



Beside you through grief's journey

Culturally Appropriate Support for Families of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls

This resource uses a Two-Eyed Seeing Approach weaving Indigenous knowledge and Western knowledge to trauma informed care and healing. The resources are inspired by the wisdom of Elders in Treaty 4 and Treaty 6 lands in Saskatchewan.

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Caring Hearts acknowledges that we are situated in Treaty 4 territory, the traditional lands of the nêhiyawak (Cree), Anihšīnāpēk (Saulteaux), Dakota, Nakoda, Lakota, and the homeland of the Métis.

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**BE COURAGEOUS
TO OTHERS BY NOT
BEING AFRAID TO
STAND UP OR SPEAK
FOR WHAT IS RIGHT.**

CHAPTER 1

SOHKITEHEWIN (COURAGE): INTRODUCTION

Sohkitechewin (Courage) means to be courageous with yourself by trying or learning something new. Be courageous to others by not being afraid to stand up or speak for what is right.

Thank you for having the courage to hopefully learn something new from this document and the Online Outline. We hope that the information you learn from these resources will give you the courage to continue your learning journey on supporting Indigenous peoples in your agency.

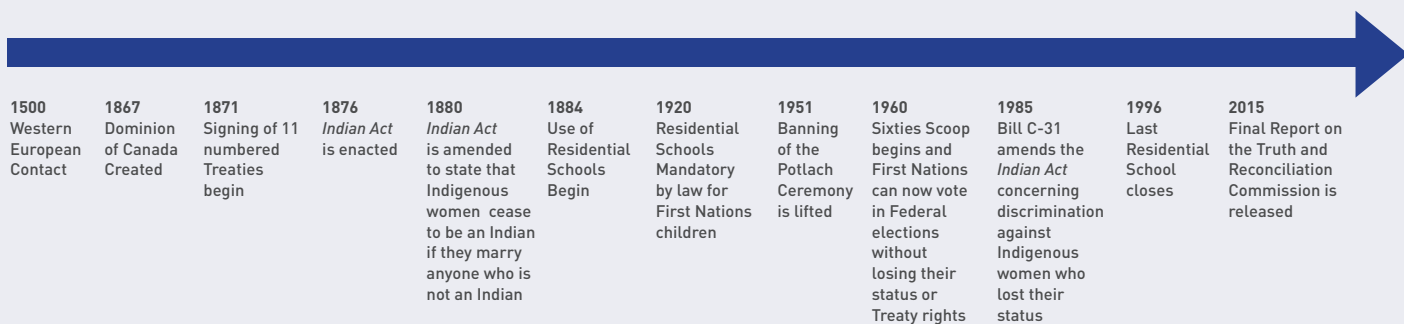
The purpose of this document is to provide background information and context for the video teachings and conversations found in the Online Outline. The Elders that you will see in the videos are from Saskatchewan Treaty 4 and Treaty 6 areas and come from diverse First Nations backgrounds, so you will notice some similarities and differences in their teachings on the various topics. Pay attention to the similarities and differences, as it will give you some insight into the diversity and uniqueness of some of the different First Nations in Saskatchewan.

The goal of combining the video teachings in the Online Outline and the document reading is to be able to learn through a two-eyed seeing approach combining Indigenous traditional knowledge and Western knowledge. Each chapter is based on the Seven Sacred Teachings (also known as the Seven Grandfather Teachings), which are seven teachings originating from

the Ojibwe and Sioux people but are widely taught and used by many Indigenous Nations in Canada. We hope that you learn from these teachings and utilize them in your work when providing support and services to Indigenous individuals and families who reach out to your agency.

Below is a very brief timeline of major events and legislation between Indigenous peoples and the Federal government of Canada, some of which, will be discussed in the document. There are many more important events and legislation missing from this timeline.

Throughout the document or Online Outline, you will read or hear the word 'Indian'. Note that the term Indian in this document will only be used when referring to the Indian Act of 1876 as this is a legal term used in the context of the Act relative to the time it was written. The term 'Aboriginal' is also a legal term stated in section 35 of the *Canadian Constitution*, 1985 which refers to First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples. The term 'Indigenous' is used on an international level that acknowledges Indigenous peoples as autonomous and self-determined groups. This document uses the term 'Indigenous' when referring to First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples, acknowledging the inherent rights to land and self-determination of these peoples in Canada. Note that First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples are distinct and unique peoples and have many different languages, cultures, and communities.



CHAPTER 2

KWAYASK-ITATISOWIN (HONESTY) AND TAPWEWIN (TRUTH): THE CRISIS OF MISSING AND MURDERED INDIGENOUS WOMEN AND GIRLS AND TWO-SPIRIT (MMIWG2S)

Kwayask-itatisowin (Honesty) means to accept yourself and others for who they are and being honest with yourself and others. Tapwewin (Truth) means to be truthful to yourself and others. Be truthful to yourself by knowing your limits. Be truthful in your words by never spreading rumours or lies. Be truthful in what you do by doing your own work.

Honesty and truth tie into colonization and the crisis of MMIWG2S because for many decades Indigenous peoples have and continue to feel the effects of colonization. This is because Western society has not always been honest or truthful with Indigenous peoples throughout history. We cannot have reconciliation if we do not have honesty and truth.

Key Terms:

Systemic racism: A form of racism that is embedded in the structure and functioning of society and its institutions, creating disadvantages for certain social and ethnic groups.

Discrimination: Being prejudiced and unjust towards different groups on the basis of sex, sexual orientation, age, ethnic background, disability, etc.

Eurocentric: The focus on predominantly Western European culture and history that is embedded in the social, political, and economic structures of Canada.
Historical Trauma: A form of trauma that results from historical events that oppressed a specific cultural, racial, or ethnic group

Intergenerational Trauma: Trauma that is passed down both genetically, mentally, and behaviourally throughout generations.

Introduction:

Missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls (MMIWG2S) is a growing crisis in Canada. The percentage of Indigenous female homicide victims increased from 9% in 1980 to 21% in 2014¹. Furthermore, the Native

Women's Association of Canada has gathered data on 582 cases of MMIWG2S where 67% are murdered, 20% are missing, 4% are suspicious death, and 9% are unknown². In addition, Indigenous women are more likely to go missing in urban settings and are three times more likely to be killed by a stranger than non-Indigenous women³. It is important to note, that statistics only tell a small portion of the story and do not give context concerning the personal experiences of MMIWG2S and their families.

This chapter will answer three questions:

- 1) Why is the issue of MMIWG2S happening?
- 2) What is contributing to the crisis of MMIWG2S?
- 3) What can we do about the issue of MMIWG2S?

Why is the issue of MMIWG2S happening?

The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls states that the history of colonization is gendered and is an important consideration in the crisis of MMIWG2S. Therefore, to understand why the issue of MMIWG2S is happening, we must look at colonial history and its lasting effects through systemic racism, historical trauma, race-based trauma, and gender-based violence against Indigenous peoples in Canada.

Colonization has many detrimental effects on Indigenous peoples and their way of life. All aspects of Canadian society such as laws, politics, and the economy were structured through a Eurocentric lens; thus, disadvantaging those who did not possess a Westernized perspective or practices. Some examples of colonialism include:

Indian Act: *The Indian Act* came into effect in 1876 and is still in effect today controlling many aspects of Indigenous peoples' lives through legislation such as who is considered Indian through the enfranchisement section, the allocation of land, the pass and permit system which prevented First Nations people from leaving reserve lands or selling goods without permission

from the Indian Agent, banning of ceremonies and dancing, and the creation of the band government system which took over Indigenous forms of government and Hereditary Chiefs.

Indigenous women are especially impacted by the Indian Act. *The Indian Act* decided who was legally an Indian through Indian status, which included benefits such as rights to land and treaty compensation. The Indian status system discriminated against status women and went against Indigenous communities who structured themselves in a matriarchal and matrilineal way. For example, First Nations women were not allowed to run for Chief in band council elections, vote in these elections, and could not own property. If a status woman married a non-status man, she would lose her Indian status and so would her children in addition to losing her band membership, so she could no longer be connected to her community. However, if a status man married a non-status woman, then the non-status woman would gain status as well as her children. In 1876, the Indian Act defined an Indian person as, "Any male person of Indian Blood"⁴. Therefore, the government was able to get rid of the matriarchal and matrilineal systems that were in place pre-contact and start tracing Indian descent through the men. The Indian Act continued discriminating against Indigenous women's status until Bill C-31 amended the enfranchisement section of the Act in 1985.

