



A Place From Which We Grow

MÉTIS TRAUMA INFORMED TOOLKIT

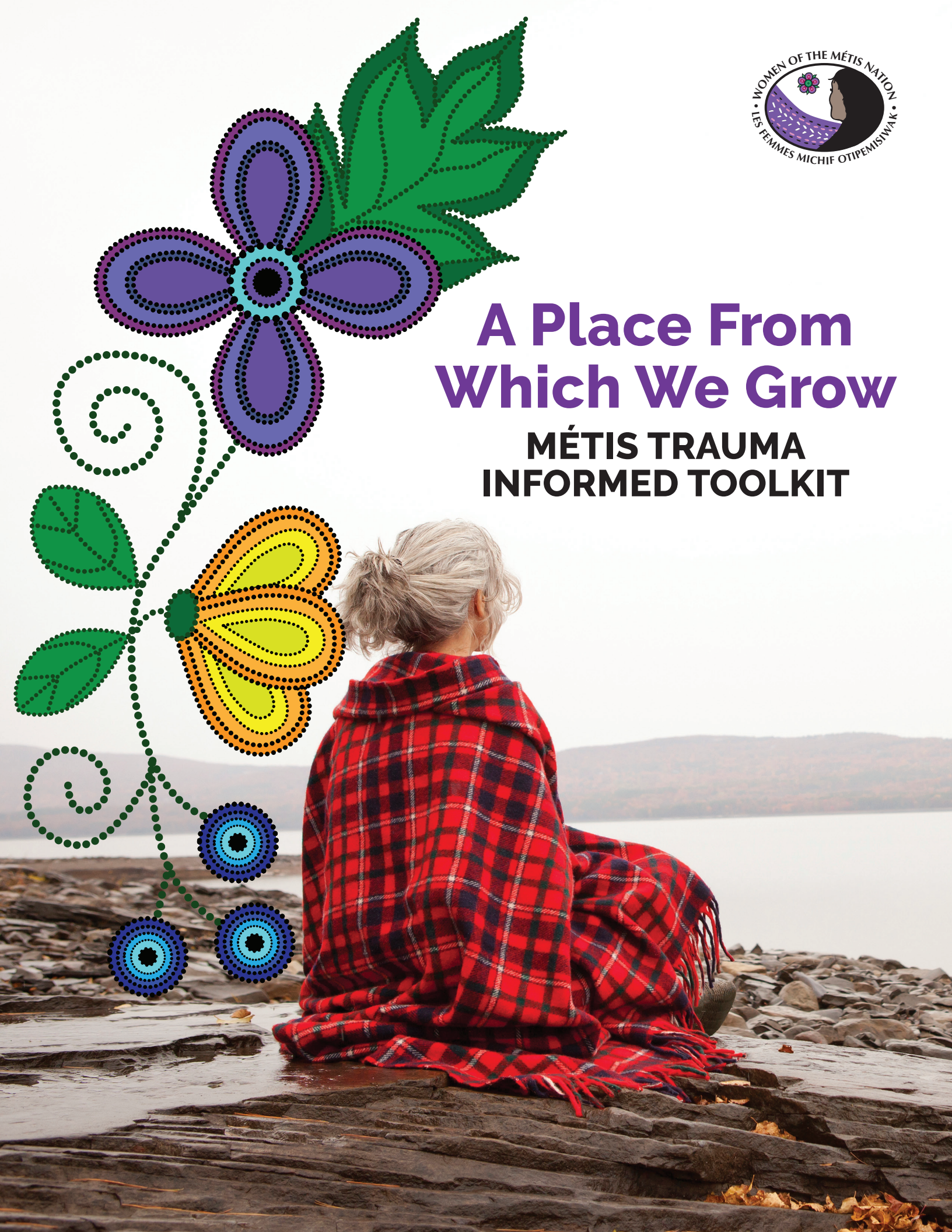
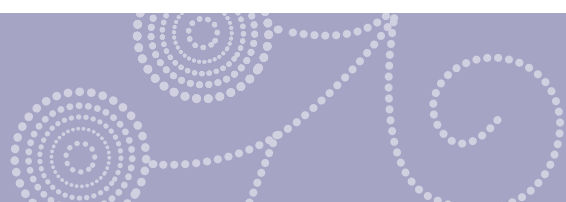




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INTRODUCTION

WHO ARE LES FEMMES MICHIF OTIPEMISIWAK

Les Femmes Michif Otipemisiwak (LMFO) is the recognized voice of Métis women from across the Métis Motherland. Our vision is to be an organization of strong Métis women, and as the mandated voice of women in the Métis Nation, to play a significant role in enhancing the social, cultural, economic, environmental and health and wellbeing of all Métis people with a focus on Métis women, youth and those who are two spirited and gender diverse.

Métis people are one of three distinct Indigenous peoples in Canada recognized under the 1982 Constitution. The national definition of Métis, as adopted by the Métis National Council (MNC) at its 18th Annual General Assembly in 2002, states: “Métis means a person who self-identifies as Métis, is distinct from other Aboriginal peoples, is of Historic Nation ancestry, and is accepted by the Métis Nation.” Our rights are entrenched in the Constitution as women in section 15(1) and as Métis in section 35(1).

Our mission is to ensure that Métis women from across the Motherland are safe, respected, connected, empowered, and have the capacity to work with Canadian and Métis governments, agencies and organizations to help create the conditions for healthy, vibrant and productive communities throughout the Métis Nation.

Our work is based on the core values of:

- Cultural safety, honour and respect;
- Accountability, responsibility and stewardship;
- Reciprocity, collaboration, and cooperation; and
- Commemoration, reconciliation, and reparation;

Our work aims to be respectful of all our people, while promoting inclusivity, gentleness, and openness and to create safe spaces for those who are gender diverse. As Métis women, we hold dear and sacred the teachings and wisdom of our grandmothers and knowledge holders. We honour the responsibility of the bundles that we carry. We share these bundles when we gather to impart the knowledge that is bestowed to us as caretakers. The first bundle we carry is that of the Grandmother's Wisdom Circle. We sit in council and look to the gifts of the generations before us. We trust that the knowledge and teachings that arrive to us will guide our steps as we move forward with our mission and vision.

Our Grandmother's Wisdom Circle's guiding principles are:

- Tapwewin (Truth), justice, equity, and advocacy
- Manâtisiwin - Respect
- Mah-mêskotonamâtowak - Reciprocity
- Miyotêhêwin - Kindness
- Mamišîwin - Trust
- Metoni miyo isâyâwin - Integrity
- Tapahtêyimisowin - Humility
- Manatisiwâyâwin- Gentleness within our working group, and
- Mistahimekowin
- Generosity



A STRENGTH-BASED APPROACH

Les Femmes Michif Otipemisiwak (LFMO) believes in a strength-based approach. This means we focus on our resilience, skills, and the positive ways we contribute to our communities. Even when we face challenges, we recognize our strengths and the things that help us overcome tough times. By using words and actions that highlight what we can achieve, we build confidence and a stronger future for everyone.

LFMO is committed to creating community spaces where Métis women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse people feel supported and empowered. We work to ensure that our communities are safe, understand the effects of trauma and intergenerational trauma, and have spaces where people can connect, heal, and grow.

This is why Wâhkôtowin (kinship) and Lateral Kindness are key values in our Métis Trauma-Informed Toolkit—guiding us in how we support one another with care, respect, and understanding.

ABOUT THIS TOOLKIT

This toolkit is designed to provide foundational trauma-informed knowledge and principles to help service providers effectively support Métis women, gender-diverse people, their families, and communities. Many Métis individuals have experienced trauma—whether personally, within their families, or across generations. By adopting a trauma-informed approach, service providers can build stronger relationships, healthier communities, and more effective support systems while leading with kindness, resilience, and understanding.

The “Reflections” sections contain questions for you to ask the individual you are supporting. These questions will help them more fully understand what they are going through and how to potentially get through their trauma.

DEVELOPING A MÉTIS-SPECIFIC TRAUMA-INFORMED APPROACH

Since 2018, Les Femmes Michif Otipemisiwak (LFMO) has engaged Métis women, youth, Elders, and community members in conversations about what a Métis-specific trauma-informed approach should include. These discussions highlighted the importance of:

- **Understanding Métis culture, history, and diversity** – Recognizing the uniqueness of Métis experiences across different regions.
- **Acknowledging the ongoing effects of colonization** – Understanding how systemic barriers and intergenerational trauma continue to impact Métis communities.
- **Learning about trauma and its effects** – Identifying how trauma influences behavior, relationships, and well-being.
- **Avoiding judgment and prioritizing care and respect** – Meeting individuals where they are with compassion.



- **Honoring self-determination, choice, and individual differences** – Empowering those you support by recognizing their autonomy.
- **Respecting community and relationships** – Recognizing the importance of kinship and social connections in healing.
- **Focusing on strengths and seeing the good in others** – Acknowledging resilience and supporting individuals in building on their strengths.
- **Showing compassion for oneself and others** – Practicing kindness, patience, and self-care in trauma-informed work.
- **Practicing mindfulness and self-awareness** – Remaining present and aware of your own biases, reactions, and well-being.
- **Valuing social justice, fairness, and ethical leadership** – Committing to equity and advocating for the rights of Métis individuals and communities.

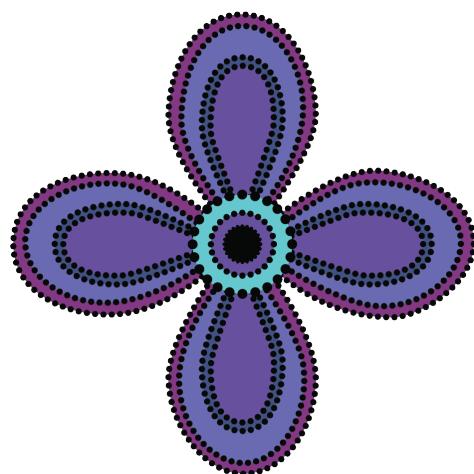
A Métis-Specific Approach to Healing

When supporting Métis survivors of trauma, violence, abuse, and neglect, Métis cultural teachings and values are central to the healing process. Connection to culture, identity, and community fosters resilience, well-being, and a sense of belonging.

This toolkit is grounded in the following trauma-informed principles:

- **Understanding trauma and its impact** – Recognizing how past experiences shape present challenges.
- **Recognizing the importance of Métis culture in healing** – Using cultural identity and traditions as sources of strength.
- **Knowing that healing happens in families, relationships, and communities** – Acknowledging that connection is key to recovery.
- **Believing that healing and recovery are always possible** – Upholding hope, growth, and empowerment in all aspects of support work.

By integrating these Métis-specific, strength-based approaches into service delivery, we can foster healing, resilience, and thriving communities.



