

Métis Women's Strength-Based Kindness Toolkit

Includes Facilitation Guide for Lateral Kindness Circle Activity



"The 'lovelessness' that abounds in Aboriginal life is painful. It just bloody hurts. We need to start being kind to one another, start treating each other like relatives and practicing those principals of Wahkotowin — and that is free."

– *Maria Campbell (Métis)*

*“Kayâs kiytayiwak kîwihtamâkonaw Kamanâ cî toya ikwa kakisîwâtisîya.
Kayâs kiytayiwak kîwihtamâkonaw Kasâ kî toya ka miyowîcîtoya Ikwa kasihtoskâtôyâ.”*

“Long ago the Elders used to tell us, have mercy and compassion for one another, gentle kindness.

Long ago the Elders used to tell us to love one another, to get along,
and to strengthen one another by working together."

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WHO ARE LES FEMMES MICHIF OTIPEMISIWAK

Les Femmes Michif Otipemisiwak is the recognized voice of Métis Women across the homeland. Operating in a democratic, transparent and fiscally accountable manner, we influence public policy and decision-making related to the concerns and aspirations of Métis women at all levels of Indigenous and Canadian government. A secretariat of the Métis National Council since 1999, LFMO was incorporated in 2010.

The mission of Les Femmes Michif Otipemisiwak is to ensure that Métis women from across the homeland are safe, connected, empowered and have the capacity to work with other Canadian and Métis organizations to help create the conditions for healthy, vibrant and productive communities throughout the Métis Nation.

We are guided by six strategic goals:

- Under the guidance of LFMO's National President, we conduct regular meetings for the Board of Directors, hold general meetings and provide a communication mechanism between and among Métis Women and the Government of Canada.

The Women of the Métis Nation / Les Femmes Michif Otipemisiwak want to promote spaces in community that set us up for success. Help us to create safety, understand the impacts of trauma and intergenerational trauma, and help us to communicate, share and heal in the most effective ways possible.

LES FEMMES MICHIF EMBODIES A STRENGTH-BASED APPROACH

When we are using this lens, we hold in balance acknowledgement of our challenges, while acknowledging our resilience and strength - the positive characteristics that have helped us to overcome, keep going, and thrive through adversity. We strive to choose language, responses, and approaches that look at resilience, strength and what is possible.



TRAUMA INFORMED APPROACH:

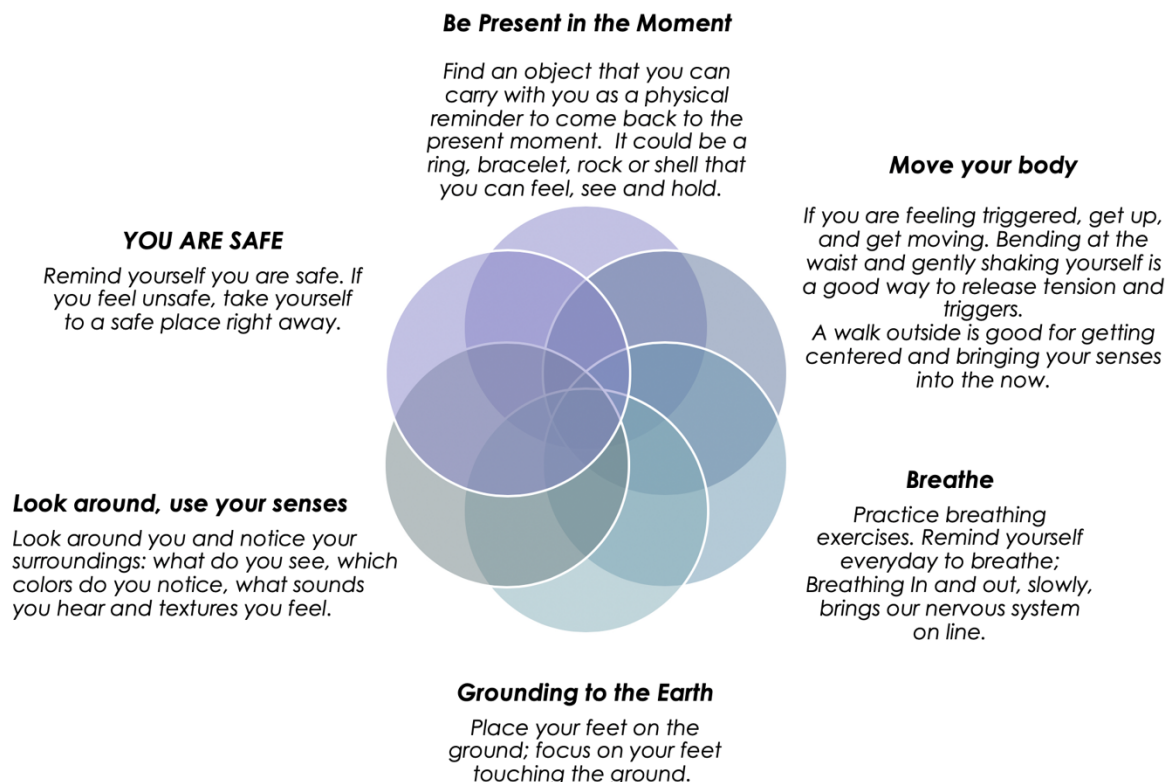
MANAGING TRIGGERS, STAYING GROUNDED, AND BEING IN THE PRESENT MOMENT

Some of the information in this toolkit may be triggering in nature, or bring up uncomfortable feelings or thoughts. We would like to ensure that you have some tools for grounding, getting centered in case you become triggered reviewing some of this material. Part of our responsibility in being trauma informed in the work of LFMO, is to make sure that we avoid as much as possible re-traumatizing people who have experienced violence. We want to ensure that people impacted by trauma reviewing this toolkit are encouraged to have tools for grounding, emotional safety, and to have internal supports in mind.

TOOLS FOR GROUNDING

WHAT THINGS DO YOU PRACTICE TO SHAKE OFF UNCOMFORTABLE FEELINGS, AND FEEL CENTERED AND CALM?

Here are some ideas for grounding in the moment, should you experience triggers.



The Women of the Métis Nation / Les Femmes Michif Otipemisiwak want to promote spaces in community that set us up for success. Help us to create safety, understand the impacts of trauma and intergenerational trauma, and help us to communicate, share and heal in the most effective ways possible.

Being trauma informed also supports a movement of Lateral Kindness, an antidote to Lateral Violence. Being trauma informed encourages us to access our compassion, empathy and kindness in the work we do with each other.

What is Lateral Kindness?

Lateral kindness helps us to live out traditional values as Michif people who are an extended family, who live out the principles of Wakohtowin. When we are in a frame of mind of lateral kindness, we can support each other in authentic ways, we more easily see the good in others, and we can learn how to “agree to disagree” in a healthy way and engage in healthy conflict.

- Lateral Kindness involves using our compassion, empathy, care, love and kindness – especially in challenging situations
- Being Laterally kind helps us to act in the interests of the “greater good” to the benefit of our family, community, workplace, nation.
- Using lateral kindness, we can address issues that contribute to lateral violence
- Using Lateral Kindness, we can move away from being adversarial and competitive toward our more traditional values of considering the success of everyone.
- How can a lateral kindness movement change the way we lead, improve our organization, and change the environment of our politics?
- Lateral Kindness invites us to take a strength-based perspective, to use assertive and kind behaviors, and to be open and authentic.
- Lateral kindness invites us to use new approaches and strategies in difficult relationships. Assertiveness, resolving issues, seeing all sides of a situation and focusing on what is good as a way of moving through conflicts.
- Practicing Lateral kindness by giving praise and recognizing the good we observe in the people around us. Lifting each other up through genuine care and celebrating them.
- Lateral kindness involves giving power back to people, creating an environment where positive and kind interactions provide motivation and buy in through genuine care.
- Returning to kindness, mutual caring, and gentleness; including ourselves.

Lateral Kindness is about a genuine commitment to being empathetic, compassionate, kind, and creating positive feelings, bonds, and authentically positive environments. Lateral Kindness does not mean that we only say and do things that people like.

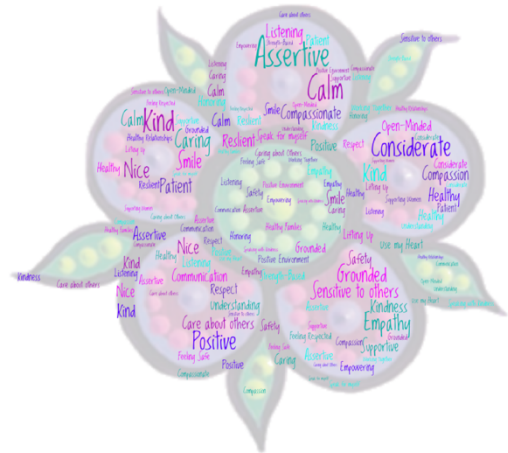
We are all responsible for our own behaviors, and there may be feedback that we get that we don't like, and people may say things to us that are legitimate and not spoken out of ill will. Finding the balance between authentic lateral kindness, and being assertive is a goal to strive for.

