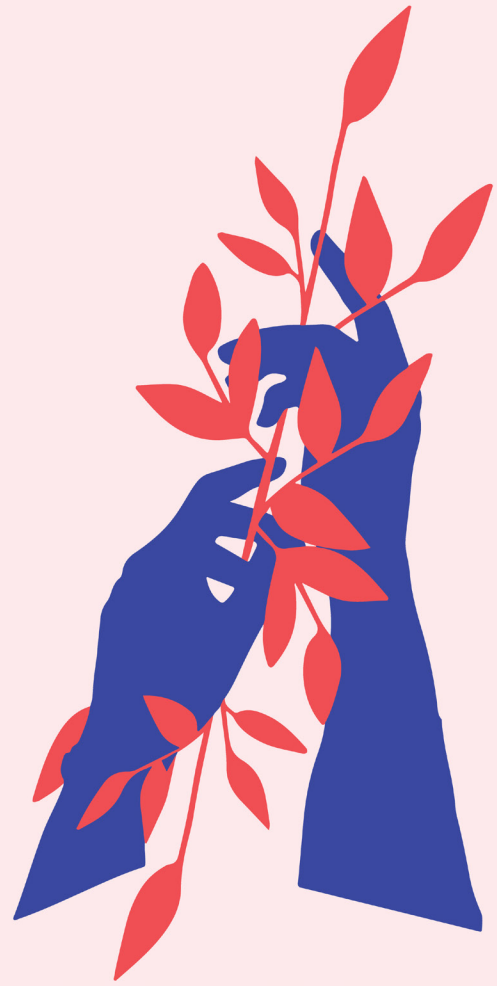


FROM THE NATIVE YOUTH SEXUAL HEALTH NETWORK

# YOU ARE MADE OF MEDICINE



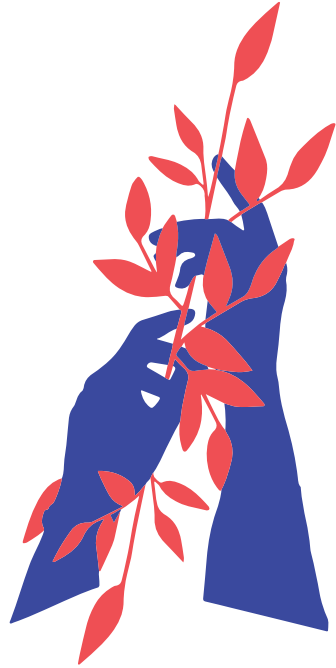
*A Mental Health  
Peer Support Manual*

FOR INDIGIQUEER,  
TWO-SPIRIT, LGBTQ+,  
AND GENDER NON-CONFORMING  
INDIGENOUS YOUTH



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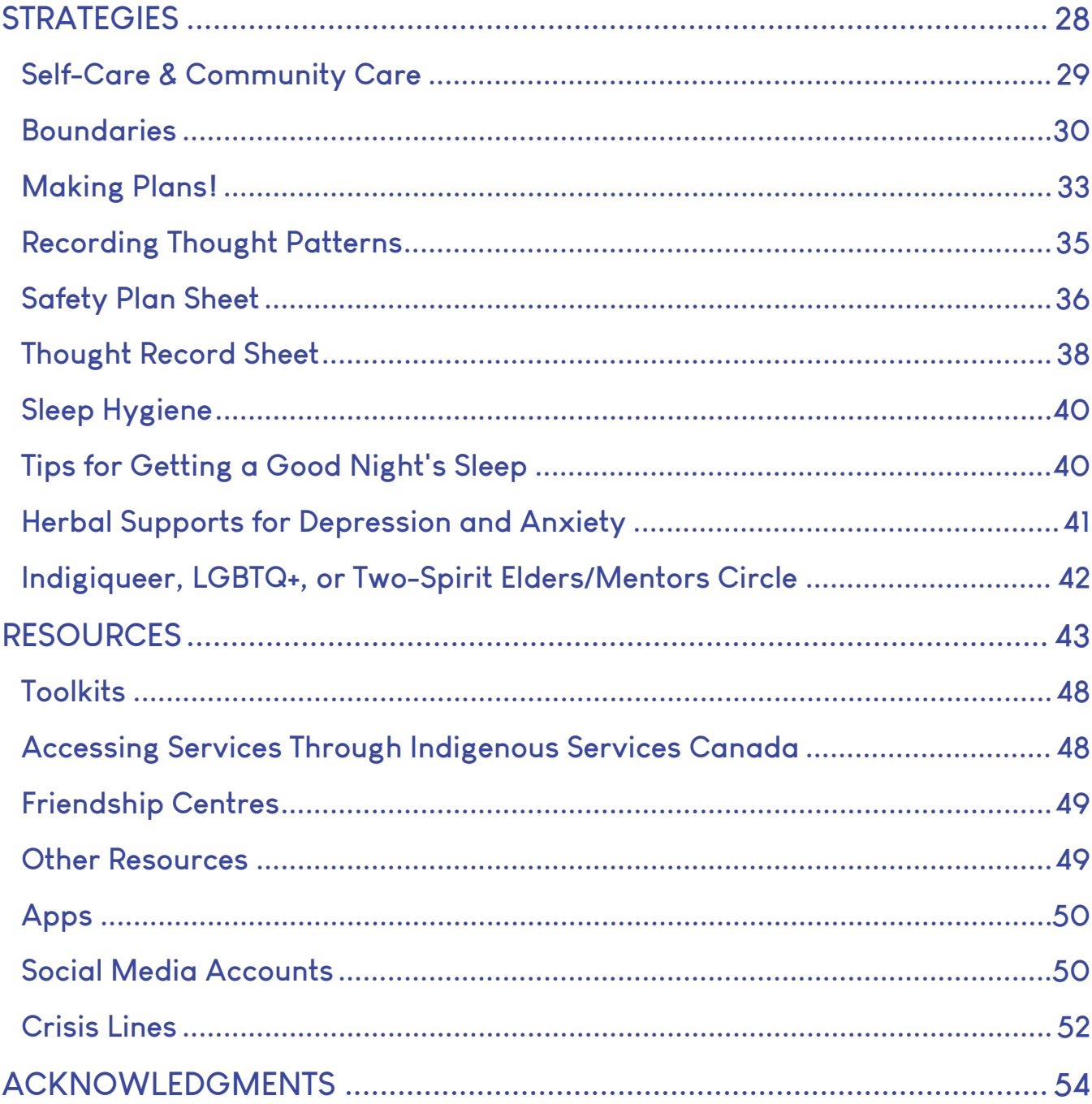


*A Mental Health  
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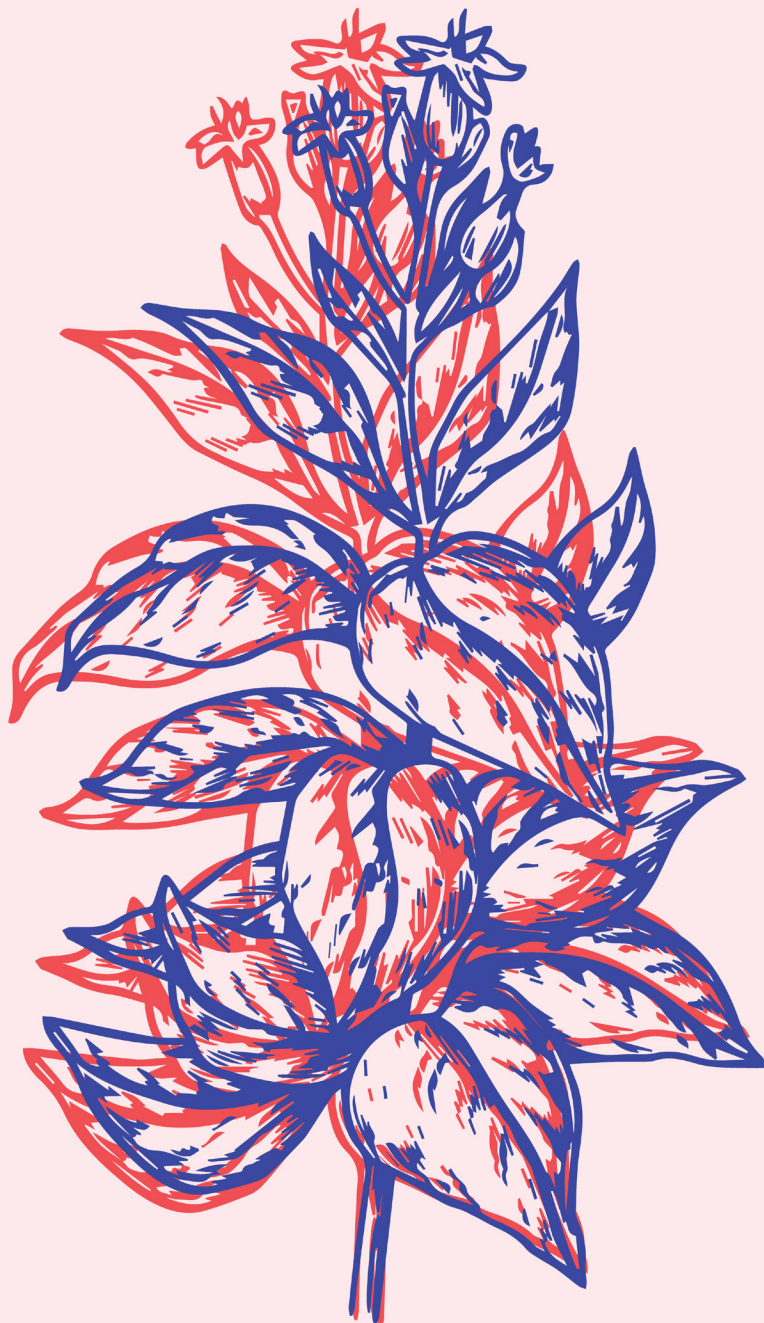


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# INTRODUCTION

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# & WELCOME



Thank you for picking up this manual! This manual is written by and for Indigiqueer, Two-Spirit, and LGBTQ+ Indigenous youth. In this manual, we will be giving some tips, strategies, and resources to manage mental health and wellness! These tips will help you support yourself and others who are facing similar challenges. Whether you are supporting yourself, a friend, a family or community member, we have tried to include as many easily accessible, cheap and/or free resources as possible in this manual. We invite you to draw, write, and doodle in this manual - mark it up & make it yours!

