

Yéil Koowú Shaawát (Raven Tail Woman) Women's Group

# Facilitator's Guide

INTRODUCTION  
*A Curriculum for Native Women*

2022



Center for  
Native Child  
and Family Resilience



## Yéil Koowú Shaawát Women's Group

### **Tlingit and Haida's Community & Behavioral Services Healing Center – Our Values:**

We value treating the whole person (mind, body, spirit) and acknowledging deep connection to Tribal values, land and relationships with others including family, clan and Tribe while preserving our culture and way of life, known as "Haa Kusti" among the Tlingit and "Tlagw íitl' xíinangaa Gíidang" among the Haida.

### **Yéil Koowú Shaawát Vision of Success:**

Through generational healing, empower women and families to lead and live healthy lives, strengthen family bonds, and raise strong, resilient children, while embracing Tribal values and culture to create a new life experience for ourselves and future generations.

Central Council of the Tlingit & Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska  
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## About Raven Tail Woman: The Journey of the Curriculum Developer

When asked to write about myself and how Yéil Koowú Shaawát came to be . . .

My earliest roots begin in a conversation with a co-worker who said, "You don't want to be like me, a cocktail waitress at 30. Go to college." That was really the first time the word "college" had ever been used in reference to myself. This was not a word in my vocabulary; it had never been vocalized in my household while growing up. It was foreign to me, an unknown option. I had absolutely no idea what I wanted to do, what I could do. It had been four years since I'd graduated high school. When faced with an indecision, I'd pray about it. I remember closing all the curtains in my apartment. I did not want anyone looking or listening if they were passing by. I got on my knees and asked God what I should do. I could only think of what I wanted to be when I was a little girl growing up; so, I'm there on my knees recalling that I always dreamed of being a prima ballerina, but of course that was out of the question as I'd never had a ballet class in my life. My second childhood aspiration was becoming a nun, as I absolutely was in awe and loved the catholic nun's full headdress and robe. I'd always wanted to be a nun, but if I was being honest with myself, it felt too late for that. The last thought that entered my head while I was praying was that I'd always wanted to work with children. No sooner had that thought come into my head when I heard a voice as if someone was in the other room saying a definitive "YES". I remember opening my eyes and feeling very nervous and embarrassed because I thought someone had walked across my window and shouted out at me, and I remember thinking, "Who had overheard my conversation?" Looking back that seems funny now. It was the first message that my journey had begun. This is me at 22, not having a clue, just taking one step at a time. One foot in front of the other it began, a journey that at the time I didn't realize would lead to the creation of Yéil Koowú Shaawát over 40 years later.

One of those early college classes that set the trajectory of my journey was an elective titled, Abnormal Child Development.

I thought it would be easier to know what "normal" was by recognizing what normal wasn't. It's that defining moment when you realize that the abnormal or dysfunctional behaviors and dynamics of family systems defined in your college textbook are describing the story of your own childhood, and you're realizing in that moment that what happened to you and your siblings was not the way children are reared in healthy, functioning families. I'm sure I'm not alone here. I've since spoken to and worked with hundreds of individuals who can recall the first time they realized that what happened in their family wasn't normal either.

Fast forward a decade, following one failed marriage with an alcoholic, cheating, abusive husband, because even if you know better, patterns have already been established. I had discovered that if you grow up in an alcoholic family, one of two things are going to happen: either you're going to grow up and become an alcoholic, or you're going to grow up and marry one. In my case it was the latter. This theory develops not solely from my own personal experience but from observing and working with numerous clients who have experienced these same events. In fact, I can count on only one hand those women who grew up in an alcoholic home but did not become a problem drinker nor did they marry one; all of them became workaholics. I was told that graduate school was going to kick my butt and I did not believe it. I thought I'd already gone through enough, knew enough; what I learned was that I knew how to look good and whole on the outside. While attending grad school, I also began working for United Indians of All Tribes Foundation with the Ina Maka Program (Lakota word for Mother Earth) in Seattle. What I discovered while working at Ina Maka from my instructors and Native Elders was the power of ceremony in healing wounded souls. The facade I was so tightly maintaining was crumbling from the inside out. Thank goodness for my mentors and teachers at Ina Maka because they recognized my disguise and slowly, painfully, so painfully, I began to disassemble the pretense that I was healthy, that I was healed.

Ceremony is critical—it's the reckoning that you do with yourself when you acknowledge and accept what happened to you, how it affected you, and how it contributed to your choices and decisions. I am Yaqui Indian. Yaqui are an Indigenous people of Mexico. Working at Ina Maka enabled me to embrace my Native origins as well as learn many ways of healing from the diversity of Tribal citizens who worked at and received services from Ina Maka and United Indians of All Tribes. As I was preparing to return to Juneau, Alaska, where I'd been living for four years, in my second marriage with my third child on the way, the Director and two of my mentors at Ina Maka advised me not to charge or push my way into the Indigenous Tribes of Southeast but rather to volunteer. They said, "Let them get to know you. Let them look at you." I had learned to facilitate Talking Circles and psychoeducational groups. I had begun to learn the ways of the sweat lodge, was integrating what I'd learned in graduate school and at Ina Maka, and had developed the beginnings of a curriculum that focused on support and using Native American spiritual healing practices, blending western psychology with traditional ways of healing. So much of what Roxanne Phinney, Arlene Red Elk, Dan Brewer, and Jack Spotted Eagle were doing at Ina Maka was innovative, original, and ahead of its time. I had the basics of a group curriculum and then the Director of Tribal Family & Youth Services at Central Council Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska, Francine Eddy-Jones, took a chance and brought me on in a very part time capacity to provide what is now known as Yéil Koowú Shaawát, Raven Tail Woman, affectionately referred to as the women's group.

