

Healing Through Spirit: Integrating Indigenous Healing Practices in Education and Mental Health

Insights and strategies for fostering healing and empowerment in communities.

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Ancestral Honoring Land Acknowledgement

► *We acknowledge that we are gathered on ancestral lands. These lands are the heartland of numerous Nations and people.*

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Speaking the Language of the Haliwa-Saponi Tribe

Short Phrases

nahá:pípi: 'Good day.'

kanahápnápi: 'Good morning.'

tokhé: yaʔq:wo 'How are you doing?'

wipí:wa 'I am good.'

kaká yjikilá:kewo 'What is your name?'

John, mjikilá:kewa 'My name is John.'

yipí:wo 'Are you good?'

ohsi:hitepí: 'Good evening.'

tó:kha: yatí:wo 'Where do you live?'

pi:láhuk 'Thank You.'

Numbers

One	nə:sa:	Six	aká:spe:
Two	nə:pa:	Seven	sa:kó:mj
Three	lá:ni	Eight	palá:ni
Four	tó:pa	Nine	kasá:hka
Five	kisá:ha	Ten	púčka

Colors

asé:pi	aču:ti	aso:ti	sí:	oto:
				
Black	Red	Blue	Yellow	Green

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My Story: Rooted in Legacy, Rising with Purpose

- In the quiet fields of the South lived Nanny Gunn, a Native American woman with hair to her feet, and her dark-skinned husband.
- My great-great-grandfather was a sharecropper.
- My mother, a single parent supported by strong grandparents. My grandfather sent me to private school, despite having only a high school diploma.
- My paternal grandmother Lucy was from the Haliwa-Saponi Tribe; her husband, a Vietnam vet, was denied his benefits.
- I grew up straddling cultural lines—teased for being both too light and too dark.
- Today, I hold two doctorates, still learning about my roots—African, Indigenous, and Caribbean.
- Legacy isn't just what we inherit. It's what we *choose* to honor, grow, and pass on.

Learning Objectives

- ▶ 1. Understand intergenerational trauma
- ▶ 2. Explore Indigenous spirituality
- ▶ 3. Apply cultural intelligence
- ▶ 4. Create trauma-responsive, culturally responsive environments

Grounding Exercise

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Indigenous Cultures Defined

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Indigenous Cultures of the United States

An inclusive exploration of Native
American and Afro-Indigenous
communities.

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Defining Indigenous Cultures

- ▶ Diverse!
- ▶ Peoples and lifeways rooted in the land before European colonization.



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Federally Recognized Tribes

- Over 574 tribes
acknowledged by the
U.S. government.

USA.GOV

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Unrecognized and State-Recognized Tribes

- Maintaining identity without federal recognition.



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Afro-Indigenous Peoples

- Shared lineage and erasure through racial classification laws.



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Examples of U.S. Indigenous Groups

- ▶ • Navajo, Hopi, Pueblo
- ▶ • Cherokee, Choctaw, Creek
- ▶ • Wampanoag, Mohawk, Lenape
- ▶ • Yamasee, Washitaw Muurs, Black Seminoles

A photograph of a woman standing outdoors at what appears to be a festival or fair. She is wearing a wide-brimmed straw hat, a light-colored off-the-shoulder crop top, and a long, flowing skirt with a vibrant orange and red pattern. She is holding a white tote bag in her right hand. In the background, there are other people, some in traditional or festival attire, and a large rooster is visible. The scene is set in a grassy field under a clear blue sky.

Haliwa Saponi!

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Indigenous Cultures of Canada

- Exploring First Nations, Inuit, Métis, and Afro-Indigenous communities.



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<https://www.canada.ca/>

Defining Indigenous Peoples in Canada

- ▶ 634 First Nations, Inuit, Métis: Three legally recognized groups.

Historical Legacy

- ▶ Colonization, residential schools, systemic discrimination.

Contemporary Communities

Land-based education,
cultural resurgence,
self-governance.

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Afro-Indigenous Identity in Canada

- Intersections of African descent and Indigenous heritage.

Examples of Indigenous Nations

- ▶ • Cree, Mohawk, Haida
 - ▶ • Inuit communities
 - ▶ • Métis Nation
 - ▶ • Afro-Indigenous families in Atlantic Canada
- ▶ <https://www.proclaimingourroots.com/>

Opening Circle

- ▶ Circle practice principles
- ▶ Cultural significance
- ▶ Participant introductions



GROUP DEVELOPED GUIDELINES



Communication

Active listening
Avoiding interruption



Cultural respect



Use of pronouns

Explore and ask



Personal preferences

Sensorimotor
Emotional



Flexibility

Timing
Revisiting content



- Facilitated questions:
 - What patterns or wounds show up in your community that you feel called to help shift.
 - What are some strengths or traditions that your community have that support healing?
 - If they were here now, what would they ask for those questions?
- Small group breakout
- Sharing insights

Communal Rules

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Understanding Intergenerational Trauma

- ▶ Definition
- ▶ Historical context
- ▶ Colonization impacts

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- **A**cknowledge and be **A**ware of trauma
- **C**reate growth from trauma
- **T**each neuroeducation and steps toward growth
- **I**ntergenerational factors
- **O**rganizations and systems re-traumatization
- **N**ow is the time to take **ACTION** to create growth from trauma



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Part I

ACT



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A: Acknowledge and be Aware of Trauma

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ACE Questionnaire

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While you were growing up, during your first 18 years of life:

Did you live with anyone who was depressed, mentally ill, or suicidal?

_____ Yes _____ No

Did you live with anyone who was a problem drinker or alcoholic?

_____ Yes _____ No

Did you live with anyone who used illegal street drugs or who abused prescription medications?

_____ Yes _____ No

Did you live with anyone who served time or was sentenced to serve time in a prison, jail, or other correctional facility?

_____ Yes _____ No

Were your parents separated or divorced?

_____ Yes _____ No

Did your parents or other adults in your home often or very often slap, hit, kick, punch or beat each other up?

_____ Yes _____ No

Did a parent or other adults in your home often or very often hit, beat, kick, or physically hurt you in any way? Ever hit you so hard that you had marks or were injured? (Do not include spanking.)

_____ Yes _____ No

Did a parent or adult in your home often or very often swear at you, insult you, or put you down?

_____ Yes _____ No

Did an adult or person at least five years older than you ever touch you sexually?

_____ Yes _____ No

Did an adult or person at least five years older than you ever try to make you touch their body sexually?

_____ Yes _____ No

Did an adult or person at least five years older than you ever force you to have sex?

_____ Yes _____ No

Now add up your “yes” answers. This is your ACE score

ACE Questionnaire

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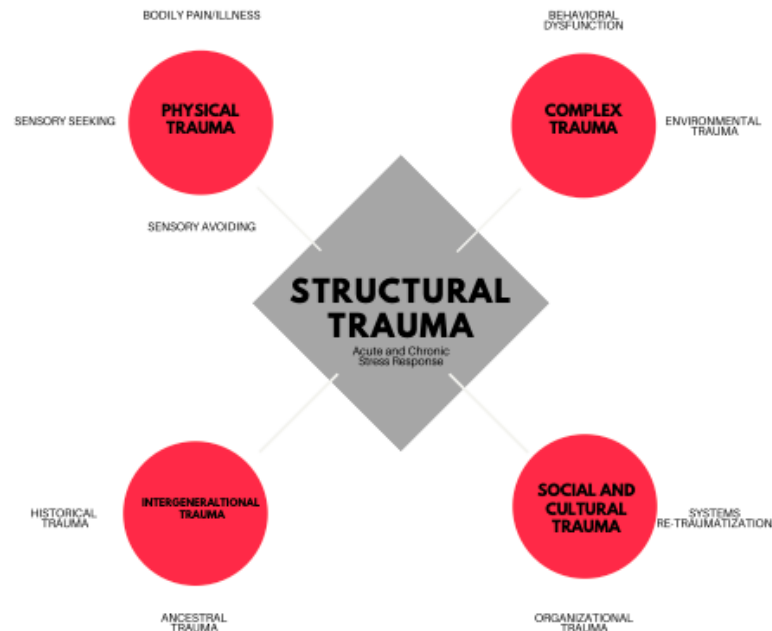
ACTION- FROM- TRAUMA APPROACH

THE FIVE DIMENSIONS OF TRAUMA MODEL

The condition of trauma is dynamic. An individual, population, or community can be exposed to various forms of trauma. Ultimately, the exposure and experience impacts neurological functioning. Hence, this model proposes that structural trauma (i.e., changes on the neurological level) occurs as a result of the other forms of trauma.

