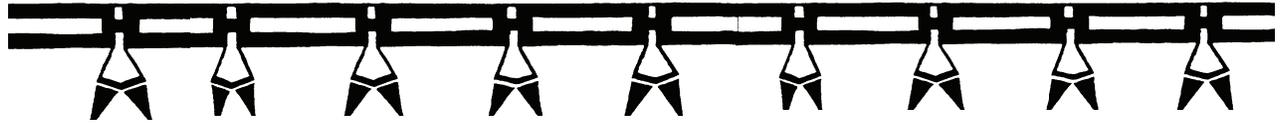


# 4: Culture & Tradition



## Purpose:

To recognize the importance that culture and tradition have in the lives and well-being of Native youth.

## Stages of Change Process:

Getting information

## Learning Objectives:

By the end of this session, Native STAND members will be able to:

1. Describe traditional Native American healing practices used to promote healing and well-being.
2. Describe the role elders play in Native American culture.

## Supplies/Materials:

- Chart paper, markers & masking tape

## Resources/Handouts:

	RM	PM	HO
Words of Wisdom	●		
Medicine Wheel	●	●	
What is an Elder?	●	●	





## 1. Welcome/Introduction

*3-5 minutes, large group lecture, adult facilitator*

- Review Session 3: Acting Out.
- Answer any questions in the QB.
- Introduce session: Traditional Native American healing focuses on balancing mind, body, and spirit. Contrary to the “Western approach” to health and healing, Native healers don’t isolate one part of a person and only try to heal that part. Traditional healing practices center on benefits to the emotional, spiritual, psychological, and cultural aspects of the tribe.<sup>1</sup>
- Read today’s WOW.

**We should be as water, which is lower than all things yet stronger than even the rocks.**

*Oglala Sioux*

## 2. Sacred Circles

*8-10 minutes, large group lecture, adult facilitator*

- Explain:  
The symbol of the circle is very important to Native peoples. Although specific interpretations and meanings of the circle vary from tribe to tribe, it generally represents wholeness, health, and harmony with one’s self, family, community, nation, and universe. It represents the cycle of things in nature and life, like seasons and stages of life.
- Ask:  
“What are some things in Native American culture or in your Tribe that are round or circular? (Write answers on a sheet of chart paper.) Answers could include:



- Medicine wheel
- Kivas
- Drums
- Hogans
- Shields
- Teepees
- Sweatlodges
- Firepits
- Round houses
- Hoops
- Sandpaintings
- Talking circles
- Powwow Dances
- Conch shells
- Bowls, pottery
- Sun, planets, moon, stars
- Teepee base
- Turtle shell
- Rattles
- Igloos
- Arm bands
- Zia sign
- Burial mounds
- Pipe bowl

<sup>1</sup> Source: [http://tribalconnections.org/ehealthinfo/trad\\_healing.html](http://tribalconnections.org/ehealthinfo/trad_healing.html).



- Explain:  
Native people refer to circles by many names, including the Sacred Circle, the Circle of Life, the Sacred Hoop, and the Medicine Wheel.
- Ask:  
What are some concepts represented by the Sacred Circle or the Medicine Wheel?  
Answers could include: (provide a few examples, if necessary)
  - ◇ four cardinal directions (e.g., east, south, west, north)
  - ◇ four seasons (e.g., spring, summer, fall, winter)
  - ◇ four phases of our lives (e.g., child, adolescent, adult, elder)
  - ◇ four elements (e.g., fire, water, earth, air)
  - ◇ four colors of humans (e.g., yellow, black, red, white)
  - ◇ four aspects of our nature (e.g., physical, mental, emotional, spiritual)

### 3. Medicine Wheel

*15-20 minutes, small group work, adult or teen co-facilitator*

- Divide the participants into four groups and assign each group one of the four cardinal directions (east, south, west, north). Refer them to the Medicine Wheel in the PM that describes the significance of the wheel's components. Each group should read the section that corresponds to its assigned cardinal direction and select 4-5 key aspects to illustrate on a chart paper without using letters or words (encourage them to be creative and colorful). Reconvene the groups and have them sit according to their cardinal directions. Beginning with the East and moving counter-clockwise, have a spokesperson from each group present their work.
- Discussion:
  - ◇ What is the relationship between the four directions?
  - ◇ How does the direction and movement around the Medicine Wheel represent situations in their own lives?
  - ◇ How can a Medicine Wheel be used to describe the process of becoming a peer educator?

