

Indigenous Knowledge to Address Trauma

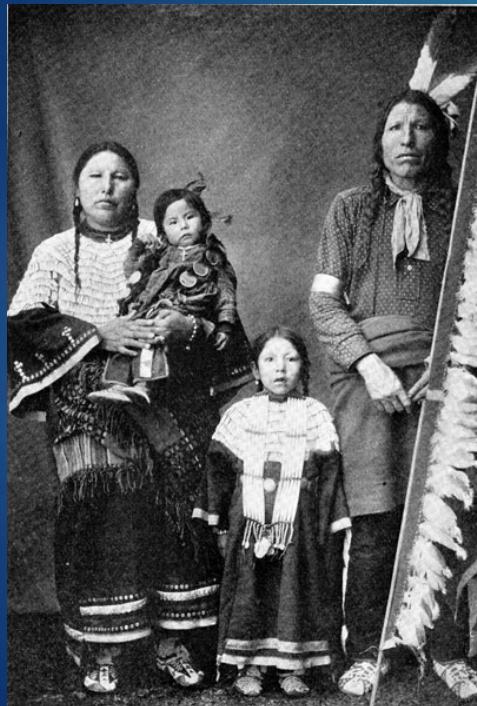
AFN MENTAL WELLNESS FORUM

APRIL 3, 2019

WINNIPEG, MB



Indigenous Families and Communities

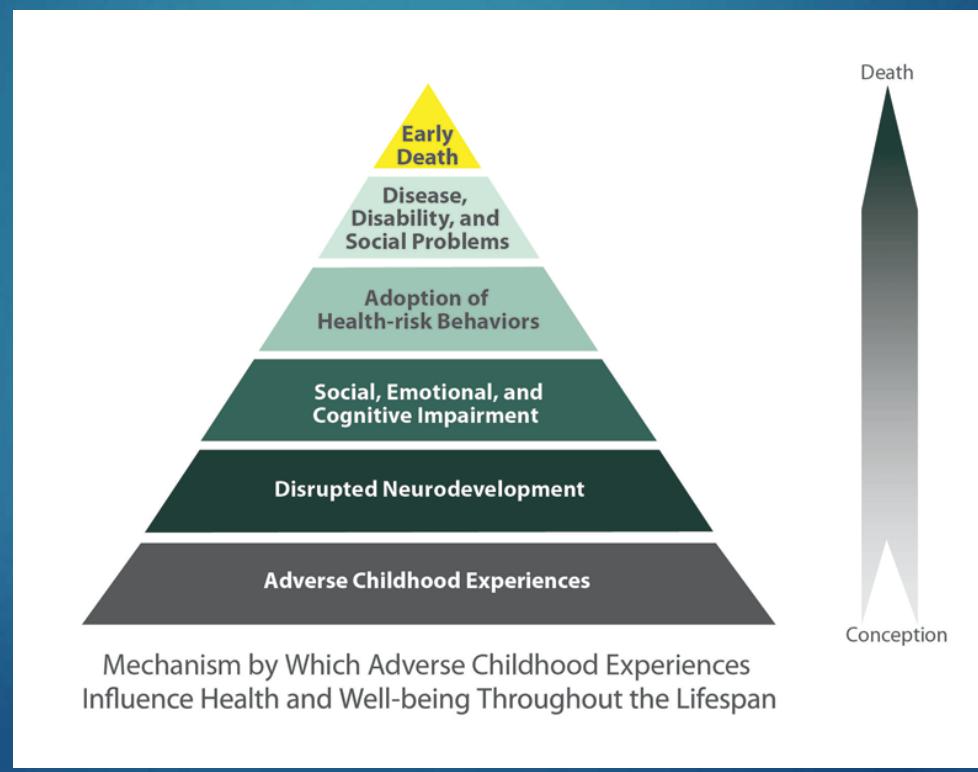


Indigenous People and Trauma

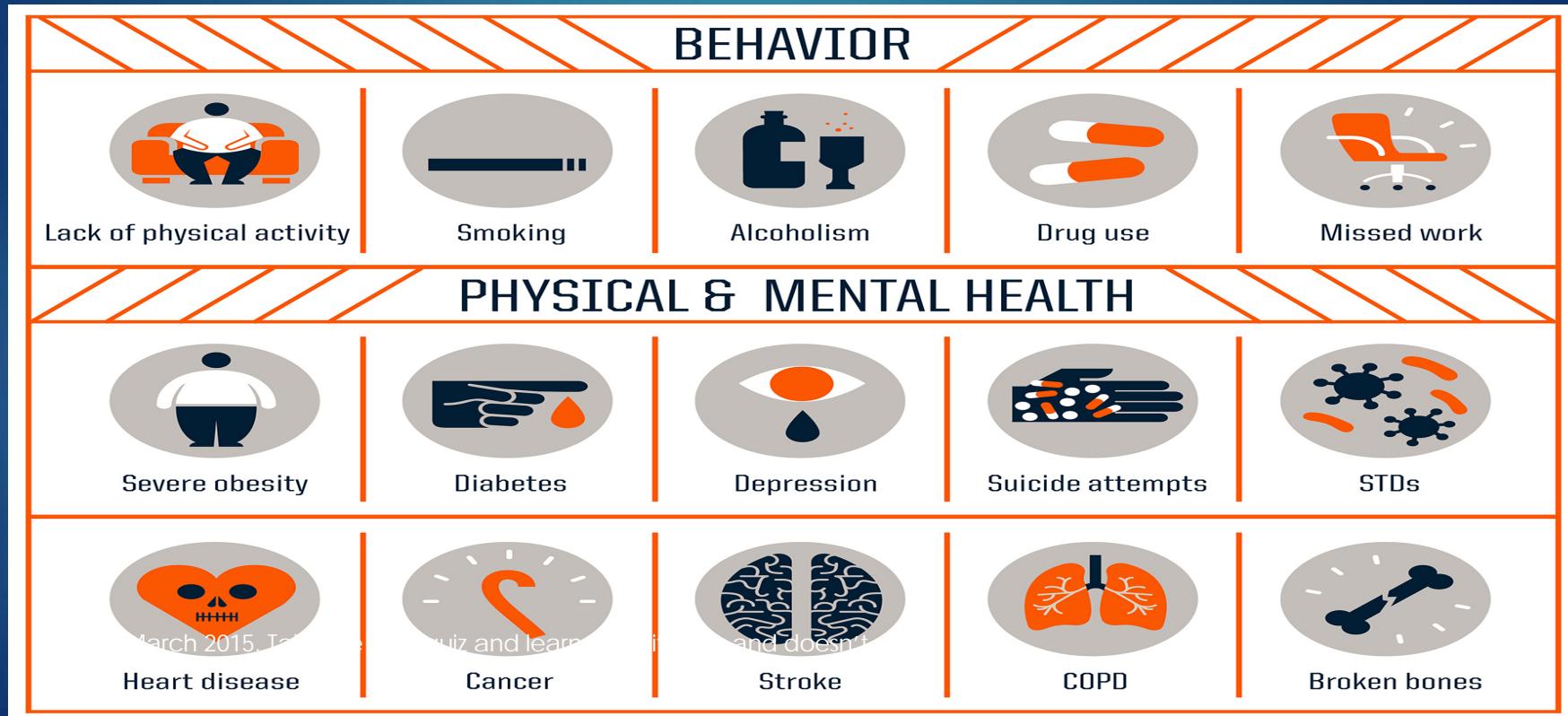
1. Single event = acute trauma response
2. Enduring or repeating event = post-traumatic stress disorder or developmental trauma
3. Cumulative effect = complex trauma
4. Historic event with prolonged impacts = intergenerational trauma
5. Personal event with impacts over generations = intergenerational (historical) trauma



Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) study



ACE Increases Health Risks



Trauma can cause change



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Invisible changes occur

- ▶ It changes biology!
 - ▶ Unable to regulate & brain malfunction
- ▶ Neurobiological and physiological changes
- ▶ It changes our brain
 - ▶ Social cues, memory impairments, rumination, difficulty learning
 - ▶ Related to mental health changes: brain changes is linked to higher rates of depression and anxiety