The more exposure to the various forms of trauma, the severity of structural trauma increases.

Each form of trauma has secondary conditions as revealed in the model. Acknowledgment of the complexity provides a platform for addressing the needs of the individual, population, or community.



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Practitioner Readiness for Trauma Care Checklist

As a provider, I am able to:

- ☐ Tailor trauma assessments and interventions in a way that considers diversity in socioeconomic, organizational, community, population, and intersecting cultural identities
- ☐ Employ a biopsychosocial approach to care that considers the complex interactions of cognitive, biological, psychological, and social factors
- ☐ Understand the impact of traumatic experiences across the lifespan and between family members (e.g., pediatric providers have knowledge of the impact of trauma on the adult caregiver)
- ☐ Acknowledge short-term and long-term effects of trauma (e.g., comorbidities, housing-related issues) and person-environment interactions related to trauma (e.g., running away from home and being assaulted)
- ☐ Perform shared decision making with clients and focus on strength, resilience, and areas for growth
- ☐ Provide a sense of autonomy, safety, and security with an awareness of how trauma impacts an individual's and organization's sense of trust
- ☐ Understand trauma reactions and their implications for assessment and treatment (e.g., able to alter plans in the presence of avoidance behaviors or triggers)
- ☐ Acknowledge how society, organizations, and systems can result in the possibility of re-traumatization

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Respect and Empathy Language	Gratitude and Growth Statements
Children	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ "What do you need?" ◦ "Do you need a break?" ◦ "How can I help?" ◦ "All done? Or do you need more?" ◦ "I want to help you." ◦ "What you experienced is not okay. What support do you need?" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ "Thank you!" ◦ "I like your hard work!" ◦ "Wow! Look at how you grew today by finishing your work!" ◦ "You have grown so much!"
Adolescents, Adults, and Older Adults	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ "That is really challenging, and I see you are upset. Can I suggest some strategies to assist with your anxiety?" ◦ "Would it be okay for us to discuss how that made you feel?" ◦ "While it may not have been the best choice, your response matches how you felt." ◦ "How can I help you grow from here?" ◦ "Did that make you feel uncomfortable? That was not my intent." ◦ "I see that may not have been the best way to phrase that. What I meant was..." 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ "That was brave of you." ◦ "Your sharing shows your strength." ◦ "Look at all you have done since and despite of..." ◦ "That is tough to talk about. I appreciate your openness and trust."

Table 4. ACTION Language

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Categories of Trauma

Expected

Unexpected

Isolated

Pervasive

Intentional

Unintentional

Direct

Indirect

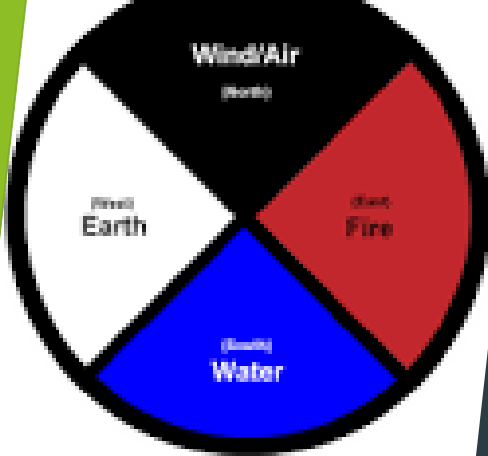
C: Create Growth

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Setting the Stage

- ☐ Creating a Growth Contract and Needs Plan
- ☐ Grounding Activities and Practitioner Check-Ins
- ☐ The Sensory Connection
- ☐ Contextual Sensory Investigation
- ☐ ACTION Creating Growth Tools
- ☐ Case Scenario



Mind-Body Connection to Spirit and the Elements

- ▶ Earth
- ▶ Wind
- ▶ Fire
- ▶ Water

“I am Offering This Poem” by Jimmy Santiago Baca

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IN-SESSION ACTIVITY

MINDFUL FINGER COUNTDOWN

Age Range: Children

Objective: To reorient to the present moment with touch and mindful counting

Directions: Have the child hold up their hand with their fingers separated. As you demonstrate the movements, ask them to imitate you. Take your thumb and second finger, and touch the pads together. With each breath, you will have the child touch the pads of the remaining fingers as described in the script below.

Provider Script: State out loud "four." Take a deep, purposeful breath and have the child do the same. Move to your next finger, touching the pads of your thumb and third finger. State out loud "three." Again, take a deep, purposeful breath and have the child do the same. Continue with the remaining fingers, breathing in between and having the child imitate. Count down to one, repeating the process if needed.

ACTION Need Assessment Worksheet

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PROVIDER WORKSHEET

ACTION CREATING GROWTH: WHAT I NEED PLAN

Age Range: Children

Objective: To develop a method to communicate needs that supports the client's progress toward growth

Directions: Following a screening or assessment, it is crucial to have a plan to provide safety, set boundaries, and develop autonomy. Use this checklist to identify sensorimotor activities, mindfulness practices, or other methods that best support the child's arousal and that facilitate their participation in required tasks, treatment sessions, and engagement with others. Work with caregivers, and the child as appropriate, to develop these activities. Highlight a way to communicate needs through specified statements or nonverbal options. (Gestures are especially useful for young children.) This should be a starting point for continued strategizing to expand methods of communication.

Desired Action	Key Words, Phrases, or Strategies
End a task	<input type="checkbox"/> Say "Stop please" <input type="checkbox"/> Use pictures with a stop sign <input type="checkbox"/> Signal with gestures
Share needs	<input type="checkbox"/> Say "I need..." or "I want..." <input type="checkbox"/> Say "Give me" <input type="checkbox"/> Use pictures of desired items to select <input type="checkbox"/> Signal with gestures
Express feelings	<input type="checkbox"/> Use "I feel" statements <input type="checkbox"/> Use pictures of emotions <input type="checkbox"/> Signal with gestures

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Breathwork



Disclaimer



Connection to the nervous system



Diaphragmatic Breathing




Rhythmic Breathing and the Insula Cortex

T: Teaching Neuro! Trauma in the brain



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Teaching Younger Children About Their Brain

- ▶ There is a part of our brain that is really smart and playful, kind of like a small dog.
- ▶ Sometimes, things happen that make that part of our brain angry, mad, sad, or afraid. It has trouble listening, playing, or learning. We do not feel like ourselves. That little dog starts to get really loud and active.
- ▶ That part of your brain tries to get happy and will run around, bark, or jump—whatever it takes to get happy! It loves feeling good!
- ▶ Like having a small dog as a pet, you have control. Not only can you train that part of your brain to feel good, but you can feel good too! You have a leash and other training tools we will share.

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Intellectual Reactions

- ▶ Front Part of the Brain versus Reptilian brain
- ▶ Challenges with:
 - ▶ Concentration
 - ▶ Problem Solving
 - ▶ Remembering

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Addressing the Impact on Memory

IN-SESSION WORKSHEET

ACTIVITIES OF DAILY LIVING: MEMORY ACTIVITIES

Age Range: All

Objective: To improve working memory, assist in planning to prepare for necessary tasks, and decrease daily stress

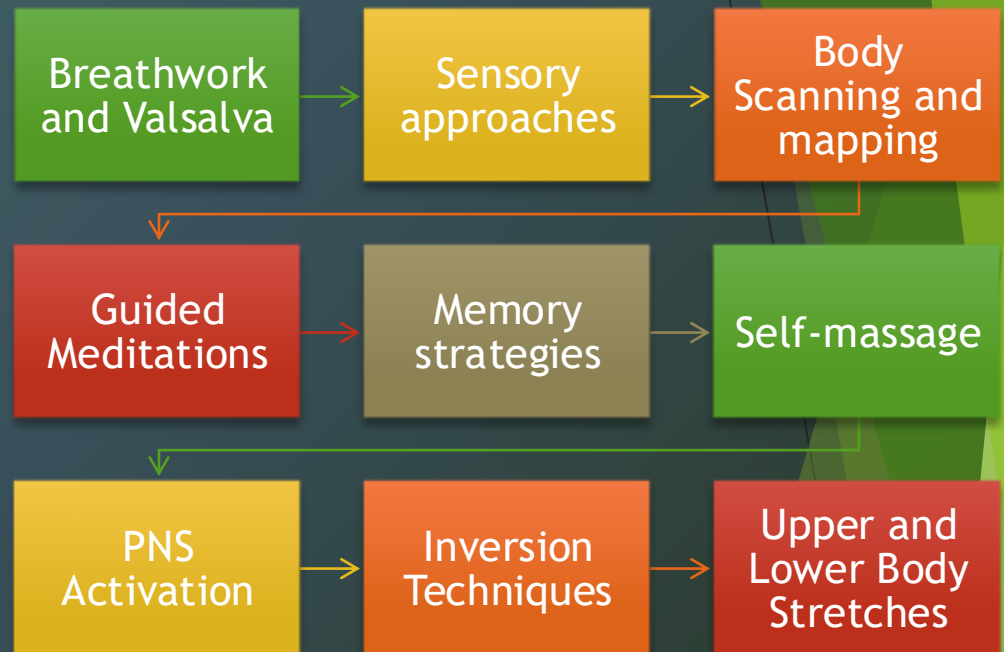
Directions: Identify an activity of importance that may be causing the client challenges. For example, perhaps they are struggling to arrive to work on time or to maintain appointments, which is leading to additional dysfunction and stress. Discuss the needed steps to complete that particular activity, and write down each step in sequential order. As a follow-up activity, write the steps out of order and have your client place them in the correct sequence. Here is a sample memory activity for getting to their therapy appointments on time, followed by blank spaces for you to use with your client.

