

Reconnecting with Native Teachings and Creating Healing Spaces with and for 2S+/LGBTQ+ Victim-Survivors of Domestic Violence



A TOOLKIT FOR FAMILY AND FRIENDS



Introduction

Teachings across American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian (Indigenous) cultures affirm that all relatives have an honored and respected place in our families, societies, and nations. In the context of our organic relationship as relatives, no one was abused, feared, or excluded because of their gender identity or sexual orientation. Colonization challenged these Indigenous teachings, imposing Western norms about gender identities and sexual orientation. However, culture is alive, not static, and Indigenous peoples and nations have adapted, survived, and thrived.

The Toolkit for Family and Friends: Reconnecting with Native Teachings and Creating Healing Spaces with and for 2S+/LGBTQ+ Victim-Survivors of Domestic Violence provides information and strategies to support families and friends to reconnect with their teachings, including borrowing or creating new teachings, and to improve their capacity to support their 2S+/LGBTQ+ family and friends who are survivors of domestic violence or sexual violence or abuse. 2S+/LGBTQ+ peoples are individuals who identify as two-spirit, additional gender identities and sexual orientations, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer or questioning. Family members can take active roles within their immediate family and larger community spaces to protect, reduce isolation, assist with safety planning, support survivors, and avoid victim-blaming. Having families and friends who are loving, understanding, respectful, and accepting is the best healing and safety net for 2S+/LGBTQ+ survivors.

We thank our 2S+/LGBTQ+ Toolkit Advisory Committee for assistance with development of our toolkit. Artwork created by Neebin Southall (neebin.com). Cover collaboratively created by Neebin Southall and Zinaida Carroll, NIWRC.



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How Can Families and Friends Help 2S+/LGBTQ+ Victim-Survivors?

Stories are our Medicine

All stories are essential and take their place in Indigenous cultures. Storytelling itself has the power to prevent and heal trauma, heal families and communities, and carry on or develop new traditions of wellbeing. In the practice of storytelling, lessons and teachings are absorbed via mind, body, spirit, and community. As part of this toolkit, we honor this tradition and offer truths and stories of 2S+/LGBTQ+ as medicine to inspire families to honor and hear the stories of local 2S+/LGBTQ+ survivors.¹ We encourage families to respectfully ask 2S+/LGBTQ+ to share their stories as a way to nourish and promote healing for the individual and the entire community.

There is power in acknowledging and reclaiming space for 2S+/LGBTQ+ people in traditional and ceremonial roles within the Tribe. The act of reclaiming this space is one that nourishes the very root of transformative and Indigenous healing. 2S+/LGBTQ+ peoples have held traditional and ceremonial roles. Too often, colonization has buried or distorted these traditional and ceremonial roles. The choice of telling your story is a healing act, and healing acts can help to decolonize because they have the power to inspire more acts of healing.

Remembering that culture is alive, not static, in the spirit of inspiring acts of healing, while not specific to a 2S+/LGBTQ+ experience, we share this story about how a father, a Bird Singer, ensured a tradition did not end but rather lived on. The tradition of bird singing, with its lessons and history, is usually passed on from father to son, noting that ‘son’ can include nephews and other male relatives. A Bird Singer did not have sons to pass the bird songs on to, so he decided to pass the tradition onto his daughter. He made it clear to others in the Tribe that after he was gone that she would lead the songs and carry on this tradition as he had. In passing this respected role onto his daughter, the father helped to ensure the community respected her as a Bird Singer and reduced the potential for community criticism, stigma, or isolation. Indigenous cultures recognize when change is crucial, especially when it comes to strengthening relations and community.



¹ <https://www.niwc.org/restoration-magazine/june-2021/stories-are-our-medicine>



Culture as a Protective Factor

- Be visibly present to support, encourage and model acceptance, create safe and brave spaces, and end isolation of 2S+/LGBTQ+ peoples. Examples of being present include organizing candlelight vigils for 2S+/LGBTQ+ relatives who have lost their lives, and helping 2S+/LGBTQ+ to prepare for, dress, and dance together at community dances.
- There are many sources of information about teachings. Because the historical documentation by non-Natives is from their perspectives and experiences, it is important to discuss such documentation with elders, cultural advisors/teachers, healers, and medicine people.
 - Talk with respected elders or cultural advisors/teachers, healers, and medicine people about specific teachings about family, creation stories, 2S+/LGBTQ+, and ceremonies around birth, puberty, marriage, and death, including any documentation from anthropologists, linguists, missionaries, and others.
- Reconnect, remember, and restore with or create and evolve new traditions and ways to respect 2S+/LGBTQ+ peoples and their respected roles within Indigenous communities and families.
- Be aware of and talk with a Tribal program or Tribal coalition addressing domestic and sexual violence to learn about local resources, understanding trauma responses, confidentiality, how to create a safe space, and respect boundaries. You can access a list of Tribal coalitions through the Alliance of Tribal Coalitions To End Violence online at atcev.org/tribal-coalitions.
- Contact StrongHearts Native Helpline 1-844-7NATIVE (762-8483), a safe, confidential and anonymous domestic violence, dating violence and sexual violence helpline for Native people, to find the closest program in your area. Advocates are also available to chat online at strongheartshelpline.org.
- Reconnect with teachings and reclaim kinship systems that honor and respect each community member. Everyone wants to thrive and be protected and loved.

Transform Shame and Promote Healing

- Take time to recognize if you have caused harm (intentional or unintentional) and be courageous enough to apologize.
- Believe survivors. Strive for understanding and acceptance in a nonjudgmental way.
- Tell them that the violence they experienced is not their fault and they are not alone.
- Make sure basic needs such as food and shelter are met, and maintain open minds and hearts.
- Check in regularly with survivors. Offer to serve as an emergency contact, and provide financial and material resources (ex. supplies for an emergency bag, money for transportation or a hotel room, etc.)
- Honor 2S+/LGBTQ+ peoples who have gone missing, been murdered, or lost their lives in other ways.
- Have conversations about two-spirit communities and hear directly from two-spirit relatives about how best to destigmatize 2S+/LGBTQ+ identity. Meals and other opportunities of shared space and time (ex. driving in the car, other gatherings) can be opportunities to pass on teachings that nourish the body, spirit, mind, and emotions.
- Help survivors feel welcome in family or community events. This can help survivors connect to healing, religious, or cultural ceremonies.





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