

Connecting with Culture

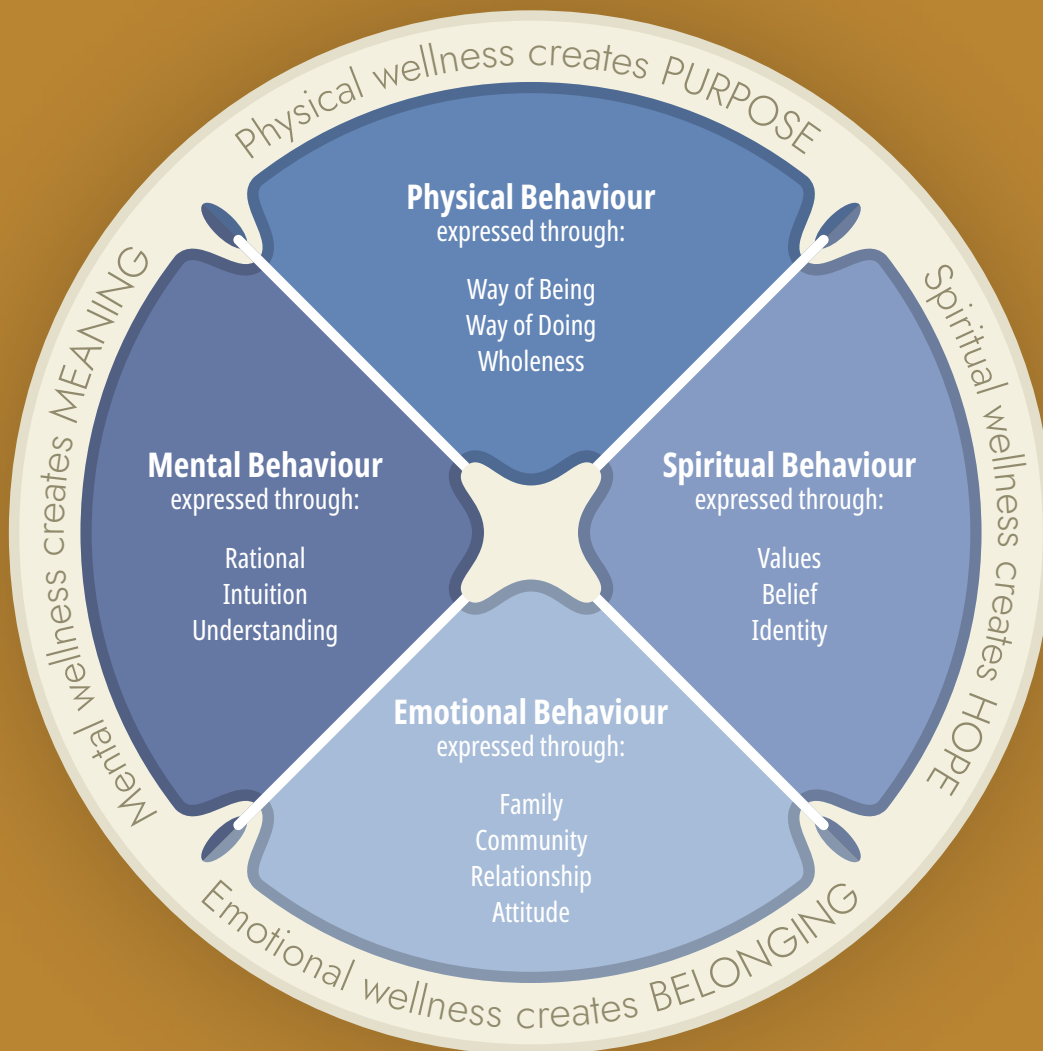
GROWING OUR WELLNESS

Activity Guide



“Wellness from an Indigenous perspective is a whole and healthy person expressed through a sense of balance of spirit, emotion, mind and body. Central to wellness is belief in one’s connection to language, land, beings of creation, and ancestry, supported by a caring family and environment.”

*Elder Jim Dumont, Definition of Wellness**



The Indigenous Wellness Framework™ was developed under the guidance of Elders and community members as part of the Honouring Our Strengths: Indigenous Culture as Intervention in Addictions Treatment project. We built on the knowledge shared through the Indigenous Wellness Framework to develop hands-on activities with a flower as a central and accessible image.

* Excerpt from “Elder Jim Dumont, National Native Addictions Partnership Foundation, Honouring Our Strengths: Indigenous Culture as Intervention in Addictions Treatment Project - University of Saskatchewan. (2014). Definition of Wellness©. Bothwell, Ontario: Author. Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Funding Reference Number AHI-120535.”

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Introduction

Thank you for picking up the *Connecting with Culture: Growing our Wellness Activity Guide*. We hope that the simple step-by-step exercises will help you experience greater wellness by thinking about and participating in Indigenous culture.

As Indigenous people, it's important to our wellness to connect with our culture. Unfortunately, many of us have been separated from our Indigenous traditions and ceremonies for a long time.

In 2012-2013, our research team visited 12 National Native Alcohol and Drug Abuse Program (NNADAP) and National Youth Solvent Abuse Program (NYSAP) treatment centres where we hosted community conversations. Our visits were led by Elder Jim Dumont. He explained that we are just beginning to have open conversations in our communities about the connections between wellness and Indigenous culture.

Elder Gladys Wapass-Greyeyes shared the story of a growing flower. Growing a flower is one way to think about connecting further with our culture.

The growth and beauty of a flower is like the renewal of culture and wellness for First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples. This Activity Guide will help you to reconnect with your Indigenous culture by growing a flower. Staff at your treatment centre have an accompanying Facilitators' Handbook with tips to help you.

Flowers are a part of our Indigenous culture as both food and medicine. They are powerful symbols and used by Indigenous peoples around the world. Flowers remind us of our connection to the land and to our Nation. They teach us about the life cycle of birth, growth and renewal. They remind us to be patient during times of change.

* As of June 2015, the National Native Addictions Partnership Foundation (NNAPF) changed its operating name to the Thunderbird Partnership Foundation, a division of NNAPF Inc.

Greetings!

Aanii!

Tansi!

Kwe!

Metaloitiog!

Shé: kon!