I am the one who has learned so much from providing this curriculum to the women I've had the honor to serve. The group's origins begin in 2001, in the Little Brown House that the Tlingit and Haida Tribe had purchased from a locally known Native family, located near the Tribe's main headquarters, in what was known as the winter village of the Auke Quan. I remember a woman telling me that I really needed to add the word "communication" into the title because we spend a lot of time discussing and learning about communication. I think my willingness to be vulnerable, transparent, and brutally honest has a lot to do with other women deciding to do the same. Arlene Red Elk and others at Ina Maka taught me how to do this. I am

a very private person. I would tell the women in the group; they would come to know more about me than my co-workers, my colleagues, my boss, and even my family. I was sharing my truth, not processing my stuff but sharing my stories of adversity, of childhood trauma, violence, and re-victimization. I told them there wasn't a man I'd met that I wasn't afraid of or I didn't trust.

Confidentiality is crucial—I think this has much to do with the success of this program and is still a critical hallmark of a successful group. People won't open-up if they don't feel safe and they won't share if it's not safe. Trust builds safety, and safety allows us to open our hearts and talk about what happened back there, back then, that place that is hard to go back to and talk about but so necessary to our healing. I learned by listening and watching; healing is messy work—there is nothing easy or neat about it. It's crying, sometimes sobbing. Your nose is stuffed and running. You're hiccupping from crying and talking. It's messy hard work to heal. It's no wonder people run the opposite direction and avoid the work it takes. I still remember the first woman who asked if she could help me by making copies or getting things ready for the group. I remember deciding that if women who had completed the group wanted to help me with it, learn to co-facilitate this group with me, they would need to do two consecutive years of all three phases and then I would be open to teaching them how to facilitate this group as a co-facilitator first. I still remember her; Bonita, she redid the handouts we use today when we work on Communication Styles in Lesson 6 of Phase I. Since then I've had probably a dozen women request to become co-facilitators. When I left Tlingit and Haida in 2015 there was a woman, Patricia Shuxun, who made sure this group kept going. She had become a co-facilitator and was volunteering. She was very instrumental in keeping the women's group going, coaching experienced employees with the content as they became the primary facilitators. She remained present and helped to maintain the integrity of the curriculum.

I believe we have it within us to heal our sick selves. There is this incredible healing power that comes when we collectively heal, when we witness one another's transformation. In the Tlingit and Haida culture, one of the Southeast Traditional Values is to "Hold Each Other Up." The Indigenous culture of the Tlingit and Haida was very sophisticated; there was

protocol and ways to deal with societal issues and bad behavior. Expectations and social relations were very intricate and complex. It was the same at Ina Maka. There were already things in place to nurture healing and rebalance. In 2001, I was adopted by the Raven, Dog Salmon clan, people of the Auke Quan. I had also come under the instruction of my mentor, Jeri Museth, who was teaching me ways of traditional healing. I had to learn about many things at this time, how to build a smoke house and a sweat lodge, smoke fish, learn clan songs and dances, and incorporate the Tribal values as necessary components of learning the culture. It's about learning the way to behave and conduct ourselves by using the values as the foundation, because the values of the Native peoples were the historic foundation from which society was built. The tragedy of the boarding school era did so much damage, caused so much devastation. It's the root cause of the traumas I see in the women I work with. Yet, we had not been understanding, recognizing, or connecting the intergenerational trauma in their families as it stems from colonization. We heal ourselves first; then we begin to heal those closest to us—our children, our families, our extended families, and eventually our community. For me it starts with the individual women who are in group. We hold each other up, treat each other with respect, and hold each other's stories in confidence. I've witnessed women come to love themselves, and embrace their culture, their cultural identity, the power of forgiving, and looking forward to the future with hope and resilience. When this project with the Center for Native Child and Family Resilience began, I still remember being asked, "What's your secret sauce, Amalia?" And I remember saying, that it's not me, it's them—it's the women doing the work. I am holding the space, the space that becomes sacred, the space they need to heal themselves.

The curriculum is the cumulative documentation of college classes in both my undergraduate, graduate, and continuing education; what really stood out to me were tools like the genograms and the power of identifying and acknowledging intergenerational trauma with this tool. I appreciate Virginia Satir's work on dysfunctional familial communication patterns. I learned traditional healing from my mentors and teachers at Ina Maka, from Don Coyhis, founder of White Bison and

Wellbriety. Jeri Museth, who deepened my understanding of the teaching of the Four-Directions and the Medicine Wheel, was my teacher and intercessor and took me through my vision quest and Sundance Ceremony. I've continued to learn from Elders and teachers in Southeast Alaska, like Kaaxkwhei Leona Santiago, about the Tlingit and Haida Tribal values and harvesting to make traditional medicines used for healing. I've learned about the southeast water ceremonies that build resilience and heal the spirit. We can take the best of both worlds, from the Western and Native. We can understand and make sense of what happened to us, when it happened, how it happened, and how to heal from what happened and in turn heal others.

*Amalia Monreal*

*X'aa aan Tlaa, Mother of the land in this area*

*Yeil Koowii Shaawát, Raven Tail Woman*



## Acknowledgements

This curriculum had its beginnings with the work of the Ina Maka program staff with United Indians of All Tribes Foundation. A member of that team, **Amalia Monreal**, developed, expanded, and solidified the model while working over many years to heal and empower Native and Indigenous women in support of the Central Council of the Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska, Tribal Family & Youth Services (TFYS). The curriculum is named for Ms. Monreal — Yéil Koowú Shaawát means “Raven Tail Woman.”

This facilitator’s guide was developed through the Native Women’s Counseling and Treatment Initiative, a project to formalize, pilot, evaluate, refine, and export an existing family-focused, trauma-informed, culturally based counseling/treatment model. A team led by TFYS counseling staff and working in partnership with the Center for Native Child and Family Resilience (CNCFR) documented the Yéil Koowú Shaawát curriculum, a model for a healing women’s group addressing the complex issues of domestic violence, abuse, and unresolved grief through the lens of historical, intergenerational, and related traumas impacting Native women in Southeast Alaska.

