

The Impact of Domestic Violence



Thunder Bay by: Roy Thomas

An Aboriginal Perspective

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With resources from:

Lake of the Woods Hospital, Sexual Assault/Domestic
Violence Treatment Program, Kenora, Ontario, Canada

Mississauga Family Resource Centre: Adult/Child Witness
of Family Violence Project, Blind River, Ontario, Canada

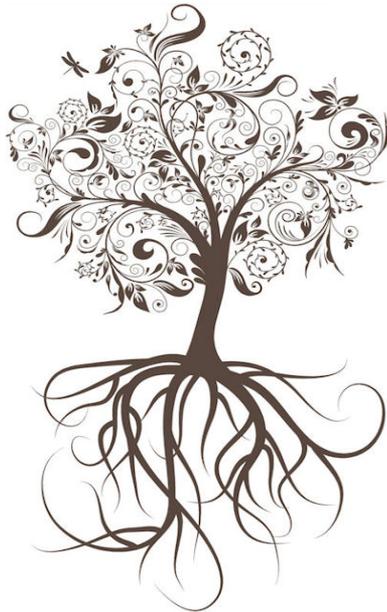
Native Women's Resource Centre of Toronto: Swimming
with Sharks, Toronto, Ontario, Canada

The Tree of Great Peace

Roots have spread out from the Tree of Great Peace, one to the north, one to the east, one to the south, and one to the west. These are the Great White Roots, and their nature is Peace and Strength.

~

May this booklet give you the insight to a better understanding of your feelings and emotions and the continued courage to live a fulfilling life for generations to come



Introduction

It is our hope that this booklet “The Impact of Domestic Violence: An Aboriginal Perspective” will provide communities with the awareness of the many effects that witnessing violence has had on the Aboriginal people, their culture and their traditions.

This booklet can provide communities with the opportunity to explore the issue of domestic violence and the impact that it has on the lives of those who are affected by it.

Our challenge is to lead the way to *hope* and a new life in recovery for survivors of family violence and for Aboriginal People.



Pompey's Feather by: Karen Noles

A Witness of Violence Is:

A person who sees violence happening in their environment. Violence can be physical, emotional, sexual, and/or verbal. Witnessing any form of family violence can have an impact on the person as a whole. Witnessing family violence as a child and learning the behaviours of these actions may lead the person to continue a cycle of violence.



Embrace of Wisdom by: Karen Noles

History

Throughout history, European cultures and beliefs contained many values that differed from Aboriginal concepts. Because Europeans became the dominant race on the North American continent, they were able to impose their values and beliefs on the Aboriginal People.

Pressure on the Aboriginals came not only from the Fur Traders but also from the Church Missionaries for Aboriginal people to fit into Western culture (assimilation). Missionaries began to convert Aboriginals from “pagan” beliefs to Christianity and taught different ideas and values about the family hierarchy. The church missionaries did not understand the patient ways in which Aboriginal people dealt with their children. They also misunderstood the freedom and sacred status afforded to Aboriginal women. Aboriginal people were taught the values and skills of the dominant European way.

Confusion about culture, heritage, and the loss of tradition is a major issue for many Aboriginal people. There have been many struggles while trying to regain that culture and lost traditions that have resulted in an identity crisis. To many, the definition of *culture* can have a meaning of the “way we live now” and the definition of heritage/traditions can mean “*as the way our ancestors lived*”.

Cultural Values

Before the Europeans came to this country, Aboriginals understood the importance of using “circular” thoughts. To understand and interact with the environment, the Aboriginal People saw that all things living and non-living were interconnected in intricate and complex patterns. Years ago, in order for the clan to survive, every member in the family unit had a role and function, which was described in the teachings that were passed down from the elders.

It was stated by the grandfathers *“any man who would strike a woman in anger, has no right to call himself a man”*. Somewhere along the way, these teachings and traditions were lost. Family life was not what it once was to Aboriginal people. The emergence of residential schools, the 60’s scoop, TB sanitariums, involuntary sterilization, and the introduction of alcohol and drugs has contributed to abuse against children, spouses and the elders.