MÉTIS CULTURAL COMPETENCE

OVERVIEW OF MÉTIS EXPERIENCES OF HISTORICAL AND INTERGENERATIONAL TRAUMA

To support Métis women, gender-diverse people, and families in a culturally safe and trauma-informed way, we must understand the unique impacts of colonization on Métis communities—both past and present.

Métis people have faced historical and intergenerational trauma, similar to other Indigenous peoples, but with unique experiences and challenges. Colonization has led to the loss of culture, language, and traditional worldviews, but Métis resilience remains strong.

This toolkit highlights both the struggles and strengths of Métis people. By sharing our stories through a lens of strength, resilience, and resistance, we can reconnect with traditional values, empower our communities, and reclaim our identity.

Some of the historical traumas and losses experienced by Métis and Michif people include:

- Emergence of Colonialism Impacts
- Loss of land “Road Allowance People”
- Loss of language and identity
- Loss of resources, livelihood and income with the fading of the NWC and Hudson’s Bay empires, end of the buffalo hunt
- Loss of Safety and Independence
- Marginalization; political, rights, economics, employment
- Persecution
- Poverty and Starvation
- Racism, colorism, and related violence and exclusion
- Residential Schools, Boarding Schools, and Day Schools attendance and traumatization
- Respect and Power decline as Colonization occurred
- Suppression of identity and ethnicity related to fear
- Violence, Death
- Warfare in the fight for our existence, our rights, and our place in Canada

MÉTIS INTERGENERATIONAL IMPACTS OF TRAUMA

“I grew up as a happy, carefree child until I was seven and the RCMP took me and my sisters to a residential school where, for the first time, I felt fear that I carried with me for many years; I turned into someone who had no voice and suffered from depression; it took 40 years for me to overcome it through the teachings and working of the Elders. The trauma of residential schools still lingers in our communities with no help available; we are just coming out of the silence and telling the truth about what happened; there is still so much denial.”

Métis Elder, Survivor of Residential School

"Thank you for helping me understand the trauma that I experienced; two-spirited people have experienced significant trauma and are committing suicide; they feel invisible. In the mission school, you were not acknowledged, not permitted to speak the Michif language, subject to sexual abuse and homophobia; you were invisible. Thank you to all for not making judgements or assumptions; two-spirited people are good people. As a two-spirited person, I was the first to be targeted through religious beliefs but is now safe to pick up the teachings and reclaim who we are. In the Indigenous language, there is no word for gender; it was based on the word for "alive"; we need to celebrate that."

Métis Elder, Survivor of Mission School

"My father fought in the war in England; he refused to come back to Canada as he was treated better in England; when we did move back to Canada, we celebrated our Métis culture, but we no longer qualified for benefits; we had to hide. We are dealing with trauma – I cannot tell my grandchildren that their great grandfather was a war hero."

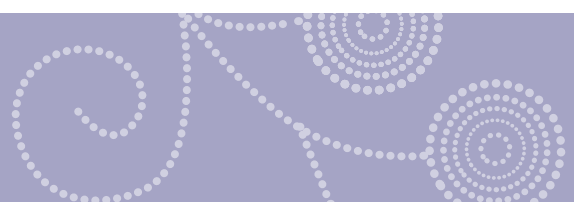
Métis Elder, reflecting on intergenerational impacts

"Métis women are beginning to reclaim their womanhood and role that was lost; intergenerational effects have brought them to a place where they struggle to honour their sacredness, strength, and pride in who they are as resilient, strong women who came from resilient and strong grandmothers. An important part of empowering women is to change the stereotypes they have absorbed in their daily roles as young women and teach them who they are as sacred beings on Mother Earth. We are forced to walk in both worlds but are not accepted by either; we are used/forced/encouraged to take a position on either side; I see both sides and try to embrace both."

Métis Elder, on intergenerational trauma effects

"They played mind games. They lied to you, the social workers. They nearly destroyed my life and my spirit. They nearly broke me to the point where I did try to commit suicide at one time because I was separated from all my siblings and I knew that I could not live without my siblings. They had no concept. They had no understanding of the trauma they were causing when they scooped up the children. It was almost like a genocide where they were trying to wipe us out."

Métis Victim, Survivor of the Sixties Scoop



The impacts of traumas related to colonization and oppression are intergenerational – passed on from generation to generation. The effects of trauma tend to ripple outward from the victims to those who surround them, and for Métis who experienced oppressive, violent, and traumatic life events, the consequences continue to be felt in each subsequent generation. The impacts are felt at individual, family and community levels:

Individual Impacts may include:

- isolation/alienation
- shame
- anger
- self-hatred
- internalized racism
- low self-esteem
- self-destructive behaviors (substance abuse, gambling, alcoholism)
- acting aggressively
- identity crisis

Family Impacts may include:

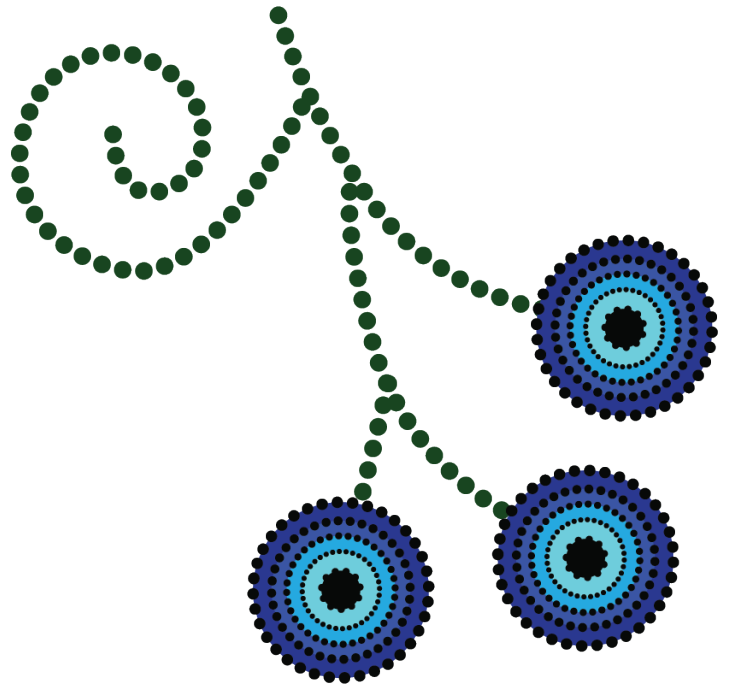
- unresolved grief
- difficulty with parenting effectively
- family violence
- loss of language, stories/oral traditions
- loss of culture and traditional practices
- loss of identity

Community and Nation Impacts may include:

- loss of connectedness with Michif / Métis languages and traditions
- loss of community and family togetherness and collective support
- loss of support from Métis elders or knowledge holders
- increased suicide rate
- lack of family and community support in the raising of children
- community and lateral violence

Because the impacts of trauma are intergenerational, many Métis people have been born into families and communities that had been struggling with the effects of trauma for many years. These are reinforced by ongoing impacts of colonization, including racism, violence toward Métis women, and marginalization that puts Métis people at risk.

"Almost mad all the time. Problems controlling my anger. Can't really think of just one time. I know most of my anger comes from pain. Someone once told me the reason I have so much anger is from my dad and it comes from my grandpa, which comes from his mom, that the anger is from pain so long ago (On Native Ground, 2012)."



OVERVIEW OF MÉTIS EXPERIENCES OF CONTEMPORARY TRAUMA AND LOSS

In the work leading to the creation of this toolkit, we interviewed, worked with and consulted with Métis Women and their family members. Many of the people we spoke with have experienced disrupted attachments with their family of origin either due to their parents' own struggles with mental health and addiction or as a result of a system that they identify as being unsupportive of their families due to systemic colonial, racist ideologies.

Métis women we worked with in researching this toolkit articulated these losses or traumas in their lives:

- Accidents
- Being a victim of crime
- Childhood abuse: sexual, physical, neglect, witnessing domestic violence
- Domestic abuse: physical, sexual, financial, spiritual, cultural, psychological
- Elder abuse: physical, sexual, financial, spiritual, cultural, psychological
- Fear of being killed, witnessing death
- Historical trauma: and the residential school experience of forcible removal from the family home, destruction of culture and language
- Human trafficking survivor
- Living in extreme poverty
- Loss due to homicide
- Loss of a loved one to homicide
- Natural disasters
- Sexual assault: any unwanted sexual contact
- Sudden and unexpected loss: of a job, housing, relationship
- Sudden death of a loved one
- Suicidal loss of a loved one

Some systemic and widespread contemporary experiences of Trauma and Loss experienced by Métis and Michif people include:

- CFS involvement
- Child Apprehension
- Sex work/sexual exploitation
- Continued experience of marginalization (political, manifestation of rights, recognition of our historical sacrifices and exclusions by Canada)
- Diverse continuum of Métis and Indigenous Métis lived experience, that sometimes marginalizes grassroots Métis
- Impact of 60's scoop
- Impacted economic participation
- Impacted health
- Impacted Identity
- Intergenerational impacts of poverty
- Isolation, Neglect, Abuse or Violence
- Lack of access to Indigenous rights-based food security or access to resources



- Lack of access to land
- Loss of language and identity
- Multigenerational impacts of Residential School, Boarding School and Day School Traumas
- Multigenerational impacts of trauma
- Reduced resilience as a result of CFS interventions and lack of family and nation connection
- Sometimes limited knowledge or access to culturally grounded healing and safety strategies
- Traumatic exclusions from the TRC and IRSSA agreements
- Unique experiences of traumatic events related to racism, poverty, violence, or other colonization related barriers

MÉTIS PEOPLES AND THEIR CURRENT IMPACTS OF TRAUMA

IMPACT OF THE SIXTIES SCOOP

- When the responsibility of child welfare services was shifted to the provinces after amendments to the Indian Act in 1951, thousands of Indigenous children were removed from their families and placed into non- Aboriginal foster or adoption homes across Canada and internationally.
- With the removal of Indigenous children from their families, communities and cultures, several survivors have grown up lost within these foster/adoption homes and have lost their identity.
- Children were often neglected from receiving vital care, many were exposed to different forms of abuse within these foster/adoption/group homes and institutions (physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, psychological abuse, verbal abuse, spiritual abuse, forced labor and neglect).
- To this day, survivors are currently trying to find themselves and/or heal from the colonial impacts of being in the 'best interest of the child'.

REFLECTION

Given these multi-dimensional impacts of trauma, how would you define what you may have gone through?

Were there losses that you experienced? How are you doing now?



What words of encouragement would you share with other Sixties Scoop survivors who are beginning and/or continuing their healing journey?

