

Circles of Knowledge Keepers:

Training Kit for Inuit, Metis & First Nations Offenders as Peer Educators & Counsellors.

**Circle # 8:
Self-care & Stress Relief**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

The need for self-care	Page 3
Overview of the Circles	Page 4
Introduction to Spirituality.....	Page 5
Ceremonies on the Inside	Page 6
Prayer	Page 7
Pastoral Support	Page 7
Talking Circles	Page 8
Creative Writing	Page 8
Physical Fitness	Page 9
Arts & Crafts Therapy	Page 10
Meditation	Page 10
Visualization	Page 12
Fellowships on the inside	Page 13

Note: Review the last Circle by asking for questions. Review Overheads # 7-A, F & H, then continue with this Circle.

This circle can work best to have Guest Speakers come in who specialize in certain areas. For example, you may want to get somebody who has practiced meditation or visualization to show others how to do it. Tapes which can guide you or with soft music can also help.

THE NEED FOR SELF-CARE

One of the hardest things for anyone to do, is to learn how to take care of themselves. Taking care of yourself doesn't mean being selfish or only looking after your own needs. Taking care of yourself is really about knowing your limits.

It is also about not trying to be perfect, not feeling like you have to know everything, or not feeling like you have to do everything either.

Many people on the outside have a hard time practicing self-care, so it may even be harder to do inside. That can make it all the more important.

Many inmates say life on the inside isn't great and that it's more like survival.

(USE OVERHEAD # 8-A)

Stress affects people in different ways. Some get angry and explode at anyone over a small thing. Others hold it in, get headaches, sick, ulcers, body pains and all kinds of problems.

How stress can affect a Knowledge Keeper can be any of these ways. It will be important for Knowledge Keepers to watch for signs and work on building a support system.

Part of the job of the main Knowledge Keeper will be to organize volunteers and give them proper support. This may include guest speakers and arranging for special training, so volunteers may feel better prepared to handle whatever comes up.

DO EXERCISE # 8-A

(USE OVERHEAD # 8-B)

OVERVIEW OF THE CIRCLES

Knowledge Keepers who make it this far will have learned:

1. What this program is all about in Circle 1;
2. Basic facts about HIV, Hepatitis and TB in Circle 2;
3. Circle 3 talked about sex, sexuality and gender roles because some of these diseases can be spread by sex;
4. We focused on risk management in Circle 4;
5. In Circle 5, we taught the skills to teach this information;

6. Next, once some people get informed, they may want to be tested for HIV and Circle 6 showed how to support people when they want to do this;
7. Circle 7 said what Aboriginal health promotion was and how your environment can affect your health;
8. Circle 8 is a focus on self-care and stress relief; and,
9. Lastly, Circle 9 is about planning this program to teach about the facts found in all the circles.

Now it comes down to you - the Knowledge Keeper - and what you will need to deal with hard topics, ones that have to do with life and death.

(USE OVERHEAD # 8-C)

INTRODUCTION OF SPIRITUALITY

Many of the spiritual practices of Aboriginal people can be called “Earth-based” spirituality. This is because the connection to the land is what is common for Aboriginal people.

There seems to be a common philosophy that the red race, or Aboriginal people were given an original teaching that instructed them to be keepers of the land.

There are differences though, based on language and race for example. It can be said though, that **respect** serves as the common foundation or starting point for spiritual beliefs of almost all Aboriginal people.

This includes respect for the land, for others, and for all life, not just human life.

Although ceremonies and teachings may be different, the role of Elders, the use of respect, songs, dances and feasts are similar ways of spiritual expression.

For some, religion can be a little different than spirituality. A person may not be religious, like going regularly to a Church to worship, but they still can be spiritual. Religions can be a more structured way of teaching and practicing a faith.

Spirituality can be defined as a respect for life. It can be less structured, only in the sense of not being confined to a building like a church. People can be spiritual walking along a street or eating a meal. Spiritual practices may still be structured, but tend to be more open or flexible about when, where and how spirituality can be expressed.

DO EXERCISE # 8-B

CEREMONIES ON THE INSIDE

In the last Circle, a list of recognized ceremonies and objects was given. The role of Elders and Traditional People is a central one for any of these practices.

For many First Nation Elders, they may ask that a person make an offering, like with tobacco or a cloth flag. This protocol is different for each culture, and even for each Elder. The idea is not to come empty handed when seeking healing or teachings. Not having an offering doesn't mean you won't be able to talk to an Elder. Tobacco or cloth are not used this way for Inuit Elders.

PRAYER

There are many, many variations in how prayer is expressed. For example, there are Mi'kmaq doing Sundances, Cree doing Peyote ceremonies, Ojibway who are Fundamentalists, etc., even though these forms of prayer may not have been originally part of their cultures. There is no right or wrong way to pray.

Also, nobody should tell you how or how not to pray. That is a personal choice and some say the most powerful prayer is one that comes from the heart of someone in need.

The Residential School legacy had a major negative impact on the spiritual belief systems of many Aboriginal people. Aboriginal students there were often told not to speak their own language. Over time this created gaps between children and the Elders.

Since Elders were the keepers of history, teachings and ceremonies, this created much damage and losses. Because physical and sexual abuse also occurred there, many Survivors have a hard time trusting anyone with a position of authority.

It also may be harder for Survivors to believe in a Creator because of the really bad experiences of Residential Schools.

(USE OVERHEAD # 8-D)

PASTORAL SUPPORT

A pastor, minister, priest or Elder can be some of the people you can turn to, in order to talk and offload your burdens. Talking is one of the best ways to get rid of stress.