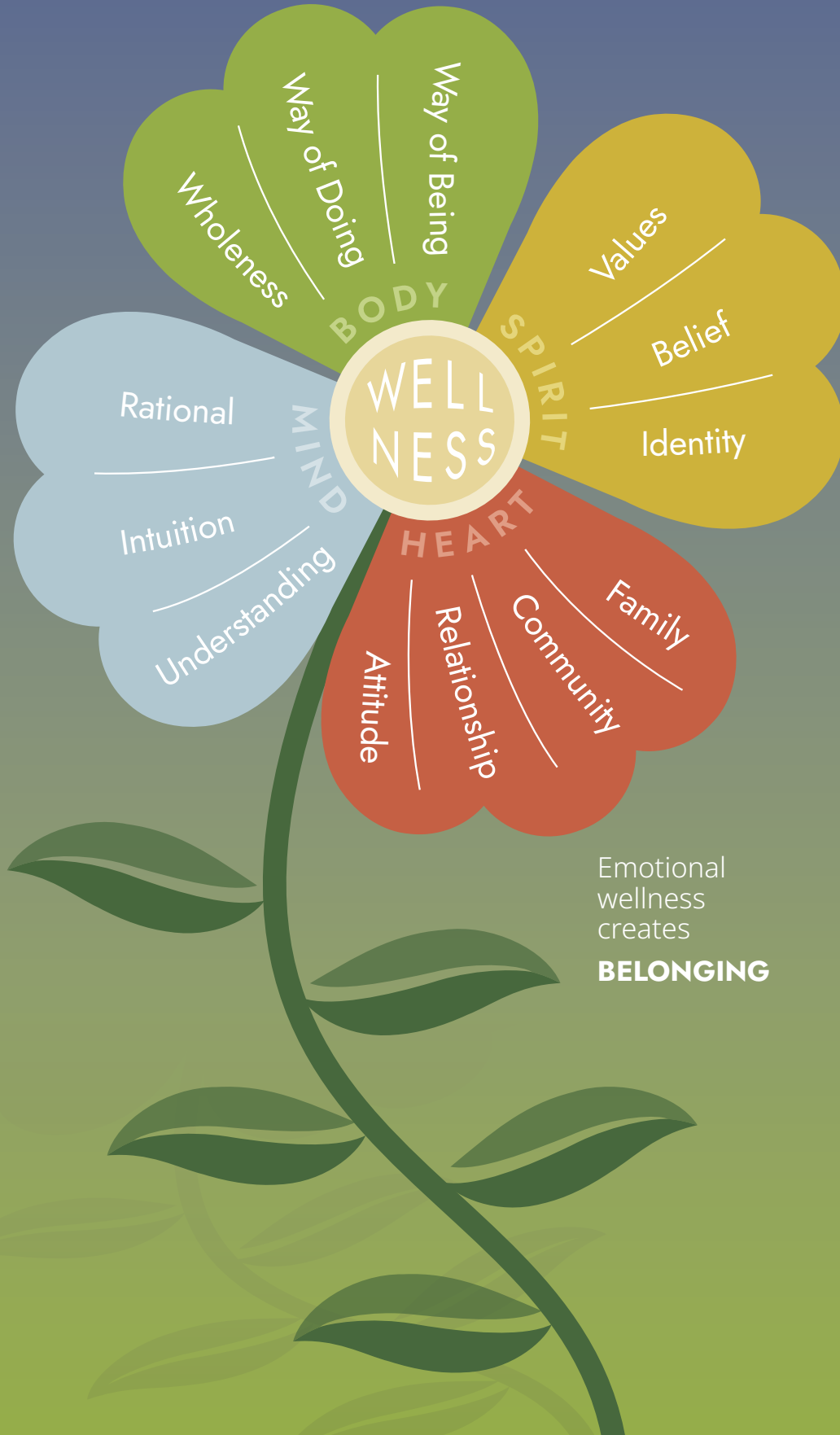
*The growth of a flower
is like the renewal of
culture and wellness
for Indigenous people.*

Physical wellness creates
PURPOSE

Spiritual wellness creates
HOPE

Mental wellness creates
MEANING

Emotional wellness creates
BELONGING



Connecting with Culture

Indigenous people living in Canada each have their own culture depending on where they live, their language and their Nation. There are differences, but there are also similarities. For example, we all agree that spirit is at the centre of our being and of those we are related to, including animals, the land and our ancestors. We believe that all of life is connected in a circle and is working towards a balance that promotes kindness and respect for all.

Cultural Differences

It's important to remember that there is not "one" culture because culture is defined by the land, language and Nation of people.

We have used the word Indigenous throughout the material. We also use the term First Nation(s) in order to differentiate this group from the Inuit and Métis peoples in Canada.



We can connect with our Indigenous culture in four different ways:

- **SPIRITUALLY**
by praying or being a part of a ceremony;
- **EMOTIONALLY**
by cooking with one of our family's recipes or participating in a community event;
- **MENTALLY**
by learning and thinking about Creation stories; and
- **PHYSICALLY** by touching the land and thanking Mother Earth for her gifts.



Growing a Wellness Flower

The Activity Guide uses the flower as a symbol for growing your wellness by connecting with your Indigenous culture. You may recognize parts of the flower because they are similar to the Medicine Wheel.

The guide has been broken up into five steps based on the different parts of the flower. Each step includes questions for you to think about as well as an activity to help you grow your cultural wellness.

There are many different ways to make a flower. At the end of the Activity Guide, you'll find two sheets with all the parts of the flower. You can:

- ✚ Cut out the parts, write on them and put them together like a jigsaw puzzle;
- ✚ Trace the parts onto coloured paper or felt;
- ✚ Draw or paint a flower of your own on a piece of paper (*there are some blank pages at the end of this guide*); or
- ✚ Make a flower from clay or from objects you've collected outside (*twigs, feathers, stones*).

Take as long as you want to grow your flower. You may choose to do one step a week or all five steps in one day. It's your choice.

This is YOUR flower. There is no wrong way to do it. Be as creative as you want. Change it as often as you want. Have fun.

We've included some examples of flowers drawn by past clients at the end of the Activity Guide.

There are five steps to growing a flower:

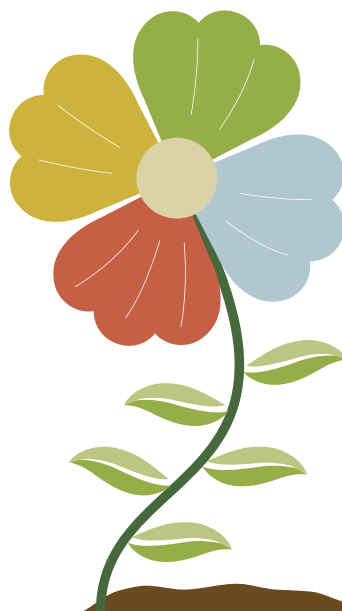
STEP 1 **MY FLOWER'S CENTRE**
What does wellness mean to me?

STEP 2 **MY FLOWER'S STEM**
What does Indigenous culture mean to me?

STEP 3 **MY FLOWER'S LEAVES**
What cultural activities are important to me?

STEP 4 **MY FLOWER'S PETALS**
What cultural activities will I get involved in?

STEP 5 **THE GROUND MY FLOWER GROWS IN**
What cultural supports do I have in my life?



Help is Available

- ✚ It can be difficult to understand what culture and wellness are. Don't hesitate to ask for help.
- ✚ Ask your group leader to work through the steps with you.
- ✚ Talk to an Elder or Knowledge Keeper in your community.
- ✚ Share your questions and ideas with your friends, family and neighbours.

STEP 1: My Flower's Centre

“Wellness from an Indigenous perspective is a whole and healthy person expressed through a sense of balance of spirit, emotion, mind and body. Central to wellness is belief in one’s connection to language, land, beings of creation, and ancestry, supported by a caring family and environment.”

Elder Jim Dumont, Definition of Wellness

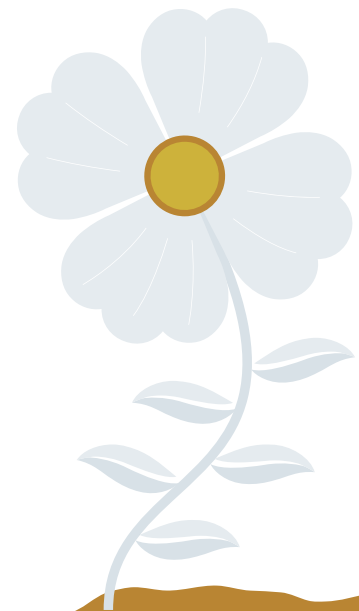
As Elder Jim says, our wellbeing comes from a balance of four kinds of wellness:

Spiritual: Our spirit is at the centre of our being and wants us to live life to the fullest. We connect with our spirit by learning about our identity as an Indigenous person. There is a beautiful story about how the Creator gave us our identity. When we connect with our identity, we have hope for the future.

Emotional: Our hearts are filled with so many emotions, such as love, sadness and happiness. Friends and family are important. So are our ties with other living beings, like animals and plants. We feel well when we have healthy relationships in our lives.

Mental: We use our mind to think and learn. The mind is also capable of intuitive thought. That means we need to listen to our spirit because our spirit nurtures our understanding about the meaning of life through intuition.

Physical: We use our bodies to move and live life. Our body is the house for our spirit. Living life with purpose and on purpose needs a healthy body.



STEP 1 Growing My Flower

Think about the Discussion Questions on the next page, either on your own or with other people.

Cut out the centre of your flower from the flower pattern at the end of the Activity Guide.

Once you are happy with your understanding of what wellness means to you, write it on or attach it to your flower's centre.

The centre of a flower is usually where the seeds develop. Each seed has the potential to spring to life as a new flower. When the flower has finished growing, it creates more seeds and the cycle continues.