Note: The *Indian Act* has gone through many amendments since 1876 targeting discriminatory laws. It continues to be fought against and amended in the courts today.

Indian Residential Schools: Indian Residential Schools operated from the 1880s until 1996. Across Canada, Indigenous children were taken from their families and communities across Canada and placed in residential schools. The goal of Indian Residential Schools was to assimilate Indigenous children into Eurocentric Canadian society by forcefully removing any knowledge and connections Indigenous children had to their culture, language, and community. This was an attempt at a complete cultural genocide against Indigenous peoples. Many Indigenous children in Indian Residential Schools experienced physical, mental, emotional, and sexual abuse against Indigenous children, that left long-lasting intergenerational traumatic impacts on Indigenous families.

The Sixties Scoop: The Sixties Scoop refers to the period starting in 1951 to the 1980s when the *Indian Act* was amended to give provinces power over Indigenous children's welfare. The result of this amendment was Indigenous children being removed from their families and communities, placed in foster care, and adopted by predominantly white families. For instance, the percentage of Indigenous children in foster care jumped from 1% in 1959 to 30-40% in the late 1960s, even though Indigenous children at the time only made up 4% of the national population⁵.

In Saskatchewan, a project from 1967 to 1969 titled *Adopt Indian and Métis* emerged as an attempt to increase the adoption of First Nations and Métis children through greater advertisements of adoptable First Nations and Métis children on television, radio, and newspapers⁶. Essentially, the Sixties Scoop resulted in many Indigenous children becoming wards of the state, contributing to the loss of treaty rights and loss of connection to families, communities, and culture.

You may be wondering why the *Indian Act*, Indian Residential Schools, and the Sixties Scoop affect the crisis of MMIWG2S. This is because colonialism sought to conquer and control Indigenous peoples by undermining the political, social, and economic systems Indigenous peoples had since time immemorial, resulting in a new Eurocentric structure. Colonization oppressed First Nations women by giving them fewer rights than men through the *Indian Act* of 1876, causing First Nations women to have to continue to fight for their rights today. The Sixties Scoop enhanced the stereotype that Indigenous mothers were unfit to raise their children⁷, which has lasting implications for Indigenous mothers. Colonization impacts the increased poverty levels amongst Indigenous peoples because of the reserve, pass, and permit systems operating in the late 1800s to early 1900s which purposefully weakened Indigenous people's chance of economic gain. We also see the effects of colonization when an Indigenous woman goes missing and she does not receive the same attention and respect as other Canadian women because of colonial attitudes, structures, and systems that have regarded Indigenous women as less important. Therefore, The *Indian Act*, Indian Residential Schools, and the Sixties Scoop are all acts of colonization toward Indigenous peoples. We cannot fully understand why the crisis of MMIWG2S is happening without understanding how colonial history has impacted Indigenous peoples.

What is contributing to the problem of MMIWG2S?

Today, issues such as systemic racism, discrimination, and historical and race-based trauma contribute to the problem of MMIWG2S.

Systemic Racism and Discrimination:

Systemic racism and discrimination are key contributors to the crisis of MMIWG2S due to Canadian society being structured around a Eurocentric worldview. Eurocentric perspectives and worldviews are reflected in the major institutions and the agencies that we work in, resulting in conscious and unconscious racism and discrimination towards Indigenous peoples. Racism, discrimination, and oppression can manifest themselves in situations such as Indigenous peoples being disregarded by the healthcare and justice systems when injured or reporting violence, or the challenges Indigenous families face to access support from the justice system, media, and the Canadian public when looking for a missing family member.

For example, there are many cases of Indigenous women going missing on the Yellowhead Highway 16 between Prince Rupert and Prince George, British Columbia. During the 1980s to early 2000s, this highway became known as The Highway of Tears because of the devastating effects of frustration, mourning, and fear on nearby Indigenous communities that grew as more Indigenous women went missing or as their bodies were found⁸. The issue of the Highways of Tears was not broadly reported on until a white woman, Nicole Hoar, went missing in 2002. Before Hoar's disappearance on the Highway of Tears, the Indigenous women that went missing received very little media attention or were stereotyped as sex workers, drug addicts, or living in poverty when portrayed in the news⁹. However, as opposed to the stereotypical and often degrading portrayals of MMIWG2S in the news, NWAC has reported that of the 500 MMIWG2S that they have kept track of, most are not sex trade workers¹⁰. It is Indigenous communities, organizations, volunteers, and community awareness campaigns that work to keep the Highway of Tears and the many women who have been missing and/or murdered retained in the Canadian conscious¹¹. Therefore, we can see how systemic racism and discrimination impact Indigenous women who went missing on the Highways of Tears because if Indigenous women are ignored or belittled by the media, justice systems, and the Canadian public, then that makes them easier targets for violence.

Historical Trauma and Race-Based Trauma:

As stated, prior, colonialism in Canada restructured matriarchal Indigenous societies to mirror patriarchal Western European norms, which impacted Indigenous women's respected roles in their community pre-colonization¹². Indigenous women held a variety of important roles depending on the Nation to which they belonged. Some of these many roles included educators and knowledge keepers, healers, and protectors of their community. They resolved disputes and held an important voice when it came to making decisions¹³. Thus, Indigenous women were highly respected and honoured in their communities signifying many Indigenous nations as matriarchal and matrilineal¹⁴.

Historical trauma is a form of trauma that results from historical events that oppressed a cultural, racial, or ethnic group and can manifest itself in people today in the form of depression, anxiety, substance abuse, violence, domestic violence, suicide, poverty and PTSD, to name just a few.

Intergenerational Trauma is trauma that gets passed down to generations from someone who directly experienced the traumatic event(s). For example, a grandmother who attended a residential school can pass down her many traumatic experiences to her daughter, who then passes it on to her granddaughter, even though her daughter and granddaughter were not in a residential school. Intergenerational trauma is passed down genetically (known as epigenetics due to genetic changes in the DNA from trauma) and psychologically. Indigenous communities have understood and acknowledged intergenerational trauma long before the concept was being discussed in the media and is referred to amongst some Elders and healers as "blood memory".

Race-based trauma is trauma that results from being racially discriminated against, experiencing racism, and/or being the victim of a racially motivated hate crime. Race-based trauma continues to be experienced today amongst Indigenous peoples in Canada and can add to experiences of historical trauma. For example, race-based trauma can occur from being targeted by police/RCMP officers, being followed around a store while shopping, and seeing racist or stereotypical portrayals of Indigenous peoples in movies and television shows.

Gender-based violence is experiences of physical, emotional, and psychological violence due to gender and gender identity. The intersection of being Indigenous and a woman can increase the likelihood of experiencing violence¹⁵.

All these forms of trauma relate to each other, and one person may experience more than one form of trauma. When an Indigenous person is experiencing one or more forms of trauma, then that can increase their likelihood of experiencing violence and/or having that violence be ignored. If an Indigenous person is experiencing gender-based violence she may be less likely to report it because of race-based trauma. Meaning she may fear reporting this violence to police because of the higher likelihood of her case being ignored or not given as much attention. She also may be more reluctant to receive medical attention for fear of being discriminated against or stereotyped because she is an Indigenous person and being treated differently by medical staff. Therefore, systemic racism, discrimination, and historical and race-based trauma intersect and contribute to the crisis of MMIWG2S by increasing the likelihood of experiencing violence and/or deterring Indigenous peoples from seeking support from Westernized agencies due to systemic racism and discrimination.

What can I do about the MMIWG2S issue?

As an agency and individual, there are three steps that you can take to fight against the crisis of MMIWG2S: Educate yourself, listen to Elders and other Indigenous peoples, and support the MMIWG2S cause.

Educate:

When providing support to Indigenous peoples in your agency, the first step is to be mindful and educated on colonial history and the way it has produced intergenerational trauma for Indigenous families. It is easy to educate yourself on colonialism in Canada and the crisis of MMIWG2S, as there are many easily accessible sources on these topics. Remember, learning about these issues is a lifelong process. We recommend taking at least 15 minutes out of your day to read a book or an article, watch a documentary, or listen to a Tedx Talk. Some examples of sources to look into are listed below and some of which are included in and accessible through the Modules:

- National Women's Association of Canada website
- *The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls*
- *Highway of Tears: A True Story of Racism, Indifference, and the Pursuit of Justice for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls* by Jessica McDiarmid
- *Red River Girl: The Life and Death of Tina Fontaine* by Joanna Jolly
- *Violence Against Indigenous Women: Literature, Activism, Resistance* by Allison Hargreaves
- *We are more than murdered and missing Tedx Talks* by Tamara Bernard and *Missing & Murdered Indigenous Women & Girls, a Canadian Responsibility Tedx Talks* by Sophie Kiwala
- Films such as *Finding Dawn*, *This River*, and *Protect Our Future Daughters* available on The National Film Board.