Counteracting
Fear and Anxiety:

Parasympathetic
Nervous System



Connection to the ACTION from Trauma Interventions




Breath! Nasal Breathing

“Breath of Fire”



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The background of the slide features a close-up of a hand reaching upwards, with fingers slightly spread, towards a bright, glowing sun. The sun is positioned in the upper center, creating a strong lens flare and illuminating the scene with a warm, golden light. The hand is in the lower foreground, with the skin tone appearing soft and natural. The overall composition conveys a sense of aspiration, hope, and reaching for one's goals. The slide is framed by green geometric shapes on the left and right sides, and a dark blue shape on the left side where the title is located.

Mediation and Mindfulness: Journeys

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Shiatsu Self-Massage

While sitting down, instruct the client to use their thumbs to provide pressure to the soles of the feet, moving in a circular manner. Then have them use their thumbs to provide a pressure massage to each toe on their feet. Instruct them to apply pressure and to massage the webbed spaces of their hands. Next, have them apply pressure to their palms, using their thumb and working down to the wrist area, continuing with gentle pressure. Then have them use their opposite hand to pull the other hand backward to stretch the wrist area. Lastly, invite them to massage their scalp using their fingertips. (Note to provider: If performing self-massage on the feet, ensure the client is comfortable with removing their shoes.)

Activity

Aromatherapy

Essential Oil	Potential Uses
Sweet orange	Improves mood, increases alertness, and assists with digestion
Lemon	Improves mood and digestive issues
Sandalwood	Has a calming effect and increases focus
Bergamot	Reduces stress and improves dermatological conditions
Rose	Decreases anxiety and enhances mood
Lavender	Decreases stress and has a calming effect
Chamomile	Improves mood and enhances positive emotions
Peppermint	Increases energy levels and improves nausea
Ginger root	Improves appetite and boosts immunity
Mandarin	Decreases anxiety and improves dermatological conditions
Ylang-ylang	Decreases nausea and improves dermatological conditions
Tea tree	Boosts immunity and improves dermatological conditions
Jasmine	Improves mood

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Part 2: ION

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INTERGENERATIONAL FACTORS

Intergenerational trauma, this type of trauma affects generations of a specific group of people and does not require directly experiencing a traumatic event. The hearing of stories, learned behaviors, and subsequent rules that emerge all feed into the well-being of generations that follow. Indeed, there are stories within our history riddled with trauma. Survivors carry that trauma not only in their minds but in their bodies. The cells in their body hold onto the trauma and serve as a history book to be shared with offspring.

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► Epigenetics

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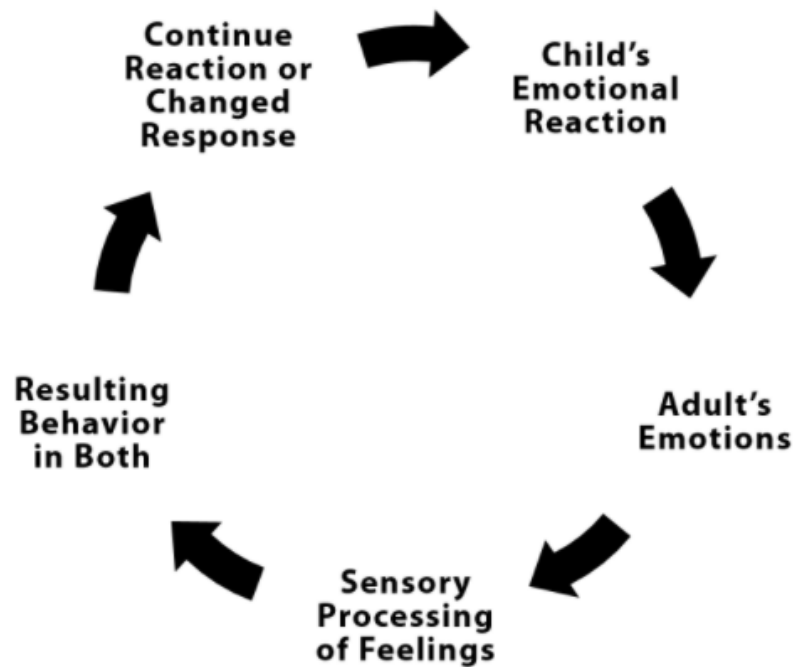


Figure 13. Reciprocal Regulation (Gibbs, 2017b)

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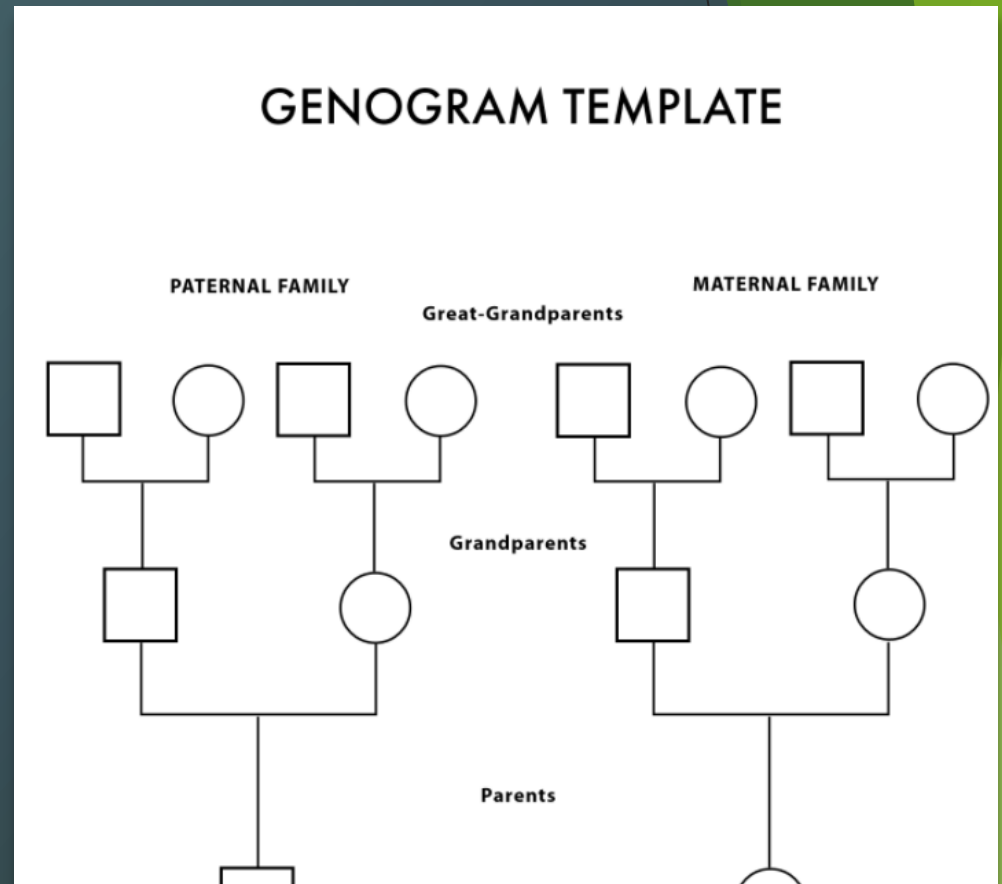
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- ☐ Provide skin-to-skin contact during the first days and months of life.
- ☐ Perform a caregiver-provided massage, which has been shown to not only calm the infant but to decrease parental stress and anxiety. Addressing reciprocal regulation prior to such techniques is vital.
- ☐ Participate in shared experiences, such as reading to the child.
- ☐ Ensure consistent play with the child at least once daily.
- ☐ Feed the child based on their needs rather than doing so at scheduled mealtimes.