CHILD FAMILY SERVICES/CHILD APPREHENSION (MILLENNIAL SCOOP)

- There is an overrepresentation of First Nations and Métis children in child welfare systems across Canada today, in comparison to Non-Indigenous children.
- In some provinces, Indigenous children encompass 70-85% of children in care and that percentage continues to increase
- Due to the inadequate funding placed towards Indigenous child welfare services, at risk children are currently taken away from their Indigenous homes/roots and are placed into non-Aboriginal foster/adoption homes.
- Indigenous families are more likely to go into child welfare care than Non-Indigenous families with the same factors (poverty, poor housing, care giver substance abuse).
- Current estimates suggest that 75-85% of Indigenous children in foster care experience sexual violence.
- Children grow up with little or no knowledge of their culture or racism.

SEX WORK/SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

First Nations, Inuit, and Métis women and gender-diverse people make up only 4% of the national female population, yet they are overrepresented in sex work. In many cases, involvement in survival sex work comes from the need to stay alive and meet basic needs.

Many Indigenous people in sex work come from families and communities affected by colonization, discrimination, and violence. Some are forced to leave their homes due to violence, foster care, or lack of safety. With limited access to shelters, resources, and support, many experience homelessness and poverty. This makes them more vulnerable to being lured into sex work in exchange for food, a place to stay, clean clothes, or substances.

Sex work increases the risk of sexual violence, physical harm, drug-related dangers, and sexually transmitted infections. Without proper support and healing resources, the cycles of trauma, survival, and exploitation continue.

To break these cycles, access to culturally safe, trauma-informed supports is essential. Indigenous and Métis women, girls, and gender-diverse people deserve safety, respect, and resources to heal, rebuild, and reclaim their futures.



REFLECTION

First, it is important to ground and calm ourselves, and feel safe and secure. Please take a couple of minutes to do this. How have you begun to heal from the intergenerational trauma of sexual exploitation?

What are some of the other cycles of exploitation and trauma that you may have experienced?

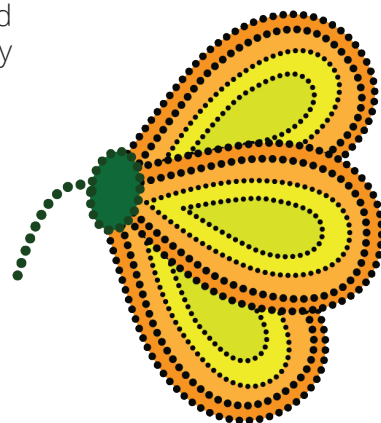
What words of encouragement would you pass on to other sexually exploited survivors who are beginning and/or continuing their healing journey?

INTERGENERATIONAL IMPACTS OF POVERTY

Because of historical and ongoing oppression, First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people continue to experience some of the highest levels of poverty in Canada.

- Unemployment rates for Indigenous people are four times higher than for non-Indigenous people. Many also earn lower incomes and have fewer job opportunities.
- Limited income and job options mean that some Indigenous people and youth struggle to access education or complete post-secondary schooling.
- Financial instability and unsafe housing increase the chances of children being removed from their families and placed in foster care, often staying in the system for long periods.
- Indigenous women, children, and gender-diverse people experiencing family violence may feel trapped due to a lack of affordable housing and shelter options. Many fear that leaving will mean homelessness or losing their children.
- Poverty and distress can make people more vulnerable to substance use as a way to cope with trauma and barriers.

These challenges are part of a cycle created by inequality, racism, and colonization. Breaking this cycle means addressing poverty, providing access to safe housing, and ensuring Indigenous communities have the resources and support they deserve.



REFLECTION

Poverty can affect many parts of life, including safety, shelter, food, and access to important resources. What has your experience with poverty been like?

Have you or your family faced intergenerational poverty, and how has it shaped your journey?

Think about how you have responded or coped with the challenges that come with financial struggles. What has helped you keep going?

If you could share words of encouragement with others who are working to break free from the cycle of poverty, what would you say to support them?

Isolation, Neglect, Abuse or Violence

- Issues of poverty among First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples can lead to violent behavior.
- Parents experiencing loss of control may inflict various forms of violence on their children, leading to adult bullying and sibling abuse.
- Domestic violence is a serious issue, particularly impacting Indigenous women, who face higher rates of victimization compared to other groups.
- Spousal assault rates against Indigenous women are three times higher than for non-Indigenous women, often involving severe and life-threatening violence.

REFLECTION

Take a moment to ground yourself, breathe, and find a sense of calm and safety. How have you started to heal from intergenerational trauma, including isolation, neglect, abuse, or violence?

What other cycles of trauma or violence have you experienced?



If you could share words of encouragement with others who are beginning or continuing their healing journey, what would you say to support them?

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Limited Access to Resources/Indigenous Methods of Healing

- Programs for women facing violence, poverty, and mental health challenges are difficult to access, especially for First Nation and Métis women. - Barriers include limited service hours, long wait times, high staff turnover, transportation costs, lack of childcare, intimate partner violence, and negative attitudes from providers.
- Current healthcare practices often overlook distinct cultural understandings and focus on oppressive social structures, rendering support services ineffective.
- Many treatment services lack essential resources and knowledge to assist Indigenous women and children in healing from trauma.
- Access to traditional Indigenous healing services is limited due to inadequate funding.
- Culturally insensitive treatments that may re-traumatize women and children.
- Lack of federal funding and jurisdictional gaps leads to marginalization and health disparities in Métis populations.
- Provincial and territorial support for Métis communities is often insufficient, resulting in a lack of culturally relevant resources and exacerbated health issues.
- Limited Métis-specific resources force individuals to seek western or basic Indigenous services, leading to feelings of being unwelcome and unmet health needs.

REFLECTION

First Nations and Métis communities have both experienced colonization, discrimination, and trauma, yet the federal government funds Indigenous health programs for First Nations while often excluding Métis communities. Why is there a difference in support?

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Why are Métis people, who also face severe levels of trauma and its impacts, not given equal access to Métis-specific care and resources?

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What do you think needs to change?

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Multigenerational Impacts of Residential School, Boarding School and Day School Trauma

- Residential school survivors experienced physical, sexual, emotional, mental, and spiritual abuse from those in power.
- Many First Nations and Métis children were forced to reject their culture and follow Eurocentric and Catholic values.
- Generational trauma continues to impact families, affecting great-grandparents, grandparents, parents, and children today.
- Many survivors never received justice or proper support to heal from their trauma.
- Without care and healing, some survivors struggled to show love, parent, and break the cycle of trauma.
- The effects of colonization and residential schools continue to shape the experiences of Métis and Indigenous families today.

REFLECTION

How would you describe your experience with Residential Schools, Boarding Schools, or Day Schools and the trauma that came with it?

Can you relate to a specific moment or loss that deeply affected you?

Have these experiences shaped your life in different ways?

How are you feeling today?

If you could share words of encouragement with others who are beginning or continuing their healing journey, what would you say to support them?



MÉTIS VOICES: AWARENESS AND NAMING OF MÉTIS RESILIENCE AND VALUES

"When we talk about these things, e.g. caring for the young to the old, children and Elders belong to all of us; we have a connection to the land; we belong to the land; we have a relationship to the old ways and history and traditions like making tourtiere for New Year's Eve or providing a cup of tea when you have guests to show that you are glad they came; we take what we need and works for us; it is what works for me and makes me resilient."

Métis Elder on traditions and resilience

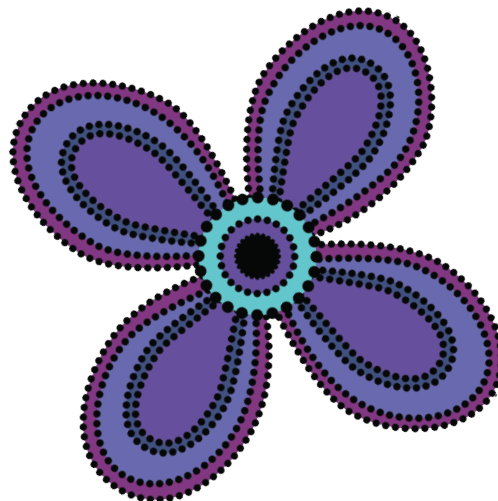
"What makes me resilient is my creativity that the Métis are well known for; I learned to bead when I was seven and as I got older, I found out what it means to be Métis; I now teach culture, which is so rewarding to see the children participating; it is important to keep cultural traditions alive; I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

Métis Elder on resilience and cultural practices

"Resiliency in my family equals stubbornness; all the struggles that we have dealt with in the past provide a good understanding of where things were and to be proud of where we are today to have this conversation. Our children will not have to face the same dilemma."

Métis Elder on resilience

(Women of the Metis Nation Les Femmes Michif Otipemisiwak, 2019)



REFLECTION

Resilience means the ability to keep going and overcome challenges. How do you define resilience in your own life?

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What are some ways you have shown strength and perseverance?

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When you reflect on your own resilience, what words of encouragement would you share with others?

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Through our work with Métis and Michif communities, we have learned that resilience is deeply woven into our history and culture. These strengths have helped Métis people survive and thrive through adversity:

- Humor, celebration, and positivity, even in difficult times.
- Love, care, compassion, and empathy for ourselves and others.
- Physical stamina and strength to endure challenges.
- Strong leaders, including women and gender-diverse people, who guided families and communities toward safety and survival.
- Skills, knowledge, and awareness from multiple perspectives and worldviews.
- Matriarchs and Knowledge Keepers who maintained leadership, safety, and cultural teachings.
- Cultural values, kinship bonds, and community connections that give people a sense of belonging.
- Traditional values and beliefs that balance the best of two worlds.

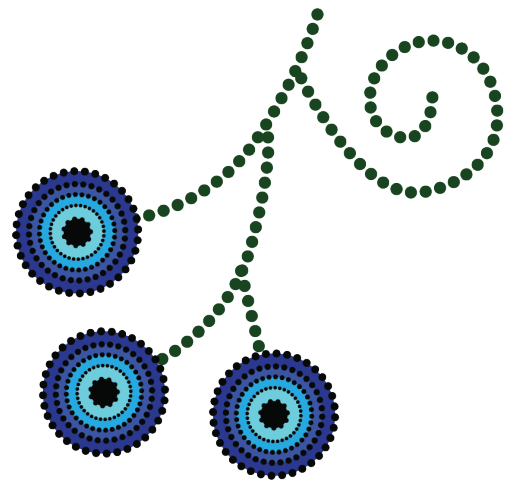
Some Métis and Michif people have struggled to maintain their traditional worldviews due to colonization and cultural loss. But by sharing stories, participating in cultural activities, and engaging in healing ceremonies, we can reconnect with our values, traditions, and resilience. By listening to our grandmothers, Elders, and Knowledge Keepers, we keep our Métis identity strong and pass on our wisdom to future generations.

