LAND ACKNOWLDEMENT

We would like to begin our presentation with a land acknowledgement.

A land acknowledgement is a formal statement that recognizes and respects the Indigenous peoples who are the traditional stewards of the land we occupy.

It serves as a step toward reconciliation, acknowledging the history of colonialism, forced removal, and ongoing inequities, while also honoring the continued presence and cultural vitality of Indigenous Nations today.

We invite you to identify and learn about the traditional lands you live or study on by visiting native-land.ca. Feel free to share yours in the chat!



PRESENTERS LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am honored to live, work, and breathe on the ancestral lands of the Yavapai-Apache Nation, with deep connections to the Hopi and Diné (Navajo) peoples. This area is now colonially known as Sedona, Arizona. Also includes: Ndee/Nnēē: (Western Apache), Hopitutskwa, Pueblos, Hohokam.

These Nations have lived in deep relationship with this land and its waters since time immemorial. Despite centuries of colonization, displacement, and violence, they continue to protect their ancestral lands and fight for reconciliation, environmental justice, and the inherent rights of First Peoples across all regions.

We stand in solidarity with these global defenders and honor their ongoing presence, resilience, and leadership.

native-land.ca

BRIDGING TRADITIONS

COMMUNITY BASED HEALING FOR NATIVE AMERICAN ELDERS



Brought to you by:

Pepper Humphrey
Kaylin Johnson
Bridget Atwood

Table Of Contents

- CULTURAL VALUES & BELIEFS
- HISTORICAL CONTEXT AND ITS PSYCHOLOGICAL LEGACY
- INTERSECTIONALITY (Age + Ethnicity + Historical Oppression)
- GRIEF AND TRAUMA EXPRESSION
- CULTURALLY ADAPTED INTERVENTIONS
- IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNSELORS

Resources

- CALIFORNIA
- ARIZONA
- TRADITIONAL INDIGENOUS PRACTICES
- SACRED LOCATIONS, HEALING & PRAYER
- REFERENCES





CULTURAL VALUES & BELIEFS

- Collectivism and kinship: Healing often occurs in community; individual therapy may feel foreign or isolating.
- Spirituality and interconnectedness: Belief that the physical, spiritual, and natural worlds are interwoven.
- Oral tradition and storytelling: Central in processing grief and maintaining cultural identity.
- Respect for elders: Elders are culture bearers, but also often carriers of generational pain.
- Cultural roles of women: Women often serve as matriarchs, healers, and knowledge keepers in many tribes, connecting generations through oral tradition and spirituality.

Native American History

Early Origins (pre oral histories & archaeology)

- Indigenous peoples lived across the Americas for thousands of years.
- Deep connections to land, ancestors, and spiritual responsibilities.

Early Civilizations (Poverty Point, Hopewell, Ancestral Puebloan, Mississippian)

- Cities, trade networks, astronomy, ceremonial centers, agriculture.
- Matrilineal governance, storytelling traditions, and complex kinship systems.

1000–1500 CE (Common Era)

- Thriving nations across North America with diverse languages, governments, spiritual systems, and ecological practices.

Just Before European Contact (Late 1400s)

- 10–18 million Indigenous people lived in what is now the U.S.
- Over 500 distinct tribes spoke 300+ languages.
- Complex governments, trade routes, spiritual systems, and ecological knowledge shaped everyday life.
- Indigenous peoples managed forests, rivers, and prairies through controlled burns, irrigation, seasonal migration, and environmental stewardship.

Current Day Contrast (What Happened After Contact)

- Today, only 5.2 million people identify as Native American in the U.S. (about 1.6% of the population).
- Hundreds of languages have been lost; only about 20 Indigenous languages in the U.S. are still spoken by children.
- Over half of all tribes experienced severe population decline due to disease, genocide, displacement, and forced assimilation.
- Many sacred sites, land bases, and governance systems were destroyed or restricted.



HISTORICAL CONTEXT AND ITS PSYCHOLOGICAL LEGACY

- Colonization forced assimilation, and the boarding school era led to widespread loss of family, land, and language.
- In addition, patriarchal policies undermined matrilineal systems and women's traditional leadership, deepening grief through gendered violence and erasure.
- Historical trauma describes the cumulative emotional and psychological wounding across generations resulting from massive group trauma.
- Elder generations may carry unacknowledged grief over cultural loss, violence, and displacement.