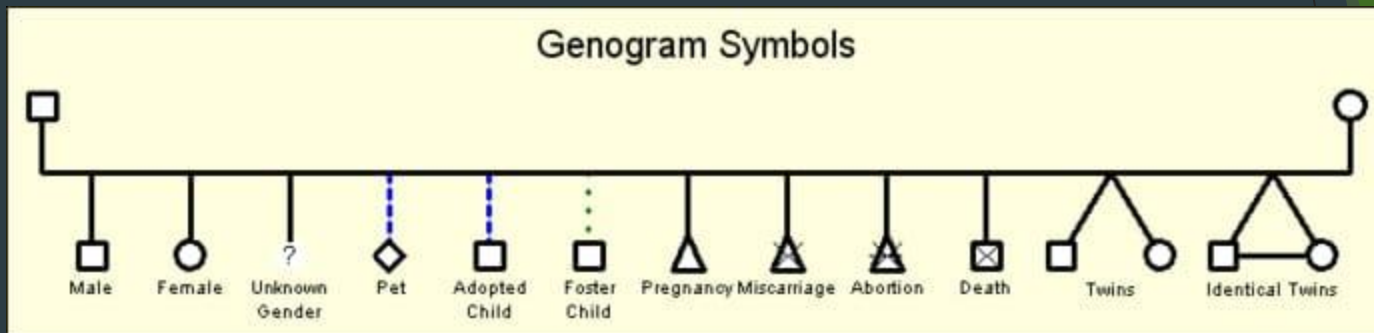
Early Intervention

Recognize Risk factors!

Review Family History: Genogram



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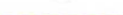


















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	Marriage
	Separation in fact
	Legal separation
	Divorce
	Nullity
	Widowed
	Engagement
	Engagement and cohabitation
	Engagement and separation
	Legal cohabitation
	Legal cohabitation and separation in fact
	Legal cohabitation and official (legal) separation
	Cohabitation
	Cohabitation and separation
	Non-sentimental cohabitation
	Non-sentimental cohabitation and separation
	Committed (long-term) relationship
	Committed relationship and separation
	Casual relationship or dating (short-term)
	Casual relationship and separation
	Temporary relation / One night stand
	Love Affair
	Love Affair and separation

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ORGANIZATIONS AND SYSTEMS

RE-TRAUMATIZATION

Nikki Harley

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Emotional Reactions	Temporary feelings of shock, fear, grief, anger, resentment, guilt, shame, helplessness, hopelessness, emotional numbness
Cognitive Reactions	Confusion, disorientation, indecisiveness, worry, shortened attention span, difficulty concentrating, memory loss, unwanted memories, self-blame
Physical Reactions	Tension, fatigue, edginess, difficulty sleeping, bodily aches or pain, startling easily, racing heartbeat, nausea, change in appetite, change in sex drive
Interpersonal Reactions	Feelings of distrust or irritability toward others; conflict, withdrawal, or isolation; feeling rejected or abandoned; being distant, judgmental, or overcontrolling of others

Table 9. Symptoms of Organizational Trauma During a Crisis (Young, Ford, Ruzek, Friedman, & Gusman, 1998)

Collective Trauma

Creating Safe Spaces

1. Routinely screen for trauma exposure and related symptoms
2. Use culturally appropriate evidence-based assessment and treatment
3. Make resources available to children, families, and providers on trauma exposure, impact, and treatment
4. Engage in efforts to strengthen the resilience and protective factors of children and families impacted by and vulnerable to trauma
5. Address parent and caregiver trauma and its impacts on the family system
6. Emphasize continuity of care and collaboration across systems
7. Maintain an environment of care for staff that addresses, minimizes, and treats secondary traumatic stress and that increases staff resilience (National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2016)

Sanctuary Space

Breathwork	Breathwork is a general term used to describe any type of therapy that utilizes breathing exercises to improve mental, physical, and spiritual health.
Yoga or mindful movement	The gentle movement associated with yoga helps develop body awareness and reduces over-reactivity to internal sensations. These practices recalibrate the threat detection system from the top down and bottom up, giving individuals with trauma control of their healing.
Mindfulness	Mindfulness activities can mitigate symptoms of PTSD by increasing activity in the prefrontal cortex and hippocampus and toning the amygdala. At its core, mindfulness is simply the basic human ability to be present. A simple mindfulness exercise involves the use of a stethoscope to center on the beauty of our heartbeat. For those who struggle with formal meditation or mindfulness practices, you can simply incorporate mindful awareness into your daily routines.
Gentle music	While music cannot cure PTSD, it has demonstrated positive results in helping to alleviate secondary symptoms of trauma, such as depression and insomnia (Blanu et al., 2012).
Diet and exercise	Good nutrition and physical activity are important parts of leading a healthy and balanced lifestyle, which can dramatically assist in maintaining overall health and well-being.
Regular sleep	Lack of sleep can lead to insulin resistance, cardiovascular disease, mood swings, poor immune function, hormonal imbalances, and lowered life expectancy. Therefore, get on a regular sleep-wake schedule, and keep a journal by your bedside to capture any last-minute thoughts for the day. You can also perform light stretching or yoga before bed to prepare the body for sleep.

Table 13. Practical Ways for Practitioners to Re-Center

Person first: We must focus on the person first—not the trauma that happened to them. Individuals are resilient and have strengths that supersede trauma. Therefore, include strengths-based and evidence-based strategies in your work. While we have presented a multitude of activities in this book, make sure that your treatment plans are person- and family-centered as well.

- ❑ **Advocacy:** Attending expensive workshops and trainings is a beginning, not an ending. Reading this book is a start. The real work is in advocacy at every level. Advocate for your clients by acknowledging their unique needs and by aligning resources that fit those needs. Educate those who work with individuals with trauma. Advocate for resources to decrease the financial and social impacts of trauma. Establish mentorship programs and training for primary care, childcare, and eldercare providers.
- ❑ **Avoid re-traumatization:** Employ the use of de-escalation techniques versus the use of physical restraints. Many of the challenges individuals present with occur when they do not feel validated. Start by acknowledging their perspective and by recognizing the trauma lens of protection through which they view the world. Listen to what they have to say! Avoid making assumptions and judgments. Ask for and provide clarification by repeating and rephrasing statements. Apologize for any misunderstandings or misinterpretations. Provide choices rather than dictating rules.
- ❑ **Assess your knowledge of trauma:** Be aware of your personal experiences. As you work

NOW is the time to take ACTION

buy-in, and provide mentorship for team members (Fette, Lambdin-Pattavina, & Weaver, 2019).

- ☐ **Promote physical activity:** Performing gross motor activities, such as sports, can improve positive outcomes and behaviors. Support the development of structured activities and access to such programs (Cahill, Egan, & Seber, 2020).
- ☐ **Address organizational trauma:** Complete organizational assessments for trauma-informed care. Develop a mission statement that includes inclusivity; cultural sensitivity and values around safety; trustworthiness and transparency; peer support and mutual self-help; collaboration and mutuality; empowerment, voice, and choice; and cultural, historical, and gender issues.
- ☐ **Incorporate a reflective practice:** With any clinical practice, it is necessary to incorporate a reflective practice on the services you provide. Be sure to revisit the events of therapy sessions by maintaining proper notes. Revisit your own thoughts and feelings during the session. Analyze what seemed to work and what did not. Consider other activities and approaches you could have taken to assist in revising treatment plans. In addition, revisit the Practitioner Readiness for Trauma Care Checklist from chapter 1 to make sure you are best supporting your clients' needs.

Now is the time for you to call others to ACTION!

Group activity

- ▶ Circle
- ▶ Pass items clockwise
- ▶ Keep with the rhythm

Juggling Thoughts

- ▶ Represents mental chatter
- ▶ Mindfulness can help focus
- ▶ How did the “chatter” feel when it moved quickly vs. slowly?

