

A GUIDE TO HARMONY

For Women and Children Living in Shelter



**NATIONAL
INDIGENOUS**
WOMEN'S RESOURCE CENTER

Add program
logo here



Add program
logo here

A GUIDE TO HARMONY

For Women and Children Living in Shelter

Product of Cangleska, Inc.; Revised by NIWRC 2021

This booklet is offered as an example.

Please feel free to adapt this booklet to suit your shelter.

It is recommended that you get feedback from shelter residents to see if this booklet was helpful and if they have any suggestions for changes.

Please note that we are committed to providing non-discriminatory services and shelter environment. This doesn't mean the exact same services will be provided to all groups. Services will vary depending on the unique needs of men, women, children and LGBTQ2S survivors. Considerations are made about needs of all special populations, including those who are differently-abled. As Native people, we are aware that battering/ Intimate Partner Violence are unnatural and gender-based. Eighty-three percent of Native women are victims of violence (National Institute of Justice; 2016). That is why this booklet speaks to women in particular. However, advocacy reclaiming the safety and sacredness of women also requires inclusion of all our Relatives within our programs and initiatives, to be consistent with our traditional values and belief systems. If you are having difficulty accessing services or resources, please let staff know. We will work to get your needs met as best as possible.





Welcome to our shelter! We are glad you are here.

This booklet will familiarize you with the way this shelter operates, what we offer and some of our policies. Advocates are always available if you have questions or concerns. Advocates will provide additional information and spend as much time as possible visiting with you to provide support and to work alongside of you as you want on your path to healing and safety. Our relationships as relatives are the foundation of all that we do. Thank you for letting us be part of your journey.

THE PURPOSE OF THE SHELTER

The shelter is a safe space for you and your children away from the violence. It gives you the opportunity to step back from abuse, heal and make some decisions about what YOU want to do.

Being in the shelter gives you some time to learn about violence and how it may have affected you and your children. It is a time when you can rest, explore your options, learn more about resources, and take back control of your life. We want to be clear that you and your children are not at fault or blamed for the abuse you've experienced. The abuser is responsible for their behavior.

We are here to help you in any way we can. Your participation in shelter or other program activities is encouraged but not required - it is always your decision. The staff members are called advocates. An advocate is a friend who will support you as a relative as you begin to figure out what you might be able to do and what you want to do.





The advocates are here to listen to you and support you (advocate for you) in dealing with medical, legal, housing, social services, mental health, and law enforcement/court systems. We can also help you make childcare and transportation arrangements, etc. Again, the advocate's role is to help you do what you want to do.

We know that it might be hard to trust others. But we all know what it's like to live with violence and encourage you to take a risk and share your experience with other women in the house and the advocates.

The following pages will familiarize you with the shelter, let you know some of our expectations, and offer some suggestions that might be helpful to you and your children while staying here.

SAFETY AND RESPECT: GUIDELINES FOR WOMEN AND CHILDREN LIVING IN THE SHELTER

We know that you have come to shelter to escape domestic violence that is painful, difficult and traumatizing. It's very common for people to turn to substances, have trouble sleeping, become depressed, deal with anxiety, or have other normal but difficult consequences or reactions from what they've survived. If you are dealing with any of these issues, please visit with an advocate. She'll listen to and support you, and help you connect to whatever available resources and assistance you need. Shelter is meant to be a safe, supportive place to heal.

We are all women and anyone staying at the shelter is here because of hard times. We are all related and it's important that everyone try hard to get along, be understanding, and support each other.

Living with others can be difficult. Everyone has their own habits and ways of doing things. Some people are naturally quiet or may be very upset about what is going on in their lives. We might mistakenly think the person is stuck up or snotty. Others may be very outgoing and want to share their experiences with you. Whatever the kind of person, it is important that we try to respect the rights and individuality of others.



There may be women staying here who are different from you. Women with different spiritual and religious beliefs, economic differences, women from other tribes or races, women whose sexual orientation is different from yours, older women, women with disabilities or special needs. ALL of you are here to escape violence and be safe. ANY woman who is seeking safety is welcome here and all of us, including you, have a responsibility to behave respectfully.

We do not want to control you the way your partner has been controlling you. Rather than lots of “rules,” we ask for mutual respect and consideration. The few rules we do have are designed to ensure the safety of women and children residing in the shelter.

RULES:

1. Children are sacred and not to be hit or called names.
2. No alcohol, other drugs or drinking/drug use in the shelter.
3. No weapons – toys or real.
4. Pick up after yourself.
5. No hitting or other violence.