During the process of developing this facilitator’s guide, Ms. Monreal mentored her co-facilitators, **Mary Rivera** and **Patricia Diane Graham**, both of whom began as group participants and during their healing journey expressed the desire to help other women in their healing. Both women committed to two consecutive years of group participation prior to becoming facilitators. Patricia was a primary facilitator from 2015 to 2018. Ms. Rivera learned and refined her facilitation skills while supporting Ms. Monreal with the preparation of the facilitator guides. Both have returned as guest speakers to share the story of their journey with current participants.

**Jeanne Gamble** is an artist who became intrigued by the Tlingit people while living for many years in two Southeastern Alaska villages, Angoon and Yakutat. Her artistic style conveys the grace, strength, and pride of this culture. The curriculum developers would like to thank Ms. Gamble for permitting the use of her artwork in curriculum materials.

Tlingit Elder **Kaaxkwhei Leona Santiago** reflected on the power of kindness and empathy that group participants demonstrate with one another, seeing the group as a community, a village of women. We thank her for providing support for the project that formalized the curriculum and developed this facilitator guide.

### The Center for Native Child and Family Resilience

Sponsored by the Children’s Bureau, CNCFR gathers and disseminates information about Tribally relevant practice models, interventions, and services that contribute substantively to child maltreatment prevention efforts and family resilience developed by and for American Indian and Alaska Native populations. CNCFR provides technical assistance and capacity building services and support to organizations working in Indian Country to develop, adapt, or expand these programs. CNCFR is a partnership between JBS International, Inc., the Tribal Law and Policy Institute, Mathematica, and L&M Policy Research. The following CNCFR team members contributed to this guide:

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I am deeply honored to acknowledge my teachers and mentors whose lifework inspires me in my understanding of trauma and its impact on Native cultures. I believe in the saying: “When the student is ready, the teacher appears,” and my teachers have appeared and made such an impact in my life and work. I am grateful for their influence. I thank the Creator for **Jeri Museth, Don Coyhis, Francine Eddy Jones, Joan Poliak, Arlene Red Elk, Dan Brewer, Vera Manuel, Dr. Bruce Weeks**, and the many women and children I have had the honor of serving. I thank the Creator for bringing them into my life, for guiding me, teaching me, and inspiring me. I would especially like to show my gratitude for Patricia Diane Graham, who believed in the healing power of this curriculum. She encouraged me to never give up on believing in the power of this curriculum to heal women and save lives.

*X’aa aan P’laa / Yéil Koowú Shaawát / Amalia Monreal*

## Curriculum Summary

**Overview:** The Yéil Koowú Shaawát curriculum is delivered through a women's group that provides a culturally based approach, integrating Western therapies with traditional Native American spiritual healing practices and Southeast Traditional Tribal teachings and values based on "Our Way of Life." Group meetings make use of the Talking Circle, Medicine Wheel, smudging, dipping, sweat lodge, and various group exercises.

**Population Designed For:** The curriculum is designed to support Native women in their healing from past trauma. Many of the women who have participated in the group have had involvement with the child welfare system. The curriculum helps to support these women in dealing with their separation and loss.

**Program Setting:** Flexible. Group meetings can be held in person or through Web-based virtual meetings.

**Duration:** The group meets one weekday evening per week for three hours. The full curriculum consists of three 12-week phases, designed to be completed sequentially over one year. New participants may enter the group during the second phase, but it is advised that participants complete Phase II before entering Phase III. It is not uncommon for women to continue participating in the group after completing all three phases. There is typically an interval of two to three weeks between the completion of a phase and the start of the next.

**Cost to Purchase:** There is no fee to purchase the curriculum information.<sup>1</sup>

**Teacher Training or Certification Requirements:** There are no specific training or certification requirements for curriculum facilitators. Clinical experience and experience leading healing groups and Talking Circles will be valuable.

The curriculum uses an empowerment model that helps prepare new facilitators and group leaders. The relationship between facilitator and group participants is a helping relationship based upon collaboration, mutual respect, and the sharing of power in group sessions. If a participant completes all three phases for two consecutive years, she could, if interested, learn the skills of facilitation and become a co-facilitator and, eventually, a facilitator.

**Group Size:** 1–2 facilitators/group leaders guide meetings of 8–12 participants.

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<sup>1</sup> Amalia Monreal, LCSW, the author of the curriculum, offers her assistance to Tribes who are interested in implementation of the Yéil Koowú Shaawát curriculum.

## Reflections From Participants

The following statements were gathered during conversations with participants about their experiences with the curriculum. Participants reflected on how the curriculum has contributed to improvements in their lives:

*"I understand now how important resources are and how these classes have a positive impact on my sobriety. I especially like THIS group, Yéil Koowú Shaawát."*

*"The program changed my son's life—he's seen me change to new behavior. He's a child of the system. I was able to get my son back. What's the difference between a bad outcome and my life now? —I have hope, knowledge, and skills."*

*"It's intentional that we bring in culture. Culture is prevention. No doubt in my mind about that. People talk about what got them out of their rage is when they were brought back to their culture."*

*"I have really looked forward each week to attending class and seeing the women. This class has taught me so much over the past three years and it took a lot of work to get where I am now. I have learned ways to handle my own stress on day-to-day things, learning about someone else's anger, and how to approach them or notice the type of anger. I would recommend to anyone who has dealt with similar situations."*



## About the Yéil Koowú Shaawát Curriculum

The Yéil Koowú Shaawát curriculum was developed over the past two decades by Amalia Monreal, LCSW, supported by the Central Council of the Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska, Tribal Family & Youth Services. Originally known as the Native Women Counseling and Treatment Services Initiative, the curriculum was named for Ms. Monreal — Yéil Koowú Shaawát means “Raven Tail Woman.”

