

CULTURAL CARE FOR NAVIGATING CRISIS & GRIEF

Why Cultural Care Matters

For Native families impacted by domestic violence (DV), sexual violence (SV), human trafficking (HT), and Missing and Murdered Indigenous People (MMIP), cultural care is not an add-on. It is a protective factor, a source of strength, and a path to healing and justice. When crisis response respects Indigenous ceremony, traditional knowledge, and survivor voice, it prevents re-wounding and restores dignity.

NATIVE-LED PRACTICES: BUILDING FROM STRENGTH

Cultural care practices and standard operating procedures (SOPs) must be developed and led by Native peoples and survivors themselves. Allies and agencies can support, but not define, these practices.

FAMILY & SURVIVOR VOICE

*Survivors and families
decide what care
looks like for them.*



NATIVE KNOWLEDGE KEEPERS LEAD

*Elders, cultural
practitioners, and local
knowledge keepers guide
protocols, ceremony, and
healing pathways.*



HEALING- INFORMED CHOICES

*Responses prioritize
consent, choice, and
unconditional care.*



SYSTEM ALIGNMENT

*Agencies and Law
Enforcement revise their
SOPs to respect and honor
Native-led practices, not
replace them.*



Native-Led Resource Example: Thunderbird Partnership Foundation

First Nations Mental Wellness Continuum Framework Toolkit

- Provides community-driven approaches to mental wellness, grief, and crisis response
- Emphasizes culture as the foundation of healing: ceremony, land, language, and traditional practices
- Offers tools for agencies & communities to develop their own SOPs, guided by elders and knowledge keepers

➤ Example practices include:

- Grief circles facilitated by elders
- Culturally grounded aftercare plans following crisis
- Land-based healing protocols (fire, water, medicines)

Learn more: thunderbirdpf.org/resources/

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WHAT THIS LOOKS LIKE IN PRACTICE:

For Law Enforcement (LE)

- Partner with Native leaders, advocates, or liaisons when responding to crises.
- Ask families: 'Who from your community would you like with you right now?'
- Honor and respect ceremony (smudging, water, song) during notifications, searches, or vigils.
- Recognize DV/SA/HT histories as critical context – not “separate” issues.

For Advocates

- Co-create safety plans that honor cultural needs (elders, ceremonies, bundles).
- Provide both system navigation and cultural healing support.
- Ensure spaces where prayer, storytelling, and art are respected alongside advocacy.
- Debrief after hard cases through circles led by Native knowledge keepers.



Cultural care is not about being ‘allowed.’ It is about being honored. Our ways of being must be respected in every form of response – led by Native peoples, families, and survivors. This prevents the re-wounding of mind, body, and spirit.”

STRENGTHS IN ACTION

- **Family-Led Vigil:** Families lead water or fire ceremonies; LE and systems show respect through presence and support.
- **Elder-Guided Debriefing:** Advocates and partners sit in circle with an elder to process grief and sustain wellness.
- **Survivor Choice:** An advocate provides both shelter referral and a cultural bundle; the survivor chooses their healing path.

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