If there are other rules or possible changes that would make you or your children feel safer and more comfortable during your stay in the shelter, please discuss them with an advocate. You can also visit with other shelter residents during house meetings, which will be described later in this booklet. We cannot promise changes will be made, but we will do our best to accommodate you.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Everyone here is in the same situation and needs to be here for their safety. It is vitally important that you do not reveal the names of any women and/or her children who might be in the shelter. Such an action could place that woman and her child(ren) in danger.

Please respect the information that another woman might share about her life and her situation. Perhaps a woman is angry with her family or her partner’s family and says unkind things about them. If you “gossip” and tell what another woman shared with you, you may be placing her in physical danger when she leaves the shelter. If a woman shares her



plan for leaving the area, it is important that you do not share her plan with others. A violent man/woman who is looking for his/her partner has many eyes and ears in the community. Likewise, all advocate, volunteers, and other staff are bound by the shelter's confidentiality policy.

Some tribes have laws that protect the privileged communication that takes place between an advocate and a person receiving program services and advocacy. An advocate is not only bound by the program's confidentiality policies but may be prohibited by tribal law to reveal any information you share about your situation. Tribal laws also provide other protections for you and your children. Advocates are familiar with tribal laws that apply to your safety and relationship with advocates and the shelter so please ask if you have questions.

If your information is requested or needed by another program or agency, like social services, the court, or school, a release of information form must be completed before this program shares any of your information. It is your decision to share or not to share your information. An advocate will visit with you about the possible consequences, safety concerns, specific types of information to be shared before you sign the release form giving your consent. You have the right to review the information being shared, withdraw consent and set a limitation on when the sharing ends.

Parenting can be challenging even under good circumstances. When you are dealing with domestic violence, moving into shelter and coping with the unknown, it can be overwhelming. Parenting while dealing with trauma, depression, lack of sleep, physical injuries, etc., can be extremely difficult. Making changes to routines or schedules as suggested here, in the midst of adjusting to living in shelter with other families that are also in crisis, may not be possible or helpful. Do the best you can. The goal is to create safety and a healing environment, not judge your parenting. As Native people we know we are all related, we are relatives. It takes many relatives to raise children in a good way. Please ask for help and support when you need it.



MEETING THE NEEDS OF CHILDREN

The immediate impact of children witnessing violence might be fear for self, fear for your safety, and self-blame. Children react in many different ways. Some might stutter, feel very anxious and/or afraid, experience sleep disruption, misbehave, think they did something wrong that caused the violence, or be very quiet and sad. Children might also have problems in school. Others might appear okay even though they are feeling bad. No matter how your child(ren) is behaving, it's a good idea to talk with your children about what happened. Explain to them why you must stay at the shelter. The following is an example or suggestion for talking with your children.

“You know that Daddy has been having a problem with being nice to me(us). None of it is your fault. We need to stay here because Daddy was too mean. He might love us but he doesn’t know how to be nice. None of us did anything wrong. Daddy made a choice about how he was going to act. We can’t be at home if Daddy is going to hurt us. I don’t know what will have to happen so that Daddy will learn to be nice to me (us), but we’re safe here. It would be good for us to talk about what happened and there are people here that will help us. What you need to know is that Mom is taking care of you and I don’t want us to be scared or getting hurt.”

Some parents think children won't understand or it's better to not bring up what happened because it will just remind kids of what happened so it's best to not talk about it. The opposite is true. Kids can understand and even your little ones will be able to understand some of what you're saying and will feel more secure. Feeling words to describe the trauma you've all experienced include scared, mad, angry, frustrated, disappointed, insecure, etc. We need to talk about violence, how it makes us feel, and give children the words to talk about it. Saying the words will help you and your children feel better.

The shelter staff and advocates are available to talk with you and your children about any concerns you might have. The advocate may have activities to build stronger bonds between family members. Advocates can also help you deal with any agencies or schools in meeting your children's need for support and services.



The advocates may make suggestions about services that might benefit you and your children. Please know that any suggestions are made with the best intentions, and you have absolute control in the decision making about whether or not the referral will be made. Ultimately, referrals will only be made with your permission.

Advocates are also available to continue to provide assistance and support to you and your children after you leave the shelter. Advocates may offer to be in contact with you once you leave the shelter, but it will only happen at your request. You and your child(ren) are not to blame for your partner's violence. Any discussion or activities with your children will not blame you or your child(ren) for your partner's violence.

DISCIPLINE AND YOUR CHILDREN

The word discipline means TO TEACH. When children are misbehaving, we want to TEACH them to not behave or talk in a disrespectful or wrong way. This means we should not hit or cuss at our children. As mothers, we have a responsibility TO TEACH our children how to conduct themselves as Native children.