Today Traditional Cultural Ways have little value for some people. They do not understand the stories or the legends in their own language. Without knowledge of their language, they have entered into a cultural struggle because they cannot communicate in their native tongue. Some believe that we can find out who we are by re-learning our language and traditional way of life. For many years the elders have not been telling their stories for fear of offending the church and some community members. Recently we have seen this trend changing as more of the stories are being told once again.

Aboriginal People are trying to recover what was lost so long ago by relearning the Traditional teachings of family ways. Gaining this forgotten knowledge is part of their healing journey.

Traditional Roles and Beliefs

Traditionally, children were taught through stories and legends told by their elders. Grandparents were in charge of taking care of the children while their parents were busy with daily tasks. Children were taught how to become helpful members of the community.

Women were seen as creators because they were given the ability to create life. Because of this, they held a sacred and respected role in Aboriginal culture. Men were providers and protectors for their families. They were the hunters, made weapons and protected the villages.

In traditional Aboriginal culture, in good relationships, personal criticism and harsh discipline were considered to be damaging and were avoided. It was believed that words have power and should be used carefully. Mutual respect and equality were very important to keep the balance in the home and in the communities.

Violence was not an attribute of traditional societies. In warfare, the killing or injuring of an enemy was a disgrace to the warrior. Traditional Aboriginal Spirituality sees people living in harmony with the earth, relating to all forms of life, and having a kindness and deep respect for their surroundings.

The Children of Trauma

Children growing up in homes where there is a high level of abuse are in danger of becoming the next generation of abusers or victims of violence. Children are impressionable; they may imitate what is familiar to them. Parents don't realize that when their children enter into adulthood that they may continue in that same characteristic-type of relationship.

Children who live in a home where a parent shows violent or abusive behaviour to the other parent live in an atmosphere of fear and violence. Although children in abusive families are not always the target of the violence, they are affected by the violence they see and hear. They are also affected by the tension, anger and sadness in their environment.

Abuse can also interfere with the normal infant bonding with mom, which is critical to the infant's emotional development. It is important to know miscarriage, still birth and premature birth may result from abuse during pregnancy.

Children who witness violence may feel guilty when fights occur, fearing that somehow they may have started them. They can be angry with their father for hurting their mother, or they may be angry with their mother for putting up with it.

Children may witness violence in many forms:

- They may see actual assaults or bruises and cuts from the assaults
- They may hear the verbal or physical violence (slaps, yelling)

Adults who grew up in homes where violence is prominent have often struggled over their many losses. These losses can range from memorable ones, such as Christmas celebrations, birthdays, pets, friends, and loved ones, to less materialistic losses such as promises, dignity, joy, safety and peace.

It is said that “these children never had a chance or place to grieve over these losses. They have learned to stuff their sadness away in an attempt to survive and cope”. As adults they still carry sadness but do not understand its source. To be healed, they may need to grieve and do the emotional work necessary to release the pain and reach inner peace.



Little Butterfly by: Karen Noles

Spiritual Needs of Human Beings

Communication:	To be seen and heard.
Safety:	To know and feel that I trust myself and know and feel that I trust others
Security:	To know and feel secure with myself, alone and with others.
Belonging:	To know and feel that I belong here and have a place in the world.
Acceptance:	To know and feel totally accepted for who I am.
Purpose:	To know and feel that my existence is important and beneficial
Spirit Centre:	To believe in myself, and have a strong sense of myself for who I am.

EMOTIONS

Each person holds their sadness in different ways. Our feelings tend to be very strongly related to past experiences or the traumas that we have suffered.

Our emotions can make us do things that we would not normally do. For example, extreme happiness can make the quietest person very chatty, or anger can make a person who is normally calm fly into rage. Understanding why we feel a certain way and knowing how these feelings can express themselves through actions can have a profound effect on our beliefs.