Lateral Kindness does not mean no boundaries, or never speaking up when accountability is called for:

- *Lateral kindness doesn't mean only saying things that people like*
- *Not holding people accountable because they may not like it*
- *Being passive as opposed to assertive in a negative situation*
- *Being a doormat or never setting boundaries*

Lateral kindness is about authenticity. It is not an excuse to say, I'm off the hook when I behave badly, because people should only be kind and compassionate to me. We all have to be accountable. Issues around lateral violence are very complex, and there is not a "one size fits all" to being Laterally Kind.

- Caring for myself so that I can communicate in a positive way
 - Be aware of my own issues, and work on areas that I need help in to avoid toxic behaviors
 - Being Empathetic to others; imagining what they may be dealing with
 - Being Compassionate to myself and others
 - Making a commitment to communicate assertively, and learning skills if I need to
 - Making a commitment to not harm others in the way that I speak, work, and live
 - Be Kind to myself and others
 - Learn how to be Assertive in my communication, ask for what I need
 - Set Boundaries with compassion for myself and others
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- A vibrant word cloud in the shape of a five-petaled flower. The petals are light purple with yellow centers. The words are scattered across the petals in various colors (pink, blue, green, orange, yellow) and sizes. Key words include: Assertive, Calm, Kind, Caring, Simple, Patient, Nice, Respectful, Open-Minded, Considerate, Compassion, Healthy, Listening, Understanding, Positive, Safe, Grounded, Sensitivity to others, Kindness, Empathy, Supportive, Encouraging, Loving, Care about others, and many others.



FACILITATING A LATERAL KINDNESS CIRCLE AND EXCHANGE

Setting the Stage:

Review the principles of being strength-based, laterally kind, and creating a safe space for your participants:

- ∞ Reminder of Strength Based Approaches
- ∞ Everyone has something to contribute, we are all valuable in the circle
- ∞ Looking at our Shared Values and Goals
- ∞ Remind participants that our goal is to use Assertive Communication, minimize Aggressive or Passive Aggressive Communication
- ∞ Promote Listening and giving your full attention to the person speaking
- ∞ Promoting Understanding, Respect, Empathy, Belonging
- ∞ Using lateral kindness to eliminate lateral violence
- ∞ Cultivating compassionate vs competitive mindset
- ∞ Using lateral kindness principles to change the way we lead, promote unity & shared leadership, and change the environment of our politics

THE LATERAL KINDNESS EXCHANGE STEPS:



A lateral kindness exchange gives the members of a group the opportunity to both share and receive messages of Lateral Kindness.



Invite your group to think about what values we share, ask for a few examples of shared values.

...THE NEED FOR WAHKOTOWIN

- "THE 'LOVELESSNESS' THAT ABOUNDS IN ABORIGINAL LIFE IS PAINFUL. IT JUST BLOODY HURTS. WE NEED TO START BEING KIND TO ONE ANOTHER. START TREATING EACH OTHER LIKE RELATIVES AND PRACTICING THOSE PRINCIPLES OF WAHKOTOWIN — AND THAT IS FREE."

— MARIA CAMPBELL (MÉTIS)



Invite participants to read and reflect about this quote from Maria Campbell, lateral violence and absence of love and kindness is a re-colonizing experience. Lateral kindness and Wahkotowin are commitments bringing us together.

LATERAL KINDNESS & CREATING SAFE SPACES

LATERALLY KIND IN COMMUNITY, LEADERSHIP, AND WORKPLACES



The kindness exchange requires vulnerability and being open to sharing and receiving a message.

A STRENGTH BASED APPROACH....



- GOALS: REMINDER OF STRENGTH BASED APPROACHES, EVERYONE HAS SOMETHING TO CONTRIBUTE, SHARED VALUES AND GOALS
- ASSERTIVE COMMUNICATION, MINIMIZE AGGRESSIVE OR PASSIVE AGGRESSIVE COMMUNICATION
- PROMOTE LISTENING, UNDERSTANDING, RESPECT, EMPATHY, BELONGING

Review strength based principles with the group, invite people to be with each other in a strength based way, leaving behind a negative reaction or action, and being strength based today.

A STRENGTH BASED APPROACH....