Trauma Behaviors

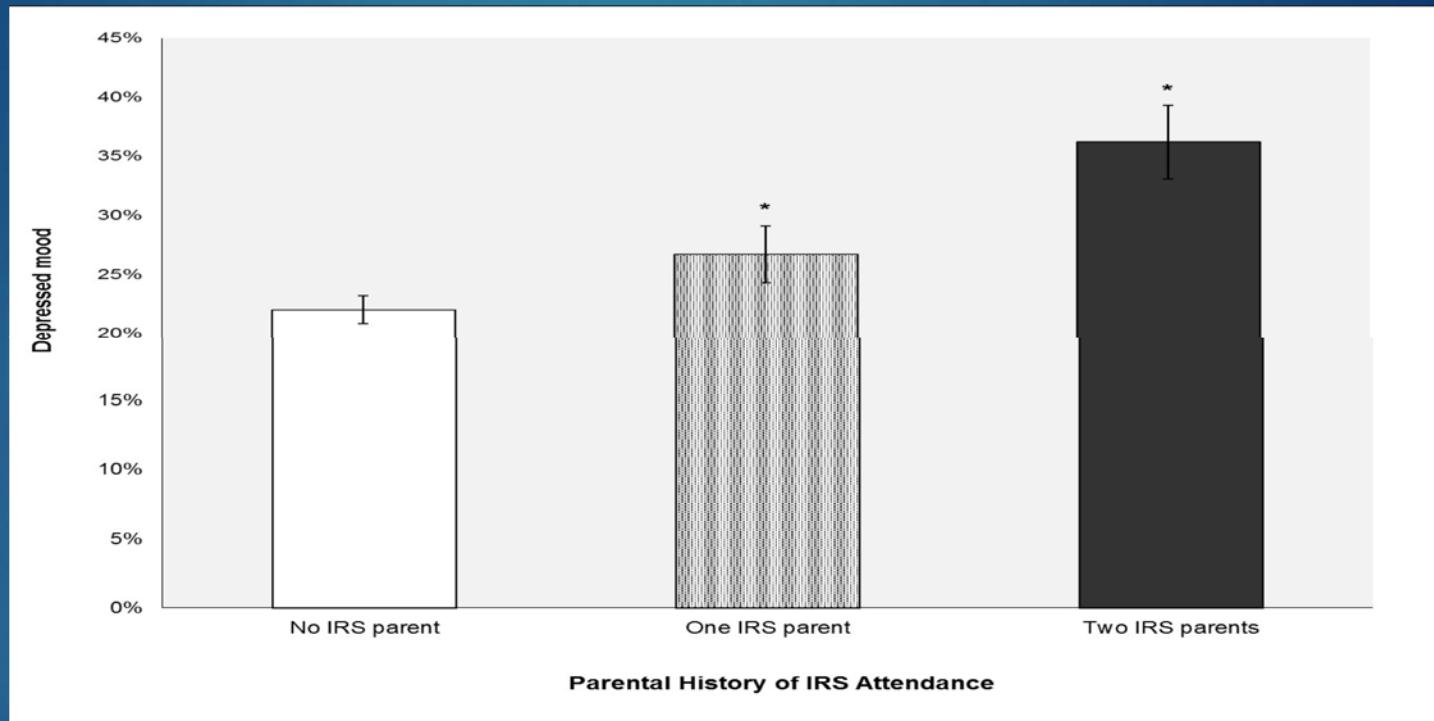
- ▶ Mistrust and fear
- ▶ Self-blame and self-hatred
- ▶ Denial and dissociation as survival mechanisms
- ▶ Unresolved intense feelings
 - ▶ May manifest as high risk behaviors such as substance abuse or addictions, suicide or self-injurious behaviour



"Intergenerational or multi-generational trauma happens when the effects of trauma are not resolved in one generation. When trauma is ignored and there is no support for dealing with it, the trauma will be passed from one generation to the next. What we learn to see as "normal" when we are children, we pass on to our own children... The unhealthy ways of behaving that people use to protect themselves can be passed on to children, without them even knowing they are doing so. This is the legacy of physical and sexual abuse in residential schools."