A healthy flower has a strong centre. It represents the ongoing life and strength of each of us individually and of our Indigenous community as a whole.

The Definition of Wellness wall card at the end of the Activity Guide provides additional information.

STEP 1 Discussion Questions

WHAT DOES WELLNESS MEAN TO ME?

What does spiritual wellness mean to you?

What does emotional wellness mean to you?

What does mental wellness mean to you?

What does physical wellness mean to you?



The meaning of wellness in my life is *(write or attach this to your flower's centre):*

STEP 2: **My Flower's Stem**

Elder Jim Dumont says that all Indigenous people share eight key ideas. These ideas form the foundation of our Indigenous culture.

Spirit: Spirit is in all things. Our spirit, heart, mind and body work together as a whole.

Circle: The circle reminds us that everything is connected and part of a whole. Day is followed by night. Winter is followed by spring, then summer and fall, year after year. If we look, we can see circular patterns in our own lives.

Harmony and Balance: The world is constantly changing, but it works towards harmony and balance. It's just like when people sing in harmony. The different individual voices blend together beautifully. We learn to balance when we ride a bicycle. We live in harmony and balance with our family, friends and neighbours when we respect each other's differences and care for one another.

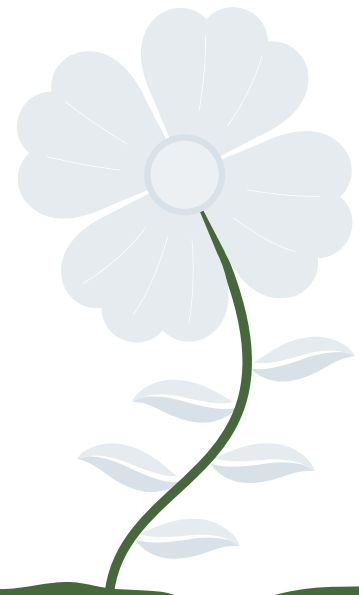
All My Relations: We are connected to all things – people, plants, trees, animals and rocks. We are all related to one another and need to look after each other.

Kindness/Caring/Respect: Kindness and caring are gifts from the Creator that our spirit carries into this world when we are born. Imagine that. We are naturally kind and caring. When we nurture this gift through our relationships, we learn about respect.

Earth Connection: We're all relatives because we're all part of Mother Earth.

Path of Life Continuum: Life is a journey. Babies learn to crawl and then to run. We grow up and figure out what our purpose is in life and how we can contribute to the life around us. We grow old. We're not alone on our journey because we're connected to our ancestors who came before us and to those who are not yet born.

Language: Our Indigenous languages are a sacred gift from the Creator. So language is more than just a way of communicating.



The stem of a flower is its base and connects all of its parts – its centre, petals and leaves.

The flower stem represents the central role that culture plays in helping us to live healthy lives.



The Definition of Culture wall card at the end of the Activity Guide provides additional information.

STEP 2 Discussion Questions

WHAT DOES INDIGENOUS CULTURE MEAN TO ME?



What stories have you heard about Indigenous culture in your family and community?

What is unique about Indigenous culture?

What does Indigenous culture mean to your family, friends and community?

Does Indigenous culture mean something different in their lives than it does in yours?



The meaning of Indigenous culture in my life is (write this on the stem of your flower):

STEP 3: My Flower's Leaves

Indigenous traditions, ceremonies and practices connect us to our culture. They help us to create wellness in our lives by balancing the spirit, heart, mind and body. Many cultural activities require a cultural teacher (sweat lodge ceremony, naming ceremony). Others, such as dancing, singing or praying, we can do on our own.



Common Cultural Activities

Ceremonial practices

Cleansing/sweat lodge ceremony

Dancing

Dream interpretation

Elders

Fasting ceremony

Feast for our ancestors/loved ones who have gone on

Give away dances/ceremony

Hunting/fishing/hide making

Land-based activities/spend time outdoors

Medicine people/traditional practitioners

Missing feast for our ancestors

Naming ceremony

Prayer

Singing

Social/cultural activities

Storytelling

Talking circle

Tell Creation Story

Traditional teachings/education

Use of natural foods/medicines

Use of our Indigenous languages

A flower is often surrounded by leaves on its stem.
The leaves produce food for a flowering plant.

Let's look at the leaves of your flower.
You will need cultural activities to make your flower bloom.

STEP 3 Growing My Flower

1. Think about the Discussion Questions on the next page, either on your own or with other people.
2. Cut out leaves for your flower from the flower pattern at the end of the Activity Guide.
3. Cut out a leaf for each of the cultural activities that are important to you. You can also include activities you have been part of in the past.
4. Once you are happy with the activities you have chosen as being important to you, write them on or attach them to your flower's leaves, along with when and how you plan to participate in these activities. Again, you can write down ones you have been a part of in the past as well.



The Common Cultural Interventions wall card at the end of the Activity Guide provides additional information.

STEP 3 Discussion Questions

WHAT CULTURAL ACTIVITIES ARE IMPORTANT TO ME?



What cultural activities are most common in your community?

What cultural activities have you been involved in the past?

What cultural activities are you currently involved in?

What additional cultural activities would you like to be involved in?



I plan to carry out the following activities

(list when and how you plan to participate and then write or attach them to the leaves of your flower):

STEP 4: My Flower's Petals

There are four kinds of cultural activities: spiritual, emotional, mental and physical.

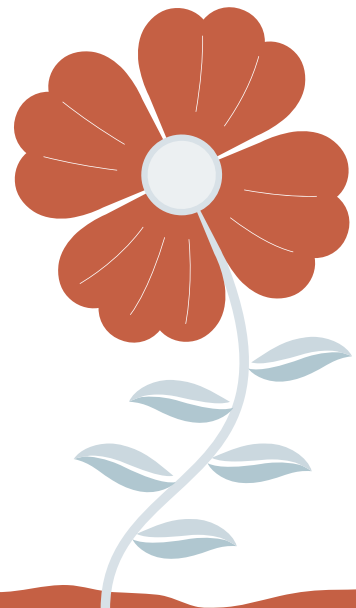
Spiritual activities involve the spirit and give us a sense of hope. We are proud to be Indigenous and we look forward to the future.

Emotional activities involve the heart and give us a sense of belonging. We feel connected to our families, our community and our culture.

Mental activities involve the mind and bring meaning to our lives. We understand how our lives and the lives of those around us are joined to those of our ancestors and those who will come after us.

Physical activities involve our body and give us a sense of purpose. Our physical body houses our spirit, heart and mind. Together they are the foundation for our purpose in life.

We can increase our wellness by participating in cultural activities in each of these areas. This will help us find harmony and balance in our lives.



The petals of a flower usually surround its centre and often help to fertilize the flower.

Just as the flower is fertilized by its petals, cultural activities can help to increase our wellness.

Behaviour	Action	Outcome
Spiritual	Belief, Identity, Values	Hope
Emotional	Relationship, Family, Community, Attitude	Belonging
Mental	Intuition, Understanding, Rational	Meaning
Physical	Wholeness, Way of Being, Way of Doing	Purpose

The Indigenous Wellness Framework wall card at the end of the Activity Guide provides additional information.



WHAT CULTURAL ACTIVITIES WILL I GET INVOLVED IN?

Adding Petals to your Flower

These can be complex ideas and you may not fully understand them right away. Let's look at one area at a time to make it a bit easier.

- A Spiritual Activities Provide Us with a Sense of **HOPE**
- B Emotional Activities Provide Us with a Sense of **BELONGING**
- C Mental Activities Bring **MEANING** to our Lives
- D Physical Activities Bring **PURPOSE** to our Lives

When you are ready, choose the type of activity that interests you the most and start with that. You may want to review the types of cultural activities that are important to you (STEP 3) as this could help you make a choice.

You can add just one petal to your flower, or you can add all 13 – one for each of the different types of cultural actions identified in the spiritual, emotional, mental and physical areas. It's up to you!