Along with physical abuse, people frequently report emotional abuse. Emotional abuse can be equally or more damaging and hurtful than physical abuse. Emotional abuse in a relationship can often lead to physical violence.

When looking at the cycle of violence in the family home, there are common emotions that may affect a person's wellbeing when exposed to violence. These emotions are: *Love, Hope, and Fear*.

- **Love:** a profoundly tender, passionate and respectful affection for another person. That person is truly cared about for who they are and their individuality is acknowledge and accepted. He or she is a good provider for the family, but at the same time the violence happening within the family is not normal
- **Hope:** The relationship didn't start out this way, if they try harder, try longer and make changes, maybe it will get better
- **Fear:** That threats to harm a spouse/partner or the family, to commit suicide, to report to the police or child welfare, to stop providing childcare, financial support, housing or transportation, may one day become a reality.

When the women or man realizes that abuse is not normal behaviour for family members who love each other, change is necessary for that family.

STAGES OF LIFE

There are 7 stages that every person goes through in life: Infancy, Childhood, Teenager, Young Adult, Adulthood, Retirement, and Elderly

Growing up in an environment that is full of conflict, fear, and pain, can jeopardize a child's development and emotional well-being, and impact their lives as adults.

Excessive use of alcohol and drugs can prevent people from completing their natural stages of life.



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Signs of Abuse and Domestic Violence

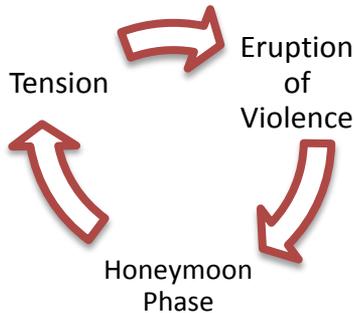
Does your partner:

1. Put you down or criticize the way that you dress, talk, dance, or do other things?
2. Make fun of you in front of your friends and family?
3. Call you names, embarrass you or tease you in a hurtful way?
4. Pressure you into doing things that you don't want to do?
5. Get jealous when you're around other guys or girls?
6. Ignore you or play mean tricks on you?
7. Take or destroy your possessions?
8. Push you around or hit you?
9. Make you ask for permission to spend time with people other than him or her?
10. Make threats or say "Do what I want or else"?
11. Are you afraid to express your own opinions or say no to something because of your partner's reaction?
12. Are you afraid to tell your friends and family what is really happening?
13. Are you afraid that you're going to get hurt?

If you answered YES to ANY of these questions, ask yourself: am I being respected in this relationship? Am I able to honour and use the gifts that were given to me by the Creator as they were intended? Is my partner abusive?

The Cycle of Abuse

There are three common phases of violence in the cycle of abuse, these are: Tension, Eruption of Violence, and the Honeymoon Phase.



- **Tension:** Everything seems to build up at this stage. You may be afraid of the person, but not sure why. You feel that you are walking on egg-shells around them.
- **Eruption of Violence:** All the issues come out at this time. It can start with a simple argument and lead to name-calling. The eruption can end with someone being physically abused.
- **Honeymoon Phase:** The abuser may feel guilty for what he or she said or did. At this stage there are apologies and promises that it will never happen again.

Emotions of love and hope allow the cycle to begin again. The **safety of everyone in the family (victim, children) must come first**. It is okay to follow and trust your gut instinct, or any sense of impending danger. There is knowledge in each of us. We need listen to our inner voice for guidance in relationships. We can also seek the support of an Elder when our instincts are telling us something is wrong. **In the case of an emergency call 9-1-1.**

The Cycle Continues...

As children become adults they have developed an understanding of what relationships are all about. The abuse that they have witnessed has affected the relationships in their lives, and their roles as children, siblings, partners and parents.

Being a victim of abuse can have a direct impact on being effective as a parent. Not only are adults coping with present violence, but they are also struggling with the trauma of their own childhood histories. The feelings of helplessness and hopelessness interfere with their ability to offer support to their children who have witnessed the abuse. In some cases, dysfunctional and disorganized households offer inadequate nurturing, support, structure and little supervision for children.