Listen:

Elder Lorna Standingready from Peepeekisis Cree Nation in Treaty 4 answered the question, "What can I do to help?", she says, "You can listen like you're listening now. You're listening and thinking [about MMIWG2S and their families] is strength in itself; your thoughts bring strength...your thoughts are spiritual. Through sitting and listening, we gain strength from each other". Listening coincides with educating yourself. Taking the time to listen to Indigenous peoples through Tedx Talks, watching documentaries made by Indigenous peoples, and reading a book by an Indigenous author is a form of listening to Indigenous voices and stories.

Although listening to stories directly from Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and Indigenous peoples is a fantastic source, you cannot simply ask personal questions concerning MMIWG2S or colonial experiences outright, because not all people will feel comfortable sharing these stories. If an Indigenous person engages in conversation with you concerning these issues, consider it an honour, and take the time to listen to their stories. Simply listening and taking the information in is the best approach.

Support:

The following section explains how you, as an agency that provides support to those going through ambiguous loss (including families of MMIWG2S), can effectively support a person or family during the confusing and distressing times of grief.

Key Term:

Ambiguous loss: A loss that occurs when a person is psychologically present but physically missing (such as a missing person), or psychologically missing but physically present (such as a person with dementia). The impact of ambiguous loss on the left behind family members is intense. The less that is known about the situation, the more the family may experience anxiety, depression, and individual internal conflict.

When providing support to families of a MMIWG2S, a knowledge of ambiguous loss and how it affects a person or family is crucial as it will explain some of the behaviours and emotions that someone may feel during this time of grief. However, just because an Indigenous person is experiencing ambiguous loss does not mean that the effects of intergenerational trauma take a back seat. Remember the effects of colonialism and intergenerational trauma are constantly present in our society. Therefore, the trauma of experiencing an ambiguous loss may heighten prevalent forms of intergenerational trauma that an Indigenous person is experiencing, possibly causing emotions and behaviours to be heightened. In addition, it may be hard for an Indigenous person to reach out for help due to the distrust of colonial/Western institutions and/or fear of being discriminated against when accessing services of support. Keep this in mind when providing support, as you never know how hard it could have been for an Indigenous person to put trust in a non-Indigenous/Westernized institution to provide the care needed at that time.

Note: The following information is taken from the *Caring Hearts Supporting Families of MMIWG and other Missing Persons* written by Duane T. Bowers and provides information about how to support a family during the distressing time of having a loved one go missing.

A loved one gone missing is a loss unlike any other kind of loss. There is no information as to what caused the loved one to be missing, no information as to their status or what is happening to them, and no information as to if or when they will return. This is referred to as Ambiguous Loss.

When a family discovers that a family member or other person has gone missing, it sets into motion a process of physical, emotional and mental activity that is incomparable to any other situation. As time passes and the female or other family member remains missing, the family becomes more and more dependent on the agencies, the systems and the strangers that are trained to respond to the event, but not necessarily to support of the family of the missing female.

When a family discovers that a female or other member has been murdered, grief becomes a process for the individual family members, the immediate family, the extended family, and often the surrounding community. If the family has difficulty in asking for or finding appropriate support, they may become emotionally, mentally, and even spiritually isolated. It becomes the duty of those around this family to provide support despite their ability to ask for help.

In ambiguous loss, it is impossible to define a problem to solve, and it is not possible to experience an appropriate set of feelings or behaviours as one does not fully know what the situation is. There are no rituals or traditions to cope with a missing loved one, and, because others don't know how to respond to the needs of the family, they withdraw out of their own discomfort. Without healthy support, the family often finds itself in a state of emotional exhaustion or numbness due to relentless uncertainty.

Over time, a clear set of side effects begin to surface in the behaviours of the left behind family members. These side effects include an inability to trust, result in a negative perception of law enforcement, the creation of poor communication between family members and a lack of understanding of each other's behaviour. In addition, there are questions as to the power and role of the media, if it is involved. Dysfunctional and often self-destructive coping mechanisms become prevalent and are often passed on to subsequent generations. The constant question as to whether the missing person is alive or dead becomes a point of contention between family members. (It is essential that each member's perception of what happened, and the status of the missing family member be heard.) And, as simple as it sounds, the family may need help determining what they can do about the current situation, and what they cannot.

There are 7 steps/concepts to work on with a family who is experiencing Ambiguous loss:

- Re-establish structure
- Accept the temporary absence
- Filling the roles of the missing person
- Review of personal beliefs about the 'status' of the missing person
- Feel through the pain of the absence, uncertainty/fear, and guilt,
- Accept dual perceptions of life
- Create long-term coping structure that integrates both perceptions

RE-ESTABLISH STRUCTURE

Providing support to the family of a missing family member should not be approached as a long-term encounter. Most often the family members are only open to periodic support for a specific issue, at a specific time, and no more. Support comes by following the family members' lead and focusing on their stated issues.

One of the first frustrations for the family often is the system (law enforcement, protective services, etc) which is expected to be in control of the situation. However, no formal system or agency is capable of providing the immediate type of assistance and support that the family requires. Family members feel isolated, unsupported, vulnerable, angry and impotent in their ability to come to the aid of the missing person. As the minutes and hours pass, the family experiences emotional and perhaps physical shock. They simply don't know what to do. Support comes through assisting the members to establish physical and emotional guidelines for their thoughts, feelings, and behaviour.

Emotional shock by nature provides a numbing effect. However, the effect is not consistent and is characterized by the constant interjection of intense feelings, followed by periods of numbing. This cycle of numbing/feeling/numbing allows the individual to continue to function physically and not be overwhelmed by an onslaught of feelings. The experience of 'missing' is so unique, that family members have no context in which to deal with the feelings that are encountered, and eventually, the family reaches a place where they can temporarily shut down their emotions and deny them. As a result of this emotional upheaval, there is a physical and hormonal reaction which may interfere with the person's ability to concentrate, their short-term memory, and over time, even their ability to fight off viruses and illnesses.

Most helpful in this situation is exposure to someone who has had this experience - another family of a (once) missing person. These folks have personally experienced a loved one gone missing and provide support, in the form of normalizing feelings or the lack of feelings being experienced by the searching family. Knowing that someone else has experienced, felt and reacted as they have greatly alleviates a layer of anxiety for the family members new to the situation.

In lieu of someone with a similar experience, support comes in validating whatever feeling is expressed by the family members; all feelings are valid. Assisting them to compare their current feelings to similar feelings of other difficult situations in their life may also support them by reminding them of coping skills they have used in the past. Reflecting on other crises also assists the family to identify the strengths and weaknesses within the family and its members. In the time immediately following the person going missing, periods of talking about thoughts and feelings will be sporadic and brief in length, following the pattern of numbing/feeling/ numbing. Providing a safe space for the family to discuss these feelings and thoughts, is essential support.

Physical shock may also be experienced by members of the family, in addition to emotional shock. As the hours may turn into days family members may forget or are not motivated to provide for their own basic needs. A daily routine may now be abandoned, as it is too painful and difficult to maintain a routine when one member is missing. However, these routines were created to assist in the provision of basic needs such as food, clothing, shelter, and safety. When the daily routines are abandoned, basic needs may go unmet.

Family members cannot focus for extended lengths of time - their ability to concentrate comes and goes. Support is provided by assisting them to identify the things that must be accomplished each day: meals, personal hygiene, medication, etc. Then, add to the list the activities the family feels are necessary to do to find their missing loved one: call the police for updates, check in with other family members, walk the neighbourhood looking for the missing person, check the phone to see if it works, etc. Assist the family to create a timeline or schedule to include all these identified activities. Help them to document the schedule in a way that is easy to post and follow.

The purpose of this schedule is to provide a structure; it provides a guideline to which the family can compare their behaviour. It is important to emphasize this is a guideline, not an expectation. There is no judgment of good/ bad or sanction/ reward for compliance or non-compliance. There will be days when the family will follow the schedule closely and days when they cannot. The schedule assists them with short-term memory loss and provides a sense of control over life. As time passes, the family will be able to see improvement in their ability to comply with the schedule. The activities on the schedule may be edited, changed, and adjusted as necessary. Eventually, it will lose its usefulness as the family takes more and more control and responsibility for their behaviour and functioning.

