

An Indigenous Holistic Approach to Trauma,  
Aggression, and Violence Utilizing the Medicine  
Wheel

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Violence & Aggression Symposium

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## Indigenous Health & Well-Being

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- Indigenous peoples do not have the same level of health and well-being as other Canadians
- Indigenous peoples have the same basic needs as other peoples, however, there are additional challenges that are multifaceted and stem from colonization
- Mental health issues have been long overlooked, especially in First Nation communities

# Supporting Indigenous Health & Well-Being

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- Challenges
- Sociopolitical history between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada
- Indigenous responses to colonization
- Paradigm clashes
- Making a difference
  - Counselling/psychotherapy
- Personal & professional role

# Challenges

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- Sociopolitical history between Indigenous & non-Indigenous peoples in Canada (colonization)
  - Important to understand how current disparities have evolved & accurate account of relationship
  - Provide alternative point of view for existing observations or experiences
  - Avoid “victim blaming”, perpetuation of negative stereotypes
  - All Canadians require an accurate account of the colonial relationship
- Similar experiences for Indigenous peoples globally

# History of Relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Peoples

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- Colonization
  - Epidemics
  - Residential Schools
  - Indian Act
- Truth and Reconciliation
  - 94 Calls to Action – June 2, 2015

## Colonization

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- “Disastrous for Native culture, identity and pride” (Lee, 1992, p. 211)
- Multiple layers: physical, economic, cultural, social, and psychological  
(Wesley-Esquimaux & Smolewski, 2004)
- Epidemics, residential schools (1863-1996), Indian Act

**Dis-connection- Connection**

# Epidemics

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- Severe social disorganization
- Traditional social structures, alliances and kinship ties – disrupted  
(Chansonneuve, 2005, p. 44)

## Residential Schools (1883-1996 in SK)

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- Partnership-Canadian government & churches
- Purpose-assimilation
- “Dis-connecting children physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually from their language, culture and their communities, from their own sense of identity as being Indian”

(Chansonneuve, 2005, p. 44)



## Residential Schools: Long-term implications

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- Cultural denigration, humiliation and shaming were standard practices in residential schools. This deprived the children of self-esteem and, in many cases, led to life-long feelings of self-hatred and depression

(Chansonneuve, 2005)

- 60's Scoop ...

## Impact of Exposure to Violence: Child's Developing Brain

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- Dr. Bruce Perry

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=brVOYtNMmKk>

## Indian Act 1876

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- a colonist relationship
- created to guide Canada's relations with First Nations peoples by imposing several restrictions on them in order to meet two main goals: to "civilize" the First Nations people and to "assimilate" them into Canadian society

(Office of the Treaty Commissioner, 2008)

## Truth and Reconciliation: 94 Calls to Action

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- Child Welfare
- Education
- Language & Culture
- Health
- Justice

[http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/File/2015/Findings/Calls\\_to\\_Action\\_English2.pdf](http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/File/2015/Findings/Calls_to_Action_English2.pdf)

## Indigenous Responses to Colonization:

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- Intergenerational Trauma – history of loss and trauma
- Historic Trauma Transmission (HTT)
- Disconnection
- PTSD
- Increased health & mental health challenges

# Intergenerational/ Multigenerational Grief

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## Historic Trauma

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“Unremitting personal and collective trauma due to demographic collapse, resulting from early influenza and smallpox epidemics and other infectious diseases, conquest, warfare, slavery, colonization, proselytization, famine and starvation, the 1892 to the late 1960s residential school period and forced assimilation”

(Wesley-Esquimaux & Smolewski, 2004, p. 1)

## Relational-Cultural Theory (Walker, 2004)

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- Views chronic disconnection as the “primary source of human suffering, resulting in paralyzing psychological isolation and impaired relational functioning” ( Walker, 2004, p. 6)
- Disconnections are exacerbated by patterned & protracted abuses of power in relationship (interpersonal, familial, or institutional-cultural - or a combination of the three)
- Colonization – Indigenous peoples have experienced abuses of power in all of these relational contexts



## PTSR vs PTSD

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- Post Traumatic Stress Response (PTSR) vs Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
- “Normalizing their response versus pathologizing their current state”