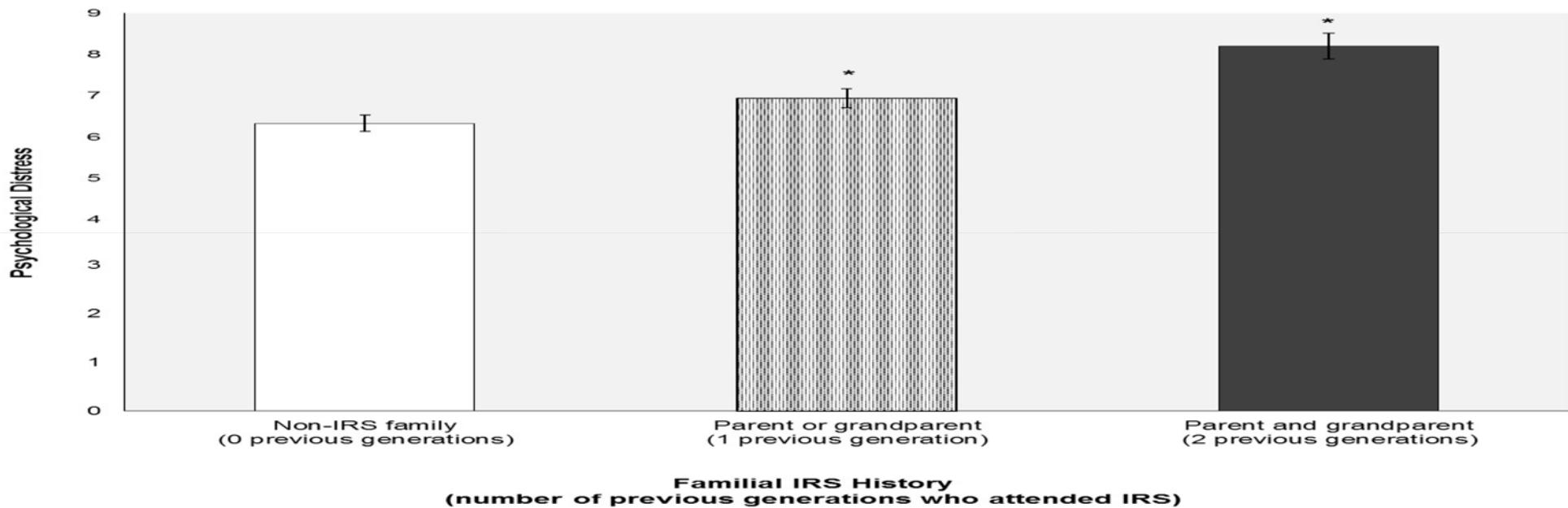
(Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 1999:A5)

Epigenetics Also Plays a Role



Percentage of First Nations youth who reported depressed mood as a function of whether neither, one, or both parents attended IRS.

More Than One Generation Attending IRS



Collective trauma can modify community functioning:

Community level changes:

- erosion of basic trust
- Silence
- deterioration in social norms, morals and values
- poor leadership

Community impacts:

- unconcealed alcohol and drug misuse among community members
- lack of cultural opportunities including transmission of language skills, history, traditional values and spirituality
- unwillingness to reclaim community members
- low levels of capitalism such as trust, reciprocal helping relations and social engagement

Nation impacts:

- popularization of negative stereotypes
- social policies that perpetuate colonization of Indigenous peoples
- lack of support for holistic programs and services targeting Aboriginal needs
- lack of support for community
- lack of support for community self-determination

Collective Trauma Impacts

- PTSD & anxiety disorder more likely
- Decline in social relations
- Decline in subsistence production and distribution activities
- Perceived increase in the amount of and problems with addictions and domestic violence
- Undermine Indigenous identity & ideology



Limitations without Culture

- ▶ An increased focus on treating 'disease' and deficits which do not close the gap of wellness.
- ▶ Healing from an Indigenous context is much broader than treating illness and in the context of inter-generational trauma and loss, requires a different approach.
- ▶ Focus on the individual does not reflect values of Indigenous people which are central to family and community
- ▶ A process of decolonization attends to the whole being: mind, body, emotion and spirit



Creating Competency

- ▶ Having a comprehension that cultural loss, degeneration and culture stress are significant forms of trauma
- ▶ Having a comprehension of cultural effects to trauma
- ▶ Requires understanding cultural responses to addressing trauma

Relational Aspects to Trauma Informed Approaches

Providing an opportunity for the development of a healthy, supportive relationship is central.

Indigenous knowledge and experience highlights the importance of relationships with all things within Creation.