## Mental Health & Wellness

When we say mental health and wellness, we are talking about emotional, psychological and social well-being. Mental health is not just mental illnesses (like depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder and others), but also includes our thoughts, feelings, relationships (with others and with ourselves), how we respond to stress and overcome challenges, and our general outlook on life. There are lots of ways to take care of our mental health, and we are going to touch on several of them throughout this manual.

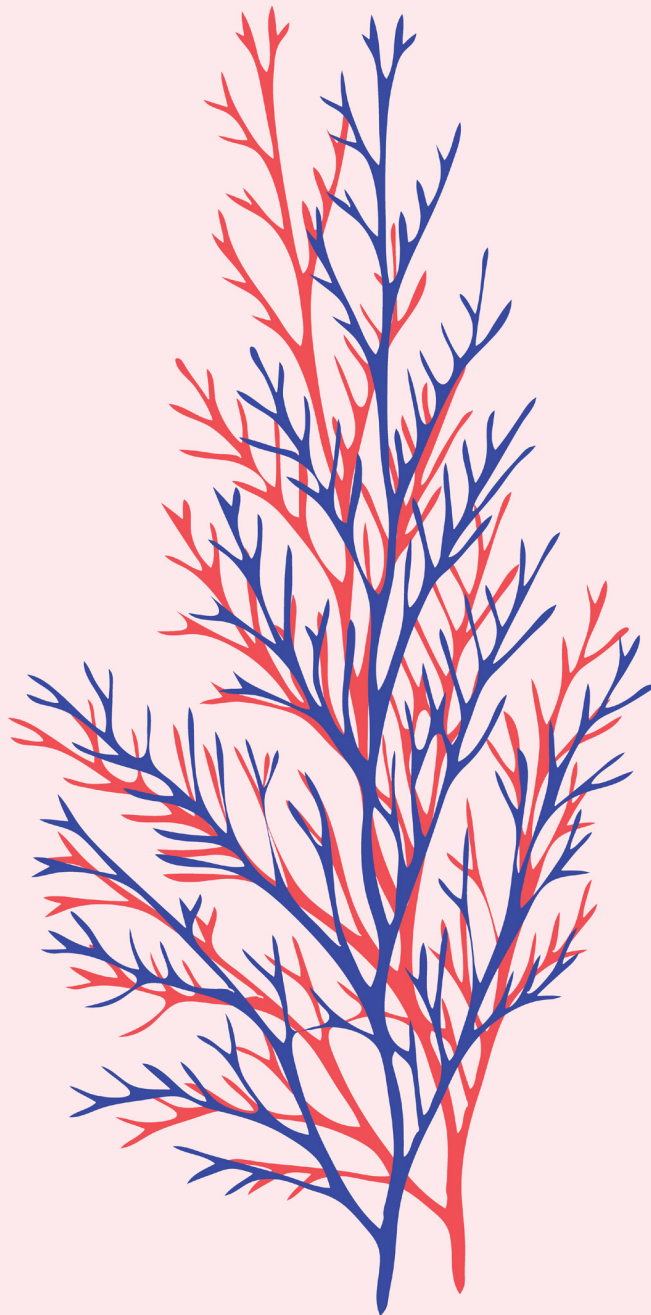
### Why Peer Support?

Oftentimes, there are lots of barriers to seeking supports for our mental health like the fact that it can be hard to reach out for support, or long waiting lists for care providers. Peer support is easier to access than many options, which is why we made a manual all about it! Because our peers share similar experiences, we don't have to worry about having to explain what it's like to grow up in your community, or what it's like being Indigiqueer, two-spirit or LGBTQ+.

### WHAT IS PEER SUPPORT?

Peer support is emotional and practical support offered between people who share a common experience.

# CHOOSING --- OUR WORDS





The words we use matter in peer support. Words have powerful histories - they can improve our self-worth or weaken our self-image. Below we briefly outline some of the alternatives to shaming/blaming language, which can have harmful effects on the peer support process. It is important to always think about how the language you are using affects those around you and yourself. And there is no shame if this is new information - not everyone has access to education on these topics, which is why we are sharing some knowledge here.

## WHAT IS SELF-DETERMINATION?

Self-determination means being supported to make decisions for ourselves based on our own lived experiences and within the context of our different cultures and communities.

## Ableist Language

Ableism refers to discrimination against disabled people (including folks with mental health issues). People have the right to self-determine their mental and emotional health and wellness. Words like "crazy" were historically used to label people with mental health issues as different or "less than" people without mental health issues. When words like "crazy" are used to describe things we think are bad, we may be accidentally implying that mental health issues are bad or "unhealthy." But as we know, what health looks like for our own bodies is self-determined! It takes practice to unlearn these types of ableist language (that many of us use without even thinking about it). Be kind to yourself as you practice!

## 10 EASY ALTERNATIVES TO COMMON ABLEIST LANGUAGE

SAY THIS!	NOT THAT!
UNREAL	INSANE
UNBELIEVABLE	CRAZY
JERK	PSYCHO
AWFUL	STUPID
BAD	DUMB
MOODY	BIPOLAR
RIDICULOUS	RETARDED
ECCENTRIC	MENTAL CASE
DISMANTLED	CRIPPLED
UNRULY	MAD HOUSE

## Affirming Language

Using language that affirms people's sense of self is a powerful way to show that we are listening and that we care. One way to do this is to use the language that people choose when referring to themselves. This means respecting Indigiqueer, Two-Spirit, and LGBTQ+ identities, as well as respecting different Indigenous peoples' ways of self-identifying, which can be unique to and based in cultural understandings (i.e., traditionally, some Indigenous peoples did not view people with mental health issues as "problems" but as people with gifts).

~~IT'S NOT THAT BAD~~  
~~JUST BE HAPPY~~  
~~DON'T BE SAD~~  
~~YOU'LL GET OVER IT~~  
~~YOU'RE OVERREACTING~~

*I Believe You.  
#SupportNotStigma*

LGBTQ+ is an acronym that stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans (transgender, transsexual, trans-identified) and queer. Sometimes it includes more letters - one common spelling is LBTTQQIA+, which stands for stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans (transgender, transsexual, trans-identified), Two-Spirit, queer, questioning, intersex and asexual. The plus sign (+) is added to indicate respect for identities that are not included in or represented by this acronym. For the sake of consistency, we are using the shorter version of this acronym (LGBTQ+) throughout this manual.

If someone takes the time to share their identity, pronouns, name, experiences, or diagnosis with you, they are sharing their story. Everyone's story and identity should be respected. And remember that some folks use different pronouns with different people, so if someone shares new pronouns with you, ask whether they are okay with you using those pronouns to refer to them around other people.

Some people may use multiple different sets of pronouns (ex. using she/her and they/them interchangeably), and some folks choose not to use pronouns at all, and simply go by their name. Some folks may also use pronouns from their Indigenous languages, or pronouns that are specific to their cultures - for example, some Indigiqueer Inuit use Inuk as a pronoun.

## GENDER-SPECIFIC PRONOUNS

Are the ways we refer to each other in the third person. People who are transitioning in some way *might choose to change their pronouns.*



Start meetings with everyone introducing themselves and stating their pronouns.

**HI EVERYONE!**  
MY NAME IS LAUREN  
AND MY PRONOUNS ARE  
**SHE AND HER.**

All name tags and name plates can also have a spot to show someone's pronouns.

## GENDER-NEUTRAL PRONOUNS

THEY - THEM - THEIR

ZIE (ZEE)

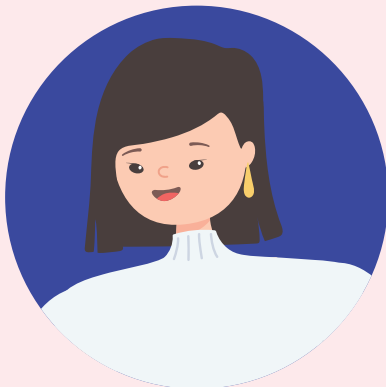
HIR (HEAR)

ZE (ZEE)

SIE (SEE)

I saw Lauren come to work today and **they** seemed really happy. I wonder if it has anything to do with **their** weekend. I hope I see **them** soon to hear all about it!

I saw Lauren come to work today and **ze** seemed really happy. I wonder if it has anything to do with **hir** weekend. I hope I see **hir** soon to hear all about it!



**HEY, I'M JULES!**  
NO PRONOUNS FOR ME -  
PLEASE JUST USE  
**MY NAME**



**SHEKOLI!**  
MY NAME IS JORDAN  
AND MY PRONOUNS ARE  
**HE/THEY**



**HI! I'M KÎSIK,**  
AND MY PRONOUNS ARE  
**THEY/THEM**

## ASK

You cannot tell someone's name or pronoun just by looking at them. If you find yourself unsure of someone's pronoun, be attentive to how others refer to this person. If you are still unclear or concerned that people might be using the incorrect pronoun, *politely and privately ask that person what pronoun they use.*