In our conversation with Métis across Canada, here are the resilience and values that our people identified as still strong in ourselves, our families and communities:

- Adaptable to change
- Being together
- Care for our young and old, and caring for each other
- Child-rearing



- Come together and help, especially in crisis
- Connected to all life and the land
- Contributing to Community and Family;
- Culture as a way of life, "Do no harm" to each other
- Equality and Fairness
- Faith and Spirituality
- Family ties ~ Kinship
- Forgiving
- Generous
- Hardworking
- Hopeful
- Humble
- Humor
- Independence
- Interconnection
- Justice
- Kindness to one another
- Kinship connections to one another, and to our First Nations relations, our European relations
- Listening and Learning; an approach to gaining knowledge over time from knowledge keepers
- Love and Compassion
- Mentoring from our grandparents, our parents and our relations
- Michif Language and Traditions
- Nonjudgmental
- Optimistic
- Parenting
- Passionate
- Patient
- Persevering
- Positive
- Pride in our Heritage
- Protecting each other
- Recognition of our Indigenous ancestry, and our emergence as a mixed-race people
- Relationships are of prime importance; building and maintaining are essential to survive, and to prosper, and to be well
- Resilience
- Resourceful
- Respect for all life and land, water
- Respect for Elders, Seniors, Traditions and Teachers
- Respect, love and acceptance of LGBTQ2S+ or Two-spirited Métis
- Sacrifice – Altruism
- Seeing the silver lining
- Self-sustaining
- Spiritual impact of choices
- Teaching Life Skills and Traditions to Children and Youth;
- Thrifty
- Traditional Values
- Wâhkôtowin – interconnection to each other, all living things, earth, spiritual world



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

Healing Through Traditional Activities

Traditional activities support wellness, healing from trauma, and help our nervous system and mind feel balanced. Engaging in these practices can strengthen our connection to culture, community, and self-care.

- **Physical Activities** – Movement, like jigging, dancing, running, walking, canoeing, or playing sports, helps release built-up energy and stress. It also improves physical health and builds connections with others. Moving our bodies can help us process trauma and feel stronger.
- **Being on the Land** – Hunting, fishing, gathering berries, and harvesting medicines are healing ways to connect with nature. The land has a natural rhythm that helps calm the nervous system. Walking, camping, hiking, or sitting by a fire can bring a deep sense of peace and grounding.
- **Preparing and Sharing Traditional Foods** – Cooking and eating together is a way to nourish ourselves and our community. Sharing meals is a traditional way of connecting, helping us build relationships, find comfort, and reclaim our sense of belonging.
- **Traditional Arts and Crafts** – Beading, sewing, leatherwork, weaving, and other creative activities are healing. The rhythm and focus of these practices feel like meditation, helping to calm the mind and regulate the nervous system. For those healing from trauma, learning traditional arts with patience and support can be an important step in their journey.
- **Spiritual and Religious Practices** – Faith, spirituality, and ceremony can help people heal from trauma, loss, and suffering. When someone experiences deep pain, reconnecting with prayer, ceremony, or personal spiritual practices can bring hope, peace, and a sense of protection.

By reconnecting with these traditions, we honor our culture, resilience, and healing journey.



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?

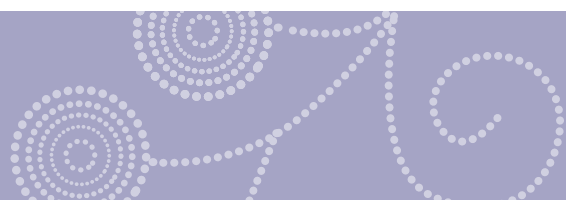
MANAGING TRIGGERS, STAYING GROUNDED, AND BEING IN THE PRESENT MOMENT

Some of the information in this toolkit may bring up difficult emotions or memories for the women and gender-diverse people you support. As a service provider, it is important to approach this material with a trauma-informed lens, recognizing the potential impact it may have on those with lived experiences of gender-based violence.

At Les Femmes Michif Otipemisiwak (LFMO), we emphasize trauma-informed care, which means creating safe, supportive, and empowering environments for survivors. If someone you are working with finds this content overwhelming, consider offering grounding techniques to help them feel steady and safe. Encouraging breaks, self-check-ins, and access to support can help mitigate distress and foster a sense of security.

Your role in providing compassionate, informed support is invaluable. By understanding trauma responses and promoting a survivor-centered approach, you help create pathways to healing and empowerment for the women and gender-diverse individuals in your care.

Here are some grounding techniques you can offer to individuals who may experience triggers in the moment.



Be Present in the Moment

Find an object that you can carry with you as a physical reminder to come back to the present moment. It could be a ring, bracelet, rock or shell that you can feel, see and hold.

YOU ARE SAFE

Remind yourself you are safe. If you feel unsafe, take yourself to a safe place right away.

Look around, use your senses

Look around you and notice your surroundings: what do you see, which colors do you notice, what sounds you hear and textures you feel.

Move your body

If you are feeling triggered, get up, and get moving. Bending at the waist and gently shaking yourself is a good way to release tension and triggers.

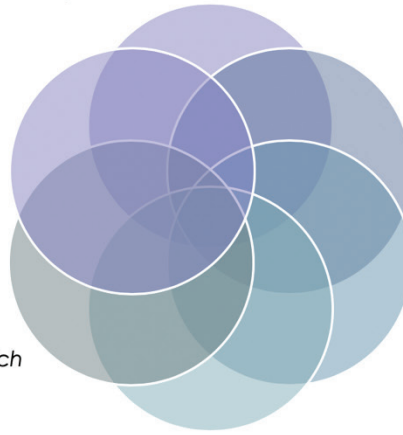
A walk outside is good for getting centered and bringing your senses into the now.

Breathe

Practice breathing exercises. Remind yourself everyday to breathe; Breathing In and out, slowly, brings our nervous system on line.

Grounding to the Earth

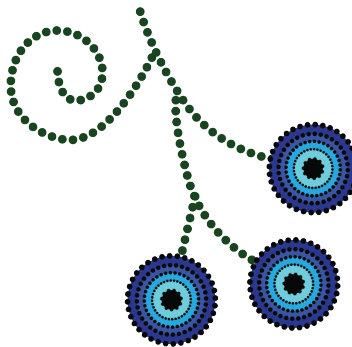
Place your feet on the ground; focus on your feet touching the ground.



Self-Soothing

When individuals who have experienced gender-based violence feel overwhelmed or triggered by something stressful, their bodies may react instinctively to protect them. This is known as a trauma response. During this time, the brain and body prioritize safety, which can make it difficult to process information or respond effectively.

As a service provider, you can support survivors by introducing self-soothing and grounding techniques that help regulate their nervous system and restore a sense of control. These techniques can assist individuals in feeling calmer, thinking more clearly, and navigating distressing moments with greater ease. By understanding how trauma affects the body, you can empower those you support to use strategies that promote safety and well-being.



REFLECTION

You may ask yourself, “Why am I reacting this way”?

Remember:

You are not crazy, stupid, worthless or incapable. You have survived negative circumstances. You are brave, resilient, smart, worthy, capable, strong, skilled, talented and beautiful.

An easy and accessible way to self-soothe is to repeat a calming and affirming statement. Here are some examples:

- I know this feeling is painful but it will pass.
- I know the intensity will pass if I care for myself right now
- Breathing in, I am calm. Breathing out, I am strong enough to care for this feeling
- I have the strength and resources to handle this situation
- I have a team of support around me
- Examining the facts right now, in this present moment, I am safe.

Can you think of some other affirming statements that you can use to ground when your nervous system is activated, or you are triggered?





Wâhkôtowin (Kinship) and Lateral Kindness to Create Safe Spaces

Wâhkôtowin: Translates in English to “kinship” or “being related to each other”. Wâhkôtowin laws reflect that all of creation is related to all things (i.e., “All our Relations”). These principles embrace the sacred continuum of relationships between all human relatives and everything in creation, including the earth, the plants and the animals. Wâhkôtowin laws therefore govern the interconnected and respectful relationships of “one thing to another”, including relations with the Creator and all things on Mother Earth.

Lateral Kindness: Based on the premise that we all have gifts to contribute as individuals.

Lateral kindness and the spirit of Wâhkôtowin are essential in fostering strong, supportive communities. As service providers, incorporating these values into daily interactions, workplace culture, and leadership can help create safer, more empowering environments for Métis women, girls, Two-Spirit and gender-diverse people who have experienced trauma.

A Wâhkôtowin approach emphasizes:

- Focusing on strengths – Recognizing and uplifting the resilience, skills, and contributions of those you support.
- Being inclusive – Creating spaces that honor diverse identities, backgrounds, and perspectives.
- Open Communication – Building trust through honest, clear, and respectful conversations, while avoiding harmful communication patterns such as aggression or passive-aggression.
- Compassion – Responding with kindness, patience, and care, recognizing the impact of trauma on individuals’ lives.
- Respect – Treating all individuals with dignity, valuing their experiences, and centering their voices in decision-making.
- Empathy – Acknowledging and validating the emotions and lived experiences of survivors.
- Collaboration – Working alongside survivors as partners in healing, recognizing their wisdom and strengths in their own recovery journey.

By integrating these principles into your practice, you contribute to the creation of trauma-informed, culturally grounded spaces where Métis women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse people feel respected, heard, and empowered in their healing.

USING WÂHKÔTOWIN AND LATERAL KINDNESS TO FACILITATE A MÉTIS TRAUMA INFORMED APPROACH AND TO ELIMINATE LATERAL VIOLENCE

A Métis trauma-informed approach is rooted in Wahkohtowin (kinship) and Lateral Kindness, recognizing that healing happens within relationships, families, and communities. Wahkohtowin teaches that we are all connected and that our well-being is interdependent, meaning that when one person experiences harm, it affects the entire community. By prioritizing relationships, reciprocity, and shared responsibility, service providers can create culturally safe, supportive environments where Métis women, girls, and 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals who have experienced trauma feel a sense of belonging and empowerment. Lateral Kindness reinforces this by actively countering Lateral Violence, which often arises from historical and ongoing colonial trauma. Instead of competition, exclusion, or harm within communities, Lateral



Kindness fosters respect, encouragement, and mutual care, ensuring that healing spaces uplift rather than retraumatize survivors.

In practice, service providers can use Wahkohtowin and Lateral Kindness by creating safe spaces for open communication, modeling nonjudgmental and compassionate interactions, and reinforcing community-based healing. This means actively listening to survivors without dismissal or invalidation, supporting their choices in their healing journey, and integrating traditional knowledge, Elders, and cultural teachings into trauma-informed care. It also requires addressing Lateral Violence directly by promoting accountability, conflict resolution, and relationship repair within families and organizations. By embedding these principles into their work, service providers help build strong, supportive networks that empower Métis survivors and their communities to heal, thrive, and break cycles of trauma and harm.

Understanding Lateral Violence

Lateral violence occurs when harm is directed toward peers or colleagues rather than addressing systemic barriers or oppression. It can manifest in harmful behaviors that erode trust, create unsafe spaces, and contribute to further trauma for those who have already experienced violence.