If the missing is a child, it is essential to include in the scheduled time for the parents to spend time together, preferably alone. Couples time should be utilized to verbalize feelings, concerns, and fears not just about the missing child, but for the family and each other as well. Honesty is paramount in this time together.

The schedule needs to also include family time. If possible, this time is separate from meals or other usual daily activities. Family meeting time is a time in which the family should feel free to discuss what they believe about the missing person and the situation. Family members should not feel limited in what they say because of the emotional reactions of other family members. After the family has discussed their feelings about the missing person, time should be spent allowing each family member to discuss what else is going on in their life, not associated with the missing loved one.

The schedule must also include the activities of all who are living within the household. Finally, reassigning the chores of the missing person and those of the family members who are now focused on the missing's recovery will allow the household to function more smoothly, and provide a structure of behaviour for the family as a whole.

Support for physical shock is like support used for stress with a focus on eating, rest, exercise, personal hygiene, and medication. The monitoring and administration of these activities may be assigned to extended family members, friends, and neighbours. These people wish/ need to be involved and to feel they are contributing something while the family member is missing. Using them for support provides for family needs as well as their own.

- **Eating:** It is important to schedule regular meals. During periods of high-stress people tend to crave snacks or comfort foods. Fruit, juice, protein bars and protein drinks and shakes, etc. should be made available for these cravings. Decaffeinated teas, coffees and sodas should also be available. Well-balanced, pre-prepared meals ready for the microwave oven are very helpful at this time. Provision of these foods may also be the responsibility of extended family, friends, and the community.
- **Rest and Sleep:** This can be impossible for the family at this time. Many families state that nighttime is the worst part of the day. They find that while lying in bed, mental activity takes over due to the lack of physical diversion, and their mind is spinning. Adults are very hesitant to use any kind of chemical sleeping aid for fear they may need to respond suddenly to a call or a knock on the door in the middle of the night. Often, they find themselves getting out of bed and engaging in some physical activity to quiet their mind. Children may experience dreams or nightmares which perpetuate their fear that whatever happened to the missing person may happen to them. Time spent reassuring the left-behind child of their safety, involving them in making the house secure, and possible changes to their sleeping arrangement will help to provide them with a sense of security.

It is essential to enlist the support of a medical doctor or community healer for the family. If possible, the doctor/ healer should make at least one home visit early on in the missing period to evaluate the physical needs of the entire family. If this is not possible, a consultation with the doctor should be arranged, which will allow for the family to discuss the variety of sleep aids available and the possible physical consequence of a prolonged period of sleeplessness. An alternative to taking sleep aids is teaching the family to rest instead of sleep. Counting while breathing or focusing the mind on relaxing the body, area by area, are healthy alternatives to letting the mind wander and worry throughout the night. With practice, family members will learn to rest the body and mind for increasing lengths of time. When family members do not get adequate sleep, their bodies will become vulnerable to stress and illness. Due to the lack of sleep, the entire family may find itself suffering from illness in addition to the situation of the missing loved one.

- **Exercise:** This is important not only as a physical necessity but as a mental one as well. While exercising we are forced to concentrate on our physical activity. A simple activity such as extra trips to the mailbox, extra trips up and down the steps, and walking an extra block with the dog not only changes behavioural patterns but thinking patterns as well. These activities provide breaks from the intensity of the situation. It is advised that the exercise occur out of doors, or away from the usual environment, to provide fresh sensory stimulation for the individual. Exercise may also be incorporated as part of the search: walking to distribute flyers about the missing person, taking the stairs rather than the elevator at offices and agencies, and doing simple stretches when on hold on the phone are a few examples. Children attending school are provided with structure, and opportunities for exercise which gives them breaks from the intensity of the family.
- **Personal hygiene and medical needs:** These are often difficult for people to address with the families of missing persons. Making the point that someone needs a shower, to change their clothes, or to shave may seem like an invasion of privacy. However, these activities are part of a daily structure of behaviour and may need to be included in the written schedule. In situations of stress, it is easy to forget to take medication or to have it refilled. Scheduling and monitoring medication is an important support that may be best assigned to an extended family member, friend, or community healer.

ACCEPT THE TEMPORARY ABSENCE

As time passes and the person remains missing, the family begins to cope by accepting the temporary absence. This acceptance begins in short, barely noticeable durations of time. Family members will begin to speak of the short-term future without including the missing person. This future may be minutes or hours into the future, but there is an indication of short-term acceptance that the missing person is not present.

Another indication of the acceptance of temporary absence is a discussion about 'when' the missing person returns. The family is shifting from the hope of an immediate return to the hope of a future return in the short-term future. This is a significant shift in their perspective and must be honoured. Those providing support should make a similar shift in their reference to the situation.

One difficulty in accepting the temporary absence of the loved one is all the reminders that he/she is missing. These cues come from tangible items (ex. a sweater belonging to the missing person), behaviour patterns (ex. setting the table and including the missing person's previously occupied seat), and speech patterns (ex. calling out the missing person's name out of instinct). Each of the cues or triggers is a painful reminder that the family member is not currently present, and each trigger must be felt. One way of describing this is as a time of 'firsts'; everyday activities that are done for the first time since the loved one has gone missing. Each first snaps the family's awareness back to the reality of the situation and raises feelings which cannot, for the moment, be ignored. Accepting the absence as temporary is one way the family can cope with these cues and their resulting feelings.

As the family accepts the temporary absence of their loved one, the emotional shock and numbing/feeling cycle begin to diminish. The family is now more capable of handling or coping with the details of the situation and does not need to shut down as often emotionally. The numbing-feeling cycle tends to be less extreme, moving to a more constant but less volatile emotional pattern. This is a new emotional pattern for the family members. They are moving from the response of the emotional shock to emotional stress. This condition may be characterized by occasional emotional outbursts, lack of patience, bouts of panic (sometimes resulting in difficulty breathing), and quickness to anger.

This new emotional structure in which the family functions should be made more stable. Though these responses are temporary with the situation, they indeed may become the new 'normal' responses of the future. It is important to assist the family to stabilize. This is an appropriate time to encourage counselling, time with Elders or other structured emotional support. This support can be found through a therapist, members of one's faith community, a variety of peer support mechanisms and peer support groups, buddy programs, and traditional structures and coping strategies within the community.

If structured support is not available, or is refused, assisting the family members to review how well they are now coping, and how their coping could be improved may be helpful. Asking the family to compare themselves today to perhaps last week helps them to recognize

change and improvement in their ability to cope with the situation. On a scale of 1 – 10 where were they then, and where are they now emotionally? What has helped them to get this far? Is it still working? What might work better? What is the strongest or longest-lasting feeling they are having today? How are they dealing with it?

The schedule at this point should include more household tasks, errands, and chores. However, it still must reflect the behaviour associated with locating the missing family member. The more repetitive behaviours diminish as the family's knowledge of and exposure to the systems involved with locating a missing person expands. The schedule should now include activities to help alleviate the family's stress. Special events promoting exercise, rest and relaxation for the entire family should be added to the schedule. Self-care activities should also be included such as massage, sweats, recreation, traditional prayer, and meditation. The schedule takes on a more functional role. The entire family is now aware of the structure and should begin to accept the responsibility for assisting each other in compliance with the schedule. These structures should remain intact, regardless of the length of time the loved one is missing. If days change to weeks or months, there should be little need to revise this new structure. The longer the behavioural and emotional structures are in place, the more they become integrated as normal. Therefore, these structures must be as healthy as possible.

Friends and extended family and community members may find that their involvement is less and less necessary as the family regains its ability to care for itself. However, extended family and friends should still be reflected in the schedule, cooking an occasional meal, taking the children to appointments or an occasional movie, coordinating yard work or car care, etc. Assisting with pet health, grooming and long-term maintenance can be extremely supportive. (This does not include day-to-day pet care which is part of the family's behaviour structure.) Extended family and friends may also be included in the continued process of searching for the missing person and dissemination of fliers. This provides diversity for the family, as well as a continuation of accepting help from others, and provides the opportunity for participation by those closest to the family.

FILLING THE ROLES OF THE MISSING PERSON

Another indicator that the family has accepted the temporary absence of the missing person is their participation in the process of filling the roles and expectations of that person. This begins out of the necessity to reassign basic chores and roles around the house to other family members. As time passes, the re-assignment of physical roles may expand. Once these roles are re-assigned, they become the norm over time and serve as one the agents of change to help the family as a whole, to adjust to the continuing absence. This can be done in a healthy way, which does not endanger the identity of other family members.

