# Supporting Indigenous Apprentices

## Purpose

Creating culturally safe and respectful workplaces helps Indigenous apprentices feel valued, supported, and connected - which increases confidence, participation, and retention. Employers who show understanding and flexibility towards cultural obligations help apprentices stay engaged and proud of their work.

## Understanding Cultural Safety

Cultural safety means recognising and respecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples’ values, beliefs, and ways of doing things. It’s about creating a space where apprentices feel safe to be themselves without fear of discrimination or misunderstanding.

Key actions to build cultural safety:

* Acknowledge and respect Country and Culture in your workplace.
* Use preferred names and pronunciation correctly.
* Avoid assumptions about background or capability - focus on individual strengths.
* Ensure team members use respectful and inclusive language.

## Building Trust and Belonging

Trust develops through consistency, fairness, and communication. Apprentices thrive in environments where they feel respected and part of the team.

* Pair the apprentice with a supportive supervisor or mentor who demonstrates patience and understanding.
* Take time to listen - relationships matter.
* Include the apprentice in toolbox talks and team decisions, so they feel part of the crew.
* Celebrate milestones and cultural events like NAIDOC Week to recognise contribution and heritage.

## Respecting Cultural and Community Commitments

Indigenous apprentices may have cultural responsibilities such as Sorry Business, community events, or family obligations. Employers who respect and plan around these commitments help apprentices stay engaged and motivated.

* Discuss these commitments early and plan flexibility into rosters or deadlines.
* Maintain open communication - it shows respect and strengthens trust.
* Document arrangements where possible so expectations are clear on both sides.

## Mentoring and Role Models

Where possible, connect Indigenous apprentices with Indigenous mentors or cultural support officers through your ACAP provider. Peer mentoring or having other Indigenous tradespeople visit the workplace can strengthen identity and confidence.

***Supervisor Tip: Encourage senior apprentices or employees to take an interest in mentoring. A simple ‘How’s your week going?’ can make a big difference to an apprentice’s sense of belonging***

## Practical Workplace Adjustments

Small, respectful adjustments can make a big difference in creating a culturally safe and inclusive environment.

* Provide uniforms or PPE that meet cultural comfort (for example, modest clothing options).
* Offer quiet spaces if reflection, prayer, or phone calls to Elders are needed.
* Ensure culturally appropriate communication - avoid sarcasm or raised voices, as these may be misunderstood.

## Accessing External Support

**Employer's Quick Guide to Indigenous Apprentice Support (Australia)**

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| **Resource/Program** | **What it Provides for the Employer/Apprentice** | **How to Access and Contact** |
| **Apprentice Connect Australia Provider (ACAP)** | ACAPS provide personalised, culturally sensitive mentoring, one-on-one check-ins, and peer networking for the apprentice. They also provide guidance on creating a culturally safe and inclusive workplace, help with retention, and accessing financial incentives. | Start with your local ACAP in your region.  **Refer to resources tab to contacts page** |
| **ABSTUDY** | A government allowance to help the apprentice with living expenses, study, and housing costs while undertaking their training. *This is claimed by the apprentice, but you should encourage them to apply.* | Direct Apprentice Application to Services Australia: Advise your apprentice to contact the ABSTUDY line via Services Australia or apply through their myGov account. Where to Go: Services Australia website or myGov |
| **Indigenous Skills and Employment Program (ISEP)** | Provides a wide range of job readiness, training, and career advancement activities to connect First Nations people with local jobs, including apprenticeships. This is a place-based program, so support varies by region. | Website: [NIAA Indigenous Skills and Employment Program web page](https://www.niaa.gov.au/our-work/employment-and-economic-development/indigenous-skills-and-employment-program-isep) |
| **Australian Apprenticeships Incentive System** | Provides financial support (wage subsidies/hiring incentives) to businesses that employ an apprentice in a Priority Occupation. | Contact your Apprentice Connect Australia Provider to confirm eligibility and submit claims for government incentives. |

## Key Message

Supporting Indigenous apprentices goes beyond meeting training requirements - it’s about building respect, trust, and opportunity. By creating culturally safe, inclusive workplaces and linking with Indigenous mentors and support services, employers can help apprentices build confidence, pride, and long-term careers in the trade.