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Tribal TTA Center Healing-informed Care Handout

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Introduction

The Tribal Training and Technical Assistance Center (the Center), funded by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), provides training and technical assistance (TTA) on mental and substance use disorders, suicide prevention, and the promotion of mental health.

Ultimately, our work in prevention is about healing—healing individuals and the communities they live in. Healing implies change but change can be difficult. Indigenous cultures have wisdom that has always provided guidance through difficult times. This wisdom calls us to focus on strengths, on what is working. SAMHSA recognizes this wisdom, guiding communities to base prevention on strengths-based practices that build protective factors and community collaborations.

Healing-informed care is care based on Indigenous wisdom about wellness and what is necessary to heal. Culture has been shown to be a protective factor for AI/AN youth.¹ Healing-informed care, derived from a rich understanding of Indigenous knowledge, is an extension of culture as a protective factor. It provides guidance to those who experience distress individually, in a family, or in a community. It provides a roadmap for maintaining or regaining health.

The purpose of this handout is to define what Indigenous healing-informed care is, to demonstrate that healing-informed care is a trauma-informed approach,² to explain the cultural foundations of healing-informed care and its relationship to the Cultural Strategic Framework. This will provide prevention workers and practitioners a deeper understanding of the cultural strengths that guide cultural resilience. By understanding how the Cultural Strategic Framework informs healing, prevention workers can formulate prevention and healing strategies that tap into the innate resilience of American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) individuals and communities.

Healing-Informed Care and Trauma-Informed Approach

Indigenous healing-informed care is consistent and has a lot in common with the SAMHSA trauma-informed approach. The trauma-informed approach has six key principles: (1) safety;

¹ R. Sanchez-Way, S. Johnson. (December 2000). Cultural Practices in American Indian Prevention Programs. *Juvenile Justice*, 7(2). Retrieved from https://www.ncjrs.gov/html/ojdp/jjn1_2000_12/cult.html

² SAMHSA Trauma-Informed Approach and Trauma-Specific Interventions. Retrieved from <http://www.samhsa.gov/nctic/trauma-interventions>

(2) trustworthiness and transparency; (3) peer support; (4) collaboration and mutuality; (5) empowerment, voice, and choice; and (6) cultural, historical, and gender issues.

The trauma-informed approach can be seen as a “how to” that is in alignment with healing-informed care. Providing and supporting physical and emotional safety is a way to demonstrate respect and caring. Being trustworthy and transparent promotes cooperation and group harmony. Offering peer support reinforces relationships that are essential in healing and community building. Collaboration and mutuality are hallmarks of respect. Empowerment, voice, and choice mirror the values of autonomy and respect. Respecting cultural, historical, and gender issues is essential to healing. As the Cultural Strategic Framework states, healing begins with acknowledging the role of historical trauma.³ Gender is an essential aspect of every individual that, if not respected, would inhibit healing. Healing also cannot be expected to happen if an individual’s or a community’s culture is not respected.

Worldview

Our worldview helps us make critical decisions, which shape our future. It helps us cope with complexity and change; it can provide a roadmap for wellness. Scholars suggest that worldview constitutes our psychological orientation in life and can determine how we think, behave, make decisions, and define events.⁴ As indigenous peoples, we have ancient, culture-specific philosophies and practices, called ways of knowing, that continue to provide us with guidance in everyday life. Ways of knowing have also been defined as “information that people in a community, based on experience and adaptation, have developed over time, and continue to develop. This knowledge is used to sustain the community and its culture.”⁵ This guidance can be especially important in the healing process, as all wellness exists within the framework of our worldview and our ways of knowing help us define health.

Indigenous peoples perceive life as a gift from the Creator. They understand that they have a responsibility to nurture and care for that gift at a personal and collective level. A good life, or good health, is perceived to be a “balance of spiritual, mental, emotional, and physical elements.”⁶ This worldview is often characterized graphically. Although these representations vary from tribe to tribe, the medicine wheel is one representation of the Indigenous worldview, showing the balance of spiritual, mental, emotional, and physical human experiences, as exemplified in Figure 1.