The curriculum model features three phases: **Phase I** addresses the building blocks of communication (including expression, discussion, and negotiation skills), conflict resolution, anger management, and problem-solving skills. **Phase II** focuses on family of origin issues and past/present relationships. **Phase III** uses a Sexual Abuse Talking Circle (SATC) and deals with post-traumatic stress disorder, dissociation, and historical and intergenerational trauma. Each phase provides participants with education and support around issues of childhood trauma, victimization and revictimization, and healing from these past traumas. The issues of alcoholism, addiction, and domestic violence are interwoven throughout the phases because they are pertinent intergenerational issues.

TFYS staff currently deliver the curriculum with the support and partnership of group alumni, who are knowledgeable about the cultural values of Southeast Tribes and possess in-depth understanding of Alaska Native families and life, intergenerational trauma, alcoholism, drug addiction, domestic violence, abuse, community response, and the importance of the delivery of social services.



Like many Tribally driven approaches to intervening on child maltreatment, Yéil Koowú Shaawát takes a strength-based approach to healing, which emphasizes the importance of cultural resiliencies and protective factors. Such protective factors often center on affirming Native identity through connecting with locally distinct Native cosmologies and spiritual traditions (which include, among other things, connecting with traditional food-ways, kinship circles, the oral tradition, song, dance, Native language, and traditional healers). A fundamental aspect of this curriculum is healing trauma and thus intervening upon and preventing child maltreatment through a reclamation of Indigenous knowledge systems, cultural identity, and peer/kinship support systems.

The curriculum integrates Western therapies and perspectives (e.g., gestalt therapy, cognitive behavioral therapy, Motivational Interviewing, and the works of Virginia Satir and Sharon Wegscheider-Cruse) and Native spiritual healing practices (e.g., sweat lodge ceremonies, purification and healing ceremonies, Talking Circles, and teachings on Native culture as well as the Southeast Traditional Tribal Values of the Tlingit and Haida).

## Organization of the Facilitator's Guide

The Yéil Koowú Shaawát Curriculum Facilitator's Guide consists of an introduction and three volumes:

- **Introduction**
- Phase I: Anger, Stress, and Communication
- Phase II: Personal and Family Development
- Phase III: Sexual Abuse Talking Circle (SATC)

This introduction provides an overview of the curriculum and guidance for establishing the program. The succeeding volumes provide guidance for facilitating each of the three phases of the curriculum. Each volume begins with an introduction to the phase it describes, followed by guidance for each lesson in the phase, including:

- **Lesson Purpose** – The purpose of the lesson, which should be read to participants at the beginning of each lesson
- **Objectives** – Group learning objectives

- **Materials** – A list of meeting materials for each lesson
- **Handouts** – A list of handouts for each lesson
- **Lesson Guidance** – A step-by-step outline for delivering the lesson, including suggested timeframes for lesson components to help facilitators plan their use of time and keep lessons on track
- **Tips** – Tips and suggestions for each lesson based on the facilitation experiences of the curriculum developer
- **Resources** – Additional content that may be useful, including a) written and Web-based materials for use in lessons, b) supplementary materials that facilitators can use in lessons at their discretion, and c) materials for facilitator review to provide background information on lesson topics
- **Space for Notetaking** – Space for handwritten notes, should users print this guide or the individual lessons

When a large selection of lesson text is *italicized*, this indicates that facilitators may read this text to participants as written.



# Facilitation of the Curriculum

## The Role of the Facilitator

### Roles and Responsibilities

Weekly sessions of the Yéil Koowú Shaawát curriculum are planned, managed, and led by a group facilitator. The leadership, communication skills, and compassion of the group facilitator will be critical to the success of the group. In leading the group, facilitators will have the following responsibilities:

- Serve as the point of contact for group participants.
- Support participants with the practical requirements of group attendance (e.g., transportation, access to virtual meetings).
- Coordinate the meeting space for in-person meetings or log-in information for virtual meetings.
- Administer group onboarding paperwork.
- Assemble and prepare weekly lesson materials.
- Lead weekly sessions; encourage dialogue.
- Provide make-up lessons for participants when applicable.
- Build and maintain relationships with participants.
- Informally check in with participants to make sure there are no unresolved issues.
- Be prepared to identify a person in crisis and respond appropriately.
- Model appropriate behaviors (e.g., listening respectfully, remaining calm during conflict, honoring diverse viewpoints).
- Establish credibility and trustworthiness through genuine concern and respect.
- Maintain confidentiality.

### Qualifications

Facilitators can come from a variety of backgrounds. There are no specific educational or certification requirements to facilitate the curriculum. However, there are some crucial skills, experience, and knowledge that facilitators should

have. First, clinical experience and prior experience leading healing groups and Talking Circles will be essential for successfully helping the group members in navigating layers of personal, intergenerational, and historical trauma. Second, while they needn't be members of the community, facilitators need to be familiar with and respectful of the local community's Tribal practices and culture to ensure appropriate adaptation of this program. For example, if a community doesn't use the Medicine Wheel, the facilitator will need to know that as well as what would be an appropriate replacement (if needed)—and whom they should contact for support, such as a community Elder or Culture Bearer who can help guide that change.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, understanding how to properly implement rituals, such as the smudging introduced in Phase I, is an essential form of cultural competence that facilitators should have. For example, Tribes may differ in the sacred plants they use in smudging and should be encouraged to use indigenous plants, such as cedar, sweetgrass, or devil's club, of their preference. (See "Culture and Adapting the Curriculum," below, for more details about cultural adaptation and the expertise required.) Curriculum adopters and potential facilitators should consult with their organizations and Tribes about applicable qualifications and requirements.