Understanding Intergenerational Trauma (Discussion)

- ▶ Facilitated questions
- ▶ Small group breakout
- ▶ Sharing insights

Mechanisms of Trauma Transmission

- ▶ Psychological
- ▶ Cultural
- ▶ Social pathways

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TRAUMA AND THE BRAIN

- ## ► Memory

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ACE STUDY (FELITTI ET AL., 1998)

- The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study revealed strong correlations between childhood trauma and long-term physical, emotional, and mental health challenges.
- Key Concept: Trauma alters brain structure (e.g., hippocampus, amygdala) and increases risk for chronic illness.
- Suggested Activity: Reflect privately on ACE score (optional), then journal on resilience factors.
 - Downloadable ACE Questionnaire: <https://acestoohigh.com/got-your-ace-score/>

ACE QUESTIONNAIRE

The ACE study showed
childhood trauma has lasting
health impacts.

Find your ACE score (optional,
private use):
[https://acestoohigh.com/got-
your-ace-score/](https://acestoohigh.com/got-your-ace-score/)

#	Experience	Yes	No	Not sure
1	Did a parent or other adult in the household often swear at you, insult you, or put you down?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2	Did a parent or other adult in the household often push, grab, slap, or throw something at you?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3	Did an adult or person at least 5 years older than you ever touch or fondle you or have you touch their body in a sexual way?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4	Did you often feel that no one in your family loved you or thought you were important or special?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5	Did you often feel that you didn't have enough to eat, had to wear dirty clothes, or had no one to protect you?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6	Was a biological parent ever lost to you through divorce, abandonment, or other reason?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7	Was your mother or stepmother often pushed, grabbed, slapped, or had something thrown at her?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8	Did you live with anyone who was a problem drinker or alcoholic, or who used street drugs?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9	Was a household member depressed or mentally ill, or did a household member attempt suicide?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10	Did a household member go to prison?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

ACE SCORE (Total "Yes" Answers):

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POLYVAGAL THEORY (PORGES, 2011)



Polyvagal Theory explains how the vagus nerve supports our ability to feel safe or threatened.



Chronic trauma impairs this ability.



Neuroception of safety is the unconscious scanning for cues that tell us we're secure.



Cultural rituals (e.g., drumming, singing) activate the ventral vagal system and promote healing.

Suggested Activity:
Group drumming or
5-4-3-2-1 senses
grounding

Spirituality in Healing

Indigenous spiritual traditions play a vital role in healing.

These traditions incorporate ceremonies that foster connection to culture and nature, enhancing the healing process.

Spiritual practices foster resilience and recovery.

Engagement in spiritual activities can boost mental health, leading to improved overall well-being.

Ceremonies serve as a communal support system.

Gathering for traditional practices can strengthen bonds within the community, promoting collective healing.

Connection to culture aids in identity reclamation.

Reconnecting with cultural roots through spirituality enhances personal identity and self-worth, essential for healing.

Storytelling and Traditional Knowledge

- 1 The power of storytelling is vital in preserving cultural knowledge.**
Storytelling serves as a vessel for passing down traditions and wisdom through generations.

- 2 Oral traditions are crucial for healing and resilience.**
These traditions provide a sense of community and support, fostering emotional healing.

- 3 Cultural narratives strengthen identity and belonging.**
Engaging with stories helps individuals connect with their roots and culture.

- 4 Storytelling can serve as a therapeutic tool.**
Sharing personal and communal stories can aid in processing trauma and promoting wellness.

- 5 Preservation of traditional knowledge through storytelling can combat cultural erosion.**
In a rapidly changing world, storytelling keeps cultures alive and relevant.

ACTION-FROM-TRAUMA APPROACH

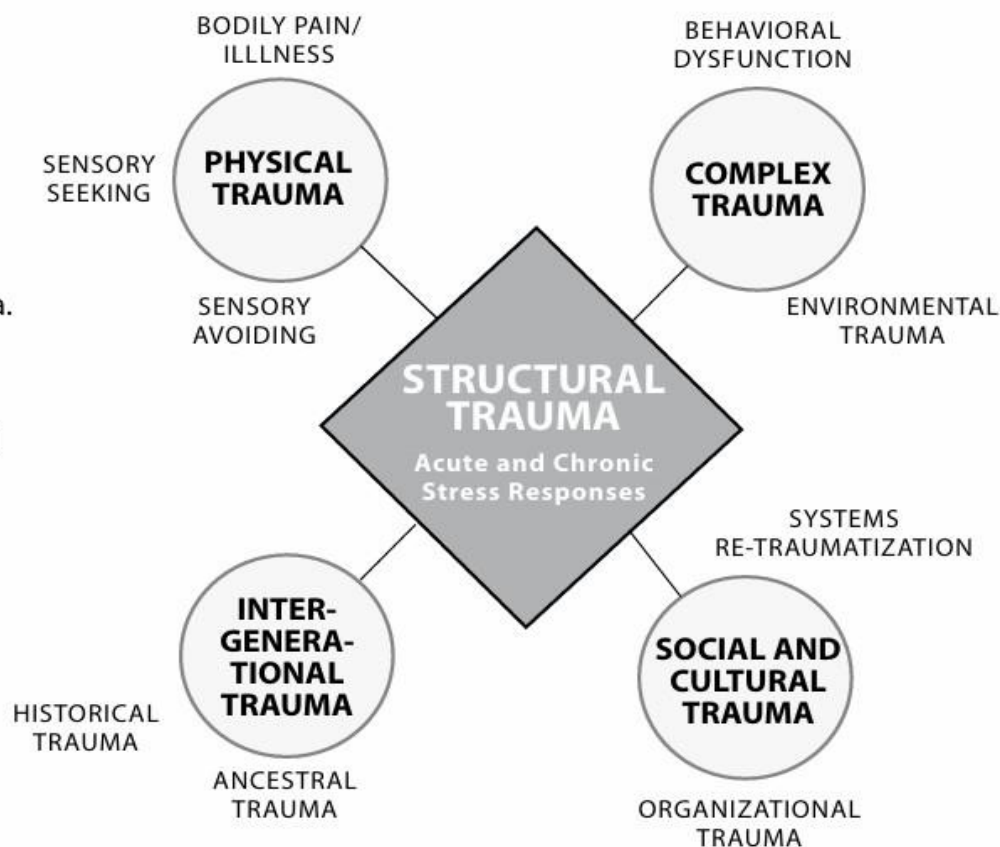
THE FIVE DIMENSIONS OF TRAUMA MODEL

The condition of trauma is dynamic. An individual, population, or community can be exposed to various forms of trauma. Ultimately, the exposure and experience impacts neurological functioning. Hence, the model proposes that structural trauma (i.e., changes on the neurological level) occurs as a result of the other forms of trauma.

When there is more exposure to the various forms of trauma, the severity of structural trauma increases.

Each form of trauma has secondary conditions as revealed in the model.

Acknowledgment of the complexity



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- Acknowledge and be **A**ware of trauma
- Create growth from trauma
- Teach neuroeducation and steps toward growth
- Intergenerational factors
- Organizations and systems re-traumatization
- **N**ow is the time to take **ACTION** to create growth from trauma



HISTORICAL TRAUMA RESPONSE

(WEAVER & BRAVE HEART, 1999)

- Brave Heart introduced Historical Trauma Response (HTR) to describe grief and loss passed across generations in Indigenous communities.
- It helps explain collective symptoms of unresolved mourning, shame, and spiritual disconnection.
- Suggested Activity: Invite elders or cultural leaders to tell intergenerational stories of strength

THE BODY KEEPS THE SCORE (VAN DER KOLK, 2014)

- ▶ Emphasizes that trauma is stored in the body. True healing requires somatic interventions like yoga, movement, and breathing - not just cognitive work.
- ▶ Suggested Activity: Body scan meditation, walking meditation, or movement-based group ritual.

INDIGENOUS MENTAL HEALTH

(GONE, 2013-
2018)

Dr. Joseph Gone critiques Western frameworks and highlights the value of culturally specific Indigenous healing.

Healing is not just psychological - it is also spiritual, social, and political.

Suggested Activity: Co-create a Community Wellness Wheel with participants. Use 4 quadrants (mental, emotional, spiritual, physical).



NATURE AND RESILIENCE (HARTMANN ET AL., 2019)

- ▶ Natural environments support regulation and belonging. Nature exposure is proven to reduce stress and improve healing outcomes - especially for people impacted by social or historical trauma.
- ▶ Suggested Activity: Mindful walk. Reflection prompt: 'What healing message does the land hold for you?'

NEUROCEPTION OF SAFETY



Neuroception is our nervous system's automatic ability to detect safety or threat.



Stephen Porges' Polyvagal Theory shows how trauma can cause us to misread safety cues as danger.



Cultural practices like drumming, chanting, and ceremony help reestablish safety and co-regulation.