## RESPECT

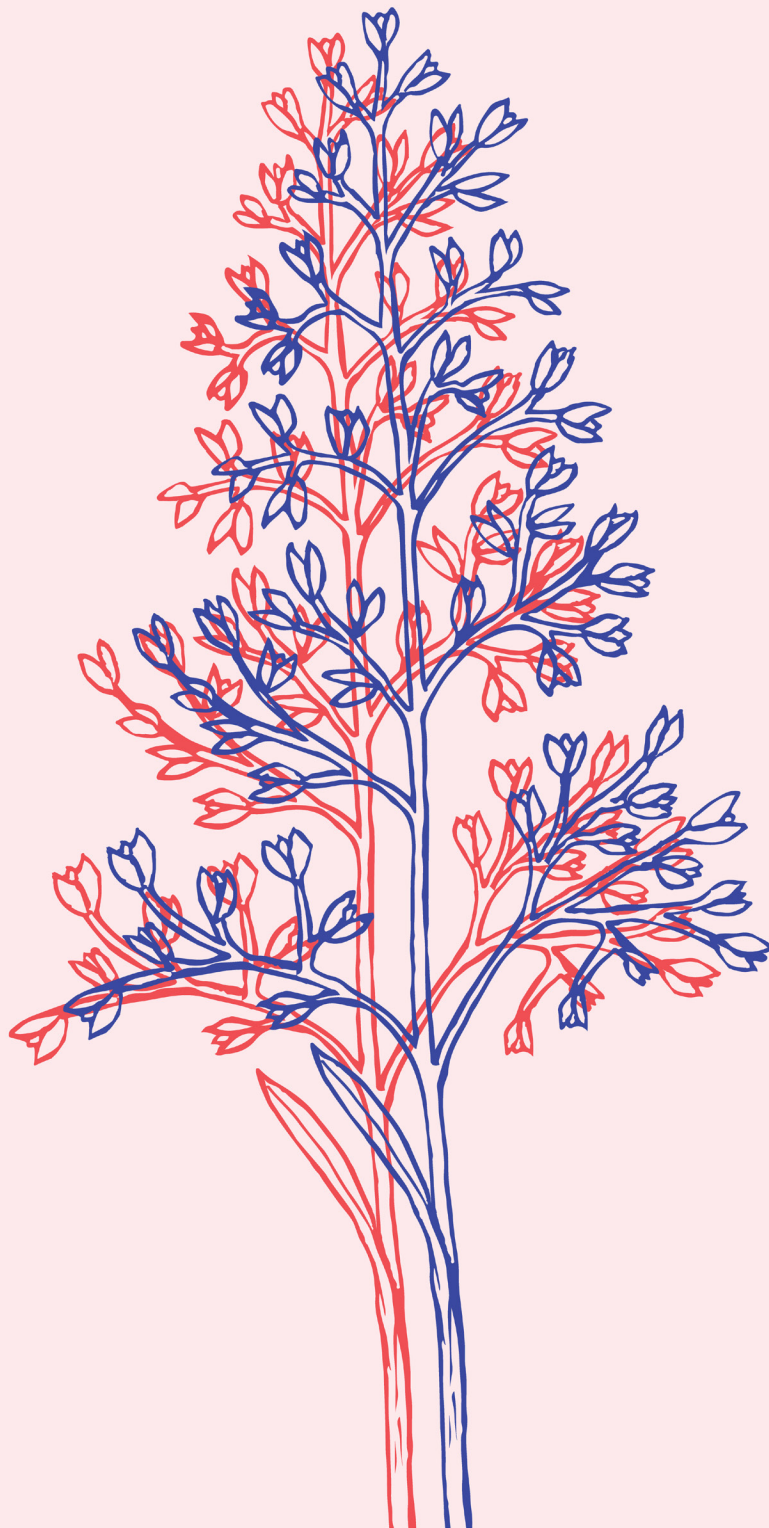
If someone takes the time to let you know their name and pronoun, use and respect it. It's not up to you to decide someone else's identity.

## PRACTICE

If you have difficulty using someone's pronoun and name, practice. Ask co-workers, peers, and friends to point out when you've made a mistake.

# COLONIALISM & TRAUMA

---



# What is Trauma?

Trauma is a body-brain response that results from an event that gives you an intense reaction and makes you feel overwhelmed, often making us feel helpless. Many traumatic events involve a threat to our physical safety, but any event that is deeply painful - emotionally or physically - can be traumatic.

Trauma can harm a person's sense of self and sense of safety, and impact their ability to feel or balance their emotions and maintain relationships. Trauma looks different for everyone, and there are many ways to heal from trauma. Trauma happens in relationships and healing does too - this means that while trauma can rupture our relationships and make us feel isolated, healing restores our sense of connection.

## WHAT CAUSES TRAUMA?

These are just *some* of the experiences that can be traumatic:

<b>FIRE</b>	<b>SERIOUS ILLNESS</b>
<b>LOSS OF A LOVED ONE</b>	<b>WITNESSING VIOLENCE</b>
<b>ABUSE</b>	<b>BULLYING</b>
<b>OVER-POLICING &amp; SURVEILLANCE</b>	<b>NATURAL DISASTER</b>
<b>HOMOPHOBIA &amp; TRANSPHOBIA</b>	<b>INCARCERATION</b>
<b>POVERTY</b>	<b>HOMELESSNESS</b>
<b>NEGLECT</b>	<b>RACISM</b>
<b>ACCIDENTS</b>	<b>RAPE &amp; SEXUAL ASSAULT</b>
<b>ADVERSE EARLY CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES</b>	

Remember, these are just some of the things that can be traumatic in our lives - there are many more experiences (big and small) that can cause trauma. As well, an experience that is traumatic for one person may not be traumatic for someone else.

# Understanding Colonialism

When we say colonialism, we are talking about the ways that settler governments attempt to control our lands and take power away from our communities. Colonial violence like residential schools, the pass system, and forced relocations have caused lasting trauma in our communities. Trauma like this can get passed down in our families and communities, which is called intergenerational trauma.

Colonialism also continues in our communities today: resource extraction and environmental violence (such as pipelines and fracking), child apprehension, and ongoing theft of our languages are all examples of colonialism at work. Any of these experiences can be traumatic.

Colonialism has also had specific negative effects on Two-Spirit, Indigiqueer and LGBTQ+ Indigenous people. Though many Indigenous peoples on Turtle Island had diverse gender systems that exceeded the binary of men and women prior to colonization, the imposition of the European gender binary through residential schools and the theft of Indigenous languages has meant that a lot of these teachings are not accessible to us - and sometimes, our communities are not safe places for us. We know that homophobia, biphobia and transphobia are invasive species - our nations, peoples, and communities have teachings based on respect and self-determination that go back much farther than the hateful ideas brought over by colonizers.

# Resilience

The trauma that we experience (or that our ancestors experienced) doesn't dictate our path in life. We can acknowledge the impacts that trauma has on us while also believing in our communities' resilience and the power of our teachings and our spirits to get us through.

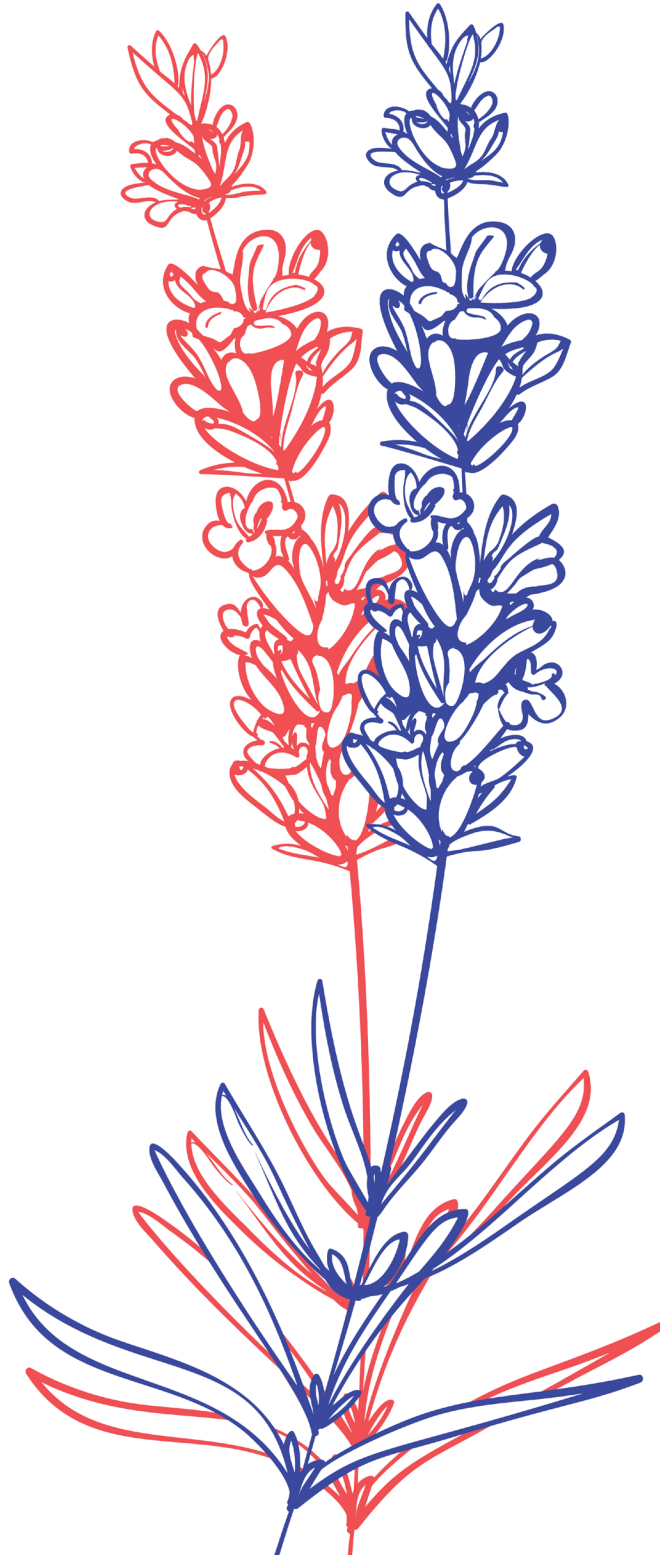
Resilience is our ability to bounce back from challenging situations. There is lots of research that suggests that resilience is a skill that we can all learn in order to survive and thrive through life's tough times. A lot of the things that help us to be resilient are already parts of our Indigenous cultures - things like spending time connecting to the land; drumming, dancing, and singing; helping others; making art or beadwork; strong community relationships; and spiritual practices. Culture can help us heal.



Image by RJ Jones



# SEEKING --- SUPPORT



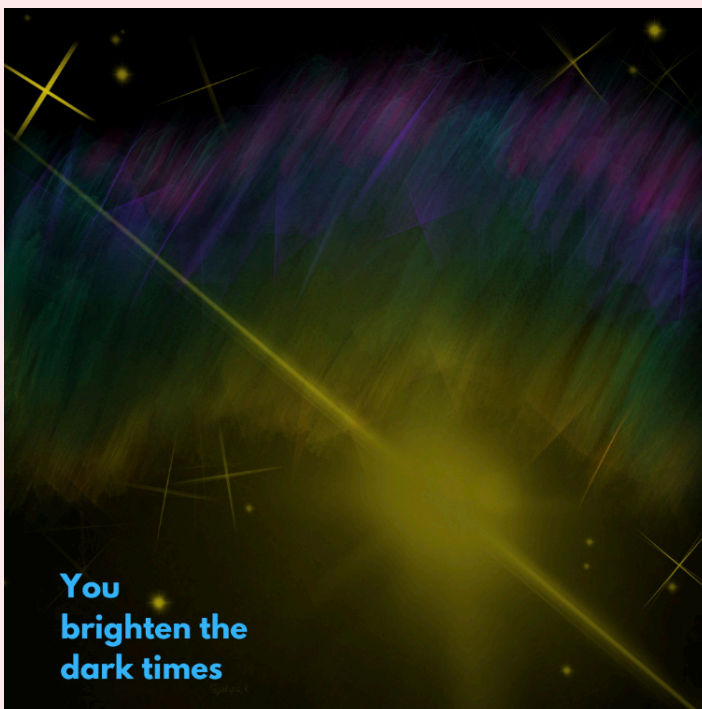
In this section, we talk about the process of seeking supports for your mental health and wellness - which is a process that looks different for everyone! Sometimes asking for help can be difficult or feel scary, and that's okay. We all deserve to get the support that we need.