- USING LATERAL KINDNESS TO ELIMINATE LATERAL VIOLENCE
- CULTIVATING COMPASSIONATE VS COMPETITIVE MINDSET
- USING LATERAL KINDNESS PRINCIPLES TO CHANGE THE WAY WE LEAD, PROMOTE UNITY & SHARED LEADERSHIP, AND CHANGE THE ENVIRONMENT OF OUR GATHERINGS

THE PRINCIPLES OF LATERAL KINDNESS

- **POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT:** GOOD DECISIONS, OUTCOMES AND IMPACTS ARE CELEBRATED
- **RECOGNITION:** SUCCESSES ARE RECOGNIZED AND SUPPORTED
- **RECIPROCITY:** ALWAYS GIVING BACK TO ONE ANOTHER
- **FOCUS ON GOOD:** EMPHASIS IS ALWAYS ON THE POSITIVE AND ON POSSIBILITY
- **ENCOURAGEMENT:** VALIDATION IS READILY OFFERED ALONG WITH APPROVAL TO CONTINUE MOVING IN A POSITIVE DIRECTION
- **MINIMIZING NEGATIVITY:** LITTLE TO NO EMPHASIS ON NEGATIVE FEEDBACK OR OUTCOMES

Review Principles of Lateral Kindness with the Group

HOW CAN WE CELEBRATE & ENCOURAGE POSITIVE BEHAVIOR?

- LATERAL KINDNESS CELEBRATES POSITIVE BEHAVIOURS IN OTHERS, EVEN SMALL ONES. BEING STRENGTHS BASED – WE MUST ASK: WHAT IS GOOD? WHAT IS WORKING? HOW CAN WE SUPPORT THIS IDEA, PERSON, EFFORT, INITIATIVE?
- BELIEVE IN EACH OTHER AND IN OUR COLLECTIVE ABILITY TO CHANGE AND GROW
- EMPHASIS ON EMPATHY – COMPASSION – CARING
- RECOGNIZE THE EXPERTISE, WISDOM AND LOVE AMONG OUR PEERS
- LISTEN WITH AN OPEN MIND AND OPEN HEART
- RECOGNIZE AND RESPECT THE VULNERABILITY IN OTHERS
- REINFORCE RESPECTFUL COMMUNICATION THROUGH RECOGNITION & VALIDATION

Review the guidelines of celebrating and encouraging positive behavior...

KINDNESS EXCHANGE

EXPERIENTIAL EXERCISE, DONE IN A CIRCLE, REQUIRES TRUST, OPENNESS, GIVING AND RECEIVING POSITIVE INFORMATION AND FEELINGS



The kindness exchange requires vulnerability and being open to sharing and receiving a message.

Explain that trauma survivors may sometimes feel uncomfortable having someone standing behind them, invite participants who feel uncomfortable having someone standing behind them, to receive messages from the side in a way that feels comfortable for them.

...WRITING A LATEROALLY KIND MESSAGE



- **YOU ARE...**
- **I APPRECIATE...**
- **GENDER NEUTRAL**
- **POSITIVE**
- **NON-JUDGMENTAL**
- **EXAMPLES?**

Each participant is going to create an open, laterally kind message that could be heard by anyone in the room, and resonate with.

THINK OF A POWERFUL MESSAGE THAT SOMEONE SAID TO YOU THAT MADE YOU FEEL COMFORT, LOVED, APPRECIATED, VALUED.

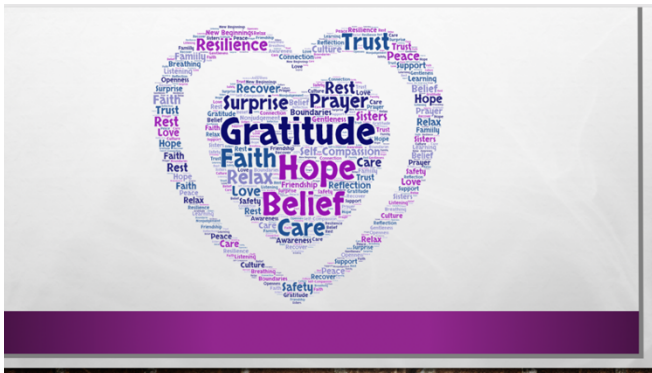
- **A SIMPLE STATEMENT LIKE**
- **"I APPRECIATE YOU"**
- **"YOU ARE LOVED"**
- **"YOU ARE A BEAUTIFUL PERSON"**
- **"I LOVE YOU"**