THE VAGUS NERVE (10TH CRANIAL NERVE)



Primary nerve of the
parasympathetic
nervous system



Influences heart rate,
digestion, respiration,
and social engagement



Key player in polyvagal
theory (Stephen Porges)

DORSAL VAGAL PATHWAY (BACK BRANCH)

Origin: Dorsal motor
nucleus

State: Shutdown,
dissociation, immobilization

Functions: Slows
metabolism, digestion;
freeze response

Trauma Implication:
Overactivation can lead to
**chronic fatigue,
dissociation, numbness;**
seen in early, overwhelming
trauma

VENTRAL VAGAL PATHWAY (FRONT BRANCH)

Origin: Nucleus ambiguus

State: Social engagement, calm, connection, safety

Functions: Facial expression, vocalization, eye contact, prosocial behavior

Trauma Implication: When active, promotes healing and co-regulation; trauma recovery often aims to **restore ventral vagal tone**

HEALING IMPLICATIONS

- ▶ Trauma-informed practices (e.g., mindfulness, rhythmic movement, safe relationships) can help shift the nervous system from dorsal
- ▶ shutdown to ventral engagement
- ▶ Somatic therapies often work to increase ventral vagal tone and interrupt chronic dorsal states

NEUROCEPTION

- Neuroception is our **subconscious “safety surveillance” system**—a fast, automatic process that scans internal and external cues (body sensations, facial expressions, tone, environment) to detect **safety, danger, or life-threat**—without conscious awareness

The Vagus Nerve and Trauma: Ventral vs. Dorsal Pathways

- The Vagus Nerve (10th Cranial Nerve)

Primary nerve of the parasympathetic nervous system

Influences heart rate, digestion, respiration, and social engagement

- Key player in polyvagal theory (Stephen Porges)

- **Ventral Vagal Pathway (Front Branch)**

State: Social engagement, calm, connection

FUNCTIONS: Facial expression, vocalization, eye contact, prosocial behavior

Trauma Implication: When active, promotes healing and co-regulation; trauma recovery often aims to restore ventral vagal tone

💡 **Healing Implications** e.g., mindfulness, rhythmic movement, safe relationships) can

Ventral Vagal PATHWAY

Origin: Nucleus ambiguus

State: Social engagement; calm; connection, safety

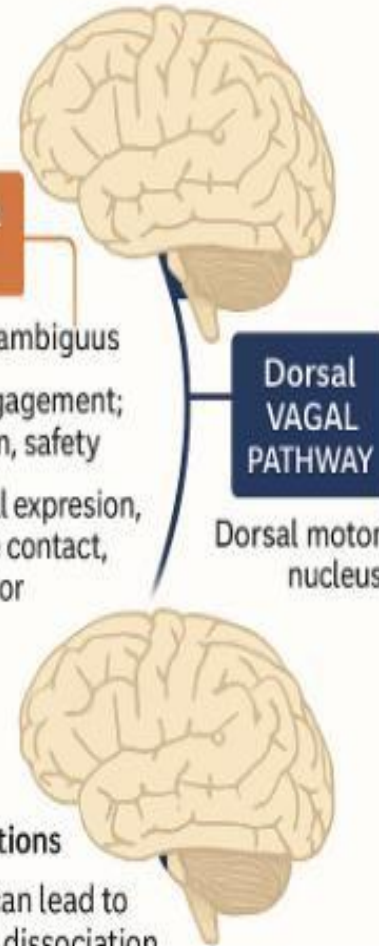
Functions: Facial expression, vocalization, eye contact, prosocial behavior

Dorsal VAGAL PATHWAY

Dorsal motor nucleus

Trauma Implications

Overactivation can lead to chronic fatigue, dissociation, numbness; seen in early, overwhelming trauma



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NEUROLOGICAL MECHANISMS

- ▶ **Input Gathering:** Brainstem receives signals from internal (heartbeat, gut) and external sources (faces, sounds, surroundings).
- ▶ **Instant Classification:** These signals are swiftly categorized as **safe**, **danger**, or **life-threat**—without active thought.
- ▶ **Response Activation:** Depending on the result, the body
 - ▶ switches between three states:
 - ▶ **Ventral vagal** → **Social Engagement** (calm, connected)
 - ▶ **Sympathetic** → **Fight/Flight** (mobilization)
 - ▶ **Dorsal vagal** → **Shutdown/Freeze** (immobilization)

VENTRAL VAGAL

SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT SYSTEM

Social bonding, feelings of harmonious connection with others and environment, feeling safe in body, joy, peace, mindful, open and curious to present moment

SYMPATHETIC

MOBILISATION SYSTEM

Fight and flight, freeze - responses to danger: emotions of rage, anger, irritation, frustration, fear, terror, panic, restless, anxious and worried

DORSAL VAGAL

IMMOBILISATION SYSTEM

Fainting, freeze, shutdown, dissociation, surrendering into death, energy conserved for vital organs

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THE CONTINUUM OF STATES

Safety (ventral): You feel present, open, socially connected.

Danger (sympathetic): Alert, aroused, may feel anxious or angry.

Life-Threat (dorsal): Shut down, numb, dissociated, or frozen. This spectrum is fluid, allowing natural movement between states

DISTORTION OF SAFETY

Our neuroceptive system evolved to **keep us alive**, but **trauma can distort it**, triggering defensive states even in safe situations

Increasing “glimmers”—small signals of safety (a kind voice, warm lighting, gentle presence)—helps shift us toward ventral vagal and social engagement ([Aldebaran Healing](#)).

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS



Mindful Awareness: Notice bodily signals like tightness or racing heart—these are neuroceptive cues.



Create Safe Environments: Use glimmers—music, supportive presence, caring space.



Regulation Exercises: Breathing, co-regulation (safe social contact), grounding to re-balance when triggered.

Neuroception Outcome	Nervous System State	Core Response	Regulation Work
Safe signals	Ventral vagal	Social, calm	Engage, connect
Danger signals	Sympathetic	Fight/flight	Soothing breaths, movement
Threat signals	Dorsal vagal	Freeze/shutdown	Grounding, gentle touch

CORE CONCEPTS

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UNDERSTANDING BALANCE IN HEALING

- Indigenous models of wellness emphasize balance between mind, body, spirit, and emotion.

Balance means respecting cycles of rest, community, ritual, and nature.

In practice: honoring both personal healing and collective responsibilities.

PAN-AFRICAN + INDIGENOUS MEDICINE WHEEL FOR HOLISTIC HEALING INDIGENOUS MEDICINE WHEEL

- ◀ Represents balance among four realms: mental, emotional, spiritual, physical
- **Kongo Cosmogram (Yowa cross)**
 - ▶ Symbolizes life cycle (birth death) and realms (celestial ancestral)
- **Intersection**
 - ▶ These frameworks overlap at a central hub representing balance between self and ancestors.

4 Corners

- ▶ 4 directions
- ▶ 4 seasons
- ▶ 4 times of day
- ▶ 4 elements
- ▶ 4 medicines

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INDIGENOUS QUADRANTS & COLORS:

- East (mental/spring) – Yellow
- South (emotional/summer) – Red
- West (spiritual/fall) – Black
- North (wisdom/winter) – White

Overlay: Cosmogram cross aligned
east–west and north–south axes

COLOR & ICONOGRAPHY

Quadrant colors guide
seasons/emotional states



Overlay the cosmogram cross at
the circle's center



Surrounding symbols may include:
Sankofa bird, Kongo spiral, eagle
feather, herbal motifs

USING THE WHEEL FOR HEALING

Self-Assessment:
Journaling prompts per
quadrant/axis (e.g.,
mental clarity, ancestral
connections)

Goal-Setting: Assign
holistic goals—physical,
mental, emotional,
spiritual, ancestral

Ceremony Integration:

Indigenous: talking
circles & seasonal
ceremonies

African: ring dances &
ancestor invocation

RITUAL & PRACTICE STEPS

- **Constructing the Wheel:**
 - Draw circle + quadrants
 - Add cosmogram cross
 - Apply color & symbols
- **Routine Usage:**
 - Regular journaling & reflection
 - Weekly/seasonal ceremony practices

CULTURAL RESPECT & GUIDANCE

1

This is a **template**,
not a replacement
for cultural
traditions

2

Practice **cultural
humility**: engage
with elders/healers,
seek permission,
respect protocols