Facilitators will benefit from having the following skills and experience:

- Experience leading healing groups
- Knowledge of their community
- An understanding of the difficulties and challenges faced by Native women
- Knowledge of the theory of intergenerational trauma
- Cultural knowledge and competency
- Understanding and appreciation for the strengths and challenges of women in the community
- Understanding of the importance of the family and extended family
- Being "a bit of an entertainer"—dynamic, with a sense of humor
- Ability to demonstrate empathy and compassion

<sup>2</sup> It's also beneficial, but not necessarily required, to have an Elder or Culture Bearer present in group lessons.

- Active listening and facilitation skills, including:
  - » Reflecting, clarifying, restating, summarizing, and empathizing
  - » Bringing people into conversations
  - » Handling disagreements
  - » Validating others' experiences
  - » Creating a sense of community and solidarity among the participants

In group sessions, participants will share confidential information. A trusting personal relationship with the facilitator is paramount. You should be prepared to build personal relationships with participants and, if comfortable, be willing to share your own story of personal trauma, how you survived, and the work involved with your healing journey. In your role as facilitator, you should seek to hold a one-on-one meeting with each participant during each phase to strengthen your relationship and provide a space for discussing issues that participants would like to discuss outside of group.

### Working in Small Communities

When working in small communities, you may find that group participants already know one another or may be related as family members. Participants' families may have histories of conflict, and participants may even have grudges from past disagreements. You may not be aware of the complexity of these preexisting relationships and will need to be prepared for this, remembering to be gentle and patient and to remind participants that the intent of the curriculum is to first focus on healing ourselves. In anticipation of the need to create a healing space within this environment, Amalia Monreal prepared a statement, "The Circle," which speaks to this issue. You will read "The Circle" at the beginning of each phase to remind participants of the necessity to remain open and nonjudgmental with one another.

Talking Circle sessions in each lesson are vitally important. You should be prepared for the potential uncovering of multigenerational family conflicts with lasting effects. You may need to be prepared to guide these relationships outside of group sessions and help resolve conflicts with group members.

### Secondary Traumatic Stress

Facilitators will likely be working with participants who are survivors of trauma, such as abuse and violence. Helping participants identify and begin the journey of healing from this trauma is one of the purposes of this curriculum. Group meetings and Talking Circles can involve intense, emotional, and often cathartic conversations as participants uncover and share their past experiences and sources of pain. You should be aware of and prepared for the possibility of incurring secondary traumatic stress as a result of leading the curriculum and thereby participating in participants' traumatic experiences. Learning about secondary traumatic stress, its symptoms, and treatments will be helpful in preparing you for this possibility.

The National Child Traumatic Stress Network defines secondary traumatic stress as "the emotional duress that results when an individual hears about the firsthand trauma experiences of another."<sup>3</sup> This term was developed by trauma specialists who were investigating why service providers seemed to be exhibiting symptoms similar to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) without having necessarily been exposed to direct trauma themselves.

Symptoms of secondary traumatic stress "include feelings of isolation, anxiety, dissociation, physical ailments, and sleep disturbances."<sup>4</sup> You should be aware of the potential emotional effects of working with trauma survivors so that you are prepared to be proactive in preventing or minimizing them.

You may have heard similar associated terms, such as burnout, vicarious trauma, and compassion fatigue. Burnout refers to the prolonged physical and psychological exhaustion related to a person's work. It is not focused on traumatic elements or PTSD-like symptoms. Compassion fatigue can be understood as another term for secondary traumatic stress, intended to be a less stigmatizing characterization. While vicarious trauma is also similar, this term focuses on the long-lasting shift in clinicians' personal beliefs and worldview that occurs with professionals who work with people who have experienced trauma. Vicarious trauma is cumulative, building up over time. Note

<sup>3</sup> The National Child Traumatic Stress Network. *Secondary traumatic stress*. <https://www.nctsn.org/trauma-informed-care/secondary-traumatic-stress>

<sup>4</sup> Administration for Children and Families. *Secondary traumatic stress*. Resource Guide to Trauma-Informed Human Services. <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/trauma-toolkit/secondary-traumatic-stress>

that the meaning of these terms continues to evolve, as there is still debate among researchers about how to best define and address these conditions.

Facilitators who are experienced clinicians may already be familiar with these issues and know how to prepare and protect themselves. Facilitators who are new to leading healing groups should review the resources below and follow the guidance found within. For example, we recommend that facilitators:

- Review resources to build an understanding of secondary traumatic stress, its potential effects on staff, and how to prevent and alleviate its impact.
- Research their organization's policies and strategies to reduce staff risk and increase resilience to secondary traumatic stress.
- Identify individual prevention and treatment strategies. Examples include relaxation techniques and seeking professional support.
- Review lesson plans thoroughly before each session to be prepared for topics that might evoke group members' past trauma.

Secondary traumatic stress can be addressed at both the individual and organizational levels through prevention and treatment strategies. As a starting point for those wishing to learn more, this article from the Administration for Children and Families identifies common symptoms, prevention strategies, and treatment strategies: <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/trauma-toolkit/secondary-traumatic-stress>. Additional resources include:

- Center for Advanced Studies on Child Welfare (CASCW), School of Social Work, College of Education and Human Development, University of Minnesota. (2012). *Secondary trauma & the child welfare workforce (CW360°)*. <https://conservancy.umn.edu/handle/11299/185442>
- Children's Bureau. (2010). *Bibliography of secondary trauma in the child welfare workforce*. Child Welfare Information Gateway. <http://www.nccwe.org/BPR/webinars/5-12-10/secondary%20trauma.pdf>