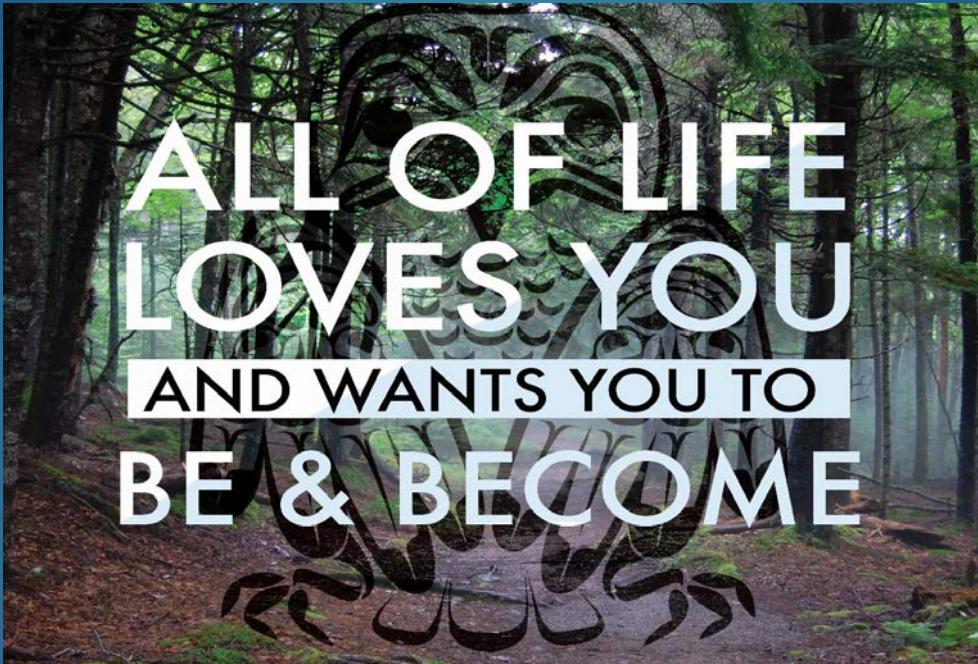


Healing in Relationships

- All of us are responsible for maintaining good and harmonious relations within extended family and community
- Our languages guide us in our relationships.
- For healing, in the circle we learn new ways of thinking, believing, feeling and relatedness. Our answers are within us.



Connection to Creation is Critical to Wellness

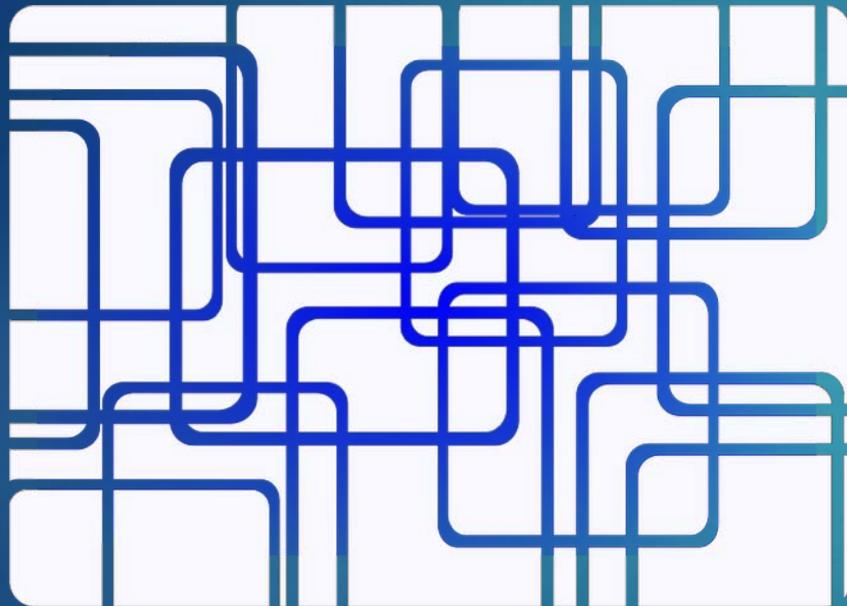


Our culture focuses on the strengths



Learning the
responsibilities of being
head youth dancer
from my Grandfather.