We'll discuss traditional and cultural supports, including knowing your rights when entering the mental health system, and knowing how to work with both traditional/ cultural supports and medication, psychiatrists, psychologists and counsellors, group therapy, etc.

## Understanding Triggers

### WHAT IS A TRIGGER? WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE TRIGGERED?

A "trigger" is something that can bring up difficult feelings, emotions, or thoughts - often based on something that has happened in the past. For example, if you have experienced abuse or violence in your life, the place the incident occurred, what was being said, or even smells can sometimes bring up similar feelings, emotions, or thoughts that you may have had either when you were experiencing the abuse or violence, or that you felt immediately after.



In general, being triggered may make you just feel different in the moment than you were feeling before the trigger happened. Triggers don't just come from violent or abusive situations, they can come from any traumatic experience. People have also called these "trauma echoes" - things that can echo or remind us of trauma we may have experienced in the past. Triggers can also happen through vicarious trauma (being triggered by experiences happening to others).

Image by Jukipa Kotierk @jukipa\_k

Many of the ways our brains and bodies respond to trauma have developed over the course of human evolution. The types of trauma responses below are designed to help us get away from predators or immediate danger, but our bodies have the same response to everyday stressors and triggers. Our bodies (as wise as they are) can't tell the difference between the threats we used to face (running away from a sabre-toothed tiger) and the things that feel like threats now (the math test you didn't study for). Often, trauma responses are grouped into four categories:

## FIGHT

Your body getting ready to defend against a physical threat. This can look like: feeling angry or lashing out, clenching your fists or jaw, feeling hot or flushed.

## FLIGHT

Your body getting ready to run away from a threat. This can look like: racing heart, feeling anxious and unable to relax.

## FREEZE

Your body getting ready to survive a threat by temporarily numbing itself. This can look like: emotionally or physically feeling numb, not being able to make decisions, having trouble communicating.

## FAWN

Your body trying to avoid an attack by appeasing the aggressor. This can look like: people-pleasing, having a hard time saying no/speaking up for yourself.

One type of freeze response is dissociation. This can look a lot of different ways, from your mind going blank to feeling like you're outside of your body watching what's happening to you.



Image by Yvonne Houssin @themistakebead

# Knowing Your Triggers

Knowing your triggers is also about knowing your "normal." Of course, normal is different for everyone - there's a funny saying that goes: "normal is a setting on the dryer" meaning that there isn't one definition to go by. Normal is how you feel, act, and think when you are feeling okay.



Image by Yvonne Houssin @themistakebead

Even though it's definitely not fun to go through a trigger, knowing what they are can help us understand why we have the feelings we have, especially when it comes to our mental health. If we know what is "normal" for us, and what triggers us (i.e., what can set off different emotions, thoughts or behaviours) then we can try to get specific supports for them when they happen. Some people have also called these "warning signs" - just like a sign before you enter somewhere, it's things to know about yourself and how you are acting/reacting that can potentially lead to feeling worse, and doing our best to notice it before it gets to that point.

Try keeping a trigger journal, or using an app to keep notes on how you're feeling and what you need.

## ASK YOURSELF:

Do I feel differently when someone says/does something or if I'm somewhere specific? In general, of course, we feel things when anyone says or does something, but are there specific things that prompt thoughts, feelings or behaviours outside your "normal"?

What can I do if that happens? The next few sections are all about different supports - it's important to keep in mind that when you're triggered, a support could be something that you look at, someone you call, somewhere you go, or something you do that helps you get through the moment.

# Feeling Safe

Earlier we talked about how it's important to self-determine what "healthy" means to you, and this also is true for the word "safety." This is important because when it comes to our mental health, there can often be a lot of places that don't feel okay or safe. When we can figure out what helps us feel safe, we can try to make those things possible in other spaces or ask for help to try to make that happen. For example, for some people, feeling safe is when they know there is an exit door easily accessible. For others, it's having someone present with them who can support them if things get tough.

Perhaps no space is altogether "safe," but are there some things that can be done to help make it safer than it was before?

WHAT DOES SAFETY FEEL LIKE FOR YOU? WHAT MAKES A SPACE SAFE(R) FOR YOU?

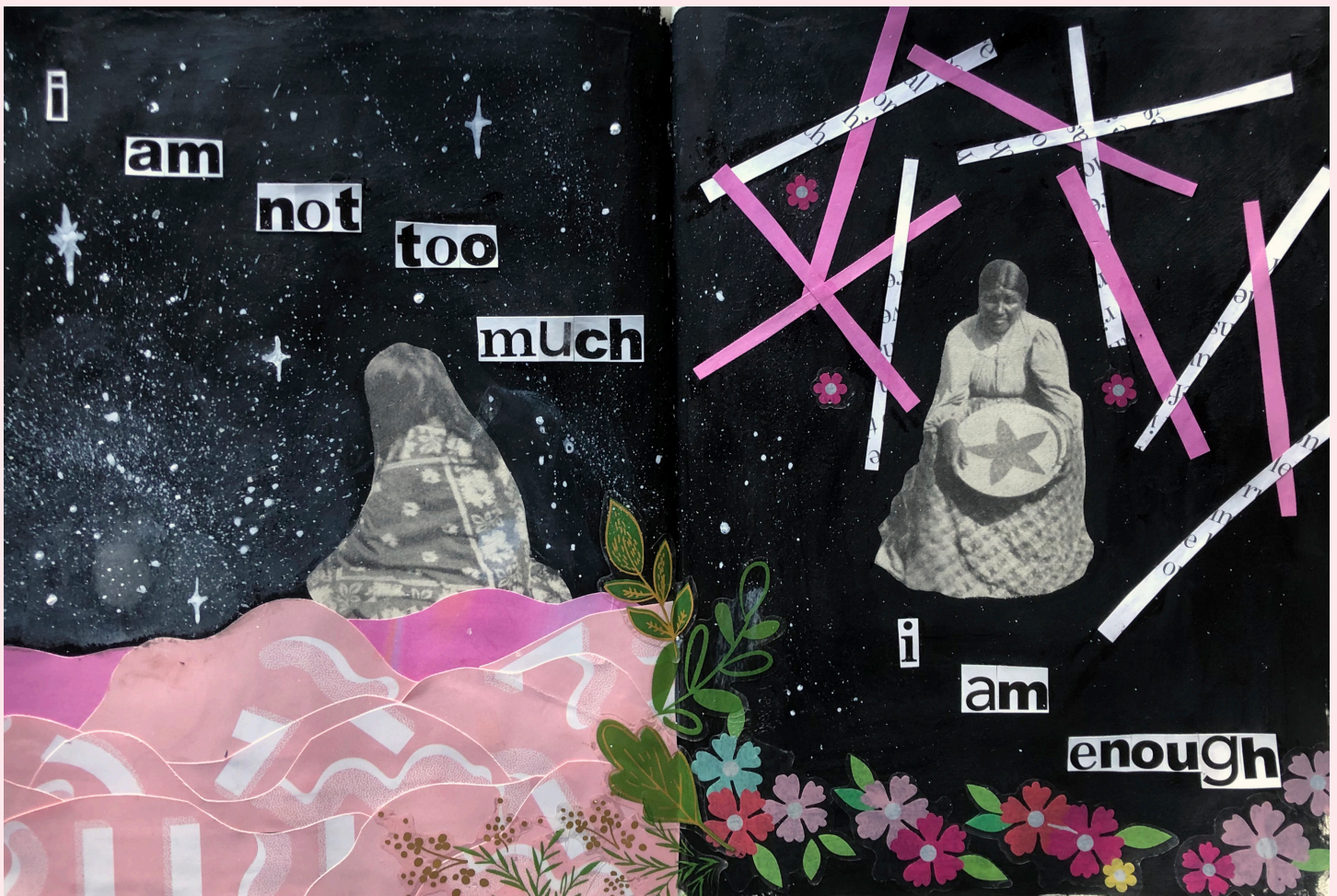


Image by Mo Thunder @mo\_thunder

# Asking for Help & Support with Mental Health

At any time in our lives, asking for help can be one of the most difficult things to do. We're often told that we should just "handle" things on our own, or that somehow, it's a sign of weakness if we can't do something by ourselves. It's important to ask why that is - what would it mean to ask for help without fear or judgement?

## WOULD WE DENY OTHER PEOPLE THE HELP THAT WE MIGHT BE ASKING OURSELVES?

Asking for help is also prevention - meaning that if we ask for support during a difficult time in our lives or even just when we notice our emotions are changing, this can potentially prevent a situation going from bad to worse. All humans need help at some point in their lives, and we can also think about traditionally how many communities had roles and responsibilities to take care of everyone. If someone had a physical injury such as a broken leg, would we not think that they deserve some form of assistance? Mental health is just as important as physical health.

## HOW CAN I ASK FOR HELP?

### WHAT DO I KNOW I NEED HELP WITH?

(i.e., does help mean going for counseling? Or does help mean getting things like food or a safe place to stay so mental health can then be taken care of?)

## HOW CAN I SUPPORT OTHER PEOPLE TO ASK FOR HELP WHEN THEY NEED IT?

As mentioned earlier, asking for what you need can be a difficult thing to do, especially when you feel alone or isolated from others. Something to keep in mind is different Elders and Knowledge Keepers have said ancestors are always with us, and we can turn to them as our counselors and helpers. We can see and hear them in the land, grass, trees, rocks, sky, water and air, or wherever we may be, if we try to keep our minds open.

## Traditional & Ceremonial Supports

Different Indigenous peoples and nations have different traditional ways to uplift people and support them in difficult times. This can include community, land-based activities, ceremonies, medicines, stories, songs, teachings, and more. Finding someone in your community to ask about how to access traditional supports can help, especially when accessing a "system" is not possible or does not feel safe for you.

Culture and ceremony do not work for all Indigiqueer, Two-Spirit and LGBTQ+ people as a source for mental health support. This can sometimes still be a space where homophobia and transphobia are experienced and can make mental health worse. If you are seeking cultural or ceremonial supports it is often helpful to know an Elder or Knowledge Keeper who is willing to create safe safer spaces for Two-Spirit, Indigiqueer and LGBTQ+ people. Talking to other self-identified Indigiqueer, Two-Spirit and LGBTQ+ community members is one way of finding Elders who are accepting and getting ideas about where to access more culturally relevant and traditionally based supports. It is also empowering to know that there are practices and ceremonies that we can do on our own (i.e., being with nature by going on walks, cedar baths, hunting, and tea).