- **"I VALUE YOU"**
- **"YOU DESERVE THE BEST"**
- **"I CARE ABOUT YOU"**
- **"YOU ARE WONDERFUL"**
- **"I ADMIRE YOU"**

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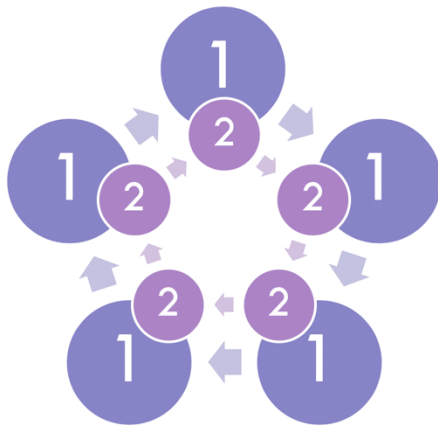
The group numbers off into two groups, it can be helpful to get participants into a circle with chairs, and number off into group “one” and group “two”. Invite one of the groups to choose a seat, and the other group to find a woman to stand behind.

A diagram of a 2D hexagonal lattice. It consists of six large purple circles arranged in a hexagon, each containing the number '2'. Between these large circles are six smaller blue circles, each containing the number '1'. The small circles are positioned at the centers of the hexagonal gaps between the large circles. Grey arrows indicate a clockwise flow from each large circle to its adjacent small circles, and from each small circle to the next large circle in the sequence.



Participants gently and with good intention, share their message with the person seated in the circle. Then, standing participants will move to the next person in the circle, until they shared the message with each person in the circle, and are back where they started.

When a full rotation is complete, the participants seated now stand to share, and the standing participants have an opportunity to share and receive.



When the circle is completed, allow participants to debrief what it was like to share messages, and to receive them. Lead participants in some deep breaths, four, grounding deep breaths are valuable to ground the nervous system, and to ground out. It is not uncommon for people to feel emotional when receiving kindness, it is also sometimes uncomfortable. This exercise, when done in a safe space, proves to be beneficial for all participants.



Invite participants to keep their positive message, and reflect about it. Some groups make sash pins with the messages, and pin it over their heart.

WHAT IS LATERAL VIOLENCE?

“When a powerful oppressor has directed oppression against a group for a period of time, members of the oppressed group feel powerless to fight back and they eventually turn their anger against each other.”

– Jane Middleton-Moz

- Although it is found everywhere, lateral violence in this case refers to its impacts in our own Métis communities.
- Lateral violence can happen in a workplace, community, family. Lateral Violence is experienced by Métis and other Indigenous people, and impacts the health and wellness of our people, and undermines the effectiveness of our interactions or work we undertake together.
- It is a cycle of abuse and its roots lie in factors such as: colonization, oppression, intergenerational trauma and the ongoing experiences of racism and discrimination.

Laterally Violent Behaviors

Lateral Violence Behaviors are sometimes overt (out in the open) and sometimes covert. When looking at what is or isn't lateral violence, we need to look at what the intent is, what the behavior actually is, and the impact of the behavior.

Sometimes people may say or do things that bother us or hurt our feelings, but are not intended to hurt us, and we don't like what they said or did, but it is not lateral violence.

Some key things to consider: is the behavior malicious in nature, with the intent to do harm, is the behavior persistent and occurring over time.

The first research into “Lateral Violence” was done in the Nursing profession. Lateral Violence was so pervasive, it was affecting patient care, human resource management, high turnover and more.

Here is how Chris Pontus, MS, RN, COHN-S/CCM and Diane Scherrer, MS, RN define Lateral Violence in their research:

“There are three categories of behaviors that are considered lateral violence: harassment, discrimination and bullying. Harassment is any form of unwanted behavior that may range from unpleasant remarks to physical violence. Sexual harassment is linked to gender or sexual orientation. Racial harassment is typified by behaviors that are linked to a person's skin color, cultural background, race, etc. Harassment tends to have a strong physical component in manifested behaviors. Behaviors that include regular following and watching are termed stalking. Discrimination involves a person being treated differently, and in particular, less favorably because of gender, race, sexual orientation or ability.

Workplace bullying is characterized by many incidents of unjustifiable actions of an individual or group toward a person or group over a long period. Bullying behaviors are persistent, offensive, abusive, threatening, and malicious in nature with the intent to do harm. The person who bullies may be in a position of power (actual or perceived).” (Chris Pontus, Pontus, & Scherrer, 2011)

“...It is about persistent criticism and personal abuse—both in public and in private— which humiliates and demeans the individual, gradually eroding their sense of self. It is designed to undermine a person's ability and convince them that they are no longer good at anything.” (Adams and Bray, 1992:49)

LATERAL VIOLENCE – LOOKING DEEPER

Setting Boundaries and asking for Accountability do not equal Lateral Violence.