Connections Create Healthy Sense of Self



Knowledge

Teachings

Culture

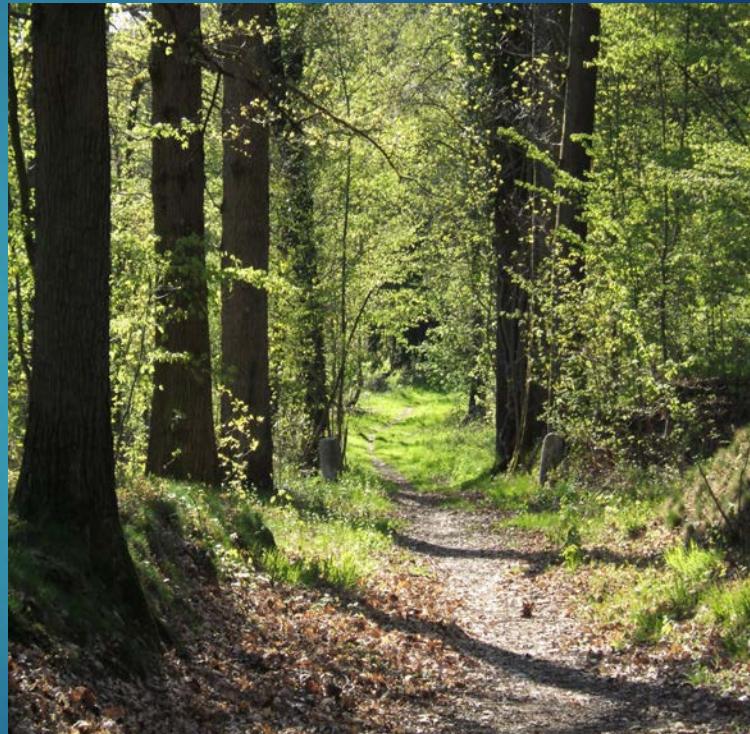
Indigenous view

Source: Indigenous Healing by Rupert Ross

Our Creation Story Tells Us Who We Are



Connection to Creation



Our Cultural Practices Teach Us How to Manage Our Neurobiological Responses



Traditional Nourishment and Healing



Ceremonies & Connection to Creator/Higher Power



Similarities to Trauma Informed Care Principles

1. Trauma awareness
 - ❖ Recognizing trauma is pervasive
2. Emphasis on safety and trustworthiness
3. Opportunity for choice, collaboration and connection
 - ❖ Meaningful engagement
4. Strengths-based and skill building
5. Non-judgmental, compassionate response
6. Treatment requires building confidence and trust to facilitate healing and recovery



“ Culturally Informed Trauma Approaches are a way of thinking and doing that provides holistic approaches with understanding of the traumatic experience and its effects on the individual, family, and community **”**

Trauma Centered Care is Incomplete

1. Presumes trauma is an individual experience and not a collective one
2. Does not attend to root causes (environment, policies, systems, practices)
3. Runs the risk of focusing on trauma and not wellness



“ A healing centered approach is holistic involving culture, spirituality, civic action and collective healing. A healing-centered approach views trauma not simply as an individual isolated experience, but rather highlights the ways in which trauma and healing are experienced collectively.

GINWRIGHT, 2018

”

Shifting to Healing Centered Care



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“ Healing, in Aboriginal terms, refers to personal and societal recovery from the lasting effects of oppression and systemic racism experienced over generations. Many Aboriginal people are suffering not simply from specific diseases and social problems, but also from a depression of spirit resulting from more than 500 years of damage to their cultures, languages, identities and self-respect. The idea of healing suggests that to reach ‘whole health’, Aboriginal people must confront the crippling injuries of the past

(RCAP, 1996:109).



NOT ONLY CAN TRAUMA BE
PASSED ON, SO CAN
RESILIENCY!



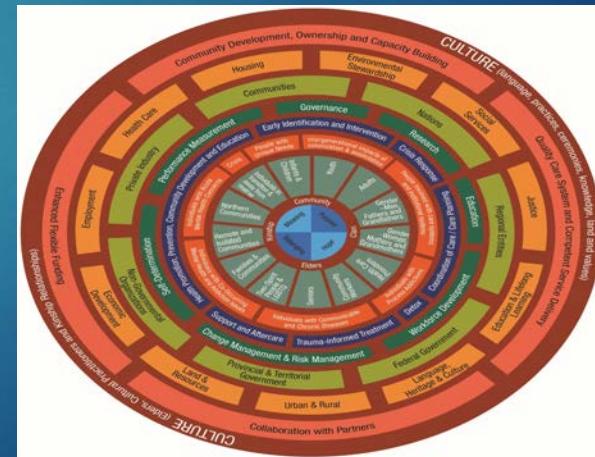
“ The survivors are extraordinary people; if theirs is a story of pain, loneliness away from their families, suffering and abuse, it is also a story of extraordinary courage, resilience and endurance. It is they who have not allowed us to KILL THE INDIAN IN THE CHILD'.... ,”

TRC REPORT

Culture as the Foundation

Culture is an important social determinant of health, and as a holistic concept of health is an integral part of a strong cultural identity.

