

# Building Relationships

## Enacting The 3 Cuppa Tea Rule

[Climate Justice and Resilience Toolkit](#)

### Yarning – Deep Listening – Cultural Safety

Building strong, respectful relationships with Aboriginal peoples, communities and organisations is fundamental to effective engagement and collaboration. This process requires a deep commitment to developing long term, sustainable, authentic, and genuine connections that transcend superficial interactions or tokenistic gestures. It requires a profound understanding and appreciation of the unique, rich cultural knowledge and diverse worldviews that Aboriginal peoples bring to any partnership or collaborative effort. It is crucial that the foundation of these relationships be built using Aboriginal strategies of engagement from the beginning. This approach embraces yarning, deep listening, respecting cultural protocols. It necessitates a willingness to learn from and be guided by Aboriginal Elders and community leaders, acknowledging their authority and wisdom. Non-Aboriginal partners must be prepared to challenge their own assumptions, biases and ways of working and to adapt their practices to align with Aboriginal cultural norms and expectations.





# Yarning

Yarning as an informal but focused conversation, a pathway of two-way learning. It is an informal and relaxed discussion, a journey that both parties share. Yarning is not a linear process, rather, it is circular, which allows the conversation to weave in a culturally safe and appropriate way to strengthen the relationships between the parties. Yarning should happen in a familiar environment (e.g., on the ground under a tree or over a cuppa tea), an informal setting where the voices of both parties are listened to and their voices heard. Yarning and a cup of tea go hand in hand, and to build relationships, one should aim to have at least 3 cups of tea on three separate occasions before asking anything from the other party. The 3 cuppa tea rule is about the forming of genuine and authentic relationships without the expectation of having to give or take something from one another.

A principle for yarning: This yarning principle requires one to listen, just listen. Learning to listen is an artform. Wait, take your time before asking questions as quite often, with the yarning, the emerging conversation will answer your questions without the need to ask them. Begin with some general chat about where you come from, then broaden out the conversation. Don't put yourself on a time limit. Yarning takes time, it is a culturally safe and appropriate way to gather rich and authentic knowledge on any topic.

# Deep Listening

The strategy of 'deep listening' when working alongside Aboriginal peoples and their communities requires a protocol for listening to what you are being told by Elders and/or Aboriginal peoples with whom you are working. MiriamRose Ungunmerr-Baumann (n.d.) describes 'deep listening' in her language as 'dadirri' (Southern Queensland) and believes that 'dadirri' is in everyone – it is not just an Aboriginal thing. It is a consciousness that everybody has, and it is a central element not only for building trust with Aboriginal people and their communities but also for "fostering a personal connection" to the space or Country you are on. It is important to note whether one is Indigenous or non-Indigenous, it is a deeply respectful protocol to 'sit and listen'. When you sit and listen, you begin to get a sense of awareness of connecting to the Country on which you sit and also to the people you have come to yarn with.

It is essential to develop an understanding of the context in which you are in or where the yarning is going to be taking place.

Sometimes, it is difficult for Aboriginal peoples to get across what they are trying to say or suggest. This isn't because Aboriginal peoples are cognitively challenged, rather, it is because many non-Aboriginal peoples are aurally challenged and find it difficult to listen deeply with intent. It is crucial to learn and be prepared to 'sit and listen' and to understand the yarning process as an authentic and culturally significant way of talking and sharing knowledge.

A Principle for Deep Listening: Listening is an artform. Begin with just listening. Wait for an invite to speak, and don't interrupt the conversation, quite often, we are preoccupied by thinking about what we will say when it is our turn to speak. But it is how we listen that is transformative, especially in groups. In the western way people interrupt conversations to input their views or thoughts across. However, in the Indigenous context, if you find Indigenous people are not talking then you have perhaps taken over the conversation. Stop, remind yourself to listen. You don't need to control the conversation. Listen to learn and listen for understanding rather than agreement.



# Cultural Safety

Ramsden's (1992) introduction of 'cultural safety' transformed nursing practice by prioritising respect for patients' cultural diversity. This concept rapidly spread across disciplines as a powerful tool to confront the persistent colonisation of Indigenous peoples. Organisations must embody this approach by creating welcoming environments deeply grounded in culture and community. Culturally safe environments for Aboriginal peoples are essential. These spaces must nurture a sense of belonging, enable individuals to develop their identities and voices and explore future opportunities. To truly embrace cultural safety, organisations must go beyond surface-level accommodations. They must actively engage with Aboriginal communities, incorporate Indigenous knowledges, and commit to ongoing learning and adaptation. This approach requires a fundamental shift in organisational culture, policies and procedures to ensure that Aboriginal peoples feel respected, valued, heard and empowered in all interactions.

Moreover, cultural safety must be viewed as an ongoing journey rather than a destination. It demands continuous reflection, evaluation, and improvement to address evolving needs and challenges. By prioritising cultural safety, organisations can create environments that not only support Aboriginal peoples' wellbeing and success but also contribute to broader societal efforts towards Climate Justice work.