No physical punishment of children is allowed at the shelter. Everyone is here to escape violence, and it is confusing to children if we're saying violence is not good and then we allow it. Violence includes the way we talk, and we are asking that you do not cuss your children out or call them names. As adults, we don't like to be talked to in this way and it is disrespectful and violent to cuss your children out and shame them with violent language.

Please do not be upset if advocates observe disrespectful behavior and talk with you. It is never our intention to be disrespectful, and we have a responsibility to bring this to your attention. It is always our intention to be helpful to you and your children.

The orientation packet contains information on Time Out in the Children in Shelter article. You do not necessarily need to learn to use Time Out if you are already practicing non-violence in parenting. Perhaps there are non-violent ways to discipline passed down from your family or from our culture as Native people. No one method is right or wrong or the best



or the worst. Our goal is to learn to teach our children to be non-violent by living it ourselves. Time Out is one method. Advocates are always interested in sharing mothering experiences and challenges. Feel free to have lively discussions about how we teach our children to have the character of our ancestor.

Sometimes there are conflicts between women because their children are in conflict. If we believe in the concept that “we are all related,” we should be able to work out conflicts between our children and ourselves as women. We are sisters/relatives and all children are treated like our own. If you’ve tried to work out conflicts but you feel you need assistance, please talk with an advocate.

RESPONSIBILITY FOR YOUR CHILDREN

You are responsible for your children at all times – just like you would be at home. However, we realize that very often lack of sleep, depression and other effects of trauma can make this difficult. If you are struggling with taking care of your children (or yourself), please let us know so we can help.

Also, if you need help talking to your children or disciplining your children, please ask an advocate or other staff person for help. Other residents may care for other’s children if an agreement is completed and signed. If assistance with childcare is needed, residents can discuss it with an advocate to find options. Dependent upon schedule and other activities, advocates may be available for childcare on a limited, generally emergency basis. The Program may be able to provide childcare under pre-arranged circumstances. Normally, residents will need to make arrangements with friends or relatives outside the shelter for childcare depending upon level of safety.

Please let us know where you are during the day in case your child gets sick or hurt at school and the school calls the Program. Also, please let us know during the day if your child is sick and needs to go to the clinic, so we can provide assistance.

The advocate will inform you when you come to the shelter that any medication you or your children are taking should be placed in the office

Sometimes Parents Need Time Outs

It is normal for parents to have times when they are exhausted, overcome by emotions, or feel like they are at the end of their rope. In those times, parenting in a good way may not be possible. Ask for help with your children from an advocate or other willing women in shelter while you take care of yourself. This also shows the children the importance of balancing care of yourself and handling responsibilities. It also shows them the role and importance of relatives.

[or your lock box we provide, if available]. It is not our intention to be disrespectful to you in any way by keeping medication. Our concern is that other children in the shelter might get into medication kept in individual rooms and accidentally experience harm. It is your responsibility to be aware of the schedule for taking medication and get the proper dose from the advocate. Sometimes things can be going on that make it difficult to remember to take medications, get to appointments, etc. Feel free to ask an advocate for reminders or ways to help you take your (or your children's) medicines, and/or get to appointments on time.

COMMUNICATION AND GOSSIP

Living with lots of other women and children can be difficult. We like and get along better with some people more than others and so do our children. Women in the shelter each bring their own childhood and other relationships with them into shelter. Some women may cope better than others with the violence; some may have experienced more severe violence or violence throughout childhood and in multiple relationships. This can make living together challenging!

Many of us tend to have very low trust levels, often for good reasons. We don't believe people will do what they've promised. Because of the violence or maybe for other reasons, we have been isolated and haven't developed close relationships with other women – even our biological female relatives. Many of us have learned that you can't trust other women.

If Native people don't trust each other and are always fighting, we won't be able to be united and stand together to make change. It's the same



divide and conquer concept that we hear about as Native people. It's the same for us as women. If we can never trust each other and are always fighting, we won't be able to stand strong together and make change for ourselves and our children.

One of the most destructive behaviors that creates chaos and stops us as women from standing together to stop violence and have harmony is GOSSIP. Gossip is defined in the dictionary as idle talk, often not true about others. Gossip occurs when we're just hanging out, bored, doing nothing and/or when we have no life interests to talk about, so we talk about other people and their lives. Sometimes it's a distraction from our own pain or anxiety.

It seems to be human nature that we share information about each other. A lot depends on our intention when we're sharing information about someone else. For example, "I just ran into Carla, and she said that her cousin, Jeri, is in the hospital. She's lost a lot of weight and they're not sure what's wrong with her." Maybe she's trying to figure out how to help. Or it could also be that a person's intent is bad, and they purposefully put a spin on the information in an effort to make someone look bad. For example, "Did you hear that Jeri is in the hospital? I heard she lost a lot of weight and they don't know what's wrong with her. I know she really likes to sleep around, and I bet she has AIDS."

