Prevention Strategies For Aboriginal Counsellors and Frontline Workers

**Take space and time** away from frontline work and the constant demands of crisis intervention to help keep balance and perspective. Also, find ways to create that sacred, quiet space internally through daily ritual or meditation.

**Be aware of holistic personal self-care needs**: ensure balanced health by attending to all aspects of your well-being (spiritual, emotional, mental and physical).

**Express feelings verbally and non-verbally**: Receive and give hugs, laugh, cry, talk, share, dance and sing.

**Listen to your body and get enough rest and replenishment**: eat good nutritious food, drink pure water and get physically active. Dance, drum, have a massage, take a walk, quilt or bead.

**Be open to change**: Look at the world through different eyes: see every situation as an opportunity to learn and grow. Read, attend healing circles, meditate or listen to beautiful music. Connect with nature and the beauty and sacredness of life.

**Trust in yourself** and your own resilience. Remind yourself of your many unique strengths and gifts.

**Take the time to look special each day** in whatever way has meaning for you.

**Keep your spirit strong**: pray or meditate, go on a vision quest, talk to an Elder, smudge with medicines (sage, cedar or sweetgrass), take cedar baths and attend Sweat Lodge ceremonies or fast for cleansing and de-stressing.

**Trust in and make time for the people in your life**: your coworkers, family and network of friends. Do not be afraid to say: *I need your support just now.* Start a “buddy” system at work with a daily check-in and use staff team debriefings to re-balance after an especially stressful time.

**Set common sense limitations**: say “no” to clients or coworkers and balance their needs with what you are able to provide. Speak your mind from your heart.

**Keep a journal or life map and/or get support** from peers and Elders who know the pressures of trauma work.

Aboriginal frontline workers at a healing retreat in eastern Ontario, July 2000, created these prevention strategies.
Medicine Wheel teachings provide a useful framework for working with survivors of childhood abuse or other trauma.

The vision of these teachings is that all healing is spiritual in the sense that honouring the spirit within generates a movement toward balance and health.

**Honouring and reconnecting** with the inner spirit will restore:

- trust in self and others;
- trust in the potential for oneself and others to change;
- trust in the ability to help oneself, one’s family and communities;
- belief in being worthy of love and kindness; and
- belief in being capable of showing love and kindness to others.

**Physical Healing Strategies:**
- breathing and relaxation techniques;
- exercise: walking, sports or games of skill and endurance;
- hunting and camping: being on the land;
- healthy diet and nutrition (*country food* for Inuit); community feasts;
- addiction recovery; and
- medications (traditional or medical) to reduce reactivity and hyperarousal.

**Mental Healing Strategies:**
- cognitive strategies, such as using diaries or logs, to identify and chart symptoms of PTSD;
- dream interpretations and vision quests; and
- creating new life stories, maps or narratives.

**Emotional Healing Strategies:**
- anger release/management;
- non-verbal expression through art and craft making, quilting, carving, song and dance;
- talking and sharing circles;
- restoring cultural pride and identity; and
- affirming each person’s unique gifts, strengths and worth.

**Spiritual Healing Strategies:**
- meditation, prayer and giving thanks;
- burning medicines or the Quilliq;
- participating in ceremonies or sweats; and
- guidance from Elders and traditional teachers.

This information was developed by Aboriginal frontline workers at a healing retreat in eastern Ontario.