More difficult for the family members is the filling of the non-physical roles of the missing loved one. The missing person's personality is unique and distinct and fits into an intricate pattern with the other personalities in the family. The removal of that personality leaves a void in the inter-relationships of the other personalities. As a metaphor, picture the family as a hanging mobile, where each personality within the family balances the others. Cut the string of one of the pieces of the mobile, and the mobile spins out of balance. The family relationship pattern will need to achieve a new balance to compensate for the missing person. When a family member attempts consciously or unconsciously to become the missing person, intervention is necessary. Appropriate support would be to help the family member to define their own identity, the value of that identity, and establish some sense of future for that identity separate from that of the missing loved one.

REVIEW OF PERSONAL BELIEFS ABOUT THE 'STATUS' OF THE MISSING PERSON

Individuals in a family may have different ideas or concerns about what has happened to the missing loved one and it is important for each individual's idea or concern to be heard. This must be possible without concern for the impact of their belief on other family members. It is very difficult for a family member to say they believe the missing family member is dead, when another family member reacts very negatively to that belief, shaming that family member for giving up hope. Family members do not have to accept each other's beliefs but need to hear them without comment.

It is extremely important that the family can be honest about their beliefs as to the status of the missing family member. Each person's belief about the situation comes

out in their behaviour and in the way they interact with other family members. If they cannot be honest about their beliefs as to the status of the missing person, they may control their behaviour within the view of the family and overreact outside of their presence. The overreaction may even become self-destructive (i.e., the use of drugs and/or alcohol or participation in high-risk behaviours, etc.).

Certainly, having to hide one's beliefs and feelings, and pretending to acquiesce to those of others will eventually result in resentment. If this resentment is not apparent and continues to be fueled for some time, relationships within the family are eventually destroyed. Family members will seek to replace these relationships with others outside of the family. Regardless of how painful honesty may be, the consequence of not encouraging honesty may be far more painful. Discussing individual beliefs must be continuous. Beliefs change over time, because of physical, emotional, and even spiritual experiences of family members.

FEEL THROUGH THE ABSENCE, UNCERTAINTY /FEAR, AND GUILT

This section of the document refers to the emotional aspects of dealing with the pain of the absence of the family member, the uncertainty and fear about their fate, and the guilt of not protecting the missing person from that fate. Because these issues are so intense and emotionally powerful, it is very difficult for anyone in or around the family to discuss them. While it is helpful to discuss these types of issues, it should only be attempted when the family members are ready. Forcing a premature discussion of any of these topics will do more harm than good.

We should also realize that these discussions are done in small pieces, over a period. No family member is capable of fully disclosing all the emotions involved at one time; normal coping skills cannot accommodate the intensity. Confronting the family members with probing questions is inappropriate. The best support for these feelings is to be available to family members when they need the support, for as long as they are willing to be vulnerable with these feelings. Silence may be the most effective support tool, as it holds no expectation, conveys no judgment, and offers only your presence.

- **The pain of absence:** No matter how many years pass, family members will nearly always have a 'back door' for the possibility that the missing loved one will be found or will return. Therefore, those who provide support need to avoid any reference to loss/ grief and must be very aware of their vocabulary. Any use of words related to death (i.e., 'grief', 'loss'), will definitely block attempts to provide support. Only terms such as 'missing' and 'absence' are appropriate. In addition, it is essential that the present tense be used when referring to the missing person, even if the family member uses a past-tense reference. This does not give you, the person providing support, permission to do the same. It is almost never appropriate for the supporter to use past tense references for at least the first two years of the missing period.

There are many triggers for a family member's emotional response to the absence of the loved one. We have discussed some of the above. They may be physical or non-physical. One of the best supports you may provide to the family is to help them identify the three most frequent emotional triggers. This may be the empty place at the dinner table, the full trash can that is the missing person's chore to empty, or the missing goodnight kiss. If family members can identify the three triggers which occur most frequently for them, and provide the most emotional pain, the person providing support may be able to help them find better ways to cope with those triggers. An example might be the empty seat at the table. The family may rearrange everyone's place at the table. While there will still be an empty place, it will be in another location, which perhaps won't have the same emotional impact on the family members. Another possibility would be to move the table against a wall so that the empty space is no longer so obvious. The important thing is that the place for the missing person is still maintained, but the emotional intensity of it being empty is lessened by the new positioning.

One of the best ways to assist the family to cope in a better way is by asking them "what would make the empty place at the table easier to tolerate?" The entire family must actively be part of the process for it to have value for them. Asking them to suggest possible solutions, choose one, and create a plan to implement the solution is very

helpful. However, the family must make the decisions, not simply go along with what the supporter suggests. As family members improve their ability to cope, they become emotionally stronger, and a sense of control emerges. The family begins to understand that they can control their feelings and not be controlled by them. They can then apply the process to other triggers and assist each other in dealing with individual emotional triggers.

One caution for the supporter in this process is to be sure the family members want to cope differently. Even verbal agreement does not ensure that the family is emotionally committed to change. Further, the family members may consciously believe they want to cope in a different way emotionally but resist all efforts to establish new coping patterns. In this situation, they need to explore the question “what are you afraid will happen if you no longer feel pain?” Another approach might be “what do you lose if you learn to handle the pain?” What may surface is the belief, on the part of the family, that pain is a necessary part of this experience, and the reduction of that pain would indicate a lack of caring or continued concern for their missing loved one. Another belief may be that the family feels they must suffer if the missing person might be suffering. If these beliefs are held by the family, they are not going to be motivated to cope in a better way. This, of course, is their choice. While the choice is not a healthy one, helping the family to verbalize these beliefs can be supportive.

- **Uncertainty/fear:** Uncertainty as to the fate of the missing person is, without a doubt, a primary emotional issue of the family. Throughout the missing period, the family will create a variety of scenarios as to where the missing loved one is, and what is happening to him/her. All their scenarios are within the realm of possibility, and all should be discussed seriously with the family member when presented. One of the reasons for mentally changing the scenario of the missing person’s fate is that the family is preparing for or rehearsing each possibility. The family is ‘trying on’ each scenario to see how they react to it physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Family members need to discuss and process each scenario they create without fear of judgment, ridicule, or dismissal due to the discomfort of the listener. They also need the opportunity to express the emotions that accompany each scenario, even though it is only a possibility. This work is best supported by a mental health professional.

Uncertainty by nature brings with it a sense of fear of the unknown and fear of the negative possibilities. People become afraid of a situation because they cannot find acceptable alternatives to the apparent outcome. In short, they fear situations in which they can find no hope. However, hope can be utilized as an antidote for fear. Assisting the family in finding some point of hope helps to reduce the element of fear. Believing that the missing person is unharmed or believing that he/she will return are common expressions of hope. Believing that they are remembered by family and friends is another. The hope may also be for the family, i.e., believing that the family will get through this situation or that the family is strong enough to survive this situation. Balancing the fear for the missing person, with hope for someone or something else may well be the only way in which this family can achieve some sort of hope/fear balance. Further, with no time restrictions as to when this situation might end, hope in an event or expectation of the future, whether it is associated with the missing loved one, may also serve to balance feelings of fear. Unfortunately, hope may not always be possible for some family members in this situation. When an effort to find a point of hope fails, providing a safe space for the family to discuss and reduce the intensity of the fear is the alternative support.

- **Guilt:** The family members of a missing person will often spend time talking about what they should have done differently to avoid this situation. Some of the time, the examples they offer are valid and very well may have changed the outcome of the situation. However, these examples do not dictate that what the family members did was ‘wrong’. It is important to discover what purpose this exploration serves for the person.

First, guilt is an emotion with which we are all familiar. Guilt is often used as a tool for behaviour modification in parenting, religion, and society in general. We have experience in dealing with and coping with guilt. While it is uncomfortable, it is familiar. Guilt, for the family, might be a safe emotion in which to dwell to avoid the onslaught of intense emotions which accompany this situation. Guilt may well serve as a defense mechanism against those emotions and feelings. This is not unhealthy. It may be what is necessary for the family to function. Over time the family should face and discuss more of the other feelings and move away from the talk of guilt.

Second, guilt may serve as a filter in the process of creating possible scenarios of the fate of the missing loved one, discussed above. By exploring a variety of situations that may have avoided the absence, the family is setting the mental stage for beginning to consider the possible fates of their loved one. Again, this is not unhealthy. These discussions should slowly move from what could have been done differently to what may have happened after.