(Mitchell & Maracle, 20005, p. 18)

## Implications for Counselling Practice

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- No consensus in the literature regarding a *best practices* approach

## Foundational Fundamental Knowledge: Prior to Engagement

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- Counselling cannot take place without communication, and we cannot communicate with someone unless we have a shared language and worldview (Torrey, 1986)
- Understanding of colonization & continued impact on current mental health & well-being (Kirmayer, Brass & Valaskakis, 2009) and neocolonial practices (Smith, 1999)
- Cross-cultural training – Indigenous worldviews, cultures, and traditions (Calabrese, 2008)
- Comprehension that all peoples' mental health & well-being are impacted by the SES (PHAC, 2010; Raphael, 2006)

## General Guidelines for Mental Health Care Providers

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- Address issues from a social/community context versus an individual approach
- Encourage & support their interpersonal & social relationships
  - Cultivate healthy relationship with self, family, community, and the universe
  - **Connecting** is key
- Support client to relearn or maintain their traditional spiritual beliefs & cultural practices
- Utilize a holistic approach to address their mental health concerns
  - Impact of abuse occurs at the physical, psychological, and spiritual levels ( Duran, 2006)

## General Guidelines for Mental Health Care Providers cont.

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- Address the power imbalance
  - SES; cultural, power imbalances that may impede communication
- Utilize proven psychoeducational & therapeutic approaches

# Healing

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- All levels of government, social change, and individual perseverance
  - Determinants of Health
    - Income & social status; social support networks; education and literacy, employment and working conditions, social environments, physical environments, personal health practices and coping skills; healthy child development (HCD); biology and genetic endowment, health services, gender, and culture.

## Healing: Individual

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- Processing and coming to terms with the horrifying and overwhelming experience; controlling and mastering physiological and biological stress reactions; and re-establishing secure social connections and inter-personal efficacy
- Decolonization

## Paradigm Clashes

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- Smith (1999) "to hold alternative histories is to hold alternative knowledge"
- Cognitive imperialism/assimilation – "imposition of one worldview on a people who have an alternative worldview, with the implication of the imposed worldview is superior to the alternative worldview" (Battiste, 2000, p. 193)



## Paradigm Clashes between Euro-American and Navajo (Calabrese, 2008)

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- Individualist dyad vs communal group process
- Role of the healer
- Disclosure
- Time factor
- Secular vs spiritual intervention
- Mechanism of therapeutic change

## Paradigm Clashes (Calabrese, 2008) cont.

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- Individualized narratives vs performed narratives
- Remedial-stigmatized vs preventative-valorized
- Dual separation of meaning-centered and pharmacological interventions vs integration
- Psychopharmacologies, synthetic-processed vs natural plant forms

## Blending Indigenous & non-Indigenous Worldviews

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- Primarily “academic discussion” (Duran & Duran, 2000, p. 90)
- Individual assessment (Lafromboise et al. , 1990)
- Duran (2006) suggests after two decades of practice:
  - Western clinical practice
  - Internalized oppression
  - Historical trauma
  - Traditional Aboriginal theory

# Addressing Traumatic Experiences & PTSD Symptoms

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- Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)
- Holistic Approach to **Self-care**:
  - Physical, Emotional, Intellectual/Mental, Spiritual
- Somatic-Based Therapies
  - Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR)  
<https://emdrcanada.org/emdr-defined/>
  - Eye Movement Integration (EMI)  
<http://www.nlpc.com/library/eye-movement-integration-therapy/#axzz3yTvRpY8a>
  - Somatic Experiencing (SE)  
<http://www.traumahealing.org/>

## Supporting Indigenous Health & Well-being

- Require accurate historical portrayal of the relationship between Indigenous & non-Indigenous peoples in Canada
  - Creates an informed perspective
- Self awareness & reflection
  - Insight into personal role (colonized or colonizer)
  - Our perceptions influence our interactions
- Interpersonal communication
  - Practice cultural safety, Rogerian principles (respect, positive regard, non-judgemental)
  - Guiding Principles/Professional Code of Ethics
  - Goal = successful engagement - RELATIONSHIP

# Comments? Thoughts?

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