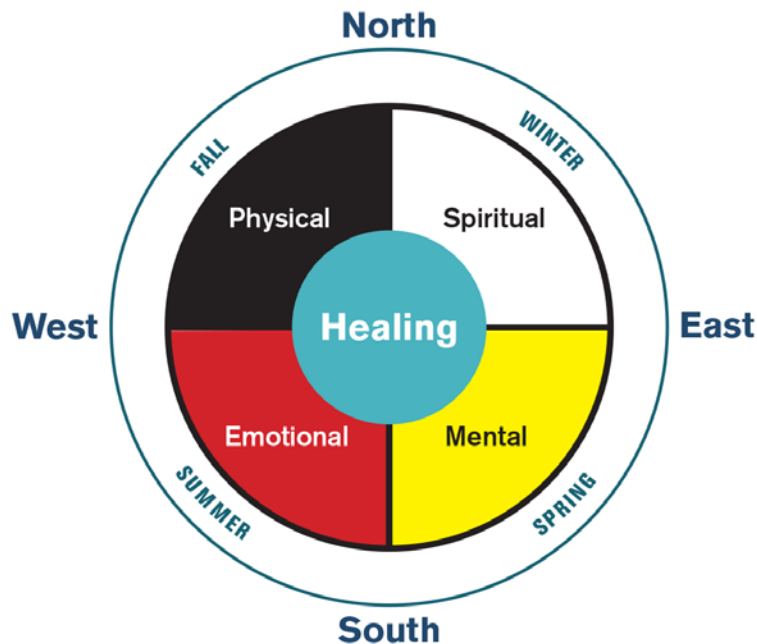
³ PrettyPaint, I. (2008). *Miracle survivors: A grounded theory on educational persistence for tribal college students*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota.

⁴ English, R. (1984). *The challenge for mental health: Minorities and their worldviews*. Austin: The University of Texas at Austin.

⁵ Barnhardt, Kawagley, *Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Alaska Native Ways of Knowing*

⁶ Poonwassie, A., & Charter, A. (2001). An Aboriginal Worldview of Helping: Empowering Approaches. *Journal of Counseling, 35*(1), 63–73.

Figure 1. American Indian Worldview Represented by the Medicine Wheel



Ways of Knowing

Ways of knowing have been defined as “information that people in a community, based on experience and adaptation, have developed over time, and continue to develop. This knowledge is used to sustain the community and its culture.”⁷ In other words, ways of knowing are what has made it possible for Indigenous peoples to survive.

Characteristics of Indigenous ways of knowing that are important in healing are:

- *Holistic* – Interconnectedness underlies all of human experience.
- *Balance* – Because of the interdependencies of all life, achieving and maintaining balance is important both to the individual and the larger group.
- *Moral Code* – The physical and metaphysical worlds are linked to a moral code.
- *Respect* – Respect of all living things and each other is essential for balance.⁸

Healing has been defined as “transition toward meaning, wholeness, connectedness, and balance.”⁹

⁷ Barnhardt, R., & Kawagley, A.O. (April, 29, 2005). Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Alaska Native Ways of Knowing. *Anthropology and Education Quarterly*, 36(1), 8–23

⁸ *ibid*, p. 16

⁹ Katz, O. & St. Denis, V. Teacher as healer. *Journal of Indigenous Studies* 2 (2): 24-36, 1991

Cultural Strategic Framework

The Cultural Strategic Framework provides the foundation for Indigenous healing approaches for mental health issues, substance use, and suicide prevention in Indian Country. Using the framework to align approaches with the Indigenous worldview will contribute to effectiveness of prevention activities.

The Center's healing-informed care approach is built upon the cultural strategic framework of:

- *Vision* – Behavioral health and wellness for tribal communities begins with acknowledging the effects of historical trauma, honoring cultural values, and developing of a vision of success.
- *Circles of Relationships* – The quality and authenticity of relationships provides the critical pathway for this work to be effective and sustainable. These circles of relationships must emerge from the community and be based on the successful integration of memberships and responsibilities.
- *Sense of Hope* – Tribal communities believe spirituality is at the core of their survival. A sense of hope includes interconnectedness (circles of relationships), sacredness of inner spirit (cultural resilience), balance (awareness), and responsibility to be lifelong learners (growth).¹⁰

Picture 1. Two Native boys in traditional dress



¹⁰ PrettyPaint, I. (2009). *Miracle survivors: A grounded theory on educational persistence for tribal college students*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota.

Indigenous Values

For prevention activities to work within a community, they need to fit the community values.¹¹ Understanding the values that AI/AN cultures are based in helps complete the picture of indigenous healing. A good reference for understanding Indigenous values is SAMHSA’s Culture Card, A Guide to Build Cultural Awareness.¹² Research has identified 10 American Indian cultural values.¹³ These values are similar, but not identical, to Alaska Native values identified by the Alaska Native Knowledge Network.¹⁴ To compare and contrast, Table 1 shows how American Indian and Alaska Native cultural values align.

