

Keeping Families Together 2023

University of Washington Tacoma | September 11, 2023

Family Advocates:

We all know that BIPOC families remain overrepresented within the child welfare system. Even DCYF's Office of Juvenile Justice admits that "[d]ata continues to show that racial and ethnic disparities persist at every point in the juvenile justice system in our state and across the nation."¹ Yet, knowing and acknowledging the problem is not enough. As Tanya Asim Cooper tells us, "[e]veryone can perpetuate or disrupt racial bias, and awareness of the individual power to do so is key."² Today, we encourage you to begin with an exercise in self-awareness. We encourage you to examine and reflect on how race and caste inform your own perceptions, decisions, and actions, either implicitly or explicitly.

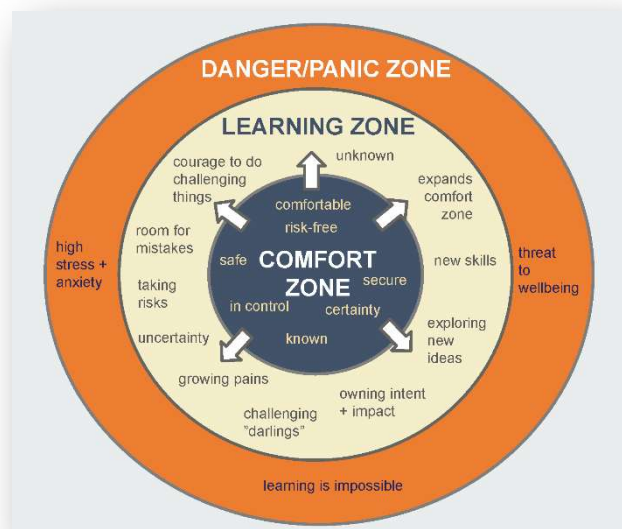
We ask you to take on this task with humility. We recognize that this is not easy or comfortable for many, or perhaps most, of you. But as psychologist Lev Vygotsky tells us, we must challenge ourselves to truly learn. See Figure 1: the Learning Zone Model. At the same time, we must not push ourselves too hard. If we push ourselves to a point where we experience inexorable stress and anxiety, we enter a state where we simply are unable to learn. We perceive our intense unease as a threat to our wellbeing and reason that we must disengage.

And, as you read the attached introductory chapter to the 4th edition of the NACC's Child Welfare Law and Practice (Redbook), entitled Justice as the Line Through, by Ivory K. Bennett and Cory B. Best, you will undoubtedly be challenged by accusations of racism and oppression levied against you and our profession. While such accusations are discomfoting, please do not disengage. Complete the tasks imbedded therein. The language is direct and challenging, but it is sincere and earnest. Stay in the learning zone and challenge yourself. Be introspective. Be an agent of change.

Sincerely,

OPD/OCLA/CHS

Figure 1: The Learning Zone Model



¹ [Reducing Racial & Ethnic Disparities | Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families](#)

² Redbook. Pg. 6.