My Thoughts

STEP 4A: Spiritual Activities Provide Us with a Sense of Hope

Our spirit is at the very centre of our being. It is the fire that gives us life and hope. Our spiritual wellbeing is the base on which we grow our physical, mental and emotional wellbeing.

There are three types of actions we can take to increase our spiritual wellness.

Action	Explanation	Examples
Belief	Our belief is based on a worldview that there are two sides to life: the spiritual and the physical. Our Indigenous culture and traditions provide us with a strong foundation on which to grow our wellness.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✚ Believing in the goodness of creation and of the Creator✚ Participating in Indigenous ceremonies✚ Asking about the cultural practices of our people
Identity	Our identity comes from the Creator.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✚ Asking an Elder to find our spirit name✚ Talking to our family about our clan identity✚ Finding out the story of our Nation
Values	We try to live our lives according to Indigenous values. Hope for the future comes from a balance between seeing life from our spirit and seeing life from our eyes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✚ Finding an Elder or cultural teacher to help us understand our culture✚ Trying to live our lives according to Indigenous values, such as the Seven Grandfather teachings (<i>wisdom, love, respect, bravery, honesty, humility, truth</i>)*✚ Fasting brings wisdom <p><small>* <i>The Mishomis Book: The Voice of the Ojibway, Edward Benton-Banai</i></small></p>

My Thoughts



STEP 4A Discussion Questions

WHAT ACTIVITIES WILL I CHOOSE TO WORK ON? WHEN WILL I DO THIS?

What Indigenous teachings or cultural practices do you find the most meaningful?
Why? What activities could you choose to grow your **belief**?

What makes you proud to be an Indigenous person?
What activities could you choose to grow your **identity**?

Think of an Indigenous person you admire. How do they live their life? What values do they live by?
What activities could you choose to grow your **values**?



In order to grow my flower, I plan to carry out the following activities.
Include when and how you will do this and then write or attach them to a flower petal.

Belief _____

Identity _____

Values _____

STEP 4B: Emotional Activities Provide Us with a Sense of Belonging

Everything is connected and part of a whole. Our relationships with other people, animals and the land give us a sense of belonging and support our emotional wellbeing.

There are four types of actions we can take to increase our emotional wellness.

Action	Explanation	Examples
Relationship	Our identity is nurtured through our relationship to the land and all that lives on the land we come from.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⌘ Experiencing the healing of the drum ⌘ Learning about medicine plants
Family	Our family extends beyond our biological family. Our extended family includes the clan family and the way we relate respectfully to friends as "cousins, auntie, uncle, grandmother, grandfather."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⌘ Telling stories about our ancestors ⌘ Spending time together in important family places
Community	Community is the land and people we come from. Our identity is connected to the story of our community and the land and beings that live on that land. It's a place that we spiritually belong to.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⌘ Participating in community events ⌘ Knowing the story of our community <i>(How did our community arrive on its land? How does our community relate to those around us and to other Nations?)</i>
Attitude	Our attitude towards life is nurtured through our relationships with family, community and creation. These connections motivate us to live life to the fullest.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⌘ Fulfilling our roles and responsibilities as we know them through our identity - our Nation, spirit name and clan ⌘ Understanding our gifts, personality and uniqueness through our identity



STEP 4B Discussion Questions

WHAT ACTIVITIES WILL I CHOOSE TO WORK ON? WHEN WILL I DO THIS?

**Can you remember a time when you felt a strong sense of connection to the land?
What activities could you choose to grow your relationship?**

What are your favorite family traditions? What activities could you choose to grow your sense of family?

How are you involved in your community? What activities could you choose to grow your connection to community?

What motivates you? What are the things, the thoughts or the feelings that help you get up when life is really tough and you feel too tired to keep going? What activities could you choose to nurture your attitude towards living life to the fullest?



**In order to grow my flower, I plan to carry out the following activities.
Include when and how you will do this and then write or attach them to a flower petal.**

Relationship _____

Family _____

Community _____

Attitude _____

STEP 4C: Mental Activities Bring Meaning to our Lives

We use our minds to understand our rational and intuitive spiritual thought. We find meaning in our lives when we connect with the knowledge that we all share as Indigenous people. We are able to make connections between what is happening now and what has happened in the past.

There are three types of actions we can take to increase our mental wellness.

Action	Explanation	Examples
Intuition	We can't always explain how we know something. There are things we didn't learn at school and work or from our family. We also have knowledge and understanding about life that comes from our ancestors, through dreams or through our connection to the land.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✚ Knowing that we need our grandparents' wisdom and guidance to live life in a good way✚ Knowing that we are all part of Mother Earth
Understanding	Our Indigenous culture helps us to connect to our spirit and to live life with the gifts we were given. We understand the meaning of our own life when we can bring our spiritual gifts into our everyday life.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✚ Talking to an Elder about the meaning of our spirit name, clan family and Nationhood to help us understand what we can do in life, in school, for a job✚ Speaking an Indigenous language and understanding that the language we speak guides the way we think
Rational	We find meaning in our lives by linking what we are thinking or feeling with an Indigenous way of seeing the world. We're not alone but are part of a larger Indigenous community.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✚ Learning about the original family and the clan family structure✚ Discussing traditional ways to feast and honour our family



STEP 4C Discussion Questions

WHAT ACTIVITIES WILL I CHOOSE TO WORK ON? WHEN WILL I DO THIS?

Have you ever felt an intuitive connection to your culture?

What activities could you choose to grow your connection to **intuition**, your inner voice?

What experiences have you had that helped you to connect to your Indigenous culture? What experiences would you like to have? What activities could you choose to grow your **understanding**?

What Indigenous traditions interest you the most? Are there traditions you would like to learn more about? What activities could you choose to grow your thinking about life (**rational**)?



In order to grow my flower, I plan to carry out the following activities.

Include when and how you will do this and then write or attach them to a flower petal.

Intuition

Understanding

Rational

STEP 4D: Physical Activities Bring Purpose to our Lives

Our daily physical activities – work, school, chores – bring purpose to our lives.

By increasing our physical wellness, we can increase our sense of purpose.

There are three types of actions we can take to increase our physical wellness.

Action	Explanation	Examples
Wholeness	Our body is the home for our spirit, heart and mind. These four parts of our being make us who we are. Our spirit, heart, mind and body are always connected. They make us whole.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⌘ Gardening ⌘ Sharing traditional foods with our community ⌘ Feasting with our ancestors
Way of Being	No matter how we grew up or live our life now, our Indigenous identity never goes away because it was given to us by the Creator. As Indigenous people, we have a unique way of being in the world and in our relationships.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⌘ Relating to the land as our mother ⌘ Being thankful for berries, the first food our Mother, the Earth, gives us every year ⌘ Being thankful for the life we've been given
Way of Doing	We can actively grow towards wellness. We can take care of our bodies. We can help other people. We can offer thanks.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⌘ Exercising ⌘ Planning a feast for a relative who has passed away ⌘ Offering gifts to the Creator, such as tobacco, food or sacred items



STEP 4D Discussion Questions

WHAT ACTIVITIES WILL I CHOOSE TO WORK ON? WHEN WILL I DO THIS?

What physical activities do you enjoy because they give you a sense of accomplishment and purpose? What other activities could you choose to grow your **wholeness**?

Think about times when you have felt good about being an Indigenous person, about being different and unique. Can you describe what happened and what made it a different **way of being**?

How do you care for your physical body? How do you care for your family and community? What other activities could you choose to grow your **way of doing**?



In order to grow my flower, I plan to carry out the following activities. Include when and how you will do this and then write or attach them to a flower petal.

Wholeness _____

Way of Being _____

Way of Doing _____

STEP 5: The Ground My Flower Grows In

All of us need help or support in order to be strong and grow. There are many different kinds of cultural supports, both formal (signing up for a workshop with a cultural practitioner at your community centre) and informal (spending time with a family member on traditional land, talking about your ancestors).