We all encounter situations, conversations and sometimes people that make us feel uncomfortable or offended. We all have experiences that are “not our favorite”. In our communities, as we begin to work with Lateral Kindness and Lateral Violence, we are exploring what these behaviors are. Recently, we are noticing that people are quick to categorize behaviors they don’t like as “Lateral Violence”.

Remember characteristics of Laterally Violent Behavior:

Malicious in nature

Persistent criticism and abuse

Done with the intent to do harm to someone

Repeated, persistent, and occurring over time

Humiliates, demeans, and harms the person targeted

When we are looking at communication, how communication makes us feel and react, every time we have an interaction that we don't like, calling it Lateral Violence is not the appropriate description. Lateral Violence is a targeted, deliberate behavior toward someone that is repeated over time and has very serious damaging effects on people.



WORKSHEET: IS IT LATERAL VIOLENCE?

IS IT LATERAL VIOLENCE? WHAT DO YOU THINK?

BEHAVIOR	TIME FRAME / CONTEXT	IS IT LATERAL VIOLENCE?
Sharing personal information about someone through gossip, with the intent to humiliate and embarrass them.	25 conversations about the person with others over a span of 12 months	
Whenever a certain person speaks in a group the members of the group: roll their eyes, whisper to each other, the speaker is interrupted, the speaker is told to "shut up", people laugh or snicker when the person is speaking	Each monthly meeting over a 12 month period	
A person in an online group for Métis women is asked if she is a Métis Citizen. She does not like this question, and feels offended.	Once	
2 members of a group of 10 people are excluded from events and opportunities because they opposing views than the group majority.	Over 20 notable exclusions or withholding of information, over 30 months	
A supervisor suggests a policy change that brings the organization into current best practices, and the manager of that policy area is offended.	New idea, one occurrence	

Marian asks to speak to Cindy Lou about a conversation they had. Marian lets Cindy Lou know that it hurts her feelings and feels disrespectful when Cindy Lou ridicules her ideas in meetings. Marian asks Cindy Lou to please change her behavior.	One conversation about repeated behavior	
A person in leadership is criticized for their management decisions and behavior by community leaders at an assembly.	Specific feedback, and specific questions at one event	
A community member has their spouse threaten members of the community who associate with someone they don't like, in an attempt to ostracize and isolate that person.	Repeated incidents over a period of months	

Facilitated Conversations:

Talk about these examples with friends, family or colleagues, do these examples seem like lateral violence or something else? How would you take action if these examples happened to you?

Please keep in mind that harassment, bullying, discrimination and violence are very serious and harmful behaviors, in and out of the workplace. If you or someone you know are experiencing harm because of behaviors like these, seeking out personal and professional support is recommended.

Recognizing and Addressing Lateral Violence

Remember characteristics of Laterally Violent Behavior:



Malicious in nature

Persistent criticism and abuse

Done with the intent to do harm to someone

Repeated, persistent, and occurring over time

Humiliates, demeans, and harms the person targeted

Any behaviors that embody maliciousness, cruelty, and intent to harm that target an individual, that are targeting someone over time, may be Laterally Violent behaviors. It is very important for people that are in workplace settings who are experiencing these types of behaviors that you document what is happening, and seek out support. The impacts of long-term bullying behavior can have serious health impacts, including depression, anxiety, and traumatic stress.

Options for addressing behavior:

1. *Asking the person to stop. It may be a supported conversation with an elder, witness, or advocate. Describe the impact on you and your family and ask them to stop.*
2. *Asking for support if it is a workplace. Document the behavior and the impact on you, and the person's supervisor may address it with them.*
3. *Workplace Harassment and Bullying is an experience that is protected by law, get support to learn about your rights and options.*
4. *Tell a trusted family member, a counsellor, co-worker or colleague what is happening. Ensure that you have some supports to deal with what is happening.*

THE Laterally Violent PERSON

Thinking about where this behavior may be coming from. Many Métis and other Indigenous people have multiple experiences of trauma in their own lives. Sometimes, the experience of trauma, including intergenerational trauma manifests in unhealthy coping strategies, impacted wellness or emotional/social skills, and a harder time to experience empathy or compassion. This does not excuse harmful behavior, but may give us insight into what might be happening for them, and sometimes, ourselves.