The 'if only's' presented by the family may be valid, and very possibly would have changed the outcome of the situation. To disregard these statements with platitudes of 'you can't blame yourself or 'you couldn't have known' is not only inappropriate but disrespectful of what the family member is experiencing. The best response to the 'if only's' is 'perhaps you're right. Perhaps it could have been different. Do you want to talk this through?' It is essential for the family member, at some point in this experience, to resolve this guilt. However, early in the period that the loved one is missing will probably not be the time. The timing of this discussion is up to the individual, and may not be considered until after the 'resolution' of the situation. Your offer asking if they would like to talk it through allows them to know that you are available when they are ready.

When the family is ready to work through the guilt of not protecting their loved one from this situation, several supports may be helpful. The most important concepts to be explored with the family are a) what does this event say about them, b) what is their level of responsibility for the situation, and c) are they capable of forgiving themselves?

ACCEPTING DUAL PERCEPTIONS OF LIFE

As time passes and the fate of the missing loved one remains unknown, the family begins to separate or compartmentalize their beliefs about life. The family members create for themselves a dual system of values through which to perceive life: one contains the values and beliefs about the world that were held prior to their loved one going missing, the other the beliefs about the world which have been accepted because of the loved one gone missing. The ultimate example would be 'my loved one will return, and everything will be all right' vs 'my loved one will never return, and life will forever be unbearable'. The family members find him/herself 'vibrating' between these two beliefs, which creates a situation of unresolved internal conflict. Unresolved conflict is one definition of the word 'stress'.

The family is usually able to deal with the present moment with no conflict; the family member is temporarily missing. The conflict occurs in the realm of the future. Beliefs are necessary for the part to provide us with a context in which to make decisions about the future. However, when beliefs about the future are in conflict, it becomes difficult to make decisions. As these conflicts cannot be resolved until there is a resolution of the situation, it is necessary for the family to accept two perceptions of the future with separate sets of decisions and expectations. Family members will view a future that includes the missing loved one, and a future that does not. This may be considered unhealthy from the viewpoint of many mental health models. It is, however, the coping mechanism necessary for the family to continue to function within the current situation and maintain a sense of the future.

- **Acknowledging the loved one that was/releasing the loved one that is:** The view of the future that includes the missing person is based largely on the expectations about them. These expectations are usually rooted in the developmental stages of the missing as they grow or age. As individuals grow within the family structure, the family itself grows to accommodate the member's development and anticipates that growth. Certain events mark these developmental stages; playing on a sports team, committing to a spiritual path, coming of age events, learning to drive, dating, and high school graduation, getting a job, getting married, having children, and raising children are examples. The family expects these events to occur as the missing person develops. The family must adjust to these events not happening if the loved one is missing.

These expectations should be acknowledged and verbalized, particularly when it becomes apparent that the expected event will not occur in the home. Visualizing the event as it could/would have been, and verbally discussing that vision is very supportive. Just as the family may review memories of activities of the missing loved one, they must also review the memories of their expectations for the missing.

As time passes, and the appropriate time for a particular expectation has passed, it is important that the family accept that development has occurred. As long as the family expects the loved ones' return, they must keep up with the growth and development of the missing person. Therefore, not only is visualizing the

events supportive, but visualizing the family member as he/she has developed is necessary as well. The family must remember that the missing person continues to grow, age and change. Education about life development may help to strengthen this process.

- **Acknowledging a future without the missing person:**

The newer set of beliefs are those that accept that the missing loved one will not be present for some period of time. This is NOT an acceptance of the belief that they will not return, but an acceptance that their return will not be in the short-ranged future. This set of beliefs, then, allows the family to make plans without the presence of or the return of the missing person. What makes this tolerable is that the family has adopted an acceptance of delayed gratification; the loved one's return will be delayed.

As before, when the appropriate time for events or developmental expectations has passed, the family will benefit from visualization and discussion: visualizing how the event could/would have happened and visualizing how the missing person has developed. In both constructs, it is important that the family keep the relationship current, and not hold onto the image of the missing as they were when they went missing.

As time passes, the memento may become an item or activity donated, in the loved one's honour, to a family or child in need. Photos of the item or event are often kept as the archive to show the missing loved one on their return. In addition, during the holiday period, the adult and the person providing support must agree to monitor the amount of time which focuses on the missing person and balance it with time spent on the family members who are present. The parent will need this support as they may not be able to change the focus of their attention on their own.

The anniversary date of when the loved one went missing is often viewed by the family as a reminder of their failure to protect him/her or to find them. The emotions of the adults are very volatile at this time. Support comes in helping to prepare the parent in advance for this day. Suggesting an event or activity which honours the missing loved one can serve as a way in which the family can effectively focus and stabilize their emotions. This activity also provides a platform from which hope for the future can be verbalized. Again, the adult and the person providing

support must ensure a balance in the amount of time focused on the missing loved one and the time focused on other

family members when hope for the future is being discussed. Over time, the anniversary of the missing date becomes the vehicle by which the family re-news their quest to find the missing person and to be sure that they have not been forgotten by family, friends, the community, and law enforcement officials. The one way that the family can be sure that their loved one lives on is by assuring that his or her memory is not forgotten.

CREATE A LONG-TERM COPING STRUCTURE THAT INTEGRATES BOTH PERCEPTIONS

If individuals believe that the missing will return, they will utilize this dual belief system. As time passes, it will become the norm for the family to picture two possible futures and discuss the loved one alternating between the two perspectives of the future as 'still missing' or 'when he/she has returned'. While this allows the family to function, make decisions about the future, and perhaps even move ahead with the life of the family, the more comfortable the family is with a coping pattern utilizing a dual belief system, the more difficult it will be for that family to accept the possibility that the loved one will not return, even in the face of evidence.

CHAPTER 3

SAKIHUYOWIN (LOVE): HOW TO APPROACH AND INCLUDE INDIGENOUS PEOPLES AND CULTURES IN YOUR AGENCY

Sakihuyowin (Love) means loving and caring for yourself and others. Take care of your physical, mental, and spiritual well-being. Show kindness to others to receive kindness.

The Sacred Teaching of Love teaches us to show kindness and respect to all people who enter our agencies' doors. Include love and kindness in your work through an open mind and heart and providing culturally competent support.

How to apply two-eyed seeing to provide support and how to make your agency more inviting to Indigenous peoples:

The concept and terminology of two-eyed seeing were developed by Mi'kmaw Elder Albert Marshall from the Moose Clan . Two-eyed seeing refers to learning and seeing out of two different eyes: one eye being traditional Indigenous knowledge and the other eye being Western forms of knowledge. The goal of two-eyed seeing is to use both eyes together to benefit and support collaboration between the two perspectives . Our institutions and workplaces are often structured and run through a Westernized perspective; however, when it comes to providing support to Indigenous peoples, it is important to incorporate a two-eyed seeing perspective. This can be done by incorporating Indigenous ways of knowing and healing in our workspaces to better support Indigenous peoples in our communities.

Health Canada published a Summary Report titled The First Nations Mental Wellness Continuum Framework which was developed through collaboration between First Nations partners and Health Canada's First Nations and Inuit Health Branch . This Framework identified five common themes through conversations and research with various partners involved:

1. **Culture as Foundation:** Culture is vital for Indigenous peoples and must be considered and acknowledged when providing support to Indigenous peoples. Therefore, agencies must be culturally competent in the work they do and ensure that cultural programs and supports are in place for Indigenous clients.
2. **Community Development, Ownership, and Capacity Building:** This refers to the importance of Indigenous controlled services and programs. Furthermore, understanding the needs of the community your agency is located in through research and partnership with Indigenous controlled services and programs.
3. **Quality Care System and Competent Service Delivery:** This refers to creating a care system that includes cultural support and understanding that is accessible, reliable, and flexible. Moreover, ensure that staff are adequately trained and educated in cultural competency and trauma-informed care.
4. **Collaboration with Partners:** This refers to the need for collaboration and partnerships between agencies on a legal, political, social, and health level.
5. **Enhanced Flexible Funding:** This can be achieved through greater flexibility of funding and deviating from the constraints of time-limited funding.

The following topics on Elders, smudging, and the medicine wheel will provide some ways for incorporating Indigenous knowledge into your workspace.

Note: Some of the information on Elders, smudging, and the medicine wheel derive from *A Guide to Traditional Healing* document written in partnership with Elder Harry Francis.

Elders

Elders are very important to Indigenous communities and provide a high degree of knowledge regarding traditional teachings, ceremonies, languages, and healing practices. An Elder is recognized for their honour, self-respect, and integrity in the community(s) that they work in. Include “Elder” before an Elders name when acknowledging and referring to an Elder, but it is also good to ask how they wish to be referred to if you are unsure if someone is recognized as an Elder or not.