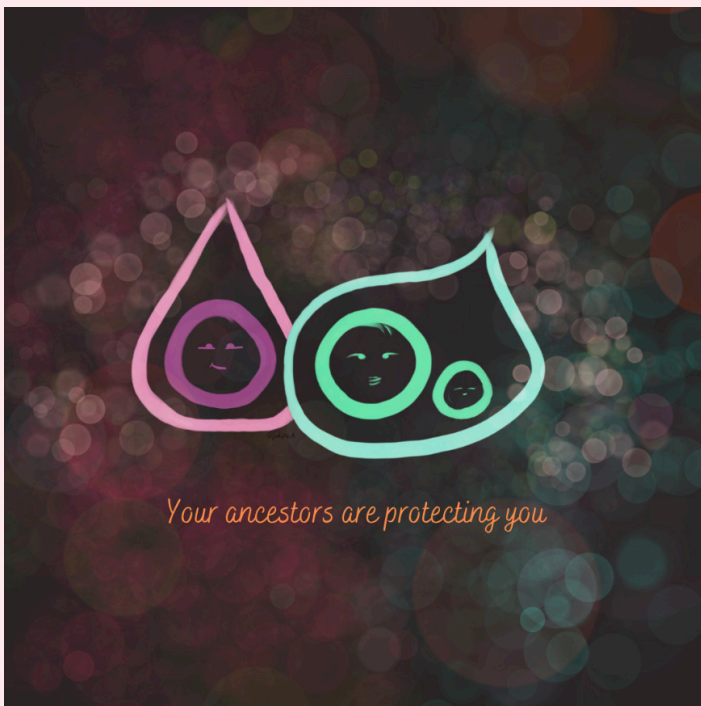


Image by Jukipa Kotierk @jukipa\_k



Image by Summer Taylor (she/they) @svmmertaylor



**Gi Makwenim**

**I remember you**

**N'Odenh Gdwaaw**

**You have my heart**

**Gi Meznin**

**I miss you**

**Indigenous Two Spirit, trans, gender non-conforming, non-binary,  
people are loved as heck**



# Counselling/Therapy

For the purposes of this manual, we will use the terms counselling and therapy interchangeably - both of these words describe the process of working with a trained professional to address feelings, behaviours, relationships, and issues related to events happening in your life.

Counselling or therapy can be done with a variety of support people - from traditional counsellors, Elders, and medicine people, to social workers or psychologists. Not every counsellor or therapist provides the same types of supports or treatments - you can try different things and find an approach that fits you and your needs.

Therapy or counselling can be helpful for a range of different issues - from self-esteem issues to healing from abuse to anger management. In general, therapists or counsellors should ask you about what you want to get out of your work together, and then make a plan for how to move towards that goal.

## Knowing Your Rights When Accessing Mental Health Support

1. I have the right to be myself and bring all of myself into the space I'm in.
2. I have the right to be called by the name and pronoun of my choosing.
3. I have the right to culture and ceremonies, if that is what I choose.
4. I have the right to make fully informed decisions regarding medication.
5. I have the right to free, prior, informed, and continuing consent regarding my care.
6. I have the right to feel safe and secure.
7. I have the right to be validated for how I'm feeling.
8. I have the right to be listened to and heard based on how things are going for me.
9. I have the right to decide what treatment options I want to pursue, where I want to access services, and with which providers.
10. I have the right to bring a support person with me when I access services.
11. I have the right to say yes to the things I do want to happen for my future and no to the things I don't want to happen for my future.

## PSYCHOLOGISTS & PSYCHIATRISTS: WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE

A psychiatrist is a medical doctor who has spent time training to specialize in mental health. A psychologist is an expert who has training in mental health. Psychiatrists can prescribe medication, and psychologists cannot. Often, psychologists specialize in "talk therapy" while psychiatrists only sometimes offer that type of support. Because they are medical doctors, psychiatrists are often the type of specialists that are covered by provincial/territorial healthcare and Non-Insured Health Benefits (for registered Inuit & status Indians).

## Harm Reduction

Harm reduction is just what it sounds like: reducing harms, or things that might cause harm. This can be things like seat belts when driving a car, or a helmet when riding a bicycle. The phrase harm reduction is typically used when talking about drugs, alcohol and substance use, and while that is important, here we want to talk about it in terms of accessing mental health supports.

*Harm reduction is...  
posting on social media  
that you're going to a  
ceremony and have room  
for a couple peeps because  
you know transportation  
can be a barrier for some  
inner city folks.*

*Harm reduction is...  
Loving someone  
who uses drugs.*

*Harm reduction is...  
an Elder, Healer or Helper who  
provides trauma informed care  
to patients who have sought out  
Traditional Healing.*

*For example, it can sound like  
"Is it ok if I move your hair  
to smudge the back of your  
neck? Sometimes sickness  
is stored there. Is that alright?"*

Images by Cecil Sveinson @superneech

How can we reduce the harms caused by having to access a system or an institution, be it a medical one or social service, if that is what you have to access to get help? Some examples of trying to alleviate potential harm might include: bringing a trusted friend for support, making sure the care provider at the institution knows you want to access both cultural supports and medical supports at the same time (if that is your choice), or doing a ritual like meditation or having comforting tea every time you have to interact with the system, so you do not feel overwhelmed.

Of course, you also might have an amazing care provider and medical system in your area, and have a great experience accessing supports. We offer this tip in the case that it might be helpful for those who have to navigate harmful systems.



Image by Huriana Kopeke-Te Aho @hurianakt.a

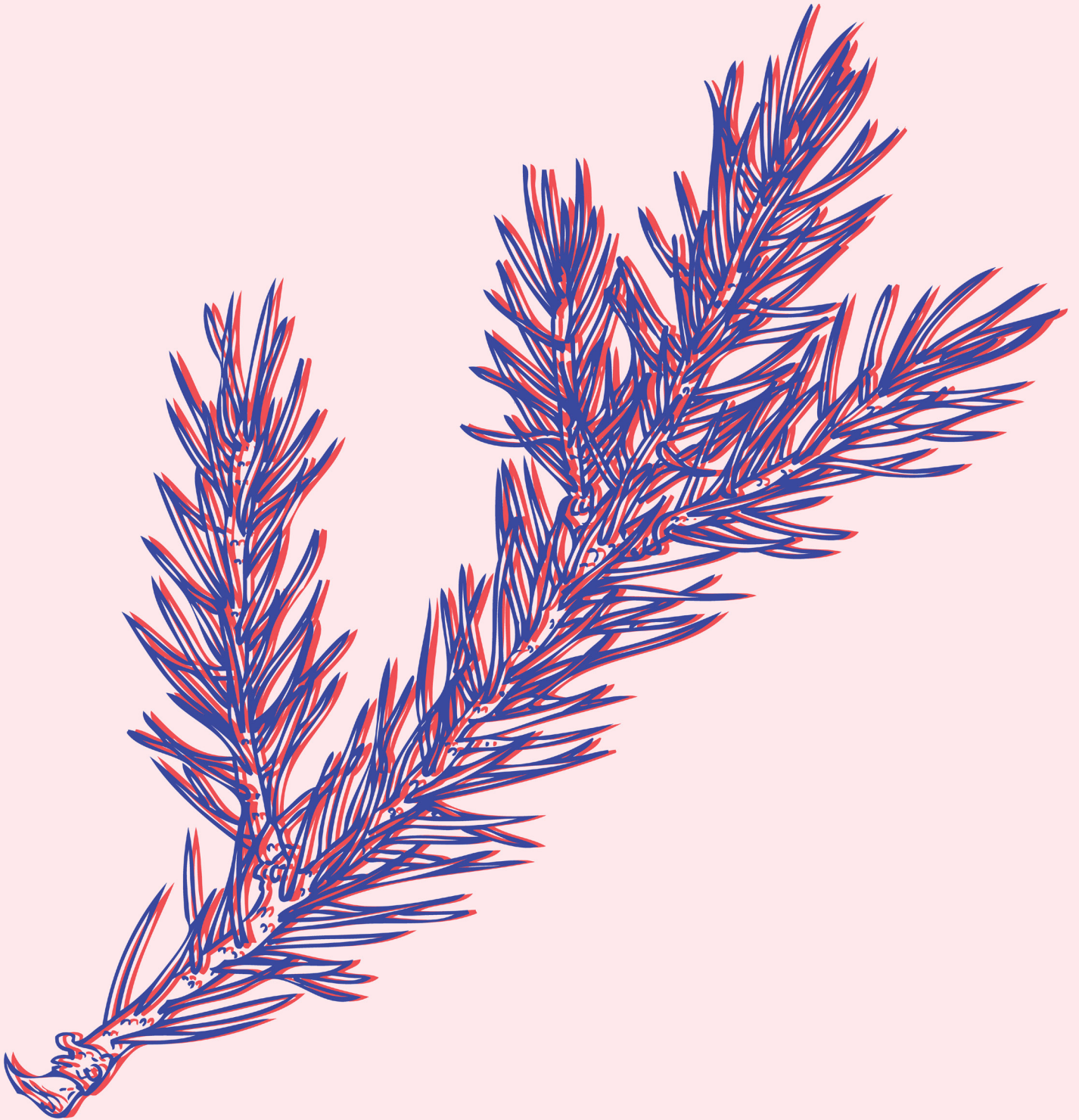
As Indigenous peoples, we have been reducing the harms of colonialism for over 500 years. There are lots of ways we reduce the harms that we face in our day-to-day lives, including choosing how we navigate systems that were not designed for us. We always have the right to choose how we want to approach risks and potential harms.

For more on NYSHN's approach to harm reduction, visit

[www.nativeyouthsexualhealth.com/harmreductionmodel.pdf](http://www.nativeyouthsexualhealth.com/harmreductionmodel.pdf)

# STRATEGIES

---



Below are exercises and activities you can do yourself, with friends, or with your community. Try them out and see which ones work for you!

## Self-Care & Community Care

In order to support others, we need to have support for ourselves. In the past few years, the idea of self-care has gotten a lot of attention. For us, self-care means doing what we can to meet our physical, emotional, mental and spiritual needs. Of course, none of us can do everything on our own - that's where community care comes in. Community care means the relationships, networks of kinship and solidarity that we build with one another to share resources and help each other get our needs met. This can look like getting a group of people together to schedule daily at-home help for an Elder, or organizing a mutual aid project in your community.

