets a formal system.

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Cultural connection vs cultural disconnection

### What do we mean by cultural disconnection?

A practical definition for leaders

**Cultural connection (protective)**

Children experience culture as lived belonging:

- knowing who they are and where they come from
- being recognised in that identity by adults
- relationships with family, community, Elders
- connection to Country and language

In practice: it is “built into the day” — not an occasional event.

**Cultural disconnection (harm)**

When systems and services break or ignore these links:

- frequent moves / disrupted relationships
- lack of cultural mentors
- “culture as a plan on paper” not lived
- identity confusion, shame, or grief

Leadership question: What do our systems make easy — and what do they make hard?

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Children’s words: cultural disconnection

### “I don’t know what it means ...”

Simple statements. Big leadership implications.

*“I honestly can’t even answer that question because I don’t know what it means [to be Aboriginal].”*

Liam (15)

*“I hadn’t met [my] aunts and uncles.”*

Ben (16)

*“I am so confused, I don’t know much about it.”*

Mia (15)

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Enablers: what helped

### Enablers of wellbeing (in the YP words)

Notice how "therapeutic" often looks like everyday consistency and recognition.

**Relational care (stable adults)**

"The workers came and watched me play... took me to training... even a game on Saturday."  
— Liam (15)

**Seen & supported (neurodiversity)**

"He knew what to do for people with ADHD. He listened to me."  
— Ben (16)

**Joy + culture as anchors**

"We did dancing once and got to paint stuff. That was one of the good weeks."  
— Chloe (17)

**Agency + future orientation**

Young people spoke about goals (study, work, sport, art) and wanting to be "in control" of their futures — especially when adults backed them.

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Constraints: what got in the way

### Constraints (and why they're leadership problems)

Not "bad kids" — but unstable systems, thin relationships, and culture treated as optional.

**What the system did**

- Frequent moves + staff turnover → disrupted relationships and identity
- Few/no Aboriginal caseworkers or cultural mentors
- "Professional boundaries" used to justify distance
- Disempowering routines and limited voice

**How it landed for children**

- "They move you around too much... it's not ideal..." — Emma (17)
- "I've been in different houses... it's overwhelming and stressful." — Charles (13)
- "I wasn't there for very long because they weren't Indigenous..." — Genni (16)
- Identity confusion, cultural disconnection, feeling unseen

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Impacts of cultural disconnection

### Impacts: how cultural disconnection harms wellbeing

A simple "cause → effect" chain you can use for leadership reflection

Cultural disconnection + fractured relationships

→

Identity confusion + loss of belonging

→

Distress / dysregulation + coping behaviours

→

Behaviour is misread → more control / surveillance

**Leadership reframe:** When you see "behaviour", ask first: **What relationship, belonging, or cultural safety need is going unmet?**

In OOH/TRC, this is early prevention: **strengthening identity, family connection, and cultural safety before problems escalate.**

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Translation to OOHC

### What this looks like in OOHC (leadership edition)

Small decisions, repeated daily → big identity and belonging outcomes.

Leadership lever	Simple example in practice
Stability	Protect key educator/primary caregiver continuity; minimise "drift" for vulnerable children
Family + community	Warm, persistent invitations for families; local Elders/community partnerships (with consent and reciprocity)
Culture in the day	Language moments, stories, SEASONS, local place-based learning — not only special events
Child voice	Daily choices (where to sit, what to play, how to calm) and genuine listening
Strengths + interests	Notice and invest in interests (sport, art, music) — "show up" consistently
Transitions	Slow, predictable arrivals/departures; relational handovers; prepare children for change

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Leadership levers: conditions that hold practice in place

### Leaders shape the "Practice Architecture"

Model Recognition → being cared for, respected, valued (and located in family, culture, community)

**Cultural-discursive**  
(language + assumptions)

- How we talk about children ("naughty" vs "needs")
- How we talk about culture (token vs lived)
- What we teach as "professionalism"

**Material-economic**  
(time + resources)

- Rosters that protect continuity
- Time for family engagement
- Resources for place-based learning

**Social-political**  
(power + participation)

- Children's voice in daily choices
- Shared decision-making with families
- Accountability to community

**Leadership prompt: Which box is easiest for you to change this month — language, resourcing, or power?**

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A simple example: when rules block care

### The "hot chocolate" story

A tiny moment that reveals a big leadership pattern

**What happened**

A carer said they could not buy a young person a hot chocolate because it was a "breach of professional boundaries."

Researchers noted the **paradox**: boundaries can keep people safe, but rigid boundaries can also create distance and more abandonment wounds.

**Leadership translation for OOHC**

Audit your "rules":

- Which ones protect children?
- Which ones accidentally block warmth, reciprocity, or cultural connection?

Replace "no" rules with "how" guidance (safe ways to show care).

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Team leadership skills

### A leadership micro-framework you can use tomorrow

3Rs (rights, relationships, reflexivity) + a simple pre/during/post practice loop

**Rights**

Children have a right to voice and participation — especially when systems label them “too vulnerable.”

**Relationships**

Safety is relational. Connection is a “practice”, not a personality trait.

**Reflexivity**

Leaders and teams need structured reflection to notice power, bias, and burnout risk.

**Pre**

Brief: roles, risks, **cultural considerations**, who supports who

→

**During**

Check-ins: **notice distress**, slow down, re-balance power, give choice

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**Post**

Debrief: **reflect**, regulate, learn, and plan follow-up

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Close

### Five commitments for culturally safe leadership

If you only remember one thing: belonging is built (or broken) by systems — and leaders set systems.

- Protect relational continuity (key educator, predictable routines)
- Embed **culture as lived practice** with community leadership (not token events)
- Share power: listen, offer choice, and **involve families** meaningfully
- Build a reflective**, supported workforce (supervision, debriefs, wellbeing)
- Measure what matters: belonging signals, **not just compliance**

**Key resources**

- Day et al. (2026) — First Nations children in TRC
- McPherson et al. (2025) — recognitional practice
- Gatwiri et al. (2025) — trauma-informed framework
- EYLF V2.0 + ACECOA perspectives sheet

*(Links are in the speaker notes.)*

Thank you. If you'd like, share in chat one commitment you're taking into next week.

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Interactive

### Q/A or 10-minute leadership huddle (use in your next team meeting)

Breakout rooms or table groups • pick one real constraint • design one week of action

- 1) Name the constraint (be specific)
- 2) Which lever is it?  language  resourcing  power  partnerships
- 3) Design one small experiment for what you could do differently?
- 4) How would you evaluate it?

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