

Healing our brains is about everything except the trauma. First, know the violence is not your fault. Second, know healing takes time and you have the right to whatever time and ways you need to heal.

Some ways to heal your brain & stop anxiety

- Breathe! Deep breathing helps break anxiety attacks and balances mind, emotions and body.
- Exercise. Yoga is powerful, but do what you can: dance, walk, stretch, run – move!
- Eat healthy. Remember water is medicine.
- Listen to music. Sing!
- Paint, bead, draw, write.
- Use your sense of smell! Essential oils, candles
- Mediate. This can be hard if you have anxiety. You don't have to sit still. It's about focus and staying in the moment.
- Practice "mindfulness." Just notice without judgement feelings, thoughts, and bodily sensations.
- Ground yourself. Pick something up or focus on your toes or hands – notice texture, temperature, smells, color weight.

NATIVE CULTURE PROVIDES MANY WAYS OF HEALING.

Sage, cedar, water, ceremony, prayer, sharing food, being in nature. Remember laughter is a strong medicine!

- Always nervous
- Can't remember
- Always Sad
- Unworthy
- Wrong
- Angry
- Can't stay sober
- Never trust
- Night terrors
- Panic attacks
- Controlling
- Scared
- Anxiety
- Suicidal
- I'M GOING CRAZY!
- Can't be alone
- Hate crowds
- Chaos
- Can't feel
- Feel everything
- Pain
- Sick a lot
- Can't think straight
- Feel damaged
- Can't sleep
- Sleep a lot
- Flashbacks
- Can't relax
- Unfocused
- Over-react
- Numb

Indigenous Teachings:

WE DO NOT HEAL ALONE. WE HEAL TOGETHER.

Find one person you can trust - someone who listens, is nonjudgmental, caring and believes you. This can be a friend or relative.

A counselor or therapist can be very helpful, but not all are trained in trauma-informed approaches. Ask if they have training in trauma-informed approaches. If you're not comfortable with them, find someone else. Ask your local domestic violence program for recommendations.

There are many resources, including apps. about mindfulness, grounding and breathing techniques available on the internet. Explore!

If you're interested in learning more about the dynamics of trauma and intergenerational trauma contact the Native Women's Society of the Great Plains for resources.

CONTACT YOUR LOCAL DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ADVOCACY PROGRAM FOR SUPPORT AND MORE INFORMATION:

**MAYBE
IT'S A NATURAL
REACTION TO TRAUMA!**

**IT'S NOT ABOUT WHAT'S WRONG WITH YOU.
IT'S ABOUT WHAT HAPPENED TO YOU.**

The effects of trauma **AND HOW TO HEAL**

Many survivors overcome their traumatic experiences and create healthy, powerful lives.



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Trauma affects the way your brain works!

Trauma can change the neurobiology of the brain – that means real physical changes can happen to the brain. It's a normal response to trauma.

Parts of our brains are built to help us survive life threatening experiences. When our lives are threatened our brains will automatically go into a “fight, flight or freeze” reaction. We don't think about it or decide; it just happens so we can survive. Sometimes our brains can kind of get stuck in these reactions even when we're safe. It makes past trauma feel present, like it's still happening.

If you get punched, you expect bruises.

If you get an emotional or mental or physical punch, the bruises are also mental, emotional and spiritual.

You are not crazy – it's a natural response to the chaos of violence.

What trauma reactions can look like:

- Problems telling your “story”
- Can't remember; memories are “snapshots” and/or disorganized
- Scan for danger & hyper-alert; not safe
- Numb, check out mentally or emotionally
- Can't “get over” things
- Avoid people
- Negativity, “crabbiness”
- Wait for the next bad thing to happen
- Constantly anxious or depressed
- Can't focus or concentrate
- Flash backs, panic attacks
- Nightmares
- Difficulty sitting still or relaxing
- Anger and over-reactions
- Sleeping a lot or can't sleep
- Difficulty making decisions
- Substance abuse
- Don't feel connected to others
- Hard to manage and share feelings
- Difficult to stay present
- Hard to feel relaxed, joy, happiness

PEOPLE RESPOND TO TRAUMA DIFFERENTLY.

People respond differently and are impacted by trauma in different ways. Not everyone who experiences trauma, will have “traumatic responses.”

Some people recover from trauma quickly. Sometimes trauma reactions last for weeks, months or a life-time. Some have chronic pain and illnesses.

Substance abuse and trauma are connected. Many people turn to drugs to deal with the pain of violence and trauma. What starts out as a “survival tool” may turn into an addiction that can add another layer of trauma. Also, if people aren't safe, recovery is extremely difficult or impossible.

There may be other causes for what looks like trauma reactions or can make the trauma reactions worse:

- Sleep deprivation
- Traumatic Brain Injury
- Exhaustion
- Vitamin/mineral deficiencies
- Pre-existing mental health issues

What do you mean Trauma?

Stress, distress and trauma are not the same thing. If we are stressed out or go through crisis, we react but can cope and regain our balance.

If an individual (or a loved one) experience a violent event or continuing situation that threatens our life or mind and is so overwhelmed we can't cope or regain our balance, we have experienced trauma.

We also can experience group or intergenerational trauma. The emotional, psychological and spiritual wounding over the lifespan and across generations effects our DNA, our genetics. We can inherit trauma responses from our ancestors that survived genocide and the violence of colonization.

Trauma is about violence, betrayal and breaking of relationships.

Sources of Trauma include

- Childhood sexual, physical, emotional abuse, neglect, and abandonment

- Domestic violence, battering
- Rape, sexual assault, trafficking
- Violent crime
- Catastrophic injury or illness, death, loss
- Institutional abuse and neglect
- Oppression like racism, poverty
- War/terrorism/combat
- Community and school violence, bullying
- Hate crimes
- Historical/generational violence
- Natural disasters
- Invasive medical procedures

HEALING IS POSSIBLE!

Many survivors overcome their traumatic experiences and create healthy, powerful lives.

Keys to healing include:

- Safety
- Healing the neurobiological trauma
- Relationship with one person you can trust
- Find meaning & purpose in surviving
- Violence doesn't define you. You have many relationships, skills and abilities.
- The violence is not your fault. You didn't cause or deserve it.
- You have the right to heal in your own way, in your own time and with support.
- You are not alone. Most of us are survivors of many traumas.

NATIVE PEOPLE ARE RESILIENT!

Resilience is about hope and belief that our survival is for a reason, a purpose. We may carry intergenerational trauma, but we also carry intergenerational resilience. Our ancestors are with us and we carry their strengths and survival skills in our DNA too!

HEALING ISN'T ABOUT WILL POWER

Healing from the neurobiological or physical effects of trauma on our brains is not about talking about what happened to us. It is helpful to name what happened to us, but sometimes talking about the trauma repeatedly makes it worse. Sometimes we can't and never will remember all that happened to us. That's our brain protecting us and that's normal.