- Children's Bureau. *Secondary traumatic stress*. Child Welfare Information Gateway. <https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/management/workforce/workforcewellbeing/burnout/secondary/>
- National Child Traumatic Stress Network, Secondary Traumatic Stress Committee. (2011). *Secondary traumatic stress: A fact sheet for child-serving professionals*. Los Angeles, CA, and Durham, NC: National Center for Child Traumatic Stress. [https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources/fact-sheet/secondary\\_traumatic\\_stress\\_child\\_serving\\_professionals.pdf](https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources/fact-sheet/secondary_traumatic_stress_child_serving_professionals.pdf)
- Osofsky, J. D., Putnam, F. W., & Lederman, C. S. (2008). How to maintain emotional health when working with trauma. *Juvenile and Family Court Journal*, 59(4), 91–102. <https://www.nationalcac.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/How-to-maintain-emotional-health-when-working-with-trauma.pdf>
- Trippany, R. L., Kress, V. E. W., & Wilcoxon, S. A. (2004). Preventing vicarious trauma: What counselors should know when working with trauma survivors. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 82(1), 31–37. [https://ovc.ojp.gov/sites/g/files/xyckuh226/files/media/document/vt\\_summary\\_and\\_a\\_new\\_theory-508.pdf](https://ovc.ojp.gov/sites/g/files/xyckuh226/files/media/document/vt_summary_and_a_new_theory-508.pdf)



## Culture and Adapting the Curriculum

In recognition of how *culture is healing*, we recommend the use of smudging and other ceremonial practices. This portion of the guide discusses the cultural traditions and ceremony on which the curriculum was founded. In recognition of the diversity of Native spiritual, ceremonial, and cultural practices, we have written the facilitator guide to require no specific practices in delivering this curriculum, and you are invited to adapt curriculum delivery to fit with your cultures and communities. This facilitator's guide is designed to function as a template that allows each community to use its own beliefs, metaphors, practices, and ceremonies for promoting wellness and healing from trauma. Each Tribe should acknowledge their own ways in how they deliver the curriculum.

### Southeast Traditional Tribal Values

The ***Southeast Traditional Tribal Values*** below embody "Our Way of Life," fostered by the Central Council of the Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska.<sup>5</sup>

#### "Our Way of Life"

- Discipline and Obedience to the Traditions of our Ancestors
- Respect for Self, Elders and Others
- Respect for Nature and Property
- Patience
- Pride in Family, Clan and Tradition is found in Love, Loyalty and Generosity
- Be Strong in Mind, Body and Spirit
- Humor
- Hold Each Other Up
- Listen Well and with Respect
- Speak with Care
- We are Stewards of the Air, Land and Sea
- Reverence for Our Creator

<sup>5</sup> Central Council of the Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska. *Southeast traditional tribal values*. <http://www.ccthita.org/about/values/index.html>

- Live in Peace and Harmony
- Be Strong and Have Courage

The curriculum integrates these values into lesson content and delivery. When adapting the curriculum, it will be useful to share your Tribal or organizational values with group participants and return to them as a focal point throughout the curriculum.

### Talking Circles

This curriculum incorporates the traditional Native American practice of Talking Circles. Facilitators will need to lead Talking Circles with a flexible, adaptable approach. Time can pass quickly in Talking Circles—it is part of your role to manage group time and understand that Talking Circle time may need to be limited to ensure adequate time for completing each lesson's educational goals. Still, Talking Circles are the cornerstone of weekly group meetings, providing participants with a forum to support each other, share information about their lives, celebrate successes, and reflect on the content of lessons. It is this process, as well as the information provided, that makes this curriculum effective. You may offer the Talking Circle at any time in the lesson (i.e., at the beginning, in the middle, or following the educational component).

This curriculum's Talking Circles differ from traditional Talking Circles in that group facilitators may speak out of turn to immediately reply to speakers in the circle (even without possession of the eagle feather or other ceremonial object that gives the current speaker the floor). This allows you to provide feedback and support to participants of the circle.

Facilitators should appreciate that group members will be (reasonably) cautious and vulnerable when sharing. Especially at the beginning of the group meetings, you should be careful to respond supportively whenever participants share in Talking Circle to validate participants' perspectives and foster a safe, trusting, and collegial atmosphere in the group. Early in the group meetings, participants will rely on your leadership. As participants become more comfortable, they will learn to take the lead in Talking Circle discussions. More information about the specifics and guidelines for introducing traditional Talking Circles is provided in Phase I, Lesson 4.

## Ceremony

The curriculum encourages the practice of weekly smudging beginning with Lesson 4 in Phase I and the use of other ceremonies (e.g., sweat lodge ceremonies, pipe ceremonies, fire ceremonies, healing ceremonies, and gathering ceremonies) that may or may not be practiced in your community's culture.

**We recommend that facilitators integrate the ceremonies they consider appropriate for their Tribe, community, and participants.**

As this curriculum has been delivered in the past, ceremonies that may require travel to a new location, such as sweat lodges and dipping, have been treated as optional. They enhance healing and traditional cultural practices but are not mandatory for participants.

## Smudging and Talking Circle Materials

You may wish to acquire the following materials for use in weekly group meetings:

### For Smudging

- **Sacred Plants:** For example, sage, cedar, or sweetgrass. Sacred plants provide the gift of purification.
- **Abalone or Other Seashell:** When smudging, the sacred plant is placed in the shell, lit, and then blown out as it starts to burn. The medicine is in the smoke.

### For Talking Circles

- **Eagle Feather:** An eagle feather or other ceremonial object, such as a talking stick or rock, may be used to indicate who the current speaker is, who "has the floor", and to whom other participants should be listening. The facilitator explains that participants will use the feather in Talking Circles beginning in Lesson 4, when the Talking Circle ceremony is introduced and implemented.
- **Centerpiece:** The centerpiece can be placed in the center of the Talking Circle as a focal point. The centerpiece could be an altar, small button blanket, or piece of cloth representing the Medicine Wheel.