Characteristics of Lateral Violence:

- **Malicious** – Acts are intended to harm, rather than to resolve conflict or misunderstanding.
- **Persistent criticism and abuse** – A pattern of ongoing negative behavior toward an individual.
- **Intentional harm** – Actions are meant to undermine or hurt someone.
- **Repeated and ongoing** – Occurs over time, creating a toxic environment.
- **Humiliating and demeaning** – Causes emotional and psychological harm to the targeted individual.

Examples of Harmful Behaviors:

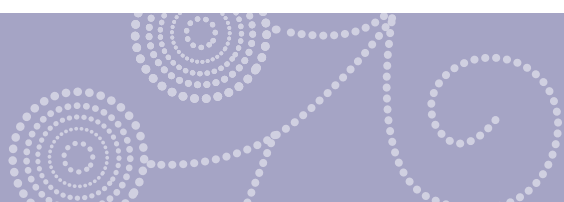
- **Silencing** – Dominating conversations or meetings to limit others' input.
- **Dismissing** – Ignoring or minimizing someone's perspective or experience.
- **Disrespecting** – Using gestures or behaviors that demean others (e.g., sighing, walking out, rolling eyes, belittling, gossiping).
- **Discouraging** – Shutting down suggestions or ideas without open discussion.
- **Denying** – Invalidating or dismissing the lived experiences of others.

THE POWER OF COMMUNICATION AND LATERAL KINDNESS

Communication is a powerful tool that can either strengthen or harm relationships. The way we speak and act sends clear messages—either “I respect and value you” or “Your thoughts and feelings don't matter.”

As service providers, practicing Lateral Kindness in communication ensures that interactions foster safety, support, and respect. This approach creates environments where Métis women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse individuals feel heard, valued, and empowered.

By prioritizing compassionate communication and collaborative leadership, we help break cycles of lateral violence and build stronger, trauma-informed communities rooted in respect, understanding, and care.



Ways to Practice Lateral Kindness

- **Respectful communication** – Listen with patience, understanding, and compassion. Respect means taking time to hear different opinions and respond thoughtfully.
- **Agreeing to disagree** – We won't always have the same views, but we must respect each other. Saying "I respectfully agree to disagree" allows for open discussion, debate, and learning from different perspectives.
- **Positive reinforcement** – Celebrate good choices, positive actions, and achievements.
- **Recognition** – Acknowledge and uplift the successes of others.
- **Reciprocity** – Give back to each other and our communities in meaningful ways.
- **Focusing on strengths** – Instead of looking for flaws, ask: What's working? What's going well? How can we support each other?
- **Encouragement** – Offer support and validation to help others grow in a positive direction.
- **Minimizing negativity** – Keep the focus on solutions and possibilities, rather than dwelling on negative feedback.
- **Celebrating kindness** – Encourage and recognize even the smallest acts of kindness.

Practicing Lateral Kindness

Lateral Kindness is a powerful approach that fosters belonging, healing, and community strength. As service providers working with Métis women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse individuals, embracing Lateral Kindness helps break cycles of harm and supports healing from both personal and intergenerational trauma. By prioritizing compassion, connection, and mutual respect, we contribute to safer, more empowering spaces where people feel valued and supported.

Ways to Practice Lateral Kindness in Your Work

- **Empathy & Compassion** – Approach every interaction with care, kindness, and understanding.
- **Recognizing Strengths** – Acknowledge the resilience, wisdom, and contributions of those you support.
- **Listening with Openness** – Hold space for others by listening without judgment, offering respect to their lived experiences.
- **Respecting Vulnerability** – Recognize that sharing experiences, particularly about trauma, takes immense courage.
- **Validating Others** – Use affirming words and gestures to acknowledge people's experiences and emotions.
- **Kindness Exchange** – Foster a culture of encouragement through positive words and supportive actions.
- **Circle Exercises** – Engage in group activities that build trust, openness, and appreciation.
- **Writing Kind Messages** – Share words of encouragement, such as:
 - "You are valued because..."
 - "I appreciate you for..."

Acts of Lateral Kindness Should Be:

- **Inclusive of All Genders** – Ensuring all identities are welcomed and respected.
- **Positive & Uplifting** – Centering encouragement and support.



- **Non-Judgmental & Supportive** – Offering kindness without conditions or expectations.

By choosing Lateral Kindness, service providers help create a culture of respect, empowerment, and healing. Through small, intentional acts of compassion, we build stronger, safer, and more connected communities for Métis women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse individuals.

REFLECTION

Think of a powerful message that someone said to you that made you feel comforted, loved, appreciated, valued including a simple statement such as the following:

"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"

Can you think of additional examples?





UNDERSTANDING TRAUMA AND ITS IMPACT

Understanding Trauma and the Body's Natural Responses

As service providers working with Métis women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse individuals, it is essential to understand what trauma is and how it affects the body, brain, and nervous system. Trauma responses are not conscious choices—they are instinctive survival mechanisms designed to protect individuals in moments of perceived danger.

Many survivors of trauma may feel confused or regretful about how they reacted in a stressful situation. However, it is important to reassure them that these responses are automatic and protective—not a sign of weakness or failure.

The Body's Natural Survival Instincts

As human beings, we are biologically wired to respond to threats. When someone experiences trauma or danger, their nervous system activates automatic survival responses, such as:

- **Fight** – Reacting with aggression or defensiveness.
- **Flight** – Attempting to escape or avoid the situation.
- **Freeze** – Becoming immobilized or feeling disconnected.

Each of these responses is a natural, adaptive mechanism that helps people cope with danger. Understanding these reactions without judgment is crucial to supporting survivors in their healing journey.

WHAT IS TRAUMA?

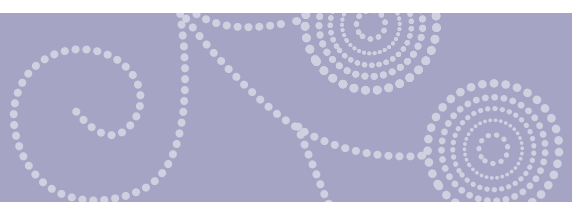
A simple definition of trauma is a real or perceived threat to life, limb, or dignity.

Imagine a moose charging at you through the bush, someone whispering a threat in your ear, or suddenly seeing a person who has harmed you before. Any of these moments can trigger the body into survival mode. What's important to know is that our minds and bodies react to both real and perceived threats. Even if the danger isn't physically there, our survival instincts are so strong that they can cause a trauma response just from a memory or fear.

WHAT CAUSES TRAUMA?

Trauma can come from many experiences, including:

- Gender-based, sexual, or other forms of violence
- Harassment or bullying (including lateral violence)
- Marginalization and oppression (such as racism, discrimination, and intergenerational trauma)
- Accidents or natural disasters
- The loss of someone important



COMMON FEATURES OF TRAUMA

No matter where it comes from, trauma usually has a few things in common:

- The person had little or no control over what happened.
- The body and brain reacted automatically to danger.
- Trauma isn't just about the event—it's about how the person experiences it.

When faced with a traumatic situation, our natural survival instincts kick in—like fight, flight, freeze, or fawn (trying to please others to stay safe). These reactions happen automatically, and people don't choose how they respond in the moment.

IMPORTANT FACTS ABOUT TRAUMA

- Trauma can affect anyone. No matter a person's age, background, gender identity, sexual orientation, or culture, trauma can have a deep and lasting impact.
- Families can experience trauma together. When something traumatic happens to one family member, it can affect the whole family. Even people who weren't directly involved can feel the effects, especially if they have a close bond with the person who experienced the trauma.
- Communities can be impacted by trauma. When a traumatic event affects one or more people in a community, the entire community may feel the weight of that experience.
- Cultures can carry trauma across generations. When groups of people face ongoing harm, oppression, forced assimilation, or genocide, the trauma can be passed down through generations, affecting cultural identity, well-being, and resilience.
- Helpers and caregivers can experience trauma too. Family members, caregivers, and frontline workers who support trauma survivors can be deeply affected by hearing painful stories and witnessing suffering. This is called "vicarious trauma", which happens when someone absorbs the emotional weight of another person's trauma over time.

Understanding trauma helps us support not only those who have experienced it but also the families, communities, and caregivers who are impacted by it. Healing happens when we create safe, supportive, and compassionate spaces for everyone.

REFLECTION

Beyond the examples of trauma we've talked about—what it is, how it looks, and how people respond—how would you define trauma in your own words?

Have you ever had an experience that felt overwhelming, scary, or out of your control? Something that left a lasting impact on how you think, feel, or see the world? Trauma can look different for everyone, and what feels traumatic to one person might not feel the same to another.



If you feel comfortable, think about an experience in your life that you would describe as traumatic. How did it affect you? How did it change the way you felt about yourself, others, or the world around you?

Trauma isn't just about what happens—it's about how we experience it and how it affects us. Understanding our own experiences can help us build empathy and support others in their healing.

A Trauma-Informed Approach to Healing

At Les Femmes Michif Otipemisiwak (LFMO), our trauma-informed approach acknowledges that trauma is not just an individual experience—it has lasting effects on families, communities, and generations. This includes:

- The ongoing impacts of colonization and systemic oppression.
- Lateral violence and internalized harm within communities.
- Intergenerational trauma passed down through families and social structures.

By recognizing the deep and complex impacts of trauma, service providers can help create safer, more compassionate spaces that support healing, resilience, and empowerment for Métis women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse individuals.

TRAUMA RESPONSES AND IMPACTS ON THE BODY

Understanding Trauma Responses and Supporting Healing

As service providers working with Métis women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse individuals, it is essential to understand how trauma affects the body and mind. Trauma can feel overwhelming—whether it is experienced directly or witnessed in others. When someone encounters a traumatic event, their body automatically switches into survival mode to protect them.



The Body's Natural Trauma Response

The survival response is controlled by the part of the brain that manages basic life functions like breathing, heart rate, vision, and movement. These responses happen instantly and automatically—they are not conscious decisions. Understanding these natural reactions can help service providers respond with patience, empathy, and trauma-informed care when working with survivors.

HOW THE BODY REACTS TO TRAUMA

When faced with a threat, the body automatically makes changes to prepare for survival. These physiological responses can include:

- **Brain** – Lowers the body's pain sensitivity to keep going.
- **Eyes** – Pupils dilate to enhance vision.
- **Lungs** – Increase oxygen intake to supply extra energy.
- **Liver** – Releases stored sugar for quick energy.
- **Heart** – Beats faster to pump oxygen and sugar to muscles.
- **Adrenal glands** – Release adrenaline to boost reaction time.
- **Spleen** – Sends extra red blood cells to increase oxygen flow.
- **Intestines** – Digestion slows down to redirect energy.
- **Body hair** – Stands up (like goosebumps) as part of a primal defense mechanism.

