

**Gentle Action Theory in parallel with
Traditional
Ways of Knowing and Being to bring
Hope and Healing to survivors of sex
trafficking.**

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Gentle Action Theory

- ▶ *Gentle action* is an approach that begins from within a system where new forms of gentle action are developed to address societal issues in creative ways prior to taking action (Peat, 2008). It is an approach that begins with an initial “creative suspension” of action. Gentle action is unlike the typical Western idea that one must do something and that it must be done right now. Instead Gentle Action allows for dialogue and time for creativity in pondering solutions and designing activities.

F. David Peat termed his theory of gentle action upon his belief that solutions to societal issues, when done in a gentle way, result in forming different kinds of actions. These actions come from within systems as opposed to outside forces. He calls for a process that begins with “creative suspension,” where we pause, listen, and learn about the system and most importantly; those affected by the system. Instead of seeking control, gentle action seeks harmony by listening and learning about the people, society, and issues instead of exerting power and control over a situation. Gentle action seeks to guide and act in a sensitive manner (Peat, 2008).

A core objective of gentle action is to develop a perception that is as clear as possible about a given situation for those involved and those called upon to assist be it directly or indirectly. It is imperative that we acknowledge that we all bring our own perceptions and prejudices to every situation we encounter, which are based on our own experiences and belief systems. The more we are aware of our own context, the more we are present and able to process information about the situation and the community needs. A basis of action can be generated that is flexible, sensitive, and creative, resulting in appropriate and harmonious action

When interacting with someone who is the victim of sexual assault and/or trafficking, we need to first recognize our own perceived viewpoints. For example, author, Sherry Hamby writes quoting from a research paper, “Even in the 21st century, victim blaming is alive and well in Indian country. Just last year, an Indian Health Service (IHS) physician published a paper in which she recommended that victims be lumped into categories such as “unintentional game players” and “intentional game players.” She recommended these harsh labels “to shed light on the experience of domestic violence in many American Indian communities” (MacEachen, 2003, p. 126). Even more amazingly, MacEachen (2003) suggested that women with a history of child sexual abuse often “provoke rape and battery in order to satisfy [their] needs ...” (p. 127).

What disturbing beliefs might we hold about those who are victims who are sexual assault and/or trafficking?

- Are they predestined because of their childhood experiences?
- Does their “lifestyle” play a role?
- Do we hear comments like “Well, you know their family – it’s not surprising..”?
- They were asking for it.
- It’s a choice they are making.
- She or he or “they” doesn’t have to agree to be a victim.
- They can always find a way to escape,

“Any advocate, scholar, or provider who has not recently re-assessed what they are doing and why they are doing it is not performing best practices.” Hamby 2014. I think that of the same importance and perhaps of the most importance is that we access, how we are doing it.

Employing Gentle Action Theory as a method of approach includes along with other tenets:

- Self-Awareness
- Respect for those being served
- Time for establishing trust
- Building of relationship
- Active listening
- Validation of their experience
- Being trustworthy

Trust is essential in employing Gentle Action

Theory, as all people involved must be trustworthy and truthful in order for the community members to bring their best abilities to the project. Creative action built on trust can change the social fabric of a community in need (Peat, 2008).

Comparison to Traditional Ways

By contrast to Western ways of responding to a societal issue; traditional ways of knowing and being seek harmony in all living things and time and space is created for the process versus rushing in with the potential to do more harm than good. As a collectivist culture, Gentle Action Theory connects well with our Native American cultural values of interconnectedness and inclusiveness as it respects processes and relationships while seeking solutions.

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- It is based on teachings and experiences passed on from generation to generation.
- Knowing the place and the relationships between things animate and inanimate.
- It is holistic. It cannot be compartmentalized. It is rooted in the spirit, culture, and language of the people.
- Traditional knowledge is a system of authority.
- Traditional knowledge is a way of life.

- Family, Elders, community, and the spirit world transmit knowledge.
- Stories, songs, ceremonies, and modeling are examples of how to transmit knowledge and are reciprocal between the learner and the teacher.

Telling Their Story

Victims are forced to tell their story to, many people, a myriad of systems and institutions in a time frame of those wanting to hear their story. There is not allowance for the victims' emotion, physical, and spiritual needs. We need to change that!

Creating An Atmosphere of Healing: Drawing on Traditional Ways of Knowing and Being

- The victim belongs in the circle
- The victim has a voice
- The victim deserves healing
- The victim can state their needs
- The victim can set boundaries of where, when, and how they tell their story
- The circle needs to encompass the victim
- The circle doesn't have a dismantle date

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