INTERSECTIONALITY (age + ethnicity + historical oppression)

- Elders face compounded vulnerabilities: cultural loss, limited healthcare access, and age-related isolation.
- The intersection of aging and survivorship: they are witnesses to cultural trauma yet must also model resilience for younger generations.
- Generational divides in language and worldview can exacerbate feelings of alienation or grief.
- The grief is often disenfranchised, unrecognized or invalidated by mainstream society.





GRIEF AND TRAUMA EXPRESSION

- Somatic symptoms: physical manifestations of emotional pain.
- Collective grief and mourning as a community.
- Spiritual disconnection: feeling “cut off” from ancestors and/or the land.
- Coping mechanisms: substance use sometimes emerges as an adaptive but harmful coping mechanism.
- Emotional and psychological distress: For many Native elders, these expressions of grief reflect both cultural and gendered trauma.

CULTURALLY ADAPTED INTERVENTIONS

• Therapeutic Implications: Programs like Community Circle of Healing and MMIWR (Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Relatives) explicitly center grief, resilience, and healing.

• Cultural competence in clinicians: Therapists working alongside tribal elders, healers, and spiritual leaders.

• Integration models: Blending Western trauma therapies (like Narrative Therapy or EMDR) with cultural healing traditions.

• Community-based grief rituals: Reviving lost ceremonies to acknowledge collective mourning and foster resilience.





Indigenous healing and prayer circles

are practiced in various forms, incorporating traditional beliefs and ceremonies. These practices are used for personal and community wellness and to address historical and contemporary trauma.

In many communities, elders facilitate talking circles, offering guidance rooted in care and cultural memory.

Elders as Healers and Leaders

In any Indigenous Nations,elders serve as knowledge keepers, healers, and facilitators of ceremony. They often lead or guide these circles, carrying songs, prayers, and traditions that connect participants to ancestors and the natural world. Their presence embodies resilience and nurtures intergenerational healing.

Talking Circles

The ancient practice of talking circles is used for teaching, listening, and sharing in a quiet, respectful manner. They can be adapted for modern needs, including online during the pandemic.

o Ceremony: Often includes an opening and closing prayer, the use of sacred herbs like sage or cedar for smudging, songs, and storytelling.

o Focus: Allows participants to speak and listen without interruption, promoting healing for the mind, heart, body, and spirit.



Medicine Wheels

Elders prepare and maintain these spaces, symbolizing balance, renewal, and the life-giving role of the feminine.

Medicine wheels are a pan-cultural symbol representing creation and the continuous cycle of life.

o Purpose: The sacred space within the wheel is used for prayer, meditation, and seeking healing.

o Location: In Arizona, a prominent medicine wheel can be found in the Amitabha Stupa and Peace Park in Sedona.

Shamanic Journeys

Elders spiritual leaders often guide these journeys, helping participants reclaim inner strength and ancestral wisdom.

Multiple or single day retreats help people address their core issues, heal their fears, and deepen their connection with their divinity.

Pollen Circles

Elders frequently serve as mentors in these circles, teaching the sacred connection between land, body, and spirit.



IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNSELORS

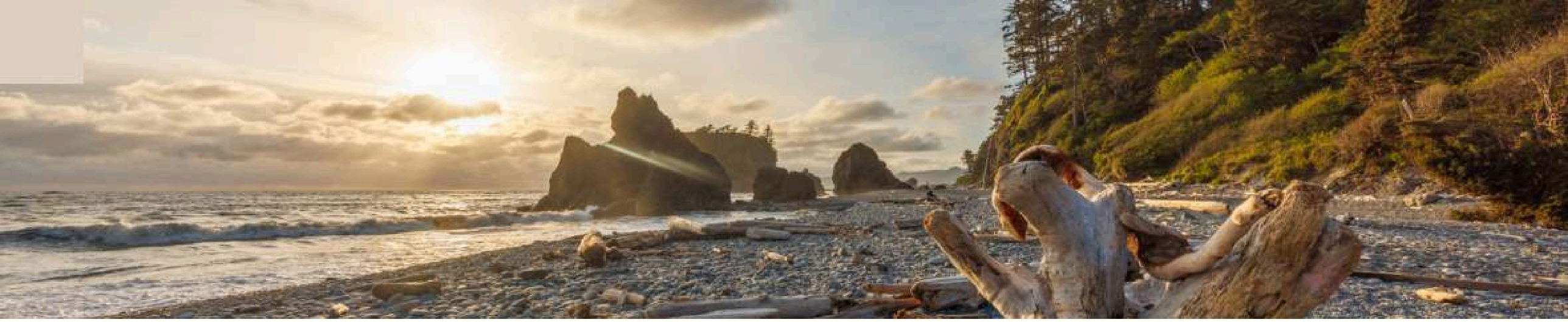




- Understand the historical and intergenerational nature of grief: don't pathologize what is cultural.
- Build trust through cultural humility and collaboration with tribal communities.
- Recognize that healing is often about reconnection (to culture, land, and ancestors), not just symptom reduction.
- A connection-based model of healing that reshapes the "why" and "how" of counseling, toward a more humanistic, relational, and systems-oriented focus where belonging and authentic engagement define well-being, is best captured in Relational-Cultural Theory (RCT).

RESOURCE SECTION





CALIFORNIA

Native American Health Center (NAHC)

- Location: The NAHC serves the San Francisco Bay Area and surrounding communities, offering a variety of services at different sites.
- Services: Provides grief support groups and counseling. While not exclusively for elders, these groups focus on navigating loss and can be a resource for healing historical grief.
- Contact: https://www.nativehealth.org/

Sacramento Native American Health Center (SNAHC)

- Services: SNAHC provides holistic health services that incorporate cultural frameworks, with the mission of providing traditional and culturally integrated wellness services.
- Contact: https://snahc.org/

California Truth and Healing Council

- Purpose: The California Truth and Healing Council (CTHC) works with tribal nations and Native-led organizations to advance truth-telling, cultural healing, and repair.
- Services: Though not a direct service provider, the CTHC partners with organizations that receive funding for cultural healing practices.
- Resources: https://tribalaffairs.ca.gov/cthc/

Northern California Tribal Court Coalition (NCTCC)

- Purpose: The NCTCC offers resources related to self-care and historical trauma, emphasizing cultural healing strategies for Native people.
- Services: Provides recommendations for reconnecting with culture to aid healing. Activities include talking with elders, participating in ceremonies, exploring traditional foods, and learning tribal language.
- Locations: Operates two health centers in the North San Diego region, serving nine consortium tribes.
- Services: Offers comprehensive health services, which may include mental and behavioral health resources.
- Contact: https://nctcc.org/



ARIZONA



Center for Native American and Indigenous Futures (CNAIF), Northern Arizona University (NAU)

- Location: Flagstaff, AZ.
- Services: The CNAIF Elders Program connects community members with elders to discuss cultural and historical issues. This program serves as a source of traditional knowledge.
- Contact: https://in.nau.edu/office-native-american-indigenous-advancement/

Indian Health Service The Federal Health Program for American Indians

- Location: Phoenix, AZ.
- Services: The Phoenix Area Indian Health Service (PAIHS) Office in Phoenix, Arizona, oversees the delivery of health care to Native American users in the tri-state area of Arizona, Nevada and Utah. They have 197 administrative and technical staff contribute to the success of our mission to raise the physical, mental, social, and spiritual health of American Indians and Alaska Natives to the highest level. Their system of care includes IHS- and tribally-operated health care facilities that serve tribal communities as well as three Urban Indian health programs.
- Contact: https://www.ihs.gov/phoenix/

Native American Programs at Via Linda Behavioral Hospital

- Location: Scottsdale, AZ.
- Services: A culturally responsive inpatient program developed in partnership with the Salt River Pima-Maricopa Community. It integrates Native healing practices with Western medicine, honoring Indigenous traditions in its counseling and activities.
- Contact: https://vialindabehavioral.com/programs/inpatient-services/native-american-mental-health-program/

Sacred locations in Arizona

(bucket list destination)

Sedona vortexes

Many Indigenous people consider Sedona's energy vortex sites to be powerful and spiritually charged places for prayer and healing.

Seven Sacred Pools

Located along the Soldier Pass Trail in Sedona, these tranquil pools are a sacred place in the desert for Indigenous people.

Montezuma Castle National Monument

The 800-year-old, 20-room dwelling is a National Monument established to preserve Native American culture. It is a powerful and sacred place for understanding Native American history and spirituality.





- Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System (AHCCCS)
- Southwest Indigenous Women's Coalition (SWIWC):
- Organizations and facilities



Access to healing and prayer circles Arizona

Arizona's state Medicaid program now covers traditional healing services through the Indian Health Service and tribally operated health facilities. This has increased access to Indigenous healing for Native Americans in the state.

The SWIWC has been conducting Community Circle of Healing Gatherings throughout Arizona to provide culturally specific healing spaces for those impacted by grief and loss, including COVID-19 and the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Relatives (MMIWR) crisis.

Several organizations offer Indigenous healing services and talking circles, including Native Health in Phoenix and clinics associated with the Indian Health Service.

"Healing is not the absence of pain, but the return to balance."

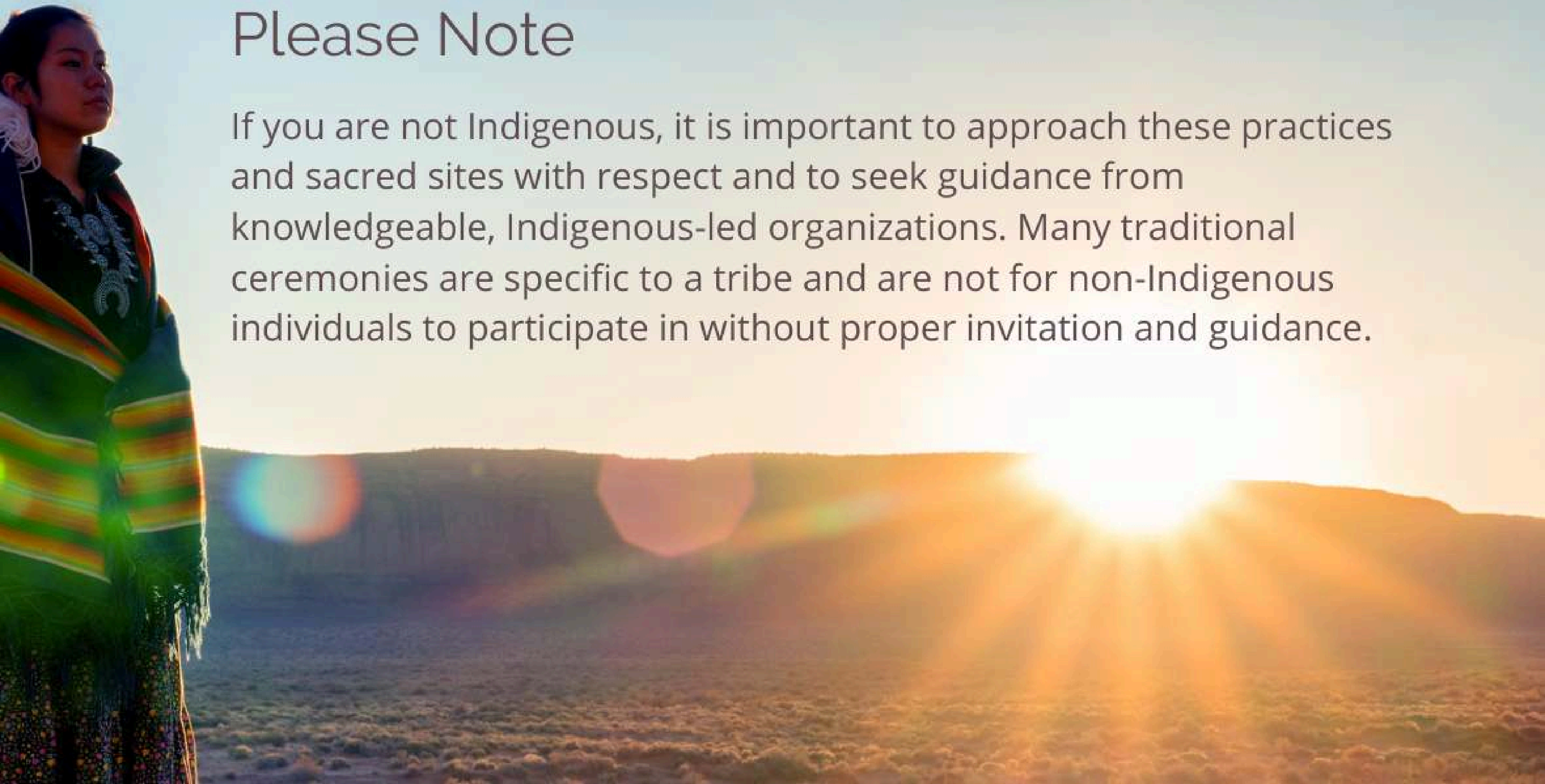
~ Marion Woodman



Native American Weomen’s Conference: Keepers of Tradition - Embracing Our Stories
https://www.nawc-az.com/