These automatic responses help individuals fight, flight, or freeze when in danger. Even if someone does not consciously recognize the threat, their body is working to protect them.

How the Body Returns to Balance

Once the immediate danger has passed, the body begins working to restore equilibrium. This process includes:

- **Brain** – The hippocampus (responsible for memory and learning) helps process the event.
- **Immune System** – Temporarily slows infection-fighting to conserve energy.
- **Liver** – Converts stored fat into energy for recovery.
- **Adrenal glands** – Release cortisol, a hormone that helps regulate metabolism and immunity. However, if cortisol levels remain too high for too long, it can negatively impact overall health.

The Impact of Ongoing Trauma on the Body and Mind

When the body is in constant survival mode, it can begin to wear down, affecting the nervous system, immune system, brain, and heart. It's similar to keeping a car's gas pedal pressed down for too long—eventually, the system starts to break down.

- **Brain** – Prolonged high cortisol levels can damage brain cells, making it harder to focus, remember things, and regulate emotions. This can lead to fatigue, anger, anxiety, and depression.
- **Immune System** – Chronic stress weakens immune function, making the body more susceptible to illness and infection.
- **Digestive System** – Reduced blood flow can make the stomach lining more vulnerable to ulcers and other digestive issues.

- **Circulatory System** – Persistent high blood pressure and rapid heart rate can strain the heart and increase the risk of cardiovascular issues.

Supporting Survivors in Healing from Trauma

For those who have lived in chronic survival mode, the body and mind can become conditioned to feel unsafe—even when no immediate threat is present. As service providers, you can play a crucial role in helping survivors reconnect with safety and stability.

Key Trauma-Informed Strategies Include:

- **Recognizing real threats vs. perceived threats** – Helping individuals understand when they are truly in danger versus when past trauma is influencing their response.
- **Creating safety every day** – Encouraging practices that promote security in relationships, environments, and routines.
- **Practicing grounding, self-soothing, and relaxation** – Teaching simple techniques that help regulate the nervous system and promote daily calm and balance.

By incorporating trauma-informed, culturally grounded approaches, service providers can help Métis women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse individuals reclaim a sense of safety, healing, and empowerment.

HARDWIRED TRAUMA RESPONSES: FIGHT, FLIGHT, FREEZE

The most common trauma responses that we understand are fight, flight, or freeze. These survival responses have been hardwired into human beings in order to help us to survive danger. We have very little control when we are activated into a trauma response, and our nervous system takes over.

Fight

Fight response may look like or feel like:

- Crying
- Hands in fists, desire to punch, rip
- Flexed/tight jaw, grinding teeth, snarl
- Fight in eyes, glaring, fight in voice
- Desire to stomp, kick, smash with legs, feet
- Feelings of anger/rage
- Homicidal/suicidal feelings
- Knotted stomach/nausea, burning stomach
- Metaphors like bombs, volcanoes erupting

Understanding the Fight Trauma Response

When someone is in a fight response, they might:

- Sound aggressive or argumentative during conversations.
- Take offense easily or start conflicts, even over small things.
- Use strong words and body language that seem intense.



Sometimes, people in fight mode may be seen as “too aggressive,” but their reactions are often a way of protecting themselves. Underneath the anger, there may be deep pain, fear, or past hurt that hasn’t been processed in a safe way.

When Fight and Flight Responses Mix

If a person has experienced repeated trauma, they might also switch into a flight response—wanting to escape or let go of built-up pain but not knowing how. When someone has held in their emotions for a long time without a safe way to express them, their anger or frustration can come out suddenly. This can look like hostility, but it often comes from years of unspoken pain.

Instead of seeing someone as just “angry” or “too aggressive,” it helps to recognize their reaction as a survival response. With support, understanding, and safe spaces, people can learn healthier ways to release their emotions and heal.

REFLECTION

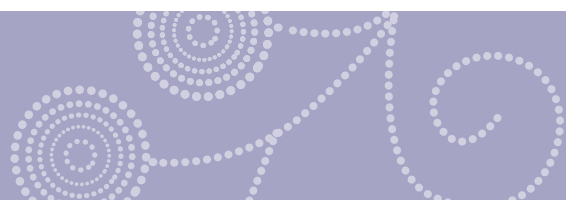
In regard to this ‘fight’ trauma response, can you relate to these occurrences? For instance, have you ever been in a situation where you were distressed and were forced to act out unreasonably because you were unable to safely confront your emotions?

Flight

Flight response may look like or feel like:

- Restless legs, feet /numbness in legs
- Anxiety/shallow breathing
- Big/darting eyes
- Leg/foot movement
- Reported or observed fidgety-ness, restlessness, feeling trapped, tense
- Sense of running in life- one activity-next
- Excessive exercise

People in flight trauma response may be observed leaving gatherings or meetings early, and also may have a hard time speaking up, staying in the room or maintaining eye contact. You might conclude that the person is not interested or does not want to participate, but they may be in full flight response.



REFLECTION

In regard to this 'flight' trauma response, can you relate to these occurrences? For instance, have you ever been in a situation where you were distressed and were unable to safely confront your emotions?

Freeze

Freeze response may look like or feel like:

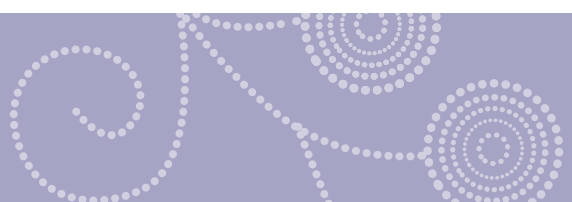
- Feeling stuck in some part of body
- Feeling cold/frozen, numb, pale skin
- Sense of stiffness, heaviness
- Holding breath/restricted breathing
- Sense of dread, heart pounding
- Decreased heart rate (can sometimes increase)
- Dissociation

A person in freeze trauma response may:

- seem forgetful
- unable to meet commitments
- sometimes neglectful of self or others
- have a hard time leaving their house
- seem to not be paying attention

This behavior may be interpreted as unmotivated or lacking interest.

Not being able to speak up about what one is going through, having that fear of rejection/humiliation, and/or not being given the opportunity to access effective resources, a person is likely to remain stuck within their emotions and thoughts (about the traumatic event). If the individual does not deal with the trauma in a healthy way, they may have a greater burden that only creates more harm and will affect their ability to work individually and collectively.



REFLECTION

Following this 'freeze' traumatic response, have you experienced relatable/similar occurrences in feeling trapped internally and, has it affected your ability to work productively as an individual?

Impacts of Trauma

Trauma affects each person differently, and its impacts can be seen across physical, emotional, behavioral, cognitive, and spiritual well-being. As service providers working with Métis women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse individuals, understanding these diverse responses can help create compassionate, trauma-informed support systems that acknowledge the unique experiences of each survivor.

The effects of trauma may manifest in one or multiple areas of a person's life. Some impacts that survivors of trauma, violence, or abuse may experience include:

Physical Impacts

- eating disturbances (more or less than usual)
- sleep disturbances (more or less than usual)
- pain in areas on the body that may have been involved in the traumatic experience
- low energy
- chronic unexplained pain
- headaches
- anxiety/panic

Emotional Impacts

- depression, spontaneous crying, despair and hopelessness
- anxiety
- extreme vulnerability
- panic attacks
- fearfulness

- compulsive and obsessive behaviors
- feeling out of control
- irritability, anger and resentment
- emotional numbness
- frightening thoughts
- difficulties in relationships

Behavioral Impacts

- self-harm such as cutting
- substance abuse
- alcohol abuse
- gambling
- self-destructive behaviors
- isolation
- choosing friends that may be unhealthy
- suicide attempts

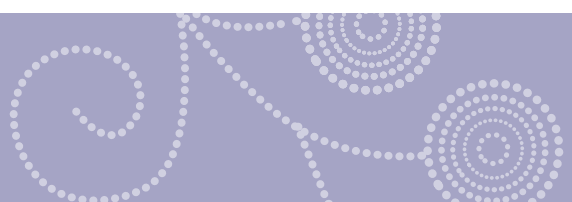
Cognitive Impacts

- memory lapses, especially about the trauma
- loss of time
- being flooded and overwhelmed with memories of the trauma
- difficulty making decisions
- decreased ability to concentrate
- feeling distracted
- withdrawal from normal routine
- thoughts of suicide

Spiritual Impacts

- guilt
- shame
- self-blame and/or self-hatred
- feeling damaged
- feeling like a “bad” person
- questioning the presence of God
- questioning one’s purpose
- sense of foreshortened future
- thoughts of being evil
- turning away from faith/religion or obsessively attending gatherings of faith/religious services and praying

We need to keep in mind that an individual who has been exposed to trauma or a traumatic event will continue to suffer from these impacts (weeks, months, years, decades), until the root causes of their trauma is addressed and until they receive the essential resources and services that will help them get back up and start their journey of healing.



REFLECTION

Trauma can affect people in many different ways. How would you describe what you're going through?

Do you relate to a specific impact, or have your experiences affected you in multiple ways?

Can a person experience deep impacts only from serious, life-threatening trauma, or can less severe experiences also bring up trauma responses?

Everyone's journey is different, and recognizing how trauma has shaped your experiences is a step toward healing.

Taking Care of Our Bodies With Water, Rest, and Food

Trauma can be hard on the body and nervous system because of the stress it creates. When we feel stress or danger, our body releases hormones like cortisol and adrenaline to help us react. One simple way to help the body flush out stress hormones is to drink water. Carrying a water bottle and staying hydrated is an easy way to support healing.

Sleep – Many people who have experienced trauma struggle with sleep issues like nightmares, insomnia, or oversleeping. If sleep is a challenge, it's helpful to talk to a doctor or health professional. There are also many ways to support better sleep, such as relaxation exercises, calming music, aromatherapy, prayer, or gentle movement during the day. Finding what works for you can help improve sleep and overall well-being.

Food – You may have heard the saying "HALT" (Hungry, Angry, Lonely, Tired). Hunger is first on the list for a reason—eating regularly is important for emotional and physical health. After trauma, some people lose their appetite, while others overeat for comfort. Having a balanced approach to food can help keep the nervous system strong and support healing.



Healthy Touch – Safe and caring touch can calm the nervous system and help with healing. A 30-second hug from a trusted friend, partner, or family member can help the body feel safe and supported. Spending time with a pet—holding, playing, or cuddling—also provides comfort and connection.

REFLECTION



MENTAL HEALTH CARE AND PROGRAMMING SUPPORTS

As a service provider, you play a critical role in ensuring that Métis women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse individuals who have experienced gender-based violence (GBV) have access to trauma-informed, culturally safe support. Healing is a deeply personal journey, and the services you provide can empower survivors, strengthen resilience, and foster long-term well-being.