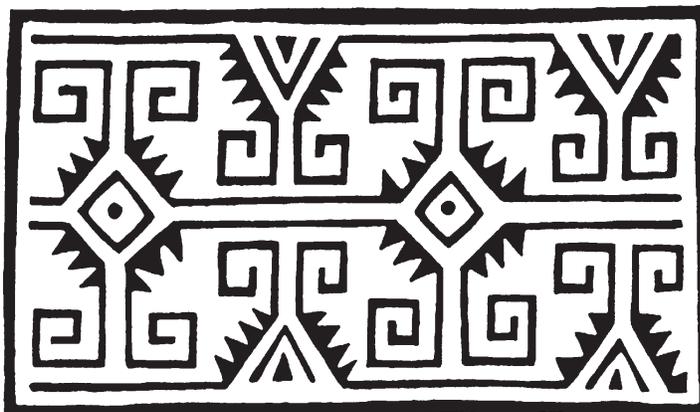




#### 4. Traditional Healing & Well-Being

*10-15 minutes, large group lecture & discussion, adult facilitator*

- Introduce topic: As we just learned, the circle represents wholeness, balance, and wellness. Wellness occurs when there is balance and harmony of the mind, body, spirit, emotions, and natural environment in relation to all things.
- Ask:
  - ◇ What happens if the circle gets out of balance? (e.g., illness, disease)
  - ◇ What are some things a person can do to regain balance? (e.g., rest, nutrition, exercise, meditation, western medicine, traditional medicine)
  - ◇ Ask participants to name some traditional healing practices used by Native Americans to promote healing and well-being. Write answers on chart paper. These may include:
    - Dances, dancing
    - Songs, singing
    - Sweatbaths/sweat lodge
    - Herbal remedies
    - Smudging
    - Vision quests
    - Ceremonies
    - Sandpaintings
    - Storytelling
    - Offerings
    - Drumming
    - Talking circle
    - Stargazing
    - Fasting
    - Running
- Ask a volunteer to share a personal story about the power of traditional healing in his or her own life or that of a family member or friend.



## 5. Learning From Our Elders

*30-40 minutes, large group, guest speaker, individual work, adult or teen co-facilitator*

Introduce topic: Traditionally, Native American elders have held unique and honored positions in their communities. Their greater life experience, historical perspective, spiritual knowledge, and closer ties to the old ways of tribal ancestors make them a valuable resource for younger people.<sup>2</sup>



### Option 1 - Elder Guest Speaker

- Introduce the guest speaker.
- Ask elder to speak with the students about the relationship of culture and tradition to health and well-being and the important role elders play in traditional Native cultures. Allow the elder to talk for 30 minutes or so.
- Leave time for questions and discussion at the end. (Be prepared to ask some questions, in case the students don't have any).

### Option 2 - No Speaker Available

- Refer students to “What is an Elder?” in the PM and ask a volunteer(s) to read some or all of the pieces aloud to the group.
- Ask the students to think about an elder in their life and something that person taught them about health and well-being.
- Ask them to write their thoughts down in the space provided for this activity in the PM.
- After 10 minutes or so, ask for volunteers to share their experiences with an elder's teachings.

## **WHAT IS AN ELDER?<sup>3</sup>**

“Elders are not born, they are not appointed, they emerge as the sum total of the experiences of life, they are a state of being.”

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“You see, the elder, the concept for me is like if you go into a strange land and you don't know the country and you're swamped and there's [bad places to travel] and there's good places to travel. So the ones who have been longer are the good guides because they know how to get around the swamps, who know where to go, and so on. It doesn't matter if there's a trail. They know that country . . . So there are in fact guides who have been there who have each individually lived through their own hell and have found their way and they are in fact guides. So if you are going into a strange land, and God knows, it's strange to so many young people. And they can avoid all that and ensure you a good trip.”

<sup>2</sup> Source: <http://www.montana.edu/conors/research/grasslandsproject.htm>.

<sup>3</sup> Stiegelbauer SM. What is an Elder? What do Elders do? First Nations elders as teachers in culture-based urban organizations. The Canadian Journal of Native Studies, 1996; VXI(1):37-66. Available at: <http://www2.brandonu.ca/library/cjns/16.1/Stiegelbauer.pdf>

“It is not surprising that many of the people recognized as ‘Elders’ have lived through difficult times, both personally and politically. Some have had problems with the law, with alcohol, with family separation; some have seen such things happen to others. What they have in common is the fact that they learned something from those experiences, that they turned to the traditional culture for understanding, support and healing, and that they are committed to helping others, especially those of similar background.”