As stated, their own experiences of oppression, perhaps abuse or harm may be at the root of their behavior. They may be survivors of trauma, and if they are Métis, they have their own issues of intergenerational or other challenging life experiences.

Through self-awareness, awakening of compassion or empathy about the impact of their behavior, and boundaries being set around their behavior – they may be able to stop using Lateral Violence as a way of life.

People who experience Lateral Violence, are at risk of becoming Laterally Violent toward others. Being very mindful about the experience can help us to be self-aware. Impacts of Trauma and Intergenerational Trauma can put us at risk of acting out unhealthy behaviors that harm ourselves or others.



Because Lateral Violence behaviors are a form of abuse, emotional, verbal, and sometimes physical, they have serious impacts on the person targeted.

Lateral Violence can cause physical and emotional / psychological illnesses:

Depression, anxiety, and traumatic stress. Headaches, sleep disorders, gastrointestinal disorders, and related physical impacts.

The person experiencing lateral violence may lose their confidence, suffer from low self-esteem, feel sad, unworthy and incapable.

At their organization or workplace, they may become less effective, have trouble with remembering or cognition, and may be absent more frequently.

There are choices for the person experiencing Lateral Violence, however prolonged exposure to bullying, harassment, intimidation and Laterally Violent situations have lasting effects both Physically and Psychologically

Documenting what has happened:

it is helpful for the person who has experienced the behaviors to document them in some way, in case they need to take action with their workplace or organization. Getting support and advice from a trusted friend, family member or advocate is helpful at this stage.

Deciding to Stay or Leave:

If it is a workplace, the individual needs to consider their options. They may have the opportunity to take a medical leave, and take time to heal and get perspective on the situation. Removing themselves from the situation may be helpful to relieve the physical and psychological stressors on them.

In Community:

If you are experiencing Lateral Violence in community environment, you also have choices. You can approach a trusted elder, community member or friend about what is happening. There may be a chance to support the person who is being laterally violent to you and set boundaries, a conversation or a circle with a support person to talk about what is happening, the impact on you and the community, and ask the person to stop or change.

Boundaries around appropriate behavior can be set, and consequences of the behavior continuing can be set. In our communities, we usually have male and female elders or knowledge holders with skills in listening, being a calming and mediating influence, and also with a position of respect to set boundaries that the community supports.

GETTING SUPPORT, CARING FOR YOURSELF AND STRENGTHENING CONNECTIONS

Get support from trusted friends, elders, and professionals. Ensure that you are mindful about getting support; gossiping about what has happened to you may make things worse, and as a result of your pain, you may end up perpetuating gossip and further lateral violence.

Care for Yourself:

Experiencing Lateral Violence is traumatic. It affects your emotional, spiritual, physical and psychological health. It is very important that you care for yourself and support your nervous system in healing from impacts of trauma.

Counselling, especially with a Trauma informed approach:

Getting counselling to help you to heal from what has happened is important. Counsellors that work with Trauma can help you to release, and learn techniques for calming your nervous system when you are not in a counselling session.

Boundaries, Communication, and Assertiveness:

When we experience Lateral Violence, our boundaries are violated, we lose confidence and may struggle with being Assertive. Do some reading about Boundaries, how to set them, and how to address people who violate your boundaries. Practice Assertive communication, set boundaries in easy situations, and when you feel up to it, set boundaries in more challenging situations. In research on Lateral Violence, some people who bully respond well to having boundaries set – especially if there is a consequence. Preparing yourself to be assertive, grounded and protecting your boundaries will assist you in regaining confidence and feeling less vulnerable

Accessing Medical Care and Treatment:

Enduring Lateral Violence over time can cause serious health issues. See your doctor, or nurse practitioner about what you are going through or what you have gone through. Enduring trauma and stress for prolonged periods can cause illnesses to develop, ensure that you are taking care of your body, and that you prioritize your health.

TRADITIONAL ACTIVITIES – SUPPORTING WELLNESS AND HEALING FROM TRAUMA

“What makes me resilient is my creativity that the Métis are well known for; I learned to bead when I was seven and as I got older, I found out what it means to be Métis; I now teach culture, which is so rewarding to see the children participating; it is important to keep cultural traditions alive; I am constantly learning to pass along information.”

~ Métis Elder, on Resilience and creativity

Traditional activities of all kinds support our wellness, healing from trauma, and help the nervous system and the mind to be well.