Please Note

If you are not Indigenous, it is important to approach these practices and sacred sites with respect and to seek guidance from knowledgeable, Indigenous-led organizations. Many traditional ceremonies are specific to a tribe and are not for non-Indigenous individuals to participate in without proper invitation and guidance.



References

Bassett, D., Tsosie, U., & Nannauck, S. (2012). Our culture is medicine: Perspectives of Native healers on health and traditional healing. Social Work in Public Health, 27(3–4), 294–306.

Brave Heart, M. Y. H. (1998). The American Indian Holocaust: Healing Historical Unresolved Grief. American Indian and Alaska Native Mental Health Research, 8(2), 56–78.

Brave Heart, M. Y. H., et al. (2021). Iwankapiya American Indian pilot clinical trial: Historical Trauma and Unresolved Grief Intervention. Community Mental Health Journal, 57(5), 873–884.

Duran, E. (2006). Healing the soul wound: Counseling with American Indians and other Native peoples. Teachers College Press.

Duran, E., & Duran, B. (1995). Native American postcolonial psychology. State University of New York Press.

Evans-Campbell, T. (2008). Historical trauma in American Indian/Native Alaska communities: A multilevel framework for exploring impacts on individuals, families, and communities. Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 23(3), 316–338.

Garrett, M. T., & Garrett, J. T. (1994). The path of good medicine: Understanding and counseling Native American Indians. Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development, 22(3), 134–144.

Gone, J. P. (2013). Redressing First Nations historical trauma: Theorizing mechanisms for Indigenous culture as mental health treatment. Transcultural Psychiatry, 50(5), 683–706. https://doi.org/10.1177/1363461513487669

Gone, J. P., & Hartmann, W. (2019). The impact of historical trauma on health outcomes for Indigenous populations in the U.S. and Canada: A systematic review. American Psychologist, 74(1), 20–35.

Goodkind, J. R., et al. (2012). Rebuilding trust: A community–university partnership to heal historical trauma among American Indian youth. American Journal of Community Psychology, 49(3–4), 381–390.

References

Hartmann, W. E., & Gone, J. P. (2016). American Indian historical trauma: Community perspectives from two Great Plains medicine men. American Journal of Community Psychology, 57(1–2), 229–242.

Hodge, D. R. (2018). Integrating spirituality and religion into social work practice with Native Americans. Social Work, 63(3), 203–212.

Jervis, L. L., & Manson, S. M. (2002). American Indian elders' resilience: Sources and challenges. The Gerontologist, 42(2), 287–297.

Jordan, J. V. (2018). Relational-cultural therapy (2nd ed.). American Psychological Association.

Kading, M. L., et al. (2015). The interplay of generational roles and historical trauma in American Indian families. Journal of Family Issues, 36(9), 1202–1221.

Neimeyer, R. A., & Sands, D. C. (2011). Meaning reconstruction in the wake of loss: Evolution of a research program. Death Studies, 35(7), 536–560.

Struthers, R., & Eschiti, V. (2005). Being healed by an Indigenous traditional healer: Sacred healing stories of Native Americans (Part II). Complementary Therapies in Clinical Practice, 11(2), 78–86.

Sue, D. W., & Sue, D. (2016). Counseling the culturally diverse: Theory and practice. Wiley.

Walls, M. L., Whitbeck, L. B., & Armenta, B. E. (2016). A cautionary tale: Examining the interplay of cultural identity, social support, and health among Native elders. Aging & Mental Health, 20(1), 70–79.

Whitbeck, L. B., Adams, G. W., Hoyt, D. R., & Chen, X. (2004). Conceptualizing and measuring historical trauma among American Indian people. American Journal of Community Psychology, 33(3–4), 119–130.


THANK YOU