Element	Indigenous Tradition	African (Kongo) Tradition
Circle + Quadrants	Mental, emotional, spiritual, physical	Birth–Death, Celestial–Ancestral axes
Central Hub	Balance & self-awareness	Ancestral convergence point
Ritual Practice	Talking circles, seasonal ceremonies	Ring dance & ancestor invocation

SUMMARY

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PRACTICE

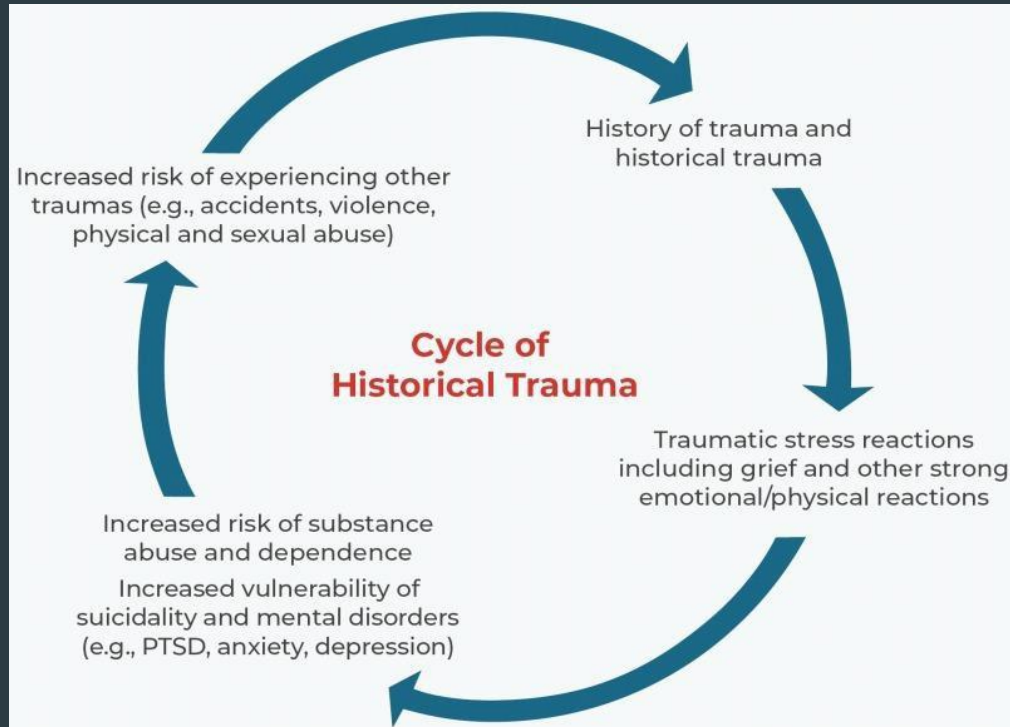
	Build your own version (paper or digital)
	Customize: colors, prompts, language, symbols
	Engage: connect with local Indigenous/African elders or knowledge holders
	Practice regularly: journaling + ceremony

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GROUNDING EXERCISE

Body Scan



CYCLE OF HISTORICAL TRAUMA

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SERVICES FOR AMERICAN INDIANS AND ALASKA NATIVES: FOR BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SERVICE PROVIDERS, ADMINISTRATORS, AND SUPERVISORS [INTERNET]. TREATMENT IMPROVEMENT PROTOCOL (TIP) SERIES, NO. 61. ROCKVILLE (MD): [SUBSTANCE ABUSE AND MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES ADMINISTRATION \(US\)](#); 2018.

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WHAT HAPPENS NEUROLOGICALLY?

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Trauma-Responsive Approaches

- Understanding the impacts of trauma on individuals and communities is crucial for creating supportive environments that foster healing and recovery.



GONE: COMMUNITY WELLNESS WHEEL

A Community Wellness Wheel includes four dimensions:

Mental • Emotional • Spiritual • Physical

Group creation of a wheel with healing actions in each quadrant.

Example: Drumming (Spiritual), Talking Circle (Emotional).

COMPONENTS OF THE COMMUNITY WELLNESS WHEEL



Four key dimensions that contribute to overall well-being: ([University of New Hampshire+4Crisis & Trauma Resource Institute+4swc.osu.edu+4](#))



Spiritual Wellness: This dimension involves finding purpose and meaning in life, which can be derived from religious faith, personal values, or a sense of connection to something greater than oneself.



Emotional Wellness: Emotional wellness refers to understanding and managing one's emotions, coping effectively with stress, and maintaining a positive outlook on life. ([Edwards Air Force Base \(University of New Hampshire+1\)](#))



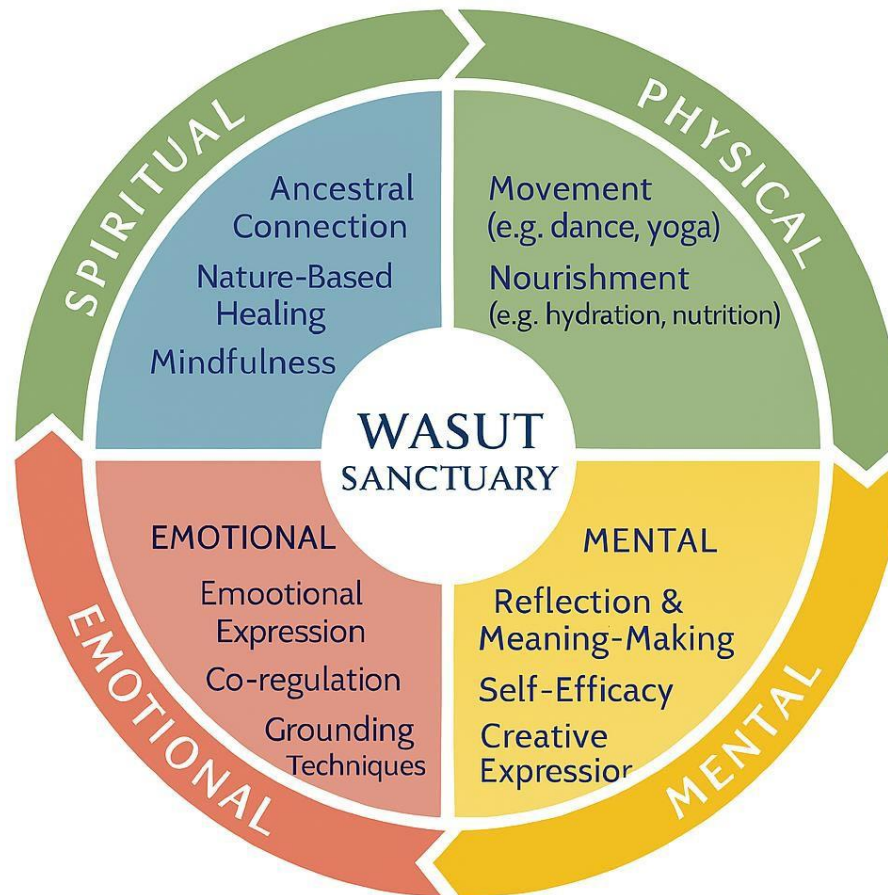
Physical Wellness: This area focuses on maintaining a healthy body through regular exercise, proper nutrition, adequate sleep, and routine medical care.



Social Wellness: Social wellness emphasizes the importance of building healthy relationships, having a supportive social network, and contributing to the community. ([University of New Hampshire+7shcs.ucdavis.edu; University of Delaware+7](#))

INTERRELATION OF THE FOUR DIMENSIONS

- ◀ Engaging in regular physical activity (physical wellness) can improve mood (emotional wellness), foster social connections (social wellness), and provide a sense of purpose (spiritual wellness)
- ◀ Additional wellness models:
 - ◀ incorporating additional dimensions such as intellectual, occupational, financial, and environmental wellness.
 - ◀ Dependent on programmatical goals and context



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SOMATIC, SENSORY- BASED ACTIVITIES