STEP 5 Growing My Flower

1. Think about the Discussion Questions on the next page, either on your own or with other people.
2. Cut out the ground your flower will grow in from the flower pattern at the end of the Activity Guide.
3. Reflect on the cultural supports you have in your life or would like to bring into your life. Once you are happy with your choices, write them on or attach them to the ground your flower is growing in.



Most flowers grow in the ground, or at least in soil of some kind. The ground supports the flower so that it can grow and flourish.

Let's look at the ground your flower grows in. Everything that grows, including you, needs support.

The Definition of Culture wall card at the end of the Activity Guide provides additional information.

STEP 5 Discussion Questions

WHAT CULTURAL SUPPORTS DO I HAVE IN MY LIFE?
WHAT ADDITIONAL ONES WOULD I LIKE TO HAVE?



How does your family provide you with cultural support?

What cultural supports are available in your community?



I have the following cultural supports in my life (write or attach these on the ground below your flower)



I need the following additional cultural supports in my life so that I can grow and flourish (list how and where you could obtain them and then write or attach these ideas on the ground below your flower):

Congratulations on growing your flower!

We hope that you enjoyed growing your flower and learning more about our Indigenous culture and wellness.

Culture is all around us. Take a walk and listen to the birds sing and the wind in the trees. Help your family to plant a garden. Participate in a community feast or cook a traditional meal.



Enclosed is a package of seeds so that you can continue your journey towards wellness at home by planting the seeds in your own community. You can start or contribute to a community garden! What teachings does your community have about flowers and growth?

Preparing traditional foods is another important way to connect with our culture. You can find a collection of recipes showcasing the beauty of First Nations foods and culinary traditions at https://thunderbirdpf.org/HOS_recipe_cards

Thank you!

Kinanâskomitinâwâw!

Huy Ch Q'u Hiswke!

Wela'lin!

Chi-Miigwetch!

Nia'wen!

Other Ways you can use the Flower

- ⌘ Share the Indigenous Wellness Framework at community gatherings to raise awareness about the important role of culture in wellness for Indigenous people healing from addictions.
- ⌘ Use the flower to review the cultural interventions you offer at your treatment centre and discuss them, for example, at staff retreats and in Board meetings.
- ⌘ Use the flower with strategic planning, review and evaluation of your programs. Are there parts of the flower that you cover well in your treatment centre and others that require more resources? Are there parts of the flower that identify cultural activities or philosophies that you might want to expand upon?
- ⌘ Introduce the flower to community organizations you work with, such as a Friendship Centre or Wellness Committee. Host a discussion about strategic planning with these organizations. Sometimes organizations work in isolation from one another; the flower may be useful as a tool for opening up culture-based discussions for developing partnerships.



Acknowledgements

Our work was inspired by the leadership of Elder Jim Dumont and our treatment centre project partners to walk with First Nations' people on the path to wellness guided by cultural interventions. We gratefully acknowledge the work of all of our team members, past and current, and all whose paths we have crossed and who have impacted our work.

To find out more about the **Honouring Our Strengths: Indigenous Culture as Intervention in Addiction Treatment** project, please see the Indigenous Wellness Reference Guide on our website at <https://thunderbirdpf.org/IWF-ref-guide>

Members of the **Honouring Our Strengths: Indigenous Culture as Intervention Research Team** include:

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Co-Principal Investigators

Carol Hopkins (National Native Addictions Partnership Foundation), Peter Menzies (Independent, formerly Centre for Addiction and Mental Health), Jennifer Robinson and former designate Jonathan Thompson (Assembly of First Nations)

Co-Applicants

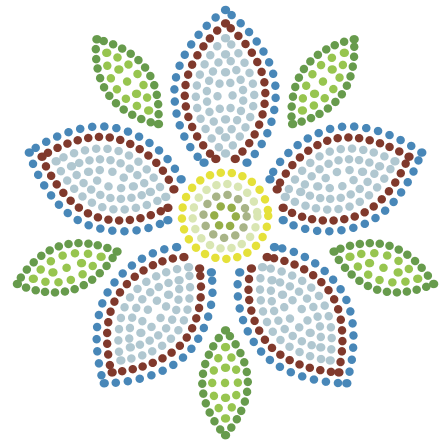
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Knowledge Users