Physical activities Physical activities like jigging or dancing are excellent ways to engage in movement and have fun through social connection and healthy touch. Physical work, sports, running, walking, canoeing – anything that engages our physical bodies enhances our wellness and improves our health, contributing to helping to overcome the effects of trauma,

Being on the land; hunting, fishing, harvesting berries and gathering herbs and medicines are also excellent activities for helping us to overcome trauma. Being on the land is a natural regulation for our nervous system, and can help the body to regulate to the rhythm of the earth in a matter of days. Being outside, on the land, and being

mindful as we harvest food or medicine is healing for our nervous system, mind, spirit and body. Spending time out in nature and on the land. Walking, camping, hiking, gathering berries or medicines, fishing, being outside by a fire, are all activities that will support your nervous system in regulating and healing.

Preparing and sharing traditional foods, to nourish ourselves and people that we care about is a positive form of resilience with many benefits as well; physical, social, emotional, spiritual. Connecting with people is part of our healing and reclaiming process, and gathering to eat a meal is a traditional way of gathering and reinforcing our connection.

Traditional artistic practices like beading, leatherwork, weaving, sewing, help us to engage our creativity and create a state of mind that is similar to meditation. The focus, rhythm and repetition when we are practicing traditional arts helps us to be in a state of nervous system regulation, calm, and mindfulness. Sometimes when people are in acute states of activated trauma, it can be hard for them to settle themselves to focus on these activities. Being patient, supporting and helping people who have been through trauma to be able learn and practice traditional art is an act of healing.

Spiritual or Religious Practices can be a very important part of healing from trauma and loss. When we experience suffering and loss, we can experience a lack of hope, and deep existential or spiritual pain. For some, a reconnection with faith, religious or spiritual practice is a very important part of restoring hope, gaining a sense of peace, protection and coming to terms with the trauma that they have experienced.

REFLECTION:

What traditional activities are a part of your life? Have you experienced or witnessed how traditional activities help people to heal?

What are your spiritual or religious practices? How do they support your resilience, sense of peace, hope, and healing?

TAKING CARE OF OUR BODIES WITH WATER, REST, FOOD, MOVEMENT AND HEALTHY TOUCH

Water; *The experience of Lateral Violence is very hard on the nervous system, because of the stress that it exposes us to. Our bodies under stress produce hormones, including cortisol and adrenalin. Our bodies responses to threats or stress introduce these hormones into our bodies. One simple thing that we can do to assist our bodies in flushing stress hormones is to drink water, carry a water bottle with you, and feel good knowing that when you drink water you are helping your body to heal.*

Sleep; Many people impacted by trauma have sleep disorders as a result of traumatic stress. Nightmares, insomnia, even over-sleeping are all experiences that people may have. Seeing your doctor or health professional and talking about what is happening is important. Beyond your doctor or health professional, there are many approaches that you can take. Progressive relaxation, using an app on your smart phone to listen to a sleep meditation or sleep themed piece of music, aromatherapy, prayer before bed, the availability of non-medication sleep supports is plentiful. Some people need to walk and exercise during the day in order to sleep well at night.

Food; You may have heard the expression “HALT” ...am I Hungry, Angry, Lonely or Tired? Hungry is the first on the list for good reason. Ensuring that you eat food is very important for your nervous system, your emotions, and of course, your body. Healthy food helps us to stay physically and emotionally grounded. When people experience trauma, their stress response may include avoiding food or over-indulging in food as a form of comfort. Having a wholistic approach to healing from Trauma is important, either over or under eating can cause new health challenges when we are trying to heal.

Exercise and Movement; People impacted by trauma can benefit greatly from exercise and movement. It helps people to ground their nervous systems, increase feel good body responses like endorphins, and activities like taking a walk outside in nature, are tremendously beneficial. Whether you are an athlete, or a gentle walker, movement and exercise will support your healing from trauma and improve your resilience.

Healthy Touch; People impacted by trauma can benefit from safe touch. Having a friend, your spouse or a family member hug you for 30 seconds or more helps our bodies and nervous system to regulate and heal. Playing with and holding a pet also helps our nervous systems, and is a way of having healthy connection to ease our nervous systems.

REFLECTION AND PERSONAL COMMITMENT:

What actions or choices do you make in your life that support wellness, physical health, healing from trauma, or being grounded?

What personal commitments will you make to....

Become Self-Aware and Mindful of your own feelings, nervous system and mental wellness?

Actively promote Kindness, Empathy and Compassion

Become aware of your own behaviors or impacts that may negatively impact others?