### WHAT DOES SELF-CARE MEAN TO YOU?

### WHAT DOES COMMUNITY CARE MEAN TO YOU?

### DO YOU HAVE ANYTHING YOU ALREADY DO TO COPE?

Don't worry if these aren't "healthy" coping tools - there is no judgement here!



The resources shared in the next sections give several ideas on things to do to "cope" - to get through different situations, feelings, or behaviours that may be challenging. You can also think of doing these things as self-care - ways to take care of yourself, which can also be ways to survive each day, and in turn help take care of our communities. Often people think of "self-care" as something kind of fancy like a massage or a pedicure - which are also great things if you can do them - but may not be accessible or affordable to many of us. Self-care can literally be waking up in the morning and saying, "hey, maybe I'm going to try not to hate myself as much today," setting reminders on your phone to drink water throughout the day, spending some time on the land each week, or reaching out to a friend when you're feeling low.

## MY EXISTING COPING STRATEGIES

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_

## Boundaries

Setting boundaries is another important part of self-care for many people. A boundary is a personal limit about what types of interaction, communication or behaviour you want to engage in (by yourself or with other people). Some examples of boundaries:

Saying no to social engagements, work commitments, or when someone asks a question you don't want to answer.

"I don't want to talk about this right now. Can we check in later?"

"If you continue to yell at me, I am going to end this conversation."

"I will need some more details before I can commit to this project."

"I can babysit on Saturday afternoon, but not the whole weekend."

Screening your calls, or waiting a few hours to respond to texts.

Another important part of boundaries is understanding and accepting the boundaries that other people set - which are never a reflection of your worth or value, but are actually about that person's needs! Sometimes when someone sets a boundary with us it can feel disappointing, or feel like we are being rejected. Remember: whenever we set boundaries, we are engaging in self-care and self-love - and each of us deserves that!

Ex. Before you vent to a friend, check in and ask them if they have capacity to support you - and if they don't, vent to another friend instead.

## EMERGENCY CARE WALL

for sadness

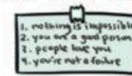


for loneliness



best friend's phone #

for self-doubt



list of reasons why you can

for anger



for worry



for other



CHIBIRD

Image by chibird.com

# BREATHING WHEN YOU FEEL ANXIOUS

## 1. TUMMY BREATHING

This is a type of breathing I do when I feel anxious, or angry, or I'm in a stressful situation.

It might work for you too -- feel free to modify this as you need!

This kind of breathing is sometimes called "diaphragmatic breathing" or "natural breathing" or lots of other names.


①

Inhale gently through your nose. Notice if your chest expands when you inhale, or if your stomach expands, or both. Exhale through your mouth.

②

On your next breath in, try to make your stomach expand first, and then your chest. Exhale through your mouth. Practice breathing like this for a bit.





It can be hard at first. I find that even if I can't manage to breathe into my stomach like I'm trying to, just focusing on my breath can be helpful.

## 2. HEART BREATHING

This kind of breathing is good for slowing down your heart if it's beating really fast.

① Inhale gently through your nose, making your stomach expand first, then your chest.

② When your lungs are full, hold your breath for a count of 3.

③ Exhale slowly through pursed lips\* and try to breathe out the air from your chest and *then* the air from your stomach.

\* pursed lips = making your mouth into a tiny "o" shape, like when you whistle

You can do this breath as many times as you want.

YOUR BODY IS YOURS





Sometimes setting boundaries feel hard because it feels like you're shutting people down or missing opportunities. Asking for more information before saying yes to something can help you feel equipped to make the best decision for you & your needs. When we are able to say no and mean it, we are able to say yes authentically. It takes practice - be gentle with yourself.

## Making Plans!

### INCLUDING SAFETY PLANS

In life, we are often asked to make plans - whether it's for school, work, friends or family. Making a plan for your mental health, in particular a safety plan for when days are really tough or difficult, can help both yourself and people around you to know what options exist for helping you through the tough moments. This can be a plan you make for yourself, between you and a friend or family member, or with your care provider (if you have one). Asking someone else to have a look at it if you feel okay with that can also help to get other ideas.

Sometimes making a plan or even knowing what we need can be difficult - so be patient with yourself, ask for help when you need it, and come back to the plan to change it if necessary.

Some questions or situations that you might be feeling like making a plan for may include the following:

What's my plan if I experience triggers?

What's my plan if my day goes from bad to worse?

What's my plan if I start to have thoughts about harming or injuring myself, and/or ending my life?

What's my plan if someone tells me something that was hard, to take care of myself after?

What are some of my strengths that can help me get through this?



Image by Jukipa Kotierk @jukipa\_k

**WARNING SIGNS OF A CRISIS**

- 1. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 2. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 3. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**TAKING MY MIND OFF THINGS**

**ACTIVITIES I CAN DO BY MYSELF**

- 1. \_\_\_\_\_
- 2. \_\_\_\_\_
- 3. \_\_\_\_\_

**PLACES I CAN GO**

- 1. \_\_\_\_\_
- 2. \_\_\_\_\_
- 3. \_\_\_\_\_

**PEOPLE I CAN GO TO**

- 1. \_\_\_\_\_  
Relationship: \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone #: \_\_\_\_\_
- 2. \_\_\_\_\_  
Relationship: \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone #: \_\_\_\_\_
- 3. \_\_\_\_\_  
Relationship: \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone #: \_\_\_\_\_

## PEOPLE I CAN CALL FOR HELP

1. \_\_\_\_\_

Relationship: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone #: \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

Relationship: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone #: \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

Relationship: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone #: \_\_\_\_\_

1. FN/Inuit Hope for Wellness Helpline

Phone #: 1-855-242-3310

2. Canada Suicide Prevention Service

Phone #: 1-833-456-4566

3. Your local emergency number

Phone #: \_\_\_\_\_

## WAYS THAT SUPPORTIVE PEOPLE CAN HELP ME STAY SAFE

1. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## I HAVE GREAT STRENGTHS TO HELP ME GET BY

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

## CREATE A 'MENTAL HEALTH' SUPPORT PICS ALBUM ON YOUR PHONE/TABLET/COMPUTER

If you have a phone or other device, you can create a specific photo album with supportive pictures, quotes, memes, images, etc. that make you feel good, or help interrupt any harmful thoughts that make you feel bad. For example, if you have a trigger or something traumatizing that happens, having something like a photo album with images that help bring you to the here and now (or even make you smile if there's a few funny ones in there) can potentially help in the moment.



Image by Jukipa Kotierk @jukipa\_k



Image by Mo Thunder @mo\_thunder

## CREATE A DISTRESS KIT

Similar to a First Aid Kit, this can be something you go to when times are tough. Especially when experiencing triggers or when difficult situations come up, this can be something you go to with various items that can help ground you, calm you, or remind you to be in the present moment. If you also have access to different cultural or natural materials, i.e., birch bark or cedar weaving, you could make a basket or holder that your items can go in. Items can be anything that means something to you or is soothing, whether that's a stone, a photo (or some funny memes), a fidget spinner, a sketchbook, or even things like a qulliq, essential oils or a smudge kit if that works for you.

# Recording Thought Patterns

Noticing the positive thoughts is just as important as noticing when we feel down about ourselves. Making note of the times we feel good can remind us of these moments in difficult times or when we're having negative thoughts. This can also help us understand what feels good and what techniques or activities we can try when we're having those negative thoughts.

If you notice that you are having thoughts that often make you feel bad, there are ways to change them. Some thoughts may be repetitive, or constant, or maybe they are not your "normal" way of thinking. It may help to record them to reflect on how you are feeling or what patterns come up, and see if you can challenge some of the negative thoughts.

Often, the thoughts that make us feel bad about ourselves are automatic - we might not even notice that they are there, but they can have a big impact on our moods. While some automatic thoughts we have throughout the day may be based in facts (ex. "I made a lot of mistakes on that test") others are based in assumptions and are simply not true (ex. "I never do anything right"). One tool for identifying and challenging negative automatic thoughts is recording your thoughts - the sheet below has instructions for recording these thoughts, and for taking a step back to see how true they really are.

More information about using thought records can be found at:

<https://www.psychologytools.com/self-help/thought-records/>

# Thought Record Sheet

## SITUATION / TRIGGER

What happened? Where? When?  
Who with? How?

## FEELINGS / EMOTIONS

Rate 0 - 100%. What emotions did I feel at that time? What else? How intense was it? What did I notice in my body? Where did I feel it?

## UNHELPFUL THOUGHTS / IMAGES

What went through my mind? What disturbed me? What did those thoughts/images/memories mean to me, or say about me or the situation? What am I responding to? What 'button' is this pressing for me? What would the worst thing about that, or that could happen?

## FACTS THAT *SUPPORT* THE UNHELPFUL THOUGHTS

What are the facts? What facts do I have that the unhelpful thought(s) are totally true?

## FACTS THAT PROVIDE EVIDENCE *AGAINST* THE UNHELPFUL THOUGHTS

What facts do I have that the unhelpful thought(s) are NOT totally true? Is it possible that this is opinion, rather than fact? What have others said about this?

## ALTERNATIVE, MORE REALISTIC AND BALANCED PERSPECTIVE

STOP! Take a breath...

What would someone else say about this situation? What's the bigger picture? Is there another way of seeing it? What advice would you give someone else? Is my reaction proportion to the actual event? Is this really as important as it seems?

## CONCLUSION

Re-rate emotions 0 - 100%. What am I feeling now? What could I do differently? What would be more effective? Do what works! Act wisely. What will be most helpful for me or the situation? What will the consequences be?

# Thought Record Sheet

Date

## SITUATION/TRIGGER

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---

---

---

## FEELINGS/EMOTIONS

---

---

---

---

## UNHELPFUL THOUGHTS/IMAGES

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## FACTS THAT SUPPORT THE UNHELPFUL THOUGHTS

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## FACTS THAT PROVIDE EVIDENCE AGAINST THE UNHELPFUL THOUGHTS

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## ALTERNATIVE, MORE REALISTIC AND BALANCED PERSPECTIVE

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## CONCLUSION

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# Sleep Hygiene

Yes, there's such a thing as 'sleep hygiene'! Just like you might think of dental hygiene (brushing your teeth) or body hygiene (taking showers and baths), how often we sleep and what kind of sleep we're getting is important. For many of us who live with different mental health challenges, sleep can often either be the most difficult thing to do or the only thing we can do. So when we think of sleep hygiene, it's about how we look at balancing getting enough rest with maintaining a regular sleep routine.