PATHWAYS TO HEALING AND SUPPORT

Survivors may seek support in a variety of ways. As a service provider, you can help connect them to the following trauma-informed and culturally relevant resources:

- Counseling with a trauma-informed professional trained in gender-based violence.
- Support from a social worker or advocate who understands the unique challenges Métis survivors face.
- Healing circles with Elders, Knowledge Keepers, or counselors that offer culturally grounded spaces for sharing and healing.
- Mental health and wellness programs designed specifically to address trauma recovery, violence prevention, and empowerment.

Your role includes not only offering support directly but also helping survivors navigate systems to find the right resources.

WHAT MAKES SUPPORT TRULY TRAUMA-INFORMED?

To provide meaningful, survivor-centered care, service providers should integrate the following trauma-informed and culturally safe principles:

Knowledge of trauma and its effects

- Understand the complex impacts of gender-based violence, trauma, and intergenerational trauma.
- Recognize how trauma affects survivors physically, emotionally, cognitively, and behaviorally.
- Use trauma-informed approaches that prioritize safety, choice, and empowerment.

Cultural safety and understanding of Métis identity and experiences

- Acknowledge the historical and ongoing impacts of colonization on Métis women, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse people.
- Integrate Métis cultural strengths and healing practices into support services.
- Respect survivors' individual and collective identities, traditions, and lived experiences.

A relational approach to healing

- Recognize that healing does not happen in isolation—relationships, families, and communities are vital in the recovery process.

- Support survivors in rebuilding trust, fostering connections, and strengthening support networks.
- Engage Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and community leaders as part of holistic healing.

A belief in recovery and healing

- Approach your work with the understanding that resilience, growth, and recovery are always possible.
- Encourage survivors to see their strengths and autonomy rather than defining them by their trauma.
- Foster hope by creating safe, empowering, and survivor-led spaces.

YOUR ROLE IN SUPPORTING SURVIVORS

Accessing support is a powerful and courageous step for survivors of gender-based violence. As a service provider, you have the opportunity to create trauma-informed, culturally responsive environments where Métis women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse individuals feel safe, heard, and respected.

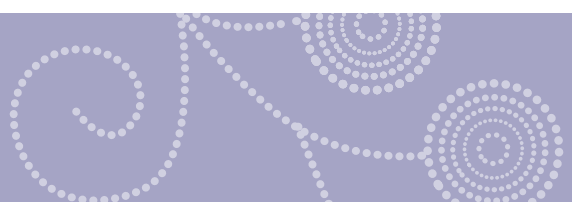
By integrating compassion, cultural humility, and trauma-informed care into your practice, you help ensure that survivors receive the support they need to heal, reclaim their power, and thrive.

REFLECTION

What formal and informal supports for health, healing and recovery facilitate your Mental Wellness?

What formal and informal supports for health, healing and recovery facilitate your Emotional Wellness?

What formal and informal supports for health, healing and recovery facilitate your Spiritual and Cultural Wellness?



What formal and informal supports for health, healing and recovery facilitate your Physical Wellness?

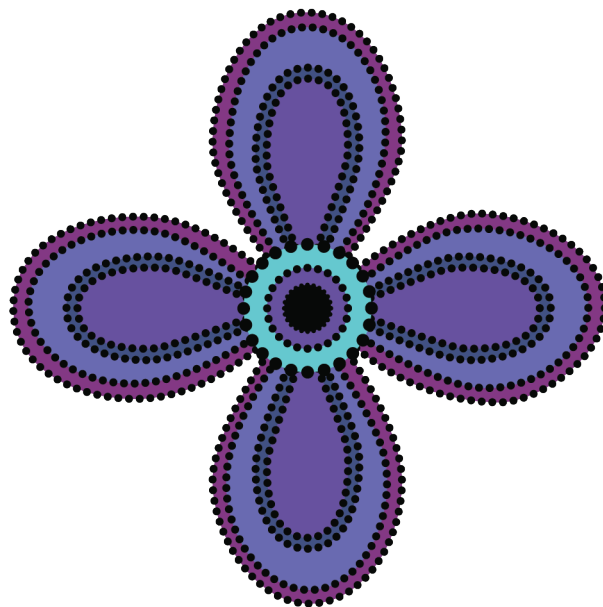
What formal and informal supports for health, healing and recovery facilitate your Personal and Relational Wellness?

SUMMARY AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

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 and principles of Wâhkôtowin and Lateral Kindness, an antidote to Lateral Violence. Being trauma informed encourages us to be compassionate, empathetic and kind in the work we do with each other.

The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step. Ensure you congratulate and celebrate those you are supporting, their loved ones and their community for stepping into a profound and transformative journey of health, healing and recovery! They are worth it! They deserve it!



APPENDIX A

Recommended Reading

The Body Keeps the Score by Bessel van der Kolk MD

If you want to have a good understanding of what trauma is and the solutions that are available to help you cope and heal from trauma, this is the book for you. In the book, the author explores several methods for healing trauma including yoga, EDMR (Eye movement desensitization and reprocessing), and neurofeedback.

Waking the Tiger by Peter Levine

The premise of this book is that trauma is physiological. Talk therapies can help you understand your trauma but it doesn't necessarily help you heal your symptoms of trauma or PTSD. Written by the creator of Somatic Experiencing, this book addresses the essential role that our body plays in trauma. By working with your body and self-regulating your bodily sensations, you bypass your thoughts and emotions process. It helps you to work around details of the past that you rather not repeat or talk about. The author uses analogies from myths and draws references from animals to help you understand your body's capabilities to heal itself.

Trauma and Recovery by Judith Herman

Traumatic experiences can permanently scar you. It can destroy your sense of self and affect your ability to respond to threats and feel your emotions. This book explores the various types of trauma from child abuse to rape, domestic violence to war, in great details. It also explores the effects on trauma survivors and explains the three stages of recovery — safety, remembrance and mourning, and reconnection.

Healing from Trauma by Jasmin Lee Cori

Hearing and reading about other people's trauma might be unsettling and triggering for you. If this is so, this book is suitable for you. This book is neither too technical nor contains too many anecdotes. The author writes in a way that you will find it easy to understand. There is also no detailed account of traumatic events in this book that will trigger your own trauma and memories. This book gives you a wide perspective and tools so that you can choose the best approach for yourself. For example, it discusses how to choose the right therapist or helper for you. It also includes spiritual challenges and opportunities that come with trauma.

Trauma Stewardship by Laura van Dernoot Lipsky and Connie Burk

Are you working as a helping profession such as a social worker, a nurse, or a counselor? Or do you have to care for an elderly parent or a young child? If so, this book is for you. This book is about secondary trauma, also known as compassion fatigue. A constant exposure to other people's trauma can overwhelm and cause you to experience the same symptoms as the traumatized survivors. In this book, the authors explore how the stress of dealing with trauma can cause "helpers" to feel hopelessness, burnout, chronic exhaustion, and how to care for yourself.



It Didn't Start with You by Mark Wolynn

What if your trauma isn't caused by your life experiences? What if it's inherited?

If you couldn't find the cause of your suffering, perhaps you want to examine your family history. Traumatic experiences can be passed down through generations. The author suggests that some of us might have inherited our trauma from our parents. Children can be born with fear and feelings that don't always belong to them. The author wrote this book so that we can break the cycle and not pass our trauma to our descendants.

APPENDIX B

Resources for Further Learning and Support

Relevant Reports and Resources

Women of the Métis Nation / Les Femmes Michif Otipemisiwak Publications WMN/LFMO has published several relevant reports and resources which are available for download at: <https://metiswomen.org/all-resources/>

Women of the Métis Nation Perspectives

The 5th National Indigenous Women's Summit Empowering Indigenous Women Now and Into the Future

Métis Perspectives of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and LGBTQ2S+ People

A report addressing the landscape of missing and murdered Métis women, girls (MMIWG) and gender diverse people in Canada.

Métis-Specific Gender-Based Analysis (Gba+) Tool

Gender-Based Analysis is an analytical, systematic process used to review the impacts and experiences of a program, policy or initiative for a wide variety of people. This GBA+ Toolkit is built upon the Government of Canada's GBA process to include a Métis-specific approach.

Recognition and Implementation of Rights Framework

The purpose of this paper is to provide the views of the Women of the Métis Nation in response to Canada's Recognition and Implementation of Rights Framework. It is a policy document which can inform current and future processes that would promote the empowerment of Métis women.

Anti-Racism Policy Paper

Despite progress and the many contributions of Métis women, Métis women, girls and gender-diverse people continue to experience a unique form of racism due to their distinct historical contexts and the ongoing systemic discrimination perpetuated by Canadian governmental policies and practices.

Forced and Coerced Sterilization Policy Paper

A policy paper examining instances of forced sterilization of Métis women across the Homeland.

Education Policy Paper

According to the 2001 Aboriginal People's Survey, 48% of Aboriginal people aged 20 to 24 not living on reserve had not completed their secondary school education. Less than half (43.9%) of Métis youth between 15 and 24 years of age completed high school or education at a higher level.

Violence Against Métis Women Policy Paper

Métis women experience gender-based violence, something that a great number of Métis women experience repeatedly throughout their lives. Métis women experience many forms of violence but the result remains the same – Métis women often are unable to address the social issues that create the causes of their victimization.

Health Policy Paper

The Women of the Métis Nation have hosted a variety of regional meetings across the homeland and several national gatherings. One thing is clear: Métis women identify health as a key priority.

Traditional Knowledge Policy Paper

Métis women have always played important roles in society. In the largely egalitarian community, women were for the most part equal partners in the development of their communities politically, socially and economically.

What We Heard

A report of the Métis Nation's engagement with Métis Sixties Scoop Survivors.

Strengthening Métis Women's Entrepreneurship

This study brings together five pieces of research that together provide the most complete picture currently available of the business environment for Métis women entrepreneurs (MWEs in the five westernmost provinces of Canada.

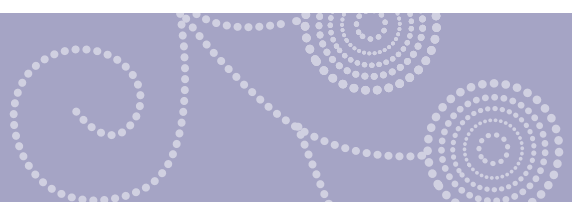
Les Femmes Michif Otipemisiwak - Women of the Métis Nation - Strategy 2013

The Métis are one of three distinct Aboriginal peoples in Canada recognized under the 1982 constitution. The Métis National Council [MNC] was developed in 1983 to be a representative voice of the interests of Métis people in Canada and abroad.