Sample Talking Circle Centerpiece

## Collecting Participant Feedback for Program Improvement

Facilitators can gather participant input and feedback on the delivery of lessons, lesson content, and the progress and healthy functioning of the group. Examples of ways to collect feedback include sticky note activities, conducted at the end of lessons, and reflective Talking Circles, held at the end of curriculum phases.

### Sticky Note Activity

The sticky note activity is used to collect participants' feedback on lessons. Take a few minutes at the end of each lesson to ask participants to provide a few words or sentences to describe something they learned, felt, or took away from the week's lesson.

When meeting in person, direct participants to write their responses on a sticky note or index card and place it in a shoe

Provide the following prompt for participants to respond to at the end of each weekly lesson:

***Please describe something you learned, felt, or took away from today's lesson.***

box or envelope. When lessons are facilitated virtually, you

can use the Chat feature of the web meeting platform to collect responses or ask participants to simply provide their responses verbally. If using verbal feedback, you will need to write down the replies. You should note that participation is voluntary.

You should collect sticky notes each week and save them for analysis later to better understand participants' experience with the group and the development of their perception of the curriculum over time. This feedback can be used to adapt future lessons based on the group's input.

### End-of-Phase Reflective Talking Circles

An optional tool for understanding participants' perceptions of health and well-being is the holding of Talking Circles at the completion of each phase. This can help facilitators understand areas for continuous quality improvement, curriculum improvement, and any potential needs for facilitator support.

At the end of each curriculum phase, facilitators schedule and invite group members to participate in a Talking Circle to discuss their experience with the group. Participation is optional. You can use three or four open-ended questions to guide the conversation. Sample questions include:

- Please talk about any particularly powerful experiences you had in the group or share something that really impacted you.
- If you could say there is one thing you can take away from this phase that you will carry forward with you in life, what would that be?
- How has your participation in this program impacted those around you, such as your children, siblings, parents, extended family, friends, co-workers, community, or other people?
- What about your participation in the group surprised you?
- What has been difficult or challenging about participating in the group?
- How do you think this group creates a sense of trust and community with each other?

### Resources to Support Lessons

We recommend integrating readings, passages, poetry, meditations, prayers, visual aids, and other resources to inspire participants and support the instructional content of lessons. Various books, articles, and websites can provide a source for inspirational readings and handouts on a variety of health, mental health, and wellness topics that bolster the curriculum. We have identified the following books as excellent sources of information and inspiration for both facilitators of this curriculum and the women in the process of healing from trauma. You may wish to assemble and acquire these books and resources to make use of the readings.

- Bopp, J., Bopp, M., Brown, L., Lane, P., & Lucas, P. (1989). *The sacred tree*. Wilmot, WI: Lotus Light.
- Borysenko, J., & Rothstein, L. (1987). *Minding the body, mending the mind*. Reading, Mass: Addison-Wesley Pub. Co.
- Brady, M. (1991). *Daybreak: Meditations for women survivors of sexual abuse*. Hazelden Publishing.
- Coyhis, D. (2007). *Meditations with Native American elders: The four seasons*. Colorado Springs, Colo: Coyhis Pub. & Consulting, Inc.
- Dayton, T. (1992). *Daily affirmations for forgiving and moving on (Powerful inspiration for personal change)*. Health Communications, Inc.
- Dayton, T. (1992). *The soul's companion*. Health Communications, Inc.
- Gibran, K. (2020). *The prophet*. Alma Classics.
- Hifler, J. S. (1992). *A Cherokee feast of days: Daily meditations, volume 1*. Council Oak Books.
- Nelson, P., & OverDrive, Inc. (1977). *There's a hole in my sidewalk: The romance of self-discovery*. Los Angeles: Stonebarn Pub.

Additional resources are provided in the *Resources* listing of each lesson in this guide. The information above is being provided as resource materials to review and support the implementation of the curriculum. The curriculum's developers

recommend that adopters identify and incorporate additional resources they have access to, feel comfortable with, and have special meaning for the facilitator, the Tribe, and the community. Facilitators are welcome to supplement the resources in this guide with additional materials.

### A Note on Copyright

Many of the resources listed in this guide are copyrighted, and they should be used minimally, as resources to inform the program. Due to fair use guidelines, it is likely not a breach of copyright to read selections from books out loud in person or online for educational purposes. However, reproducing copyrighted materials for distribution (e.g., as handouts) requires additional discretion because of copyright.

For example, Portia Nelson's poem, "Autobiography in Five Short Chapters", is popular in self-help and recovery circles. The poem appears in full on many websites, including on the late Ms. Nelson's Wikipedia page. However, the poem is part of a copyrighted book still in print today and therefore should not be reproduced without permission. In contrast, *The Prophet* by Kahlil Gibran, also referenced in this guide, is now in the public domain. Before building a volume with selected readings to distribute in person or electronically, you should review resources on copyright and fair use. Sample resources are provided below.

- American University Library. (2010). *What faculty need to know about copyright for teaching*. [https://www.american.edu/library/documents/upload/copyright\\_for\\_teaching.pdf](https://www.american.edu/library/documents/upload/copyright_for_teaching.pdf)
- University of California. *UC copyright website*. <https://copyright.universityofcalifornia.edu/index.html>

### In-Person and Virtual Meetings

As a women's healing group, the curriculum centers on in-person meetings. While this guide was under development, the curriculum was being delivered in-person with women of the Tlingit and Haida community in Juneau, Alaska. The group's ability to meet in person was disrupted by the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic. Fortunately, group meetings were

able to transition to virtual sessions and the group was able to continue. Based on this experience, this guide will include tips on how to conduct group meetings virtually. You will need to be mindful should you need to adapt activities to a virtual setting. There are opportunities to use technology to develop innovative and engaging delivery methods, and you are encouraged to be creative while respecting local health and safety protocols.