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Definition of Wellness

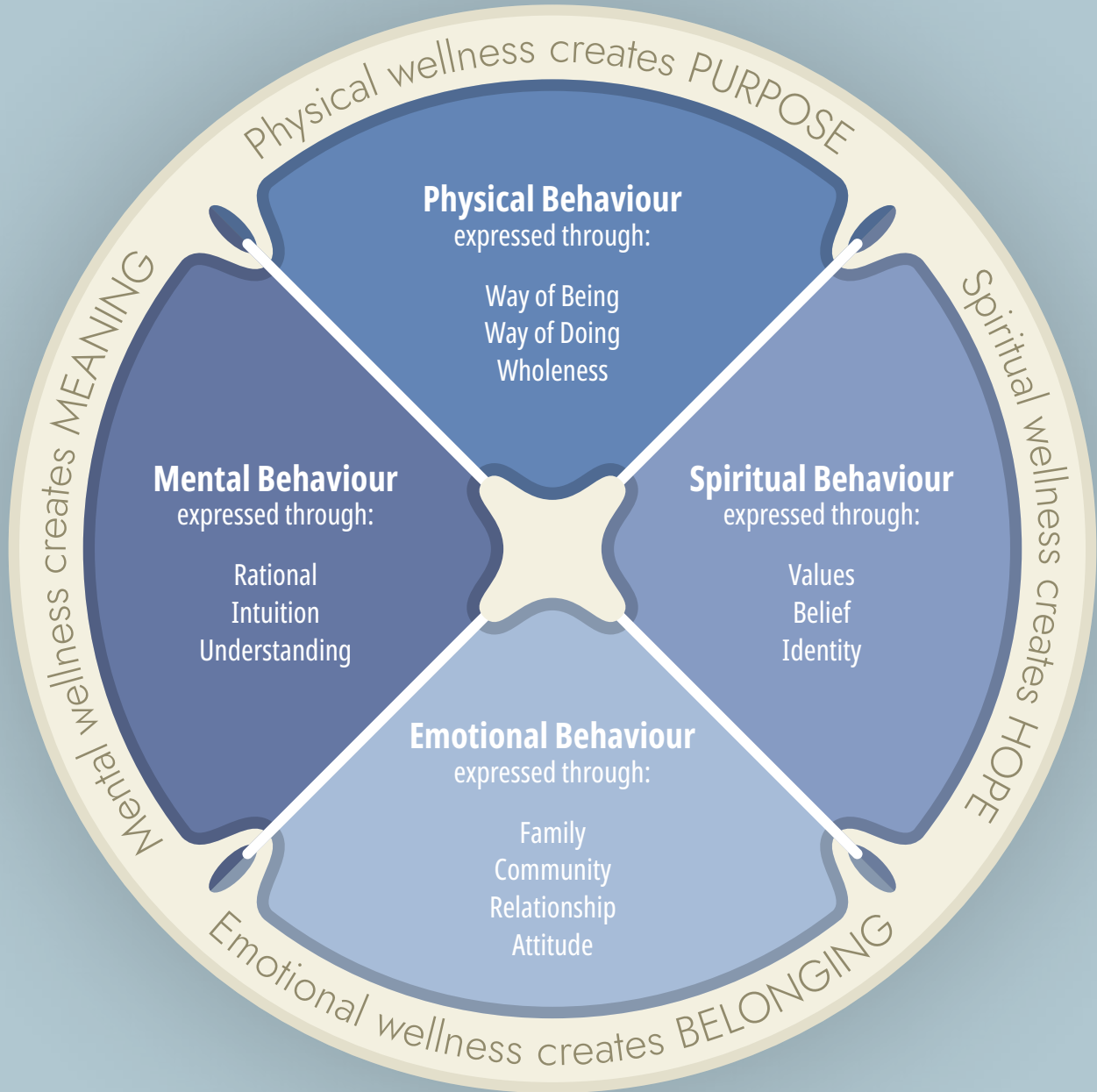
WELLNESS

from an Indigenous perspective is a whole and healthy person expressed through a sense of balance of spirit, emotion, mind and body. Central to wellness is belief in one's connection to language, land, beings of creation, and ancestry, supported by a caring family and environment. The spirit causes us to live, gives us vitality, mobility, purpose and the desire to achieve the highest quality of living in the world. **Spiritual** wellbeing is the quality of being alive in a qualitative way. Spirit is central to the primary vision of life and worldview and thereby facilitates hope. Within an Indigenous worldview, being rooted in family, community and within creation as extended family is the foundation of belonging and relationships. At this heart level of one's being, **emotional** and relational wellbeing is nurtured by one's belonging within interdependent relationships with others and living in relation to creation, including beings in creation. The mind operates in both a rational and intuitive capacity. **Mental** wellbeing is the conscious and intelligent drive to know and activate one's being and becoming. Having a reason for being gives meaning to life. The body is the most outer part of our being and is comprised of the most immediate behavioral aspects of our being. **Physical** wellbeing is that way of behaving and doing that actualizes the intention and desire of the spirit in the world. This and the knowledge that the spirit has something to do in the world generates a sense of purpose, conscious of being part of something that is much greater than they are as an individual.



Elder Jim Dumont, National Native Addictions Partnership Foundation, Honouring Our Strengths: Indigenous Culture as Intervention in Addictions Treatment Project - University of Saskatchewan. (2014). Definition of Wellness©. Bothwell, Ontario: Author. Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Funding Reference Number AHI-120535.

Indigenous Wellness Framework



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Definition of Culture

Although there are many ways by which culture is expressed amongst the various First Nations, there are principal, foundational beliefs and concepts that are commonly held that support a unified definition of “Indigenous culture”. In what follows are these primary concepts of the Indigenous worldview.

The Spirit: The most fundamental feature of the Indigenous worldview is the spirit. Within this reality the spirit is housed within an inclusive concept of body-mind-heart-spirit. In our life within this earth realm these work together in such a way as to be inseparably functioning as a whole. The spirit is always central and always works in relationship to the other levels of being. Spirit is in all things and throughout all things. In the Indigenous worldview we live in a spiritual universe and within a spiritual relationship.

The Circle: The circle, more than any other symbol, is most expressive of the Indigenous view of the world. The circle is primary to all of life and life process, and, is also of primary significance in relating to and understanding life itself in all its dimensions and diversity. Human beings, amongst other beings, are in harmony with the life flow and grow to their greatest fulfillment when they too operate in a circular fashion. The Circle, then, being primary, influences, in every way, how we see the world. The Circle is synonymous with Wholeness. Wholeness is the perception of the undivided entirety of things. To see in a circular manner is to envision the interconnectedness and the interdependence within life. The Wholeness of life is the Circle of life. Harmony and Balance: Desire for harmony is the pre-disposition of all of the created world. Harmony is a central value of the Indigenous worldview, which pre-supposes that all of life consciously cares for one another, and while respecting the individual's autonomy, strives to achieve and maintain an interrelationship that

assures quality of life for the collective whole. Balance is a fundamental principle within the way that harmony in interrelationship works. A worldview that presumes a disposition toward balance causes people to see the dynamic character of their “real world” as always striving to maintain an equilibrium and symmetry in all aspects of the total economy of its ecology. Simply put: the Indigenous person sees the world as always and naturally striving to maintain an equilibrium and symmetry – everything will ultimately try to achieve a balanced solution. The value of harmony works well within such a worldview because it assumes that people lean toward this same balance, and therefore, desire to be in harmony with one another.

“All My Relations”: All that is created consciously cares about the harmony and well-being of life; all things are regarded as “persons” and as “relatives”. Personhood not only applies to human persons, but plants, trees, animals, rocks, and visible and unseen forces of nature are also considered as “persons”. Because they are persons, they have the range and qualities of personhood that are commonly attributed in western ideology exclusively to human persons. Once this is accepted, it elevates the prevailing view of other-than-human beings to a higher quality of being and moves the nature of relationship to an all-inclusive ethical level. We are all related to one another as persons, and are responsible for maintaining good and harmonious relationships within the “extended family” of persons.

Kindness/Caring/Respect: Another key to understanding the Indigenous worldview is the recognition of the fundamental precept: the universe cares. The Creator cares for his creation. The Earth cares about her off-spring and all of earth-life. The beings within creation care about each other and about how they relate to one another within the interconnectedness and interdependence of the web of life. In that the creation originated in this way, it sustains itself and thrives by means of an underlying orientation toward kindness. The key to harmony in a life that is conceived as “all my relations” is respect. Respect is understood as the honouring of the harmonious interconnectedness of all of life, which is a relationship that is reciprocal and interpersonal. The Indigenous person is predisposed to have in his or her interest both the greatest good for the Individual as well as the collective good.

Earth Connection: We are all relatives because we have the same Mother. In the Indigenous mind, the human person is of the earth and from the earth. Like all of the created world, the human being is part of the balance of nature and must find a special yet interconnected place within the created whole. The human person is a relative to all other “persons” of the Earth, and, along with all creatures calls the Earth, Mother. The Earth herself is a living, breathing, conscious being, complete with heart/feeling, soul/spirit, and physical/organic life, as it is with all the relatives of creation. Indigenous identity and relationship is defined by the land and the connection the natural world.

Path of Life Continuum: The experience of living in this world is understood as a journey of the spirit moving progressively through stages that are interconnected and continuous. In the same way, lives are connected inter-generationally as “strings of lives” connecting us to our ancestors and to those yet unborn.

Language: The original language is the most expressive communication of the spirit, emotions, thinking, behaviour and actions of the people. Language is the “voice” of the culture and therefore the true and most expressive means for the transmission of the original way of life and way of being in the world.

Culture is the expression, the life-ways, and the spiritual, psychological, social, material practice of this Indigenous worldview.



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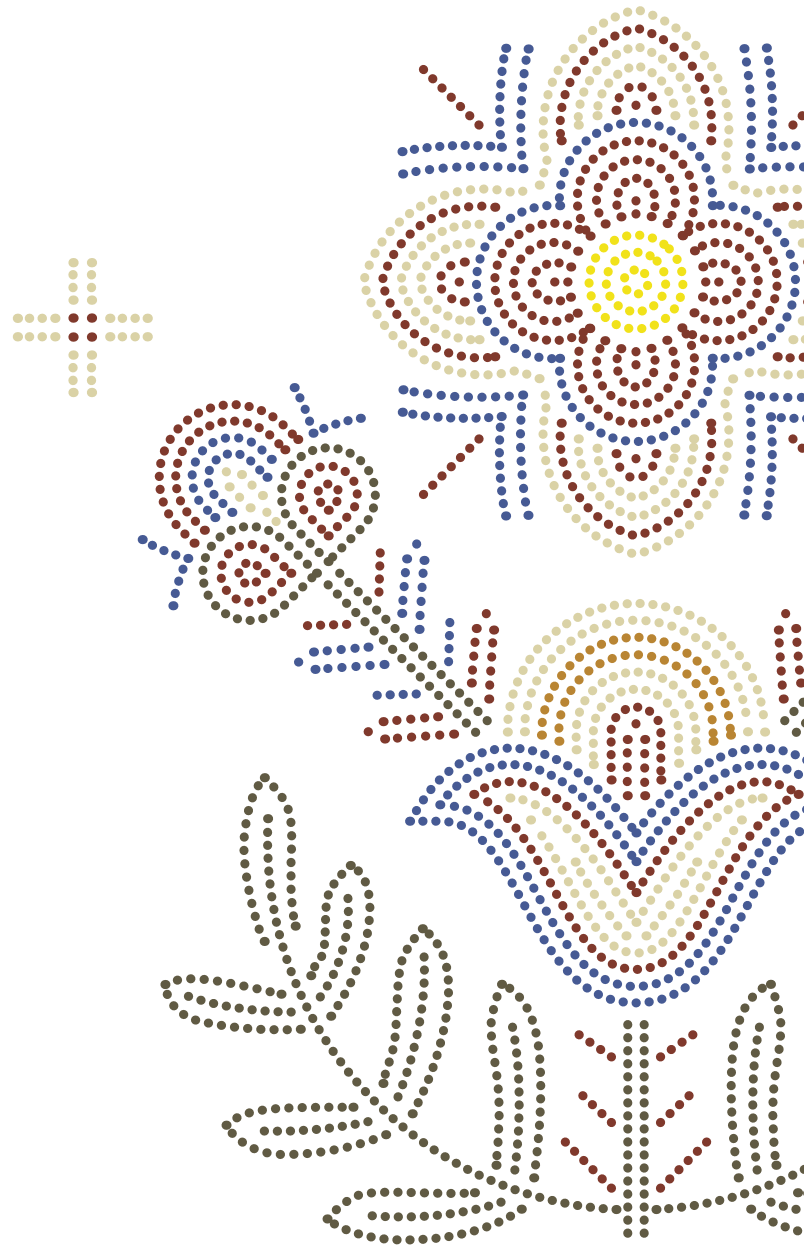
Cultural Interventions specific to my community include:

Common Cultural Interventions

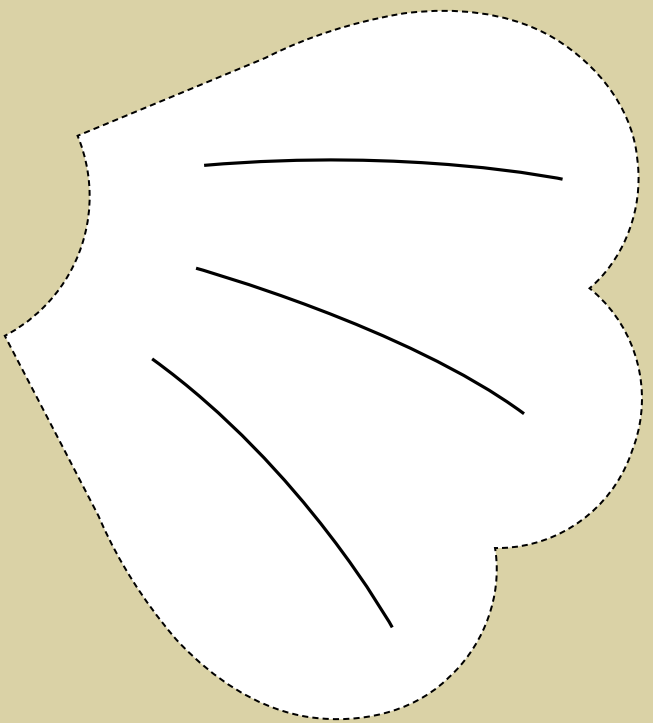
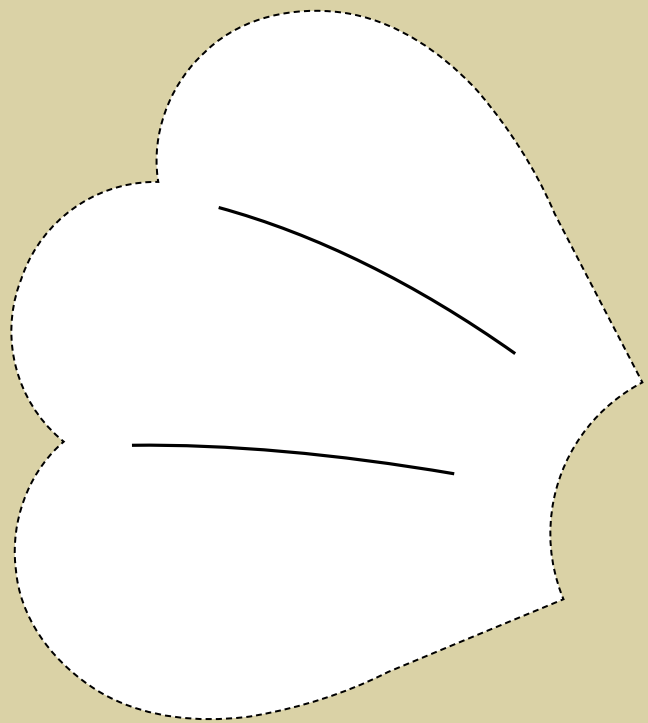
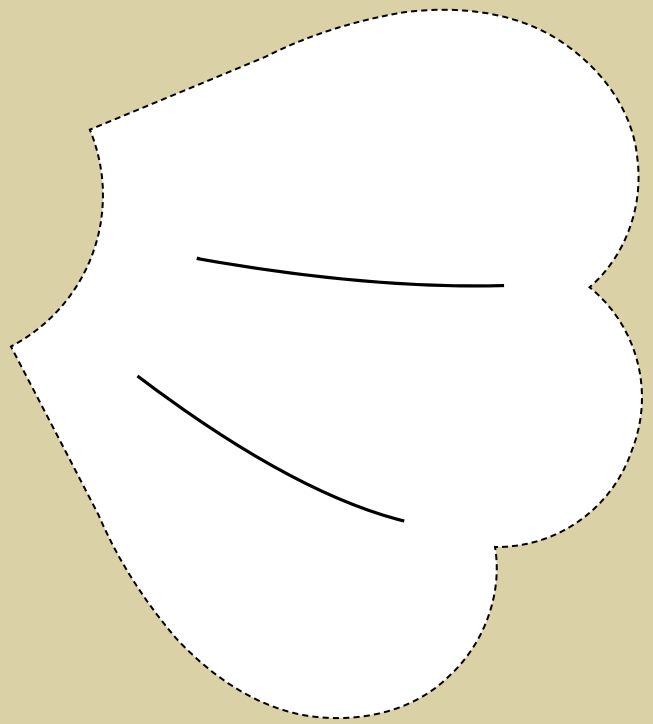
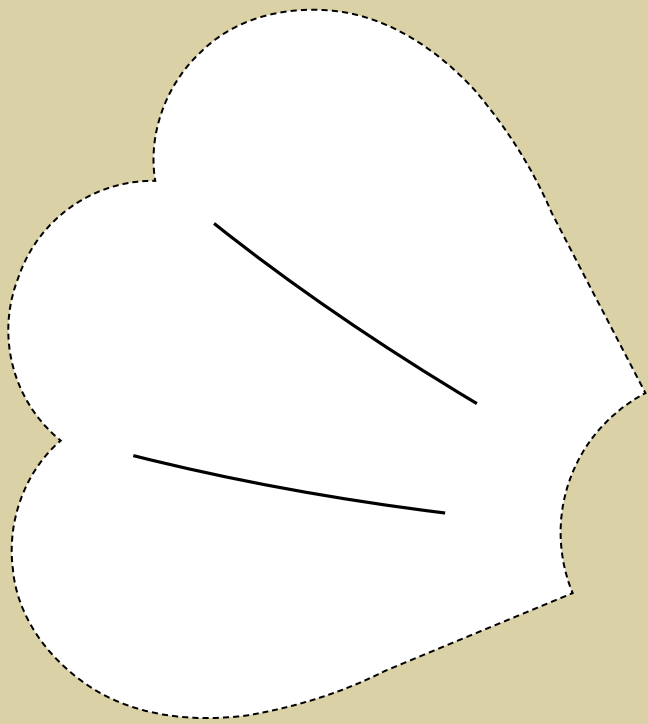
It is said that what the Great Spirit gave to his/her children to live in this physical world in a good way, was given forever. This means that the answer to addressing substance use issues exists within Indigenous culture.