Many First Nations communities believe that the way to achieve individual, family, and community wellness (a balance of mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual aspects of life) is through culturally specific, holistic interventions. (FNMWC)



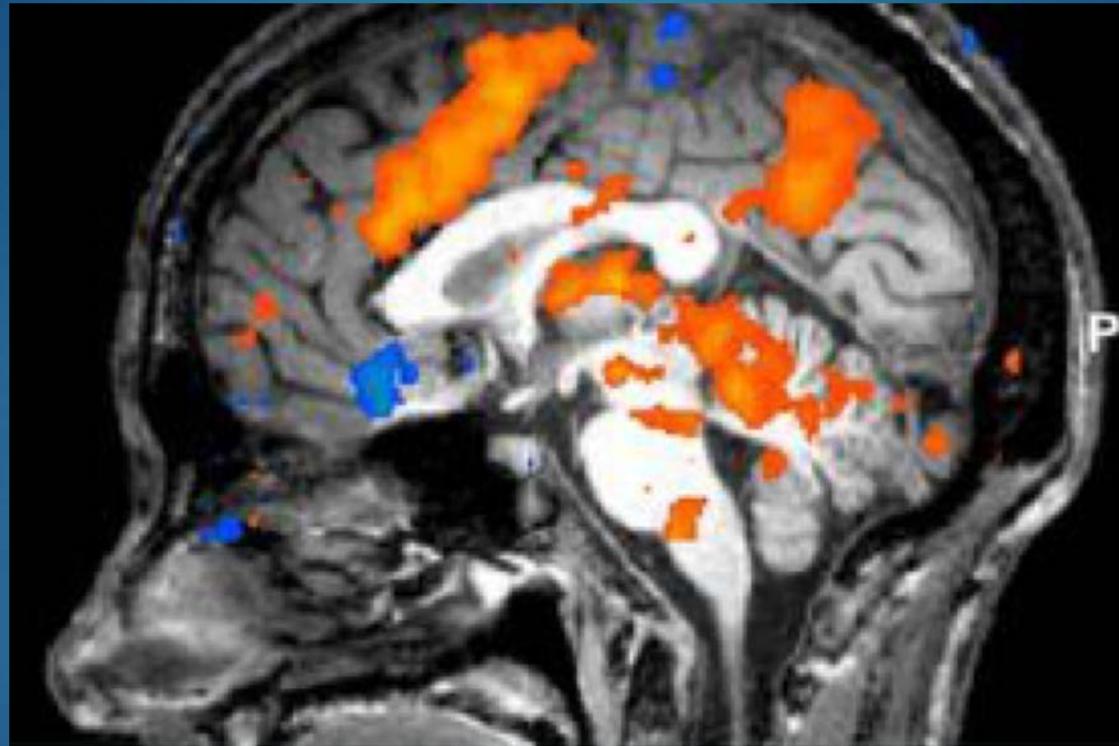
CULTURAL INTERVENTIONS PROMOTE WELLNESS

Mental wellness is a balance of the spiritual, emotional, mental, and physical. This balance is enriched as individuals have:

- HOPE for their future and those of their families that is grounded in a sense of identity, unique Indigenous values, and having a belief in spirit (spiritual wellness)
- a sense of BELONGING and connectedness within their families, to community, and to culture (emotional wellness)
- a sense of MEANING and an understanding of how their lives and those of their families and communities are part of creation and a rich history (mental wellness)
- PURPOSE in their daily lives whether it is through education, employment, care-giving activities, or cultural ways of being and doing (physical wellness)

- 
- ▶ Cultural reclamation is at the heart of healing. Reclaiming culture includes:
 - Revitalization of language
 - Understanding impact of Indigenous history to community and nation
 - Reclaiming cultural practices and community ceremonies,
 - Learning cultural teachings
 - ▶ Our task in achieving wellness requires we:
 - ▶ Know who we are
 - ▶ Seek our identity
 - ▶ Understand our role on Mother Earth

Cultural Values, Practices and Beliefs influence Brain Functioning



Immordino-Yang, et. al., (2009). Neural correlates of admiration and compassion. PNAS. 106(19), 8012-8026.

