

Intergenerational Trauma

Trauma

Trauma refers to a person's reaction or response to an injury...painful events in childhood reduce the capacity to respond well to further traumatic events even as adults.ⁱ

Trauma is the lasting emotional response that often results from living through a distressing event. Experiencing a traumatic event can harm a person's sense of safety, sense of self, and ability to regulate emotions and navigate relationships. Long after the traumatic event occurs, people with trauma can often feel shame, helplessness, powerlessness and intense fear.ⁱⁱ

Traumatic events experienced early in life, such as abuse, neglect and disrupted attachment, can often be devastating. Equally challenging can be later life experiences that are out of one's control, such as a serious accident, being the victim of violence, living through a natural disaster or war, or sudden unexpected loss. When thoughts and memories of the traumatic event don't go away or get worse, they may lead to posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) which can seriously disrupt a person's ability to regulate their emotions and maintain healthy relationships.ⁱⁱⁱ

Intergenerational Trauma

Intergenerational trauma refers to trauma that is passed from a trauma survivor to their descendants. It can also be referred to as transgenerational or multigenerational trauma.^{iv}

Intergenerational trauma occurs when the effects of trauma are passed down between generations...this can occur if a parent experienced abuse as a child, the cycle of trauma and abuse impacts their parenting...Intergenerational trauma can also be the result of oppression, including racial trauma or other systemic oppression. The effects of intergenerational trauma in descendants of refugees, residential schools, and Holocaust survivors, demonstrating that this type of trauma continues to impact populations for generations after a collective traumatic event has occurred.^v

Linklater (2014) described the effects of trauma for Indigenous peoples:

Colonization has caused multiple injuries to Indigenous people, therefore many Indigenous people experience trauma in a multi-traumatic context; thus living in and with trauma is a common experience. It is the cumulative emotional and psychological wounding that is transmitted from one generation to the next.^{vi}

The Centre for Suicide Prevention reports:

Colonization led to losses of culture, traditional values, and family stability, as it was made impossible, in many cases, for parents and Elders to pass along vital cultural knowledge and resilience to children who were taken away. In addition, relocation and settlement took many Indigenous people away from their traditional ways of living and thriving (Elias, 2012).^{vii}

Trauma and Beyond (website) shared this information about intergenerational trauma:

Experiencing trauma can lead to maladaptive ways of coping with the unresolved emotions about the event....coping mechanisms such as hypervigilance, hyperarousal or avoidance may appear as anger, panic, isolation, anxiety or depression. This, in turn, will affect relationships. Because the human brain develops in direct response to the environment, the emotional responses of the parent will affect the developing brains of their offspring. Trauma can produce neurochemicals in the brain that will alter brain functioning. These neurochemical changes can also be passed on. Intergenerational trauma such as slavery, genocide, surviving terrorism, and warfare have been widely studied. Individual trauma such as rape, physical abuse, extreme neglect can also have long-lasting effects over generations. People who live through these events often go untreated. Most are unaware that they carry trauma, or that they may pass it on to future generations.^{viii}

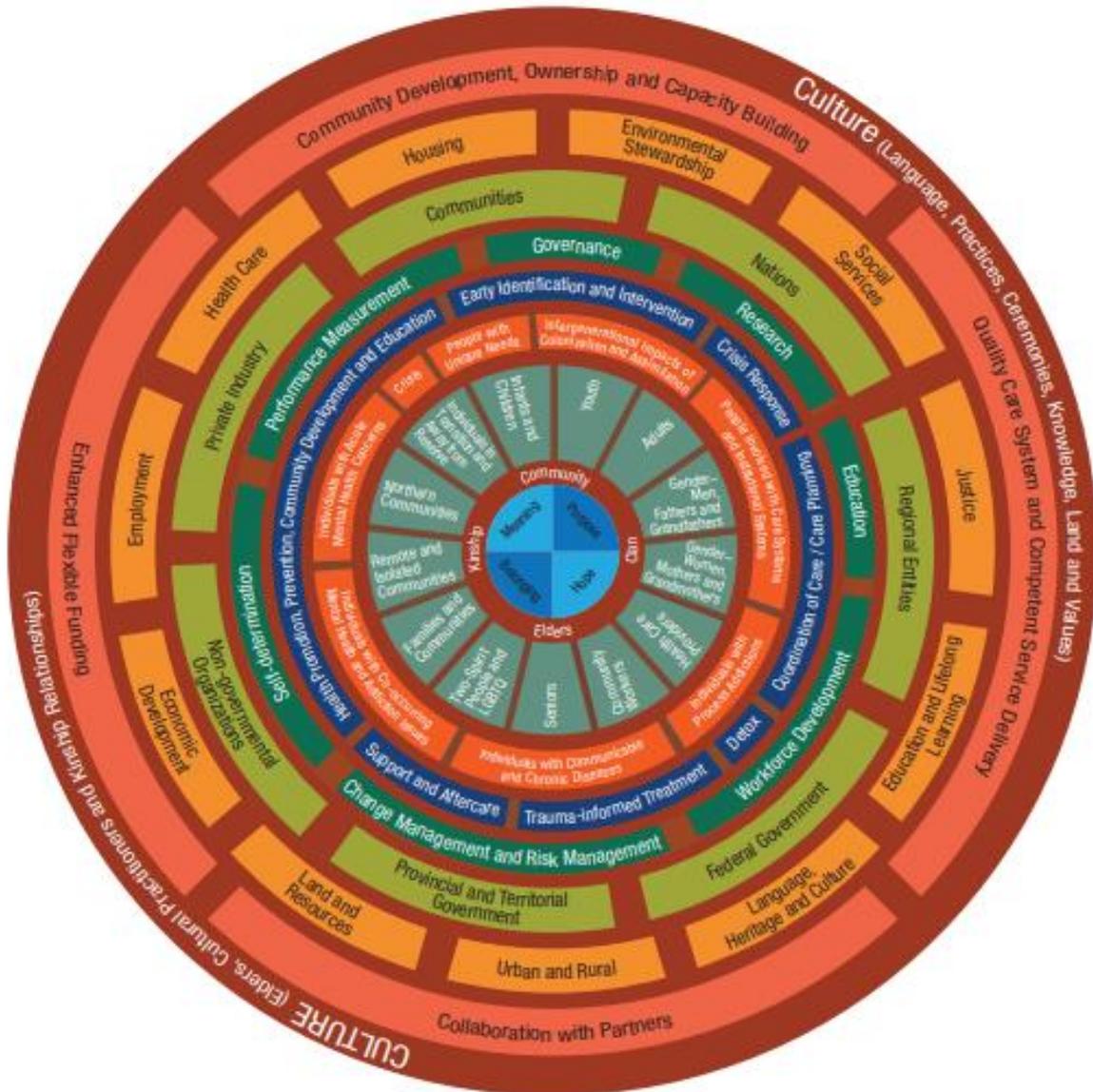
Helping People who have Experienced Trauma