## TIPS FOR GETTING A GOOD NIGHT'S SLEEP

- Try having a hot bath or shower about 90 minutes before bed
- Eat a small snack just before bed
- Start a bedtime routine to help your body get used to going to sleep at the same time every day
- Use medicinal teas that calm your nervous system
- Try staying off screens for at least an hour before bedtime
- Try listening to a sleepy podcast or listening to calming music

For more tips, visit:

<http://www.anxietycanada.com/sites/default/files/SleepHygiene.pdf>



Image by lehente Foote @BareMedicineDoula

Figuring out what's keeping us awake can also help us figure out what is going to help us get to sleep. For example, if anxiety is keeping you up, drinking calming tea 30 minutes before bed can calm your nervous system and help you get a better sleep. Or, if you're sleeping too much because of depression, doing some exercise during the day (even just going for a walk!) can help you get into a regular sleep/wake cycle.



# Herbal Supports for Depression and Anxiety

Below are some options to try with natural herbs and medicines - it is highly recommended to talk to your care provider and/or medicine people before using any of these medicines, and to also make sure if you are taking other medications that they are not contraindicated (which means they would interfere with one another).

## BACH'S RESCUE REMEDY

This is a commercially available tincture that helps with acute stress and panic - you can get it at most health food stores or order it online.

## BUILDING UP THE NERVOUS SYSTEM

Vitamin B, calcium (helps with irritability of nerves) - try warm milk with honey or cinnamon, seaweed, nettle, green milky oats, or try using rose essential oil.

## FOR SUPPORT WITH DEPRESSION

Vitamin D (especially during the winter months), or using an uplifting aromatherapy that smells good to you like lemon balm, or hawthorn (which can also help with grief, loss and sadness). St. John's wort is a plant medicine that many people use to help with depression, but since it can interfere with many prescription medications it's important to talk to a care provider before using it!

## NERVOUS SYSTEM SUPPORTS

Using these medicines as a tea can help calm our minds and bodies:

lavender

catnip

licorice root

chamomile

lemon balm

fennel

passionflower (**don't take with other sedative medications**)

nettle leaf

## FOR SUPPORT WITH SLEEP

Using a spray on a pillow that contains lavender, valerian, or hops, or applying a lavender and chamomile body cream or oil.

**Don't forget to check with your medicine people or care provider (or an auntie!) before using these medicines, since some can interact with certain types of sedatives and blood thinners.**

## WATER

Water is also healing to the nervous system, it can cleanse and soothe. Aiming to drink 2 litres of water a day can go a long way!

## HERBAL BATHS

To make herbal baths, including foot baths (can be loose leaf herbs or in distilled oil form): try lavender and chamomile, or lemon balm and oatmeal.

## CALMING COMBINATION

Combination to calm (especially during migraines or headaches from stress): Make tea to drink, have a foot bath, put a cool compress on your forehead, listen to relaxing music. If someone you trust is around, ask them to massage your scalp or shoulders.

# Indigiqueer, LGBTQ+, or Two-Spirit Elders/Mentors Circle

## CREATE ONE IN YOUR COMMUNITY

In a lot of our traditions, a key part of wellness has always been visiting and connecting with our communities. Coming together to laugh, listen, and share our stories can be a powerful mood booster. Building a circle to bring together Indigiqueer, LGBTQ+ and Two-Spirit youth, mentors, and Elders is one way to form a supportive network for yourself and your peers.

These are some examples of the MANY things you can do in your community, with your friends, or at your school: you could have tea time and tell stories, or create art about mental health with your friends, or organize a beading circle with some supportive aunties. Many great things have come from kitchen table discussions over tea and some food, who knows what you might learn from each other.

If physical distancing regulations make this difficult, you could schedule regular phone dates or video chats with your community, or organize a six-feet-apart medicine walk!

# Resources

Below is a list of resources and apps that touch on many of the topics covered in this manual. Disclaimer: some of these resources may need some small adjustments to be LGBTQ+ inclusive or culturally relevant for our communities. Take what's useful for you, and leave the rest!

## BUILDING COMMUNITY



Friends Make the Best Medicine: A Zine Guide to Creating Community Mental Health Support Networks

<http://nycicarus.org/images/fmtbm.pdf>

Pods and Pod Mapping Worksheet

<https://batjc.wordpress.com/pods-and-pod-mapping-worksheet/>



## HERBAL SUPPORTS



Plancestral Supports Through Life's Many Chapters

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1lhWaJRDCjWWzpTXUungT26kJguBnsJWR/view>

## SELF CARE & ASKING FOR HELP



What No One Tells You About Self Care: How to Take Care of Yourself When You Have Depression

<https://themighty.com/2016/09/self-care-how-to-take-care-of-yourself-when-you-have-depression/>

How to Ask for Help with Self-Harm

<http://www.rookiemag.com/2015/09/ask-help-self-harm/>



## PARENTING

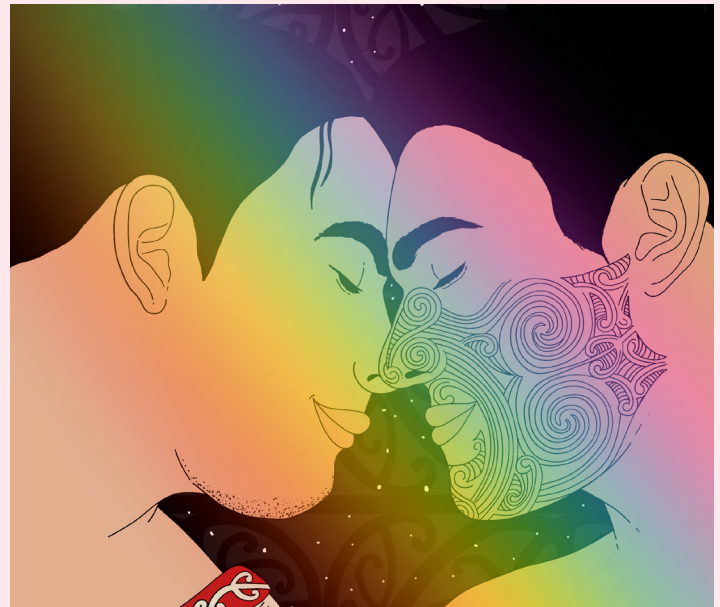


**Queer Birth Project** - a collective of birth workers who offer free monthly groups for LGBTQ+ parents

<https://www.queerbirthproject.org/>

**Trans & Queer Families Resource Package** - a Google Drive folder with many articles, infographics & more

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1wCGvFzGijOjSL6-kJBfhpc-e8ZTqFVvg>



Images by Huriana Kopeke-Te Aho @hurianakt.a

## GRIEF AND LOSS



**Toolkit for People Who Have Been Impacted by a Suicide Loss**

[https://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/sites/default/files/2019-03/suicide\\_loss\\_toolkit\\_eng.pdf](https://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/sites/default/files/2019-03/suicide_loss_toolkit_eng.pdf)

**Hope and Healing After Suicide: A Practical Guide for People Who Have Lost Someone to Suicide in Ontario**

<http://suicideprevention.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/Casp-After-Suicide-Book.pdf>



**How to Support a Grieving Friend: Beyond the Basics**

<https://whatsyourgrief.com/how-to-help-a-grieving-friend-beyond-the-basics/>

## SUPPORTING OTHERS



### Self-Care While Helping a Friend

<http://mindyourmind.ca/help/self-care-while-helping-friend>

### When Your Partner Has Anxiety: A Meltdown Guide

<https://kylarosesims.wordpress.com/2016/11/01/when-your-partner-has-anxiety-a-meltdown-guide/>



### Being a Friend to Someone in Crisis

<http://www.activeminds.org/issues-a-resources/be-a-friend>

## ENCOURAGEMENT & SELF-EXPRESSION



### 19 Small Awards Anyone with Anxiety Deserves to Receive

<http://www.buzzfeed.com/annaborges/you-did-it>

### 23 Ways to Treat Yo' Self Without Buying or Eating Anything

<http://www.yesandyes.org/2015/10/rewards-that-arent-food-or-shopping.html>



### 24 Creative Ways to Channel Depression or Anxiety

[http://www.buzzfeed.com/alannaokun/making-it-through?utm\\_term=.wooXKJ304](http://www.buzzfeed.com/alannaokun/making-it-through?utm_term=.wooXKJ304)

## GLOSSARIES



### LGBTQIA Resource Centre Glossary

<https://lgbtqia.ucdavis.edu/educated/glossary>

## GETTING THE MOST OUT OF THERAPY



### What to Expect from Your First Therapy Session

<https://www.verywellmind.com/psychotherapy-101-p2-1067403>

### 10 Tips for Making the Most Out of Therapy

<https://psychcentral.com/lib/therapists-spill-10-tips-for-making-the-most-of-therapy#1>



## EATING DISORDER RECOVERY



### Nalgona Positivity Pride - Eating Disorder Support for BIPOC

<https://www.nalgonapositivitypride.com/eating-disorders-support>

### Trans Folx Fighting EDs: Resources for Trans People Fighting EDs

<https://www.transfolxfightingeds.com/resources>



### Dear Body: A Peace Treaty with My Queer, Trans, and Recovering Body

<https://letsqueerthingsup.com/2019/05/02/dear-body-a-peace-treaty-with-my-queer-trans-and-recovering-body/>

## ACCESSING HEALTHCARE



### Healthcare & You

<http://teenhealthsource.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Healthcare-You-final.pdf>

### Getting Ready for a Healthcare Appointment

<http://teenhealthsource.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Getting-Ready-for-Your-Appointment.pdf>



## FOR WHEN YOU FEEL LIKE SH\*T



### Everything is Awful and I'm Not Ok: Questions to Ask Before Giving Up

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/OB6A2F5ky9SELUOZfdO5YMEpyNUk/view>

### Questions to Ask Yourself Before Giving Up:

<http://gutsmagazine.ca/featured/questions-to-ask>



### You Feel Like Shit: An Interactive Self-Care Guide

[http://philome.la/jace\\_harr/you-feel-like-shit-an-interactive-self-care-guide/play](http://philome.la/jace_harr/you-feel-like-shit-an-interactive-self-care-guide/play)

### What to Do When You Feel Like Your World Is Ending and Everybody Hates You and Nothing Will Ever Be Ok Again

<http://bellejar.ca/2016/01/08/what-to-do-when-you-feel-like-your-world-is-ending-and-everybody-hates-you-and-nothing-will-ever-be-ok-again/>