Being victims of abuse, control and intimidation in the home adds to the risk of becoming an abusive parent. Abuse, intimidation and control are demonstrated as a method to gain power and control, and maintain fear in the family.

Abuse may continue after a relationship has ended. The abuser may use harassing phone calls, emails, texts, Facebook messages, and other threats, to scare the victim. All of these methods are attempts to manipulate and maintain control over the victim's behaviour.

Childhood Trauma- Stages of Development

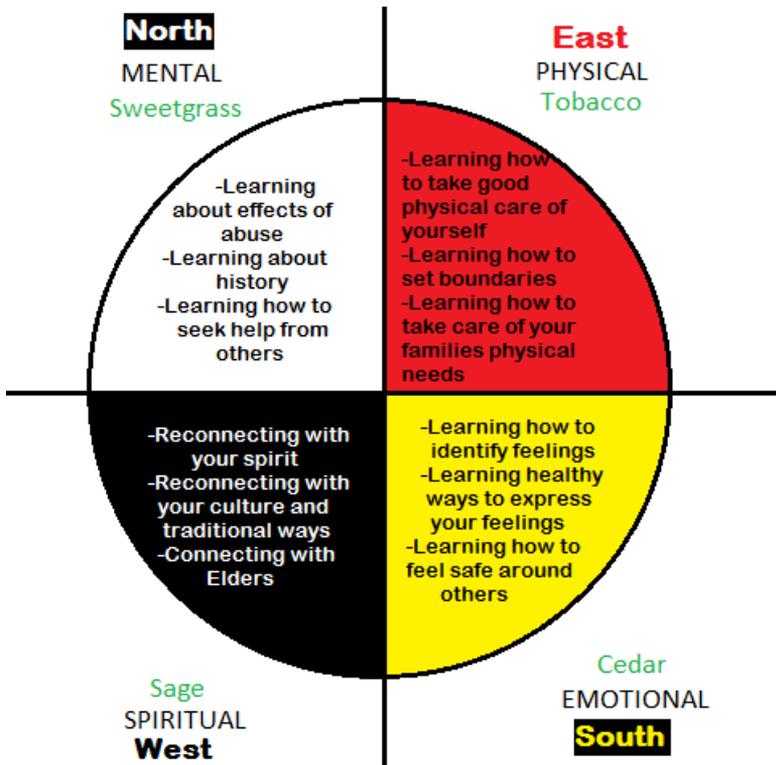
There are many physical and emotional indicators that people who are abused may display. Some people may not know the source of these symptoms, or even that they are problems.

	Physical Indicators	Emotional Indicators
Child	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Thumb Sucking (child needs emotional fulfillment) -Nervous ticks -Stuttering -Lack of motor skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Nightmares -Phobias -Acting out -Anger -Sadness
Adolescent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Eating Disorders -Headaches -Stomach problems -Intestinal Problems -Body aches and pains 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Suicidal tendencies -Promiscuity -Low self-esteem -Depression -Aggression -Truancy/problematic school behaviours -Alcohol/Drug Use
Adult	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Chronic head, face, pelvic pain -Gastrointestinal distress or symptoms -Body aches and pains -Panic/anxiety attacks -Insomnia 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Obesity, eating disorders -Sexual dysfunction -Neurological symptoms -Poor health habits -Depression -Addictions

The Healing Process

The concept of healing in Aboriginal communities focuses on well-being rather than sickness. It is a process aimed at achieving balance within oneself, in relationships, and in life.

Elders and traditional helpers encourage a healing approach that focuses on physical, mental, emotional and spiritual wellbeing. These four elements are represented in the medicine wheel. The Medicine Wheel also provides the teaching of the Four Sacred Medicines. The Medicine Wheel can provide a “road map” for both the healing process and daily living.