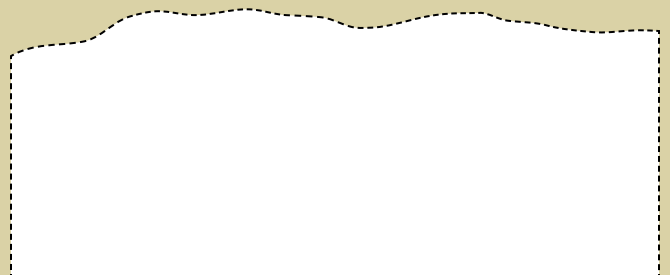
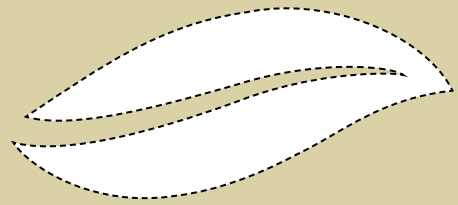
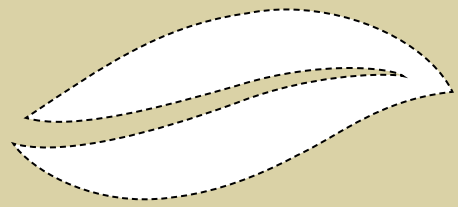
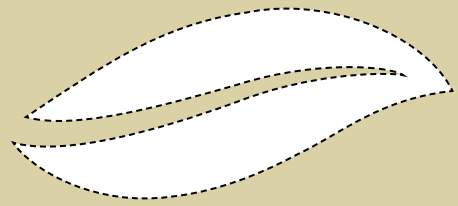
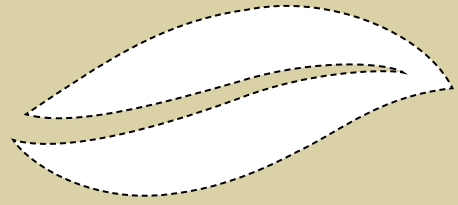
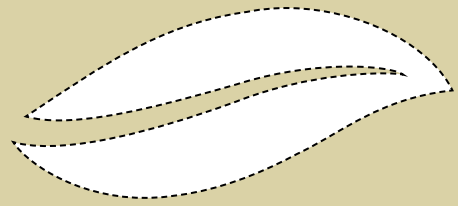
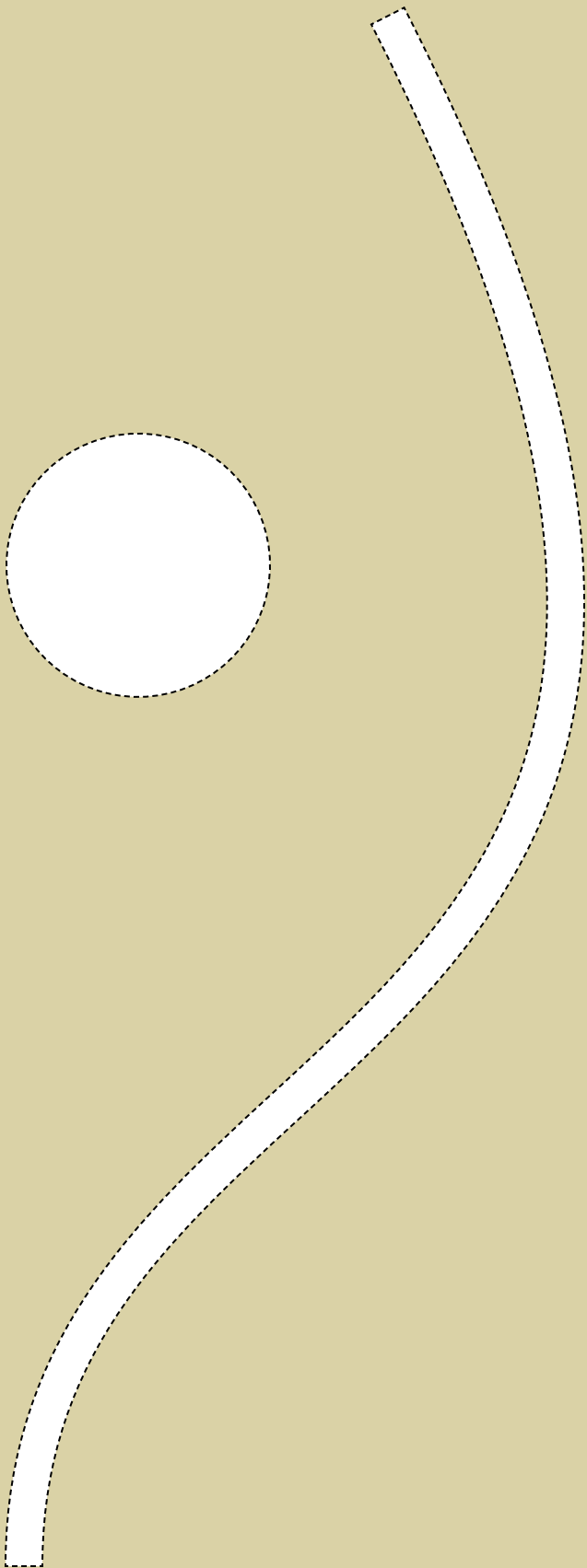
Culture is the facilitator of spiritual expression. One's spirit desires to live life to the fullest. A connection to spirit is essential and primary to wellbeing. Cultural interventions are therefore essential to wellness. Cultural interventions such as ceremonies attend to the whole person, while other interventions may have more specific focus. Cultural interventions are facilitated by individuals who have sanctioning of their skills and knowledge in culture because they live the culture and have been recognized by both the cultural teachers/community and the spirit to lead or facilitate a certain cultural activity.

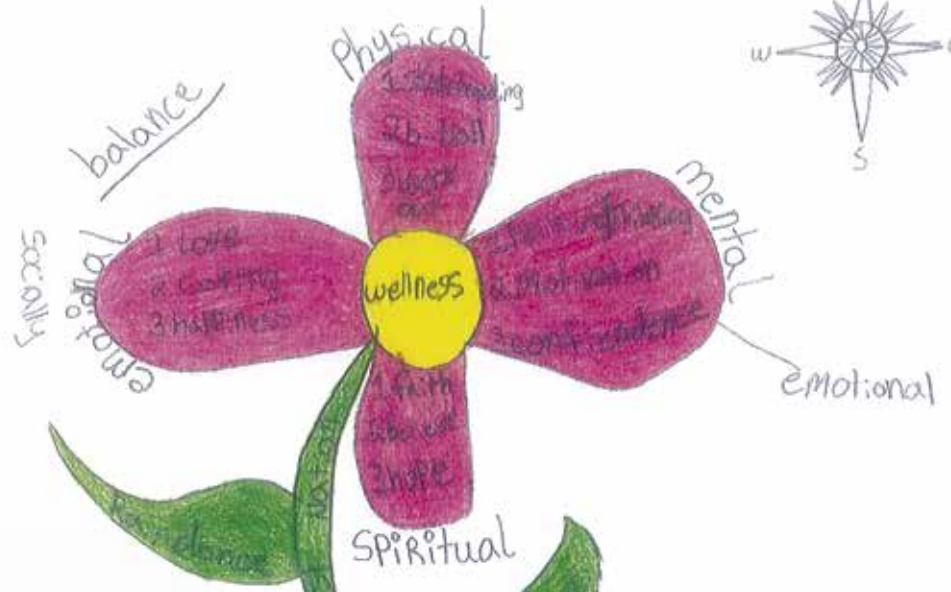
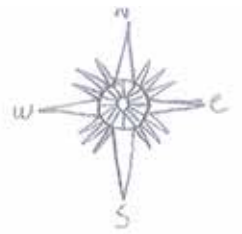
However, some cultural interventions, generally those that are not ceremonial, do not require this level of expertise. An example is the use of sacred medicines for smudge, although this differs across cultures. All cultural interventions require a level of cultural competency that is in compliance with the culture of the people on that land. Critically important is to know that there is not "one" culture because culture is defined by the land, language and nation of people. Treatment centres offer culture through their treatment programs based on the culture of the people where the treatment centre is located. Clients participating in the treatment programs may experience cultural interventions different from their own culture. Cultural interventions then become an introduction to culture and are always facilitated with an encouragement to clients to "go home and find their own way".



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