Supports for Front Line Services and Programming

Sexual Assault Support Worker Handbook, May 2016

This handbook has been developed to assist anti-violence workers to provide information and emotional and practical support to survivors of sexual assault. It will be of use to community based victim service workers, sexual assault support workers, Stopping the Violence Counsellors,



outreach workers, multicultural outreach workers, Band workers, immigrant and settlement workers, medical personnel, social workers, advocates, police-based victim service workers, and anyone a survivor may go to for help.

Source: Ending Violence Association of BC

<https://endingviolence.org/resources/sexual-assault-support-worker-handbook-may-2016/>

Handbook on Sensitive Practice for Health Care Practitioner: Lessons from Adult Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse

Published by the Public Health Agency of Canada, the handbook presents information designed to help health care practitioners' practice in a way that is sensitive to the needs of adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse and other types of interpersonal violence.

Source: Public Health Services Canada

<https://publications.gc.ca/site/eng/329301/publication.html>

Trauma Matters

Guidelines developed by the Jean Tweed Centre, in consultation with service providers, experts, and women with lived experience from across Ontario, to support organizations that provide substance use treatment services for women. Designed to aid in understanding the interconnections of trauma and substance use, and provide better care for substance-involved women who have experienced trauma.

<https://jeantweed.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Trauma-Matters-online-version-August-2013.pdf>

Beyond trauma: A healing journey for women (2006)

Manualized curriculum for women's services. Developed by Stephanie Covington for use in substance treatment centres, criminal justice system, mental health settings and domestic violence shelters. Additional curricula have been developed for girls and men.

Source: Stephanie Covington, PhD, LCSW Available for a fee at <https://www.stephaniecovington.com/books/bookstore/beyond-trauma-a-healing-journey-for-women-2nd-edition/>

Trauma Recovery and Empowerment Model (TREM)

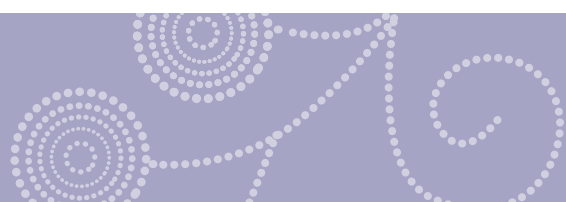
Offered by Community Connections in Washington DC, the TREM curriculum consists of 29 sessions focusing on empowerment, education about trauma, and building coping skills. There are versions for working with women, men, and youth.

Source: Community Connections

<https://communityconnectionsdc.org/trainings>

Sexual Assault Support Worker Handbook

This handbook was developed to assist anti-violence workers to provide information and emotional and practical support to survivors of sexual assault. It will be of use to community-based victim service workers, sexual assault support workers, Stopping the Violence Counsellors, outreach workers, multi-



cultural outreach workers, Band workers, immigrant and settlement workers, medical personnel, social workers, advocates, police-based victim service workers, and anyone a survivor may go to for help.

Source: Ending Violence Association of BC

<https://endingviolence.org/resources/sexual-assault-support-worker-handbook-may-2016/>

Women and Substance Use: Trauma-informed Online Tool (2011)

Virtual toolkit. Provides overview of key issues, themes in practice and policy, promising practices, and tensions. Provides links to recommended readings, curricula and training resources, and web resources for working with women and for understanding connections between substance use, mental health and trauma. Also includes strategies for developing trauma-informed practices and services.

Source: BC Centre for Excellence on Women's Health

<https://coalescing-vc.org/>

Bridging responses: A Front-Line Worker's Guide to Supporting Women Who Have Post-Traumatic Stress (2001)

Written for frontline workers working with women in a variety of service settings (e.g., police, shelters, health care). Provides information about responses women can have to trauma and how to recognize them. Includes guidelines on asking about trauma issues.

Source: Centre for Addiction and Mental Health

http://www.camh.net/Publications/Resources_for_Professionals/Bridging_responses/index.html

Helping Children and Youth Who Have Experienced Traumatic Events (2011)

Provides information on how systems of care and trauma-informed services can improve the lives of children and youth who have experienced traumatic events. Includes findings from a national evaluation of such programs and describes common treatment approaches.

Source: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (United States)

<https://library.samhsa.gov/product/helping-children-and-youth-who-have-experienced-traumatic-events/sma11-4642>

Trauma-Informed Practice Guide (2013)

Practitioners have identified the importance of recognizing the impact of trauma on people accessing MHSU services, and of responding effectively and compassionately at the practitioner level, organizational level, and through wider collaboration across systems and sectors. The literature underscores the continuing urgent need for services to address the impact of violence and trauma in an individual's life.

Source: Centre of Excellence for Women's Health

https://cewh.ca/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/2013_TIP-Guide.pdf



Trauma-informed Organizational Toolkit for Homeless Services (2009)

Provides practical ways for becoming trauma-informed. Includes organizational self-assessment and a manual for creating organizational change.

Source: National Centre on Family Homelessness (United States)

https://www.air.org/sites/default/files/downloads/report/Trauma-Informed_Organizational_Toolkit_0.pdf

Handbook on sensitive practice for health care practitioners: Lessons from adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse (2009)

Discusses childhood sexual abuse in the context of health care encounters. Identifies principles of trauma-informed practice and provides guidelines for health care services for trauma survivors. Based on extensive interviews with survivors and practitioners.

Source: National Clearinghouse on Family Violence (Public Health Agency of Canada) <https://publications.gc.ca/site/eng/329301/publication.html>

Trauma-informed Approaches in Addictions Treatment (2009)

A discussion guide to gendering the *National Framework for Action to Reduce the Harms Associated with Alcohol and Other Drugs and Substances in Canada*. Identifies Canadian examples of promising practices in action. Lists discussion questions on providing integrated approaches.

Source: Centre of Excellence for Women's Health

https://cewh.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/2010_GenderingNatFrameworkTraumaInformed.pdf

The Trauma Toolkit

This toolkit aims to provide knowledge to service providers working with adults who have experienced or been affected by trauma. It will also help service providers and organizations to work from a trauma-informed perspective and develop trauma-informed relationships that cultivate safety, trust and compassion.

Source: Manitoba Trauma Information and Education Centre

https://trauma-informed.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/trauma-informed_toolkit_v07-1.pdf

Understanding Links Between Adolescent Trauma and Substance Abuse: A Toolkit for Providers (2007)

Designed for both service providers and consumers. Discusses trauma and substance abuse, traumatic stress in adolescents, understanding substance abuse in adolescents, and engaging adolescents in treatment.

Source: National Child Traumatic Stress Network (United States) <https://www.nctsn.org/resources/understanding-links-between-adolescent-trauma-and-substance-abuse-toolkit-providers-2nd>



Responding to childhood trauma: the promise and practice of trauma informed care (2006)

Describes differential responses to trauma depending on the age of the child; risk and protective factors related to child maltreatment, magnitude of the problem; and subtle psychological effects of trauma on children. Also discusses key components of trauma-informed care, strengths-based approaches and resiliency, and programmatic approaches to trauma-informed care.

Source: National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors (United States)

www.childrescuebill.org/VictimsOfAbuse/RespondingHodas.pdf

Seeking Safety: A Treatment Manual for PTSD and Substance Abuse (2002)

Website offers the book *Seeking Safety* as well as a wide variety of articles about treatment and implementation (primarily photocopies of journal articles). DVDs are also available for a fee.

Source: Seeking Safety (Lisa Najavits and Associates)

<https://www.indigo.ca/en-ca/seeking-safety-a-treatment-manual-for-ptsd-and-substance-abuse/9781572306394.html>

APPENDIX C

Website Resources

Canadian Métis Health Department Information and Links:

Métis Nation British Columbia Health Services

Métis Crisis Line 1-833-638-4722. For general health inquiries please email health@mnbc.ca

Métis Nation Alberta, Health Services Information line: 1-800-252-7553

<https://albertametis.com/>

Métis Nation Saskatchewan Health Web Link: <https://metisnationsk.com/health/>

Telephone: (306)-343-8285 or (toll free) 1-833-343-8285

Manitoba Métis Federation Weblink to Health and Wellness Department:

<https://www.mmf.mb.ca/health-wellness>

Manitoba Métis Child and Family Services Web Listing of resources: <https://www.Métiscfs.mb.ca/links.php>

Manitoba Emergency Health Contact - All Nations Coordinated Response Network

Telephone: 204-944-4200 Toll Free: 1-866-345-9241

Métis Nation Ontario Healing and Wellness Branch: 1-800-263-4889.

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



Aboriginal Healing Foundation

An organization dedicated to encouraging and supporting, community-based Aboriginal directed healing initiatives which address the legacy of physical and sexual abuse suffered in Canada's Indian Residential School System, including inter-generational impacts.

<http://www.ahf.ca/>

British Columbia Centre of Excellence for Women's Health (BCCEWH)

The BCCEWH offers a range of information and resources on women's health issues, including substance use, mental health, and trauma-informed approaches through the Coalescing on Women and Substance Use website.

www.coalescing-vc.org

Building Bridges

A cross-sectoral initiative to support women experiencing violence, MHSU issues, led by the Woman Abuse Response Program at BC Women's Hospital and Health Centre Vancouver, BC.

www.bcwomens.ca/Services/HealthServices/WomanAbuseResponse/Building+Bridges.htm

CAST Canada

CAST Canada helps professionals and corporations better understand the role of trauma and unresolved grief in addictions, homelessness, chronic unemployment, and other concerns through workshops, training and keynote speaking throughout Ontario and across Canada.

www.cast-canada.ca/

Centre for Addictions and Mental Health (CAMH)

This knowledge exchange section on the CAMH website offers information for MHSU specialists. There are numerous links to trauma-related issues, as well as culturally sensitive approaches. <https://www.camh.ca/>

Homeless Hub of Canada

A site with extensive links to articles and resources related to connections between trauma, substance use, mental health and homelessness.

www.homelesshub.ca/

Kelty Mental Health Resource Centre

A child and youth focused resource for practitioners, parents, and caregivers and school-based professionals on MHSU related topics, including links to trauma specific information.

www.keltymentalhealth.ca



Website Resources – US and International

Community Connections

A treatment and training agency focusing on trauma-informed and trauma-specific approaches for working with those seeking MHSU services.

www.communityconnectionsdc.org/

National Centre on Family Homelessness

This site offers a number of articles and toolkits to help organizations become trauma-informed. <https://www.facebook.com/people/The-National-Center-on-Family-Homelessness/100080115726327/>

SAMHSA's National Center for Trauma-Informed Care

A comprehensive website that provides information on trauma-informed practices and implementation.

<https://www.samhsa.gov/>

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LGBTQ2S+ People. A report addressing the landscape of missing and murdered Métis women,
girls (MMIWG) and gender diverse people in Canada. Ottawa, ON: WMN/LFMO.



NOTES

This image shows a single page from a notebook or ledger. It features approximately 20 horizontal ruling lines spaced evenly down the page. The lines are thin and light gray. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the page.