Involving Elders within your workspace to better support Indigenous peoples can go a long way as an Indigenous person may feel comfortable and safe in your agency. Having an Elder sit in on a meeting and provide advice on different topics or situations is important to creating culturally sensitive supports and services in your agency. Furthermore, having an Elder present can build a sense of trust between an Indigenous person and your agency. It is important to ask if an Indigenous person would prefer to speak with an Elder or want to have an Elder sit in on a meeting. It is also okay and often welcomed for you to seek advice from an Elder on how best to support Indigenous peoples.

If you are considering visiting an Indigenous community or organizing an event with an Indigenous focus, you should consult an Elder for her or his perspective. It is important to note that Elders are busy people and can be booked up with various events up to 6 months in advance. If you or your organization is wanting to reach out for an Elders help, consider asking as soon as possible and not at the last minute. Furthermore, building relationships is essential. If you do not have a relationship with an Elder prior to asking them for advice or to say a blessing/prayer, then take the time to go to them and ask them in person first. You can do this by inviting them to go for coffee or a walk, or asking them where it is convenient for them to meet you.

A certain protocol should be followed when requesting an Elders assistance and can vary from nation to nation and community to community. Most importantly, tobaccos should be presented to an Elder when asking for any help; this could include asking for prayers, ceremonial help, advice, or any sort of questions you may have. Most times, simply purchasing cigarettes to offer an Elder will suffice, but doing your own research on the community/Nation that an Elder comes from and their protocol for offering tobacco is always a good start. Furthermore,

an Elders time should be recognized and properly compensated as a sign of respect and appreciation. This gift may include an honorarium, cloth, blanket, or clothing (like mitts, toque, socks, slippers, etc.).

Smudging

Two-eyed seeing in your work or workplace could also mean providing a safe space for Indigenous peoples to smudge and connect with each other and the people whom they are getting support from. Smudging is important to Indigenous culture as it carries prayers through the rising smoke to the Creator, grandmother, grandfathers, and spirit helpers. People may choose to smudge themselves, objects, or homes to clear negative energy. Smudging can be used to:

- Clear the air around us
- Clean our minds to have good thoughts
- Smudge our eyes to only see good things
- Smudge our ears so that we will only hear good things
- Smudge our mouths so that we only speak good things
- Smudge our whole being so that we only feel good things

Depending on the person who is smudging, the process may require sweetgrass, sage, tobacco, and/or other plants/medicines, hot coals or matches, and a heat-resistant bowl. When smudging with an Indigenous person/Elder, take the time to learn and observe the different approaches an Elder may take when setting up their smudge. To smudge, start by lighting the dried plants/medicines and generate smoke (a feather can be used to keep the smoke flowing), and use your hands and/or feather to gather the smoke and spread it over oneself.

There are multiple ways to incorporate smudging in your workspace. One way could be to dedicate a small room or corner to smudging. This allows employees and clients a safe space to smudge on their own or with an Elder. Another way is to start meetings or check-ins with an Indigenous client by smudging with an Elder. Including smudging and a blessing/prayer before a meeting will assist the meeting in proceeding in a good and positive way.

Medicine Wheel

Incorporating the medicine wheel as a guide for healing and support can be utilized as a method of two-eyed seeing in your work/workplace.

The medicine wheel is an important part of the healing practice. The circle of the medicine wheel symbolizes a healing circle. Each of the four sections of the wheel represents important elements needed to achieve balance and wholeness within oneself. The number four is significant to the medicine wheel in multiple ways:

- Sacred colours: yellow, red, black, blue, and white
- Wellness of an individual: physical, spiritual, emotional, mental
- Wellness for family/community: social, spiritual, emotional, mental
- The four directions: North, East, South, West
- The four seasons: Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter
- The four elements: fire, earth, wind, water
- The four stages of life: childhood, youth, adulthood, and elder

The medicine wheel can be incorporated as visuals in a physical space to aid as a reminder of balance and wholeness when providing support and care. The medicine wheel can also aid as a reminder to be in touch with one's physical, spiritual, emotional, and mental wellbeing. Before starting work in the morning check in with yourself: how am I doing physically, spiritually, mentally, and emotionally and what can I do today to aid my physical, spiritual, mental, and emotional wellbeing? It is just as important to check in with yourself as it is to check in with others because you cannot provide effective care for others if you are not providing effective care for yourself. Furthermore, look to the medicine wheel when providing care and support to others.

Signage and Art

When talking to the Elders in Treaty 6 on how to make a Westernized space more inviting to Indigenous peoples, many stated physical things like Indigenous art on the wall and signage in Indigenous languages. There are plenty of Indigenous artists in Saskatchewan whose art is available for purchase online. Painting, photographs, and sculptures in an office space can make a Westernized space seem less intimidating by including Indigenous voices through art. Many Elders agreed that if your agency plays the radio/music in the office, also think about including music written by Indigenous artists or

drum groups. In Canada, most of the time, our signage includes words in English and French. Language is extremely important to keeping culture alive; therefore, if you have welcome signs in your agency, also include translations in the Indigenous languages of the land your agency is located on. Some examples of how to say 'hello' in the Indigenous languages in Treaty 4 are¹⁹:

- Nêhiyawak (Cree): Tānisi, Tansi
- Michif: Taanishi, Tanshi
- Anihšīnāpēk(Saulteaux): Ānīn
- Nakoda: Háu
- Lakota: Hau
- Dakota: Hau, Ho

Remember that because of systemic racism and discrimination, it can be hard and stressful for an Indigenous person to reach out for support from a Westernized agency. Therefore, make sure that you are greeting everybody who walks through your agency's doors with kindness and respect. Body language is important; greet everyone with the same smile and welcoming attitude. Nobody should leave an agency feeling as though they have been looked down upon or stereotyped based on the way they look. Confront the colonial idea of hierarchy and remove power over relationships.

How to approach Indigenous communities

Reaching out to Friendship Centers can be a good start when trying to approach Indigenous peoples or communities in an urban setting. Other methods of approach are reaching out to a Band Office and explaining your intentions for connecting to a particular center, leader, or Elder in the community. Ask the person at the Friendship Centre or Band Office if you can speak with a leader or Elder in person or over the phone, as written correspondence is not the traditional way to communicate with Indigenous peoples. Face-to-face interactions or speaking over the phone are a better way to go. Essentially, when approaching Indigenous communities and Elders, look to Indigenous-run agencies for advice, guidance, and connections.

Adhering to protocol with Indigenous peoples and communities

Protocol is important when interacting with Indigenous peoples and providing services to Indigenous communities. Protocols in this context refer to being culturally informed about Indigenous peoples and

communities and respecting and following the traditions of a particular community so that the relations between agency and community are successful. Different Indigenous Nations or communities can have different protocols, so it is important to do your research on the specific community. Most importantly, seek the advice of local Elders.

Below are some points on protocol that you can be expected to know, however, the details on each will differ depending on the community that you are working with:

- **Acknowledge the land you are on:** What Nations reside on the land you now work on? What Nations reside on the land that you will be visiting? Take the time to research land acknowledgements beforehand and be prepared to acknowledge the land before your meetings.
 - **Offering tobacco:** Always offer tobacco to an Elder when asking for prayer/blessing, advice, to be a part of a ceremony or event, to sit in on a meeting, or to meet with a client. Offering tobacco is a sign of respect.
 - **Prayer/blessing:** It is common for an Elder to start a meeting off with a prayer so the meeting can continue in a good way. This could differ from Nation to Nation; some may just say a prayer and a blessing, and some may say a prayer, smudge the room, and offer for you to smudge as well. The prayer may also be said in the language that the community speaks.
 - **Introductions:** Before you get started in a meeting, it is common for an Elder to make an introduction by saying their name, the community they are from, the Nation they belong to, and anything else they wish to include. It will be expected that you do the same introduction. This exchange of information about yourselves will aid in building trust and a stronger relationship.
- Understand that building trust between you and an Indigenous person/community is key for building a successful relationship when providing services. Slowly is the best method of approach. This means you should not rush a meeting forward and do not rush an Elder in what they are sharing with you. It might be best to schedule an extra meeting to simply get to know an Elder better while also exchanging information about yourself before diving straight into the topic or purpose of the meeting.
- **Food:** Providing food is an important part of any meeting you have with an Elder or even with an Indigenous person. Having muffins, donuts, tea, coffee, and water are good options for a morning meeting. If your meeting extends over a lunch period, having bannock, soup, sandwiches, cookies, and fruit are good options.
 - **Include the Circle:** If possible, organize chairs, desks, and tables in a circle so everyone can face each other on an equal level. The circle is a common symbol in Indigenous cultures and can represent many things such as life, equality, and healing.