### General Tips for Facilitating Lessons

The following tips and resources are provided to help facilitators start off on the right foot:

- The first couple of lessons are all about setting the tone and general attitude. You need to be simultaneously firm, humble, and tender, and have a good sense of humor. The participants are trauma survivors, including survivors of childhood traumas, and may have experience with the child welfare system—in their childhood as well as in their present day lives involving their children. Some families may be in their second or third generation of involvement with the foster care system. They may have experienced intergenerational trauma and are often adult children of alcoholics. You must have the ability to listen deeply with empathy and compassion.
- You need to be flexible and adapt the curriculum to the needs of group participants. Listen to participants to learn about their needs, strengths, and challenges, and be open to adapting the curriculum to best serve the participants and any changes in their lives and the community.
- The Talking Circle is a critical part of most lessons. Remember that an important outcome of this curriculum is the building of trust and relationships among participants as a group as well as with the facilitator. This trust building is a crucial part of the richness of women's group.
- Celebrate successes in participants' lives, big or small, and accomplishments in the progress of the group. For example, it is valuable to celebrate milestones in length of sobriety, the birth of a child, and family reunification.

- Provide notebooks for participants that contain lesson handouts and space for taking notes. These notebooks have shown value in past group iterations. Notebooks can be mailed to participants before the first lesson or provided at orientation.
- Past groups have gathered for dinner at the meeting location before group meetings. This is not required, but it is recommended. It has demonstrated value in building group camaraderie.
- You may wish to keep group progress notes to help you monitor each participant's attendance, level of participation, and progress. A sample form can be found in the Appendix for Phase I.
- Seek participant input and feedback on the delivery of lessons, lesson content, and the progress and healthy functioning of the group. For example, you can use a sticky note activity and Talking Circles to gather group feedback on the lessons and phases respectively. You can then review this feedback and adapt future lessons based on the group's input. You can also use the sticky notes to inform your group progress notes.

In addition, it is important to have one-on-one meetings as a part of the onboarding process. During that meeting, you'll discuss the group guidelines and expectations to ensure that participants know what to expect from the sessions. Although *finalizing* the group guidelines happens in the group's initial meeting to ensure that the members spend time negotiating norms with each other and come to take ownership over those rules (and thereby the group), the preliminary guidelines set the tone for those discussions, and it will be helpful to participants to know what to expect.

## Resources

The following general resources are provided to inform group facilitation:

- Ackerman, C. E. (2021, November 25). *Your ultimate group therapy guide (+Activities & topic ideas)*. PositivePsychology.com. <https://positivepsychology.com/group-therapy>
- Center for Community Health and Development. *Chapter 21, Section 2: Creating and facilitating peer support groups*. University of Kansas. Community Tool Box. <https://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/implement/enhancing-support/peer-support-groups/main>
- GoodTherapy. (2019, April 24). *Group therapy*. <https://www.goodtherapy.org/learn-about-therapy/modes/group-therapy>
- GoodTherapy. (2020, January 8). *Online group therapy: Tips for therapists*. <https://www.goodtherapy.org/for-professionals/software-technology/telehealth/article/online-group-therapy-tips-for-therapists>
- Grande, D. (2020, June 2). *Active listening skills: Why active listening is important, and how to do it*. Psychology Today. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/in-it-together/202006/active-listening-skills>
- Lee, M. A. (2016, February 19). *10 important tips for creating a therapy support group*. The Coach's Blog. For Growth Counseling Services, Inc. <https://www.thecounselorcoach.com/practice-business-building-ideas-counselor-blog/six-tips-for-creating-a-therapy-support-group>
- Novotney, A. (2019) Keys to great group therapy. *Monitor on Psychology*, 50(4), 66. <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2019/04/group-therapy>
- Thomason, T. (2011). Best practices in counseling Native Americans. *Journal of Indigenous Research* 1(1). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.26077/ypcz-9x86>. Available at: <https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/kicjir/vol1/iss1/3>

## Checklist: Starting the Curriculum with Phase I

Facilitators may review the checklist before starting Phase I to help ensure necessary preparations are made:

- Collect participants' contact information and identify preferred contact method.
- Hold one-on-one meetings with each participant as part of the onboarding process. (These meetings can be in person, virtual, or by phone.)
- Prepare a list of participants in the group.
- Distribute the consent form and group intake form. Sample forms can be found in the Appendix for Phase I.
- Find out if participants need help with transportation and provide information about local resources.
- Reserve meeting space or set up Web-based meeting platform.
- Test and practice with Web-based meeting platform.
- Assemble supplies, such as a dry erase board (preferred) or easel with paper pads, markers, pens, pencils, paper, sticky notes or index cards, shoe box, and colored pencils for drawing/doodling.
- Have individual notebooks (paper/hardback) available for participants, containing syllabus, Traditional Tribal Values (magnet if available), inspirational reading or book list, or handouts.

## Lesson Facilitation Checklist

Facilitators may use this checklist as a resource for preparing each weekly lesson:

- Send a reminder with meeting date and location (or login information for virtual meetings).
- Ensure intake and consent forms are completed.
- Confirm meeting space reservation.
- Arrange chairs in a circle and set up easel with paper pad or dry erase board and markers. (A dry erase board is preferred so the facilitator has freedom of movement.)
- Assemble materials and the handouts you plan to distribute or display in hard copy or digital form. (Specific recommendations for handouts can be found in the Facilitator's Guide volumes for Phases I, II, and III.)
- Prepare and arrange smudging and Talking Circle materials. (See p. 14 for more information about these materials.)
- Set up a clipboard so facilitator has easy access to lecture notes.
- Share materials/handouts by email in advance of lesson (optional) or provide handout at the class if meeting in person.



Yéil Koowú Shaawát (Raven Tail Woman) Women's Group

**Facilitator's Guide**  
**INTRODUCTION**  
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**2022**