This isn't easy though for many people, and learning to trust someone can be a long process. There may be other people you feel safe enough talking to inside. These people can be part of your own support team, so you can help others.

TALKING CIRCLES

Talking Circles is a common way many Aboriginal people teach and discuss things. The idea is to go around in a circle, letting each person speak. Usually, when one person is speaking, they are the **only** person speaking.

Most circles get started with a smudge, like lighting sweetgrass or sage. Some use a talking stick or stone which gets handed around and the person holding the object has the floor.

By arranging talking circles, this can be one way to let Knowledge Keepers hear what others are feeling or experiencing. This can be a good way to debrief and support the team.

CREATIVE WRITING

Some people find it helpful to write down their experiences and channel their energy this way. This can be as simple as writing in a journal or diary each night or morning, or writing longer stories that talk about your life, or even poems.

On the outside, a library is a good place to find books that can help motivate you. Books can be a good way to escape from the day to day happenings.

PHYSICAL FITNESS

The benefits of being physically fit are very good for keeping an immune system strong. It is also an excellent way of managing stress.

Like anything, it may be useful to find someone who knows what they are doing, so that you don't injure yourself. It is also important to have a goal too. For example, if your goal is to lose weight and firm up a bit, then you might do certain types of aerobic exercises plus weightlifting.

On the other hand, if you losing weight isn't your goal, then you might want to focus on less aerobic/cardio exercises and just do weights. Muscle mass does make you burn more calories though, so you will need to increase calorie intake to match what you burn off.

It is also very important when working out, to drink plenty of water. As you sweat, you lose water which is why you will weigh slightly less after a good workout. You will need to put back water into your system, if you want to get the best benefits of your exercise routines.

Remember, if your facility has bad water, it is always good to have water that has been boiled beforehand to kill the little bugs in it.

One of the greater benefits is the good feeling you have after a good workout. You may even feel better about yourself, but by focusing on the exercise itself, you may get rid of stress that builds up from the things you experience in your day.

This can include things you experienced as part of your job as a Knowledge Keeper.

ARTS & CRAFTS THERAPY

Arts and crafts can be an easy way to relax. They can be done as a form of expression or more for a source of income. Many Aboriginal people, through carving, painting, leatherwork can find it healing and a form of therapy.

These help to reinforce cultural identity and to get your mind off negative things happening around you.

(USE OVERHEAD # 8-E)

MEDITATION

Sometimes, people can get very worried or anxious about things and don't have a way of calming down. They may be stressed out and have nobody to talk to. On the inside, they also have no where to go and very little to do.

There is a way anyone can learn, called meditation. This has been practiced for centuries and is easy to learn. The more you do it though, the better you can get at it.

5 Basic Steps to learn to meditate:

1. Get into a comfortable position and keep your back straight. You might find it easier to sit on the floor with your back against the wall. You can also sit in a chair.

2. Find a time when it's not going to be as noisy and when you may not get interrupted. If you can't, then try doing it anyway and with practice, you can tune out noise.
3. Pay attention to your breathing. Notice how it feels to breathe in and out with long deep breaths. Feel it coming in and going out. Try and make sure it's your belly that rises and falls, and not your chest. This is a better way to breathe.
4. Now, pay attention to your mind. Close your eyes. Keep focusing on your breathing. What you likely will notice is your mind doesn't shut up. This is kind of normal. It takes awhile to learn how to control thoughts. Keep breathing deeply.
5. With practice, you can learn to do this and the noise in your head does stop. Some people catch it right away when they are having thoughts. You can simply say "there's a thought". Then go back to focusing on your breathing. After awhile, you will begin to relax. Over time, you may become calmer to your environment. All it takes is practice.

(USE OVERHEAD # 8-F)

VISUALIZATION

This is almost like meditation, but it is different. It uses the mind to help keep the body healthy and stronger. This can help to fight illness.

You start the same way you do with meditation. Find as quiet a place as you can, sit comfortably, then focus on your breathing. Now, this is where it gets a little different.

With meditation, the goal is to focus on breathing and empty the mind. With visualization, you try to use the mind and especially your imagination to help.

Picture, as you breathe deeply, that you are breathing out all the junk and sickness. Imagine getting rid of all the bad things in your mind, your body, your feelings, and your spirit.

You can also focus on just one of these at a time. For example, you can breathe in good feelings and healing, then breathe out bad feelings and pain.

If you have an illness, you can use your mind to help you fight the illness. Everybody can have a different way of doing this. If you have HIV, Hepatitis, or TB, you can imagine your T-cells fighting the virus.

Picture them as they really are and should be - warrior cells. You can also imagine the virus getting weaker, getting beaten up by the warrior cells. You can create whatever example you want. All you need is a good imagination.

This isn't magic and it's also not a promise that you will get healthy or get rid of an illness, at least not on it's own. You will still need to make personal choices on what medicine to take, things around diet, exercise, etc.. Together with many things, you can find ways of staying stronger.

(USE OVERHEAD # 8-G)

FELLOWSHIPS ON THE INSIDE

For some things, you may want to go to fellowships that deal with those areas. Alcoholics Anonymous or Narcotics Anonymous are two types that support people to deal with alcoholism or drug addiction.

These may not be for everyone, so people who feel they need help in these areas will need to make that choice for themselves. Generally, they have one hour meetings, which may be a discussion or speaker meeting.

Discussions let everyone talk from their own experiences. They take turns talking and you have the choice not to say anything, even if asked. Speaker meetings may have one or a few people go to a podium and tell their life story and how they got over their problems.

These two fellowships have been around for many years. AA is about 55 years old and NA came afterwards. They use 12 steps and 12 traditions to run their meetings.