CHAPTER 4

IYINISIWIN (WISDOM) AND KISTEYIMITOWIN (RESPECT): TRADITIONAL HEALING AND CONNECTING TO THE LAND

Iyiniwiwin (Wisdom) means to show wisdom and help those who are struggling with understanding. Be wise with yourself and gain wisdom with perseverance and time; nothing comes without effort. Be wise with others by sharing your knowledge with others and those younger than you; be a role model. Kisteyimitowin (Respect) means to respect all living things. Respect your environment and keep a positive attitude towards all aspects of nature. Protect and care for nature; leave nature better than when you found it. Do not take more than you need and do not let things go to waste. Respect yourself and respect people around you.

We can apply the Sacred Teaching of Wisdom and Respect in our agencies by remembering that there are different perspectives and ways of approaching support and care besides the Western way. We can learn from these different ways of knowing and healing to better support people in our community.

Hope and Healing

“Our Mother Earth is our medicine, everything that grows is our medicine” –

Elder Elaine Pelletier, Lucky Man Cree Nation in Treaty 6

We all experience grief and its many forms. We discussed ambiguous loss earlier and why it is important that we adequately support families of MMIWG2S. In addition to grieving MMIWG2S and children lost to residential schools, there is also grieving for the loss of language and culture. Many of the Elders we spoke to mention the importance of keeping culture and language alive.

It is important that we as agencies do not forget that Indigenous cultures and languages are still practiced, spoken, and present today. There are more than 630 First Nations in Canada representing more than 50 Nations and 50 languages, there are over 50 Inuit communities with different Inuktitut dialects, and the Métis with its own language and dialects²⁰. Therefore, these three Indigenous groups (First Nations, Inuit, and Métis) are extremely diverse and that is why agencies must do the

work to learn about the Nation(s) that they serve in their communities and incorporate that Nation(s) culture and language in your workplace and in the support you provide.

CEREMONY

We have mentioned the importance of including traditional healing methods in the workplace and for clients who prefer a traditional healing approach such as smudging and incorporating the medicine wheel. Ceremonies are also a form of healing and there are different ceremonies for different events and purposes such as a pipe ceremony, naming ceremony, sweat lodge ceremony, sundance ceremony, pow wow ceremony, and potlach ceremony. Many ceremonies and dances were outlawed from the late 1800s to the mid-1900s, which is why it is important that Indigenous peoples have the opportunity to participate in ceremonies today as a form of healing and reconciliation.

The protocol for these ceremonies may be performed differently depending on the Nation/community. Some common examples of protocol to remember when attending a ceremony are men and women sometimes sitting on opposite sides of the circle, women wearing long skirts and ribbon skirts, smudging before the ceremony begins, and taking all food that is offered to you. Attending a ceremony, if appropriate, as an individual and an agency is a great way to learn about and respect the protocols and culture of the Nations you support in your community.

SHARING CIRCLES

Another form of traditional healing is Sharing Circles. Sharing Circles can be used for multiple reasons like restorative justice, healing trauma and grief, or for any discussion on various topics. A Sharing Circle is a great form of healing and communicating that can be incorporated into any work environment. Sitting in a circle is important because everyone is equal and interconnected. It is important to ask an Elder or knowledge keeper to help you facilitate a Sharing

Circle. Remember, the Elder or knowledge keeper may have certain protocols for conducting a Sharing Circle according to the Nation they belong to that differ from the protocols mentioned below.

Many Elders or knowledge keepers will begin with smudging and a blessing/prayer to start the Circle off in a good way. A talking stick or feather may be used to pass around the circle to different speakers. Whoever has the talking stick or feather is the only one allowed to talk at that time and everyone's attention and respect are given to the speaker. According to the protocol of the facilitator, the talking stick or feather may be passed clockwise or counterclockwise. If you are outside, the Circle may surround a fire and if you are inside, the circle may surround the smudge bowl and/or medicines. However, surrounding a particular object or not will depend on the protocol of the person facilitating the circle.

Having food present before, during, or after the circle is important. Some facilitators may have a starting feast and an ending feast for the circle. The feast will usually consist of soup, bannock, fruit, dessert and tea or coffee. If your agency is helping to facilitate a circle, remember to talk to the Elder or knowledge keeper you are working with on how they wish to have food incorporated into the circle.

Teachings

Teachings are vital forms of education and are often presented through the form of oral storytelling. When you are working with an Elder, they may share stories with you which almost always contain a lesson. When getting advice or asking questions from an Elder, you may not get a straightforward answer, but listen carefully and read between the lines of the teachings, stories, and lessons given to you. Remember that sharing stories and teachings are sacred and if you are wanting to share a story publicly that was told to you, ask the Elder if you may do so first.

“Look at the moon, sun, stars, we all learn from something...as First Nations people, everything has a spirit to us like the trees and grass. Animals are our brothers and sisters. We all have to treat them equally like our brothers and sisters and children. Love everything.”

-Elder Ralph Arcand, Moosomin First Nation in Treaty 6

- Many teachings connect to the land. For example, the Seven Sacred Teaching each has an animal attached to it whose characteristics we can learn from.
- The beaver represents wisdom because it uses its gift of strong teeth and tail wisely in its survival and builds a strong home in a sustainable way in its environment.
- The buffalo represents respect because the buffalo gave its whole self so First Nations people could sustain themselves and in return, no parts of it would go to waste; therefore, the relationship between First Nations people and the buffalo was of mutual respect.
- The eagle represents love because it can fly the highest to Creator out of all the sacred animals and can see everything from its perspective.
- The bear represents courage because she bravely and fiercely protects her cubs, putting herself in danger for the benefit of her cubs.
- The turtle represents truth because he carries creation and its teachings on his back. Before European contact, some First Nations knew what is now called Canada as Turtle Island because a turtle supports Canada on its back.
- The raven represents honesty because it knows who it is and walks tall through life. To be honest in life is to walk tall.
- The wolf represents humility because it lives in a pack and reminds us that we are all an equal part of creation.

You can include these animals in your workspace through art which will aid as a reminder of the Seven Sacred Teachings.

Connecting to land is a form of healing and is commonly known as “land-based healing”. Since time immemorial, Indigenous peoples have known the importance of respecting nature in all its forms as well as the importance of using nature to heal mentally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually. We can learn from the land as an agency because a connection to land reminds us of the importance of interconnectedness. Every creature has a role in nature just as we have a role in our communities to support others in a meaningful and culturally competent way that maintains harmony and balance.

“Our sun is powerful; it gave us the day. And when the sun goes down you stand outside and lift your hands up to the sun and talk to the sun: take this pain away, go take it with you, sun, to where you are going and you will feel good... The trees are so powerful, do not cut trees, they are alive. Talk to the trees or stand with your back to them, hug them, cry to them, they will help you with whatever you want like healing. They will listen to you”

-Elder Evelyn Thomas, Sweetgrass First Nation in Treaty 6



TAPAHEYIMISOWIN (HUMILITY): CONCLUSION

Tapahteyimisowin (Humility) means to be humble and not brag or boast to others who are struggling when you are not. Be humble to yourself and use your best judgment. Be humble to others and do not be unkind to family, friends, and neighbours.

Ultimately, we must be humble in the work we do in our agencies because our work requires us to be compassionate and empathetic to others. We cannot show compassion and empathy to the people we provide support to if we do not possess a sense of humility.

We hope you apply aspects of the Seven Sacred Teachings in your work because each teaching provides helpful advice to live by. Recall that colonization has impacted Indigenous peoples on an economic, political, and legal level and contributes to systemic racism and discrimination experienced by Indigenous peoples today. You, as an agency, must do the work to break down these systems of racism, discrimination, and prejudice by educating yourself on colonization in Canada and evaluating the barriers that your agency may have for Indigenous peoples.

Remember that utilizing two-eyed seeing in your work will allow you to combine a Western and traditional Indigenous knowledge approach to benefit Indigenous peoples to whom you provide support. For instance, asking an Elder for help, and advice, being on staff, and sitting in meetings with clients are good ways to incorporate Indigenous knowledge in your workplace. Including Indigenous artwork, music, greetings, smudging, the medicine wheel, and sharing circles creates a welcoming environment. Recall the stories and teachings that Elders from Treaty 4 and Treaty 6 shared on topics such as MMIWG2S, culture and language, healing, and the importance of land as these stories and teachings are an honour to listen to and learn about.

Thank you for taking the time to learn with us.

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