Immordino-Yang, et. al., (2013). Modularity and the Cultural Mind: Contributions of Cultural Neuroscience to Cognitive Theory. Perspect Psychol Sci. 8(1):56-6

What Our Knowledge Says About Resiliency

- ▶ The elasticity in Indigenous peoples resiliency comes from one's spiritually endowed identity & values
- ▶ A core constellation of values have been found to be sufficiently resistant to acculturation so as to persist over time and through various assimilative forces. (Dumont, 1993)
- ▶ Change is directed toward connecting to one's identity vs. changes to fix deficits



Holistic Resiliency

1. Caring and Supportive Community
2. High Expectations for Success
3. Opportunities for Meaningful Participation
4. Positive Bonds
5. Clear and Consistent Boundaries
6. Life Skills
7. Self Identity



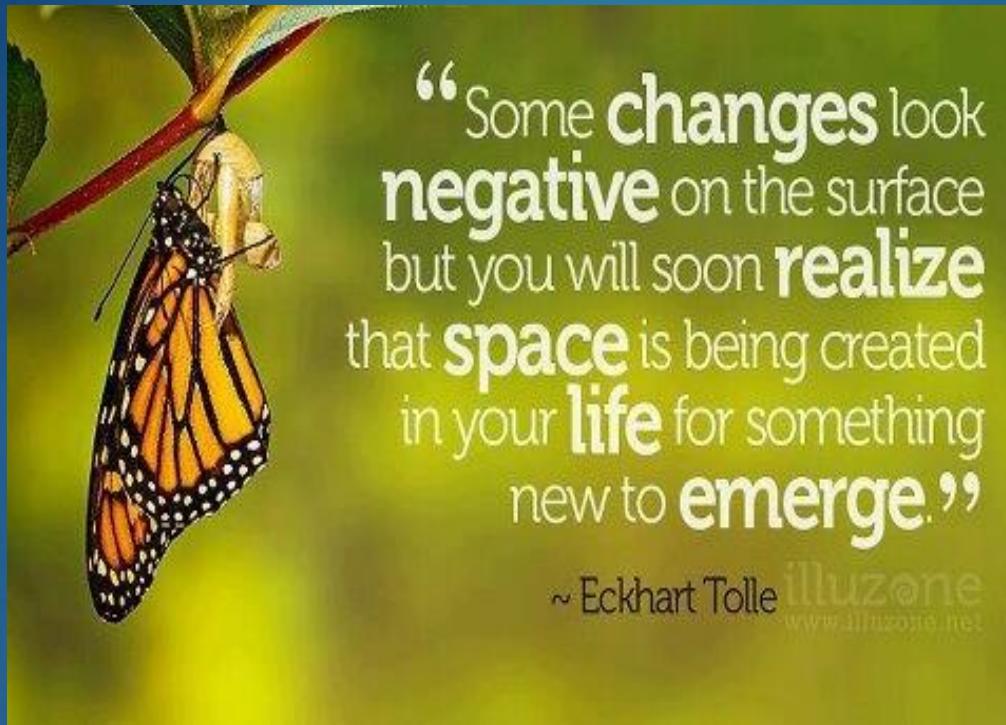
Build Resilience

- ▶ Encourage relationship development
- ▶ Encourage stability and predictability in life
- ▶ Help them recognize their relationship to all things and being interconnected
- ▶ Focus on strengths
- ▶ Maintain hope



Culture & resiliency

- ▶ Connection to culture and a strong sense of cultural identity has been found to demonstrate the following:
 - ▶ Associated with prosocial behavior in youth
 - ▶ Increases values of belonging, mastery, independence and generosity in youth
 - ▶ Discourages risky health behaviors and encourages generally stable and positive health practices
 - ▶ Combats the effects of stress and negative health outcomes
 - ▶ Buffers depressive symptoms and alcohol in adults
 - ▶ Protects against alcohol misuse, the impact of discrimination, and suicide
 - ▶ As listed in Crooks, Chiodo, Thomas, Burns & Camillo (2010)



“Some **changes** look
negative on the surface
but you will soon **realize**
that **space** is being created
in your **life** for something
new to **emerge**. ”

~ Eckhart Tolle

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Miiгwech!
Thank You!