Helping people who have experience trauma needs patience and good listening skills. From an Indigenous lens, the task is always to be kind, to show compassion, to let the person know they are valued and loved and to be a helper.

In 2015, First Nations and Health Canada worked in partnership to create a resource to support First Nations wellness programs. The First Nations Mental Wellness Continuum Framework promotes life through hope, belonging, meaning and purpose - purpose in their daily lives, hope for the future, connectedness and belonging and a sense of meaning and understanding of their place in the world.^{ix} The Framework focuses on the broader concept of mental wellness rather than mental illness. Mental wellness is supported by factors such as culture, language, Elders, families, and creation. It is necessary for healthy individual, family, and community life. First Nations seek to achieve whole health—physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, social, and economic well-being—through a coordinated, comprehensive approach that respects, values, and utilizes First Nations cultural knowledge, approaches, languages, and ways of knowing.^x

The First Nations Mental Wellness Continuum Framework is a resource that must be explored when considering helping persons through trauma. An image of the Framework (below) is provided for quick reference, however please refer to the report for further reading.

First Nations Mental Wellness Continuum Framework:



Other Excellent Resources

The Centre for Suicide Prevention created a tool kit for Trauma and Suicide, Trauma and Suicide in Children, and Trauma and Suicide in Indigenous People. For more information: [Indigenous people, trauma, and suicide prevention - Centre for Suicide Prevention \(suicideinfo.ca\)](http://suicideinfo.ca)

The Center for Disease Control's Office of Public Health Preparedness and Response (OPHPR), in collaboration with the National Center for Trauma-Informed Care (NCTIC),

developed training for OPHPR employees about the role of trauma-informed care during public health emergencies. The training includes:

Guiding Principles of a Trauma Informed Approach

1. Safety
2. Trustworthiness and transparency
3. Peer support
4. Collaboration and mutuality
5. Empowerment voice and choice
6. Cultural, historical and gender issues^{xi}

Always seek guidance and assistance from persons with experience in helping those who have experienced trauma.

ⁱ Linklater, R. Decolonizing Trauma Work, Indigenous Stories and Strategies, 2014, page 22

ⁱⁱ [Trauma | CAMH](#), Retrieved March 22, 2022

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid.

^{iv} [What Is Intergenerational Trauma? \(verywellmind.com\)](#). Retrieved March 22, 2022

^v Ibid.

^{vi} Linklater, R. Decolonizing Trauma Work, Indigenous Stories and Strategies, 2014, pages 22-23

^{vii} [Indigenous people, trauma, and suicide prevention - Centre for Suicide Prevention \(suicideinfo.ca\)](#). Retrieved March 22, 2022

^{viii} [Understanding Intergenerational Trauma | Trauma Treatment Los Angeles \(traumaandbeyondcenter.com\)](#). Retrieved March 23, 2022

^{ix} [Indigenous people, trauma, and suicide prevention - Centre for Suicide Prevention \(suicideinfo.ca\)](#) Retrieved March 22, 2022

^x [24-14-1273-FN-Mental-Wellness-Framework-EN05_low.pdf \(thunderbirdpf.org\)](#). Retrieved March 22, 2022.

^{xi} [TRAINING EMERGENCY RESPONDERS FINAL \(cdc.gov\)](#). Retrieved March 22, 2022.