Table 1. American Indian and Alaska Native Cultural Values Alignment

American Indian Cultural Values	Alaska Native Cultural Values
Spirituality	Pray for guidance
Child-rearing and connectedness with extended family	See connections—all things are related
Respect of age, wisdom, tradition	Honor your elders
Respect for nature	(There is no comparable value stated, but, as referenced above, this value is implicit in the AN worldview)
Generosity and sharing	Share what you have and take care of others
Cooperation and group harmony	Live carefully—what you do will come back to you Know who you are—you are a reflection on your family
Autonomy and respect for others	Show respect to others

¹¹ National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases, Taking Action: Health Promotion and Outreach with American Indians and Alaska Natives Literature Review, September 1, 2006, retrieved from

¹² SAMHSA, Culture Card: A Guide to Build Cultural Awareness, retrieved from http://www.niams.nih.gov/About_Us/Mission_and_Purpose/Community_Outreach/Multicultural_Outreach/AIAN_WG/NIH_AIAN_Lit_Rev.aspx<http://store.samhsa.gov/shin/content//SMA08-4354/SMA08-4354.pdf>

¹³ PrettyPaint, I., (2009). *Miracle survivors: A grounded theory on educational persistence for tribal college students*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota

¹⁴ Retrieved August 20, 2015, from the Alaska Native Heritage Center at <http://www.alaskanative.net/en/main-nav/about-us/anhc-mission-new/>.

Composure and patience	Accept what life brings and have patience
Relativity of time	(Not applicable)
Non-verbal communication	Not applicable

Definition of Health Key Concepts

The Indigenous worldview, ways of knowing, values, and cultural theoretical framework inform our concepts of health and wellness. From these foundational elements, the following basic principles of health and wellness for indigenous peoples are derived.¹⁵

- **Balance** – Illness is seen as being out of balance; some part of the whole is not in balance with the rest of the whole. To heal, all four aspects of an individual should be considered and should be in balance—mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical.
- **Relational** – This concept emphasizes the interconnectedness of all things. Health is holistic, but also communal. If an individual is unwell, the family, community, and future generations are affected. By the same token, the effects of a healthy person will also ripple through the community.
- **Strengths-based** – The indigenous worldview assumes that all individuals have innate strengths they bring when facing adversity. Healing-informed care recognizes this belief and helps individuals and communities express these strengths.

¹⁵ Barnhardt, R., & Kawagley, A.O. (April, 29, 2005). Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Alaska Native Ways of Knowing. *Anthropology and Education Quarterly*, 36(1), 8–23

Picture 2. Native fathers drumming, holding children



Indigenous Healing Practices

Cultural healing practices vary from tribe to tribe and village to village. They are based on the place, as well as the people; however, there are commonalities among the practices. Indigenous healing practices include practices for purification, renewal, and transformation. These Indigenous practices help in promoting healing and nourishing resilience. Table 2 shows examples of cultural practices and potential benefits that can be derived from these practices.

Table 2. Cultural Healing Practices and Benefits

Cultural Practices	Benefits
Language classes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informs the cultural worldview, ways of knowing, knowledge systems, values, and practices • Connects us to each other and our culture • The key that unlocks the worldview, values, and teachings
Smudging (purification)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helps provide a feeling of the sacred and safety, which are important in healing trauma • Helps focus attention and intention • Helps turn thinking from negative to positive

Cultural Practices	Benefits
Ceremonies and ritual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gets people in touch with a sense of spiritual connection • Focuses the mind, heart, and body on healing • Communicates a message of personal responsibility, “You have to do something, too” • Reminds us that healing is relational and takes place in the context of one’s community
Stories and artwork	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Illustrates and clarifies values • Connects us to each other and to a place • Conveys culturally specific values, including high expectations, caring, support, and opportunities for participation
Talking circles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promotes belonging • Provides a safe and healthy way to resolve conflict • Encourages community
Gift giving (generosity)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrates and solidifies connectedness • Shows respect for the giver and recipient
Visiting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourages people to tell their stories and to connect with each other • Helps release internalized pain • May help show the connection between thought and feeling • Helps people get in touch with their purpose
Subsistence/culture camps	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teaches Indigenous values • Contributes to belonging and a sense of self worth
Respect of elders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teaches Indigenous values • Contributes to belonging and a sense of self worth • Provides support
Fun walks/runs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Addresses the physical component of wellness • Brings the community together

Cultural Practices	Benefits
Powwows	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connects us to each other and our culture • Conveys cultural values, including high expectations, caring, support, and opportunities for participation
Regalia, arts and craft making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connects us to each other and our culture • Provides opportunities for hands-on learners to connect to their culture

Summary

Healing-informed care principles are strengths-based and specific to each culture and community. However, the common ground that underlies these principles is found in the indigenous worldview, ways of knowing, and cultural practices. To understand the foundation of healing-informed principles is to more fully recognize the rich cultural knowledge that informs cultural practices. These are summarized in the Cultural Strategic Framework. When grounded in the Cultural Strategic Framework, healing practices stay true to the precepts of Indigenous healing, that is, vision, circles of relationship, and a sense of hope. This grounding can help the AI/AN tribes and villages served by the Tribal TTA Center as they plan and implement activities to address mental and substance use disorders, suicide prevention, and the promotion of mental health.