APA PRESIDENTIAL TASK FORCE

CULTURALLY INFORMED TRAUMA AND GRIEF RECOVERY TOOLKIT

AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

Indigenous Community Healing and Resilience

"I choose joy over despair. Not because I have my head in the sand, but because joy is what the earth gives me daily and I must return the gift." ROBIN WALL KIMMERER, POTAWATOMI

Who is this for?
Whether you identify as Indigenous, Native, Indian, Native Hawaiian, First Peoples, or use your community or tribal affiliation, if you have experienced trauma or want to help others, we hope you will discover new ways to understand trauma and find healing for yourself, your family, and community. We recognize that healing practices vary from tribe to tribe, thus we give broad strategies below as examples that can be tailored to what works best for you.

What traumas have impacted Indigenous communities?
For Indigenous peoples, the word "trauma" brings up painful experiences, not just in the present, but conscious or unconscious memories of grief, loss, and deep hurt passed on from generation to generation. Native peoples, collectively, have gone through many devastations, including mass disease, enslavement, massacre, forced relocation, stolen lands, forced removal of children from families through boarding schools and adoptions, and loss of languages and spiritual practices. Researchers call this *historical trauma* or *the soul wound*.

Historical trauma sounds like these hurts have only happened in the past, but Indigenous peoples experience many ongoing harms that impact us daily. Current traumas include racism, threats to our lands and environmental abuse, undoing the silence around boarding school experiences, and knowing that our relatives are often missing and murdered without answers. Some of our communities face high rates of drug and alcohol addiction, violence, poverty, and inadequate schooling. Even our current physical and mental health reflects the challenges that we have faced across generations.

Many Indigenous peoples are still disconnected from their cultural knowledge, practices, and language. The disconnection can come with feelings of sadness, anger, shame, and grief. We may feel lost, without purpose, or try to cope with these feelings in both helpful and harmful ways. Below, we give examples of culturally based ways of healing.

What is Healing?
Healing means "to bring back into balance all aspects of our being" (emotional, mental, physical, spiritual). Healing is the strengthening and reconnecting of our sacred bonds within ourselves, with all living beings, and with the natural world. We do not walk in this world alone but in relationship. Therefore, we must learn to give and receive with tenderness, remembering the power of those connections through space and time. Healing is a process, and there is no set amount of time it takes to grieve or become well. `

Cultural Healing Strategies

Connect with your Culture: Learning, engaging, and developing your cultural practices and language is one way to engage in healing. Research shows it helps us understand who we are, be more connected with our communities and ancestors, and it contributes to our overall wellness. Researchers have found that cultural practices such as traditional teachings, storytelling, ceremony, and traditional dance can serve in healing trauma and grief.

Find Balance with the Medicine Wheel: The medicine wheel is an Indigenous way of restoring balance to our 4 aspects of being. When symptoms of trauma and grief linger, we are out of balance. You can complete a medicine wheel, often represented by a circle divided into 4 equal parts, to see a holistic picture of what aspects of your being you are cultivating and which you may need to give more attention and care. For example, you may find you need to take a break from social media or start going for walks with a friend.

Storytelling: An Acoma potter, Josie Kie says "We all have a story. We all have something to tell." Stories are passed on orally, through clay, on canvas, in weavings, basketry and beading, and now, even through digital storytelling. Through the process of creating our stories, we can make sense and meaning of our experiences to help heal from trauma and grief. By sharing our stories, we help others better understand what we have been through, increase our connection with others, and take our power back.

Community Healing: mitákuye oyás'iŋ (all our relations). Our relations include all those in the healing circle, as well as our families, communities, ancestors, the animal and plant nations, and the land around us. Many other Indigenous communities express this similar idea that "you are my other me." Healing for ourselves happens when we heal communally. Gathering of Native Americans is one way to approach community healing. Whether you participate in a powwow, a feast day, or an all-night ceremony, there are many ways to help each other to heal.



Caring for Ourselves and Others: We can look to traditional child rearing practices to guide how we care for ourselves and others. We start by implementing traditional values of patience, praise, kindness, humility, and respect centered within traditional Native parenting. Elders have shared that the wisdom from these practices is grounded in wholistic spiritual insights and rituals.

Ground Yourself: Grounding exercises help us disrupt overwhelming thoughts or emotions by focusing on something smaller in the present. For example, you could physically ground yourself by standing or sitting outside and focusing on the details of how that connection between your body and the earth feels. Another grounding exercise is deep breathing. Dr. Bigfoot teaches Native youth to pair their "inhalations and exhalations with relaxing images such as the sway of wind-swept grasses or of the movement of a woman's shawl during a ceremonial dance."

Reach out for Professional Guidance: There is strength in reaching out to a traditional healer, psychologist, therapist, or calling a crisis line. You may benefit from choosing professionals who can integrate traditional practices (e.g., ceremony, cleansing, fasting, and sweat lodge) into your healing journey. When choosing a psychologist/therapist ask if they are familiar with your community; how they include culture into their therapy; what types of services they offer; and if they are open to working with your family and traditional healers to address your needs. For more information on interpersonal trauma, violence, and abuse, *see* here. To learn about collective trauma, *see* this. To learn more about how to heal and thrive, *go to* here.