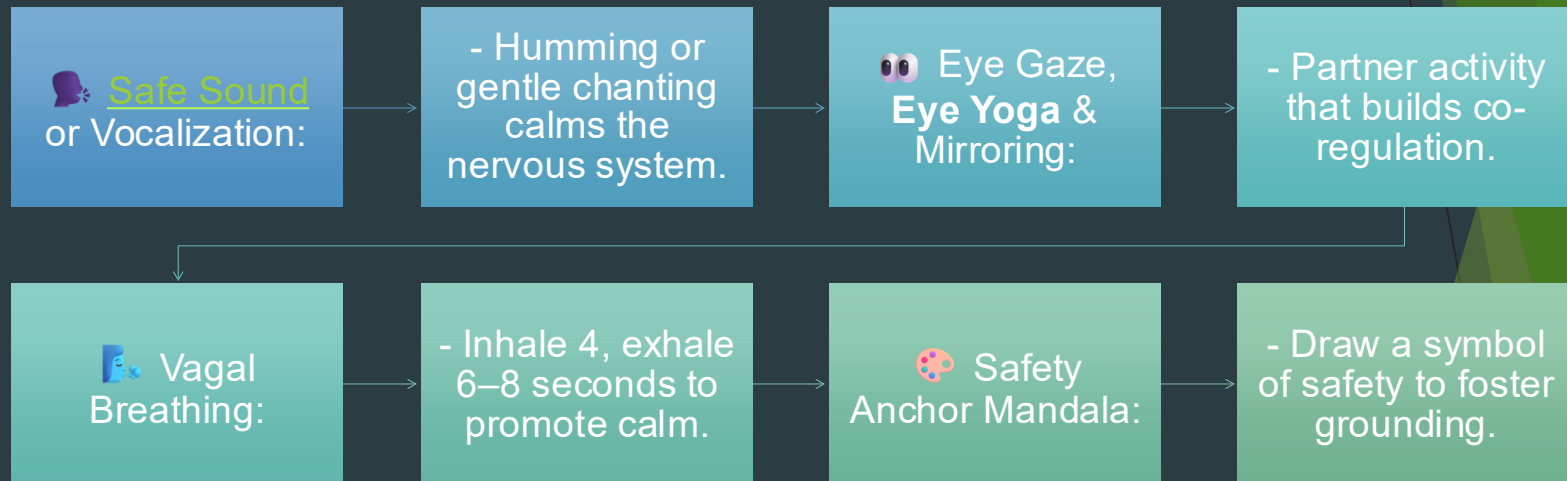
To support healing and regulation through the vagus nerve



Activities are aligned with the ventral (social engagement) and dorsal (shutdown/freeze) branches of the vagus nerve.



VENTRAL VAGAL PATHWAY ACTIVATION




DORSAL VAGAL RELEASE ACTIVITIES

 Weighted
Sensory or Blanket
Wrap:

- Deep pressure
helps restore body
boundaries **Self-
shiatsu Massage.**

 Grounding
Through
Movement:

- Gentle stomping
or heel drops re-
engage the body.

 Sensory Scan
(5-4-3-2-1):

- Reconnects with
the environment.

 Co-regulation
Circle:

- Share regulating
strategies in a
group setting.

◆ REFLECTION PROMPT

How did your body
respond to each
activity?

What surprised
you? What felt
safe? What didn't?

This builds
awareness of
neuroception — the
body's detection of
safety or danger.



Application, Collaboration, and Moving Forward

Develop Community-Based Healing Initiatives

Collaborate on creating actionable, community-driven projects.

Reflect and Commit to Ongoing Healing

Commit to applying workshop teachings in personal and community healing efforts.

Participate in a Communal Healing Ceremony

Celebrate shared growth and reaffirm commitment to cultural reconnection.

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Reconnecting to Ancestral Wisdom



- **Participate in group storytelling sessions.**
Engage with others to share and hear stories that connect to our heritage.
- **Learn about the significance of spiritual rituals and traditional knowledge in healing.**
Understand how these practices contribute to holistic healing and well-being.

Youth Engagement in Cultural Preservation

► Explore ways to involve youth in cultural preservation and healing practices.

Create action plans for mentorship programs.

EMPOWERING YOUTH IN HEALING



MENTORSHIP AS A HEALING TOOL

Youth can act as mentors, guiding peers through challenges and fostering resilience. This peer support enhances community bonds and encourages personal growth.



LEADERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

Engaging youth in leadership roles empowers them to take charge of community healing initiatives, fostering a sense of responsibility and ownership.



CULTURAL PRESERVATION INITIATIVES

Youth involvement in cultural preservation helps maintain traditions and practices that are vital for community identity and continuity, promoting healing through heritage.



INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS FROM YOUTH

Young people often bring fresh perspectives and innovative solutions to healing processes, addressing community issues in unique and effective ways.

Elders share knowledge.

Elders support the healing journeys of younger generations.

Role of Elders in Healing

Elders play a vital role in guiding cultural practices.

Impacts on Identity

- ▶ Loss of language
- ▶ Disconnection from traditions
- ▶ Stigma and internalized oppression

Impacts on Identity (Discussion)

- ▶ Facilitated questions
- ▶ Small group breakout
- ▶ Sharing insights

Mental Health Implications

- ▶ High rates of PTSD, depression
- ▶ Suicide and substance use trends

Mental Health Implications (Discussion)

- ▶ Facilitated questions
- ▶ Small group breakout
- ▶ Sharing insights

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Spirituality in Indigenous Healing

- ▶ Role of ceremony and ritual
- ▶ Belief systems
- ▶ Holistic worldviews

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Spirituality in Indigenous Healing (Discussion)

- ▶ Facilitated questions
- ▶ Small group breakout
- ▶ Sharing insights



Examples of Spiritual Ceremonies

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Examples of Spiritual Ceremonies (Discussion)

- ▶ Facilitated questions
- ▶ Small group breakout
- ▶ Sharing insights

Healing Through Connection

- ▶ Connection to land
- ▶ Ancestors
- ▶ Community

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Healing Through Connection (Discussion)

- ▶ Facilitated questions
- ▶ Small group breakout
- ▶ Sharing insights

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Trauma-Responsive Care

- ▶ Core principles
- ▶ Safety and empowerment
- ▶ Trust and collaboration

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Trauma-Responsive Care (Discussion)

- ▶ Facilitated questions:
 - ▶ What Happened to You?
 - ▶ What do You Need?
- ▶ Small group breakout
- ▶ Sharing insights

Aligning TRC with Culture

- ▶ Adaptation of models
- ▶ Use of traditional concepts

Education & Healing Practices

Classroom
integration

Mental
health
support

Role of
school
counselors

Education & Healing Practices (Activity)

- ▶ Interactive exercises
- ▶ Role plays
- ▶ Peer feedback

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Working with Elders



Protocols



Building trust



Inviting collaboration

Tools for Culturally Intelligent Plans



Lesson plans



Community events



Curriculum redesign

Cultural Intelligence vs. Competency



Self-awareness



Contextual
knowledge



Dynamic learning

Cultural Intelligence vs. Competency (Activity)

- ▶ Interactive exercises
- ▶ Role plays
- ▶ Peer feedback

Blending Traditions and Therapy



CBT and mindfulness
with ceremonies



Examples of
integrative models

Blending Traditions and Therapy (Activity)

- ▶ Interactive exercises
- ▶ Role plays
- ▶ Peer feedback

Community- Based Healing



FEASTS



WELLNESS
CIRCLES



LAND-BASED
EDUCATION

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Sustainable Healing Models

- ▶ Train-the-trainer
- ▶ Capacity building
- ▶ Evaluation methods

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Closing: Storytelling

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Closing Circle



Final reflections



Commitments to action

Closing Circle (Activity)

- ▶ Interactive exercises
- ▶ Role plays
- ▶ Peer feedback

Next Steps



PERSONAL
PLANNING



PROGRAM
DEVELOPMENT



ONGOING
EDUCATION

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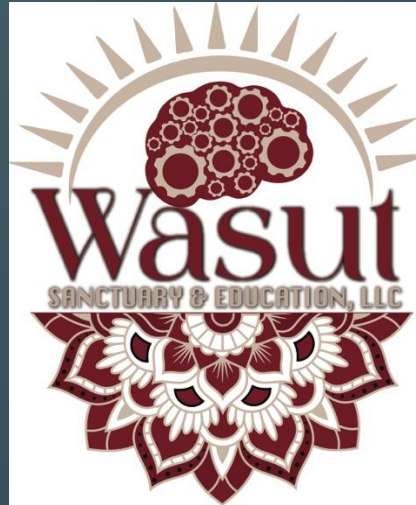
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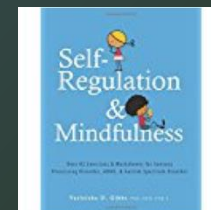
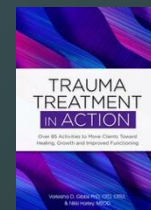
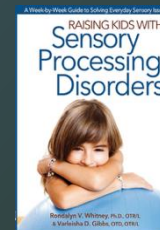
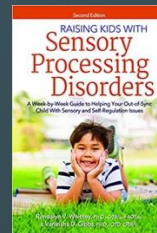
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