By: Martha McCann

The Four Sacred Medicines

North: *Sweetgrass* is used for ritual cleansing. When Sweetgrass is walked on, it bends but does not break. The sweetgrass, once braided, is stronger than any one strand on its own, which symbolizes community and unity. The braid is said to be the hair of Mother Earth and the three sections of the braid represent mind, body and spirit.

East: *Tobacco* connects us to the spirit world; it absorbs prayers and carries them to the spirit world. If a request is accompanied by an offer of tobacco that is accepted, the promise must be honoured. Tobacco can also be used to thank the Creator for his gifts.

South: *Cedar* is used for purification and to attract positive energy, feelings, emotions, and for balance.

West: *Sage* gives strength, wisdom, and clarity of purpose. It is a powerful purifying medicine that drives away negative energies.

Traditional Healing Methods

Smudging: a ceremony that involves burning the sacred medicines to purify or cleanse negative energy, feelings or thoughts from a place or a person

Healing circles: Meetings held to heal physical, emotional and spiritual wounds

Sweat Lodge: A ceremonial sauna used for healing and cleansing

Recovery

The path to recovery can be walked in many different ways. Some suggestions for the healing process can include:

It is important to understand the dynamics of the cycle of abuse and how it has impacted you.

It was not your fault- it has taken courage for you to live in this difficult situation. Be open and honest with yourself. Be forgiving to yourself and acknowledge that you did not make this happen to you.

Find a teacher that knows the many teachings of Aboriginal Culture. By re-learning and re-teaching yourself and your children about traditions/teachings, you can gain knowledge of the past and teach it to the next generation. The teachings have the power to break the cycle of violence.

Recovery can include helping others. Everyone in a community has a responsibility to help stop abuse.



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Help Is Available



Family by: Shaun Hedican

If you are living in a First Nations community, contact your local band office to find out what services are available to you.

Nurses and Social Workers are safe people to talk to. Nurses are available even if you are not physically injured. If you live in Thunder Bay, please note the agency and health services available to you (page 22).

General Resources

For help with domestic violence or information on Shelters in all communities in North West Ontario

211 Ontario

Tel: 2-1-1 **Website:** www.211ontario.ca

Talk for Healing

Tel: 1-855-554-HEAL **Website:** <http://www.talk4healing.com/>

Kanawayhitowin: Taking care of Each Other's Spirits

Website: <http://www.kanawayhitowin.ca/>

Website with information and education regarding domestic violence

Community Resources

Resources in Thunder Bay for help with domestic violence

Beendigen

Tel: 807-344-9579 **Toll free:** 1-888-200-9997

Crisis Home/Line: 807-346-4357 (HELP)

Website: www.beendigen.com

Catholic Family Development Centre

Tel: 807-345-7323 **Fax:** 807-345-5141

Website: www.catholicfamilycentre.ca

Dilico Anishnabek Family Care

Tel: 807-623-8511 **Toll free:** 1-800-465-3985

Website: www.dilico.com

Faye Peterson Transition House

Tel: 807-345-4681 **Crisis Line:** 807-345-0450

Toll Free: 1-800-465-6971

Website: www.fayepeterson.org

Matawa Crisis Response

Tel: (807)628-3880

Nishnawbe-Aski Legal Services Corporation

Tel: (807) 622-1413 **Toll free:** 1-800-465-5581

Website: <http://www.nanlegal.on.ca/>

Ontario Native Women's Association

Tel: 807-623-3442 **Toll Free:** 1-800-667-0816

Website: www.onwa-tbay.ca

TBRHSC/Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence Treatment Centre

Tel: 807-684-6751 **Fax:** 807-684-5906

Website: www.tbrhsc.net

Thunder Bay and Area Victim Services

Tel: 807-684-1051 **Website:** www.tbayvictimservices.com

Thunder Bay Counselling Centre

Tel: 807-684-1880 **Website:** www.tbaycounselling.com

Thunder Bay Indian Friendship Centre

Tel: 807-345-5840 **Website:** www.tbifc.ca



We're All in the Same Boat By: Roy Thomas

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