## NAVIGATING CRISIS



### Fireweed Collective's Crisis Toolkit

<https://fireweedcollective.org/crisis-toolkit/>

### I Am Feeling Suicidal. What Can I Do?

<https://wemattercampaign.org/get-help/suicidal-thoughts>



### How to Support Someone Thinking of Suicide

<https://youthspace.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/YouthSpaceSuicideSupportGuide.pdf>

## Toolkits



Surviving the Apocalypse Together is a toolkit designed to help queer and trans folks navigate the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. It has some great safety plan templates:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/OB6A2F5ky9SELUOZfd05YMEpyNUk/view>

The Indigenizing Love Toolkit includes a great list of Two-Spirit resources (pages 31-35):

<https://www.healthynativeyouth.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/IndigenizingLoveToolkitYouth.pdf>



The Northwest Portland Area Indian Health Board has a collection of resources on Two-Spirit and LGBTQ+ Indigenous health, including a toolkit for youth:

<http://www.npaihb.org/2slgbtq/#seeus>



Image by Yvonne Houssin @themistakebead

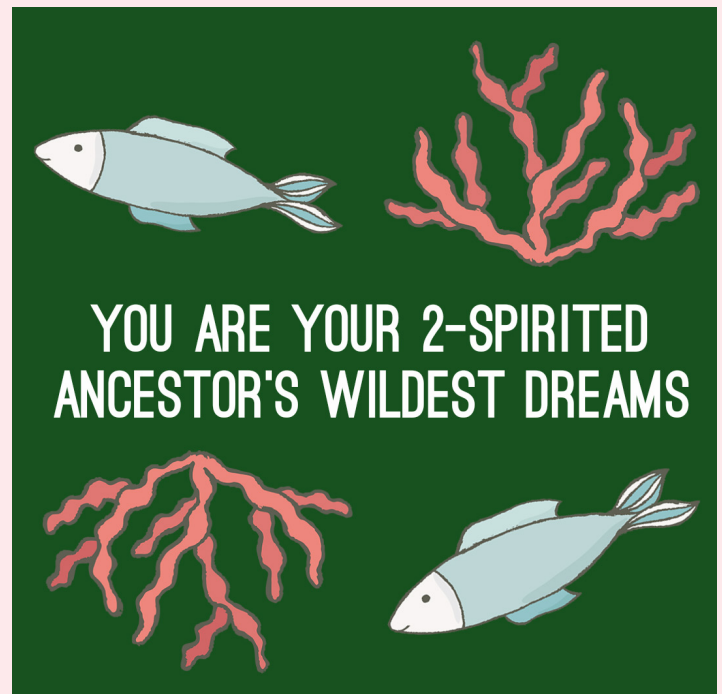


Image by lehente Foote @BareMedicineDoula

## Accessing Services Through Indigenous Services Canada (ISC)

Status Indians and Inuit who are registered with a land claim organization (Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated, Inuvialuit Regional Corporation, Makivik Corporation) may



be eligible for no-cost mental health services (such as individual or group therapy) through ISC. Contact your band office or ISC's Non-Insured Health Benefits (NIHB) regional office to see what options are available to you.



You can find contact information for NIHB regional offices here:

<https://www.sac-isc.gc.ca/eng/1579274812116/1579708265237#regional>

## Friendship Centres

Friendship centres are great resources for Indigenous people in Urban settings. Lots of friendship centres have programming to support youth mental health, and almost all of them offer cultural programming and can help connect you with Elders.



You can find a friendship centre near you on the National Association of Friendship Centres website:

<https://nafc.ca/en/friendship-centres>

## Other Resources



Embrace Life Council - a non-profit suicide prevention organization based in Iqaluit, Nunavut. Their website has lots of great resources:

<http://inuusiq.com/>

The We Matter Campaign has a ton of great resources on their website - including videos with messages of hope from fellow youth, toolkits to help support your community, and links to more supports:

<https://wemattercampaign.org/>



We also highly recommend "*Wreck this Journal*" (which now also has an app for your phone)! *Wreck this Journal* is a book that has suggestions and activities on different pages to try out, designed to help express your emotions. Available at:

<http://www.kerismith.com/shop>

## Apps



Insight Timer - a free app with thousands of guided meditations, courses, calming music and more. You can also listen on your web browser:

<https://insighttimer.com/>

### PsychCentral's Top 10 Free Mental Health Apps

<http://psychcentral.com/blog/archives/2013/09/20/top-10-free-mental-health-apps/>



80 Awesome Mental Health Resources When You Can't Afford a Therapist

<http://greatist.com/grow/resources-when-you-can-not-afford-therapy>

## Social Media Accounts

### FACEBOOK



Byron Nicholai - Yup'ik musician from Alaska whose Facebook page is a great inspirational and motivational resource.

<https://www.facebook.com/I.Sing.You.Dance>

Naniqtar (William) Komaksiutiksak - an Inuk rapper who spreads positive messages through his music.

<https://www.facebook.com/NorthernKnowledgeMusic>



2 Spirits in Motion Foundation - a Canada-wide initiative sharing positive LGBTQ+ & Two-Spirit content.

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/418258811958932>

## INSTAGRAMS

For the memes:

@indigenous\_fememeisms  
@skodenne  
@decolonial.meme.queens  
@thebandoffice

Resources, aunties/uncles, and helpful relatives:

@maggiestoronto  
@latinxparenting  
@wahrs\_dtes  
@prairieharmreduction  
@peers\_victoria  
@keinfoshop  
@qtpocmentalhealth  
@pieces.to.pathways  
@niizh\_manidook\_hide\_camp  
@scarleteenorg  
@teaandbannock  
@Project.reclaim  
@rezcondomtour  
@jacksaddleback  
@2slgbtq  
@navajo\_nation\_pride  
@twospiritpowwow  
@ullaakut  
@w2salliance  
@superneech

Rad two-spirit, LGBTQ+ and Indigiqueer Artists & Writers:

@nativeboytoy  
@hesquiahtqueer  
@moe.butterfly.art  
@hurianakt.a  
@wanahae  
@coffinbirth  
@adamgarnetjones  
@mo\_thunder  
@vientoxsol

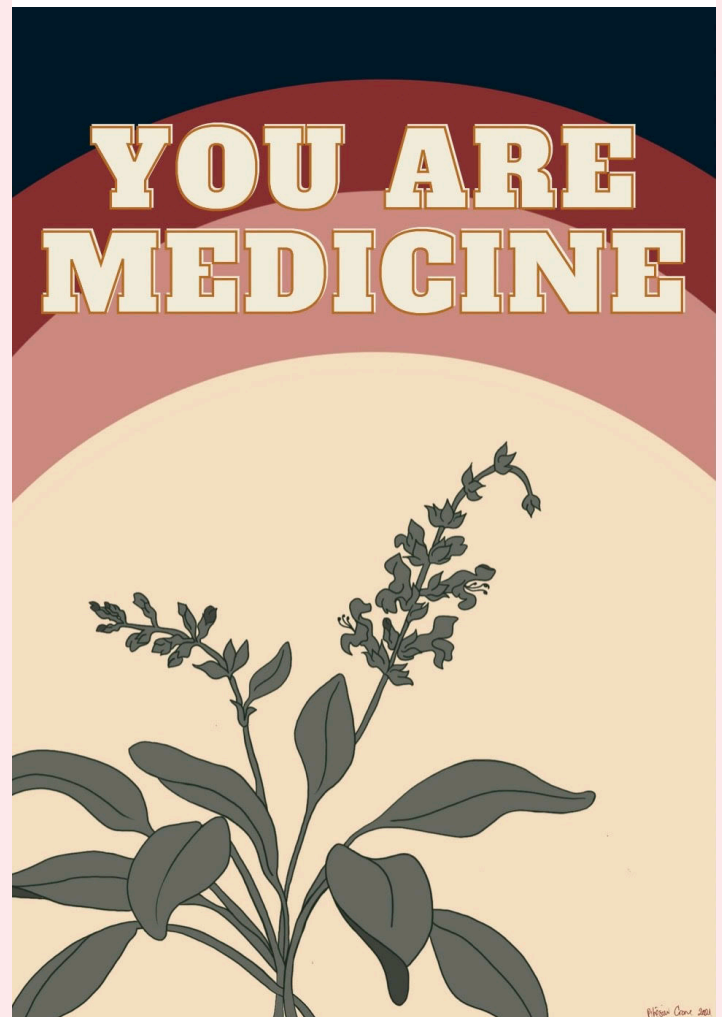


Image by Pihêsiw Crane (they/them) @apiscikahakis

# Crisis Lines

## TRANS LIFELINE



24/7 phone support from trans and non-binary volunteers, available in English and Spanish.

1-877-330-6366

<https://translifeline.org/>

## KID'S HELP PHONE



24/7 free phone and text support, available in English and French.

1-800-668-6868 or text CONNECT to 686868

<https://kidshelpphone.ca/>

## LGBT YOUTHLINE



Text and chat support for 2SLGBTQ youth (up to age 29) in Ontario. Available Friday-Sunday, 4pm-9:30pm (EST).

Text: 647-694-4275 or chat online.

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

## FIRST NATIONS AND INUIT HOPE FOR WELLNESS HELP LINE



24/7 free phone and chat support, available in English, French, Cree, Ojibwe and Inuktitut.

1-855-242-3310

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

## CANADA SUICIDE PREVENTION SERVICE

24/7 free phone support, available in English and French  
1-833-456-4566

## THE KAMATSIAQTUT HELPLINE

24/7 free phone support for folks in the North, available in English and Inuktitut  
1-867-979-3333 (Nunavut)  
OR toll free at 1-800-265-3333

## KUU-US CRISIS HELPLINE

24/7 phone support for Indigenous people in British Columbia, with dedicated lines for adults and youth.

250-723-4050 (adults/Elders)

250-723-2040 (children & youth)

1-800-588-8717 (toll-free for everyone)

1-833-MétisBC (1-833-638-4722) (for Métis people)

## PULAAVİK KABLŪ SUPPORT LINE

A helpline for general support, and COVID-specific support, serviced by bilingual Inuit counsellors. This support line is currently specifically for those who call the Kivalliq region of Nunavut home (due to limited capacity), and can be accessed whether or they reside there or not. Available from 9AM-4PM (CST) at:

1-844-654-3580



Image by Pihêsiw Crane (they/them) @apiscikahakis

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And thank YOU for reading this manual!

Connect with NYSHN:

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Facebook: Native Youth Sexual Health Network

Email: [info@nativeyouthsexualhealth.com](mailto:info@nativeyouthsexualhealth.com)

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