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“When you ask an elder for advice about tradition, you are also asking for a kind of honesty and purity and the best of tradition itself which was the spiritual as well as the everyday. Elders are practical, they have practical situations to attend to. You can confide in them and just ask for direction and help yourself.”

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“Aside from the issue of age, a person becomes an ‘Elder’ in the ‘eyes of the community.’ That in itself is a process, as one Elder said, ‘part of the process of life’. Elders, however, are also practical people—people who live and make choices within an everyday life. Being an Elder requires a certain quality of person. It is also informal and something in tune with the cycle of life, with the natural way that things work.

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“Through the process of accumulating knowledge and experience, some individuals begin to show an aptitude for talking to people and helping them in ways that contribute to a better life. This aptitude is acknowledged by the community in seeking them out, for discussions, for teaching, for public lectures. This in itself is a process as it happens slowly overtime so that by the time a person reaches the age of Eldership, the community begins to ‘recognize’ them as an Elder, as one who is able to communicate the teachings in a meaningful way.”

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“So an elder is a very high quality of person and someone who never asked to be called an elder but is deserving of that title and of that respect, and it’s other people who recognize that person. There’s no process that I know of where you can make someone an elder. It’s a term of respect and recognition given by the people because a person has lived that life, has followed it, given those teachings from birth, has followed them through life, has lived it and practised it and now he can give that back, with the understanding. So that makes it even less in number how many elders we have.”

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“Approaching an elder is a little bit like going swimming. The first time, some people are scared of water, but after they get used to it, it becomes natural to them. And so, we have to do as much as we can to get rid of the artificial barriers that are there. People are shy to go—reluctant to show their ignorance, that they don’t know how to do it.”

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“The Elder I approached said that all you have to do is start talking to the Elder and things will happen—that starting the conversation, establishing the relationship is what is important, not judging the seriousness of what might be said. She said that was the nature of this kind of guidance and encouraged me to come again to talk, informally, that the conversation would take care of itself. My perception of approaching an Elder, before this discussion, was that it had to be done in the ‘proper way’, within a traditional framework, and I wasn’t sure what this was. This perception is likely one shared by many people, Native or non-Native, who have not had previous experience with working with Elders. In reality, the most difficult part was beginning, then the Elder helped with the rest.”

“Native elders are living links to the past. Their vivid memories have the vitality, immediacy and authenticity of those who have experienced the transition from traditional ways to the new. In the short space of two generations, they have gone from travelling the coast in canoes to flying in floatplanes...Not even the social upheaval of losing nine out of every ten people to raging epidemics in the nineteenth century, not even the disorientation of changing to new, cash economy with a more complex technological base, not even the acceptance of a new cosmology and religion, none of these broke native pride in the past or native ties to ancestral lands and waters. This is remarkable continuity. This is what the elders are about.”

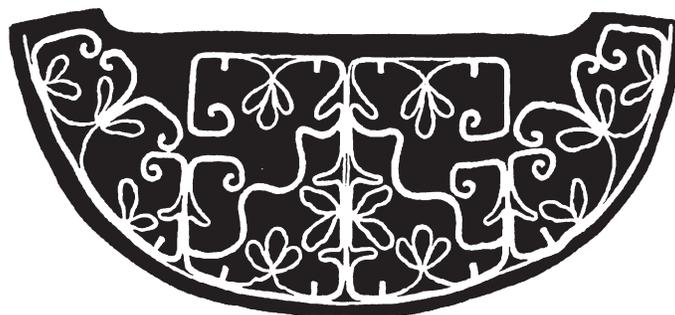
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“Elders are the people who are the cornerstone of our culture as they are the keepers and teachers of traditional teachings. They are the link with our past, our present and our future. They are spiritual leaders and teachers but also have the wisdom and the experience to provide very pragmatic guidance and advice on how best to improve and ensure the physical, mental and spiritual health of our community.”

## 6. **Closing**

*3-5 minutes, large group discussion, adult or teen co-facilitator*

- Answer any questions.
- Revisit WOW.
- Preview next session.
- Adjourn.



# NOTES