Pretty soon it's going around that Jeri has AIDS, even though the person giving the information never said anything close to that. Information changes as it passes from one person to another, and the situation could spiral out of control with Carla and Jeri confronting everyone about who said what to whom. The person communicating had no intention of causing any harm, and yet the result is hurt feelings, anger, and distrust. When people live in close quarters, there is even greater potential for information about someone's life to end up expanded on, taken out of context, or eventually be totally distorted.

We're all beautiful, awesome women. We're asking you, as women living together, to be understanding of each other's situation, give each other the benefit of the doubt, and be mindful about what we're saying and how we're saying it.



Here are some suggestions if someone is gossiping to you about others:

- Think about what your intent is in listening or talking about someone else.
- Leave the situation as gracefully as you can.
- Listen without responding and don't pass the information along to anyone else. (Note that if someone is physically threatening someone else, you might want to share the information with an advocate.)
- Don't immediately assume the worst if someone tells you that someone else is talking about you. You can choose how you respond. You could do nothing or not pay any attention, talk calmly and directly with the person who supposedly was gossiping about you, or you can ask an advocate to help you figure out how to respond. It might be helpful to think about why this person is sharing this information with you. Why would a person tell you something that will hurt you? What's the point?
- You can say, "I'm sorry but I'd really rather not hear this. I don't know this person." Or "Stop. I don't want to participate in gossip." Or, you could say, "Why are you telling me this? I have enough problems and that could all just be gossip."
- Be clear about what your intention is in passing along information. Are you trying to make sure no one gets hurt? Or because you don't like the person being gossiped about so you're sharing with someone else to get them to not like that person, too.
- Try and focus your conversations with others about issues, not people.
- Share concerns about people we love and their behavior in an effort to learn, respond in a helpful way, and understand ourselves better.
- Be careful about who you talk with about your concerns about someone else (or yourself!). You want to feel confident that the person you're visiting with won't abuse your trust.
- If your child and another woman's child are quarreling, treat them both as if they're your children. When you see all children as your children, you can help them sort through their quarrel and learn how to behave and communicate with each other in a respectful way.



- Let go of any resentments and anger. Remember, we can't control other people and if a person doesn't particularly like us or our children, it's ok. We're not asking everyone to become best friends. Just recognize that we have to make the best of living together for a short period of time.

Gossip is destructive and while it may contain some grain of truth, it is often filled with more untruths. When we talk about other people, we need to make sure about what we learned from them. What we've learned could be about words of wisdom and how we want to be, or it could be behaviors we've seen and how we don't want to be.

If you find yourself having difficulty with lots of people, it is a good idea to look at yourself. Sometimes we're just exhausted or overwhelmed by everything and need rest and quiet. Or maybe we need to meet with people and programs that can help us learn how to take care of ourselves, and how to communicate and behave in a good way with others. We're not asking anyone to be perfect. We all make mistakes and we're all learning!

If someone is gossiping about other women in shelter or people not residing in the shelter, the advocates may bring it to their attention. If you believe you or your children are the subject of gossip and it's an issue for you, if you try to deal with the situation but need help in responding, talk with an advocate and/or bring it up at a house meeting. Please don't threaten anyone or get in someone's face and cuss them out, etc. Remember that verbal threats and physical violence are not allowed in the shelter.

We're all women here and we all know the struggles and hardships we share as women. We're asking each of you to take responsibility for making the shelter a safe place. A place where our lessons are gentle, and we can grow and learn about ourselves. We all know what it is to be hurting. Let's help each other.



SUPPORT GROUP

The shelter offers support groups that are available to all women. You do not have to stay at the shelter to attend support group. Or, if you have been in the shelter and left to return home, or have left your partner and are living elsewhere, you are encouraged to continue to attend support group.

Support group is a time for you to listen and be heard, and to get information about violence, how it may have affected you and ways to heal. It is a safe place where you can explore yourself and the impact of violence on you and your children. Your participation in the support group is not required to stay in the shelter. Anyone attending the group is bound by confidentiality. Childcare is available.

There may be other topics you'd like information about such as alcohol, mothering, etc. Just bring it up with the group and the facilitator will do her best to get information, speakers, etc. There may be other self-development activities you would like to participate in such as massage, acupuncture, counseling, parenting, treatment, etc. Don't be afraid to approach the support group facilitator, an advocate, or any staff person to get information about what's available in the area or setting up a referral/appointment.



Attending support group doesn't mean there is anything wrong with you. You're not sick, bad, dumb, crazy, or stupid. We have the right as human beings to heal, grow, and learn. There's nothing wrong with exploring yourself and it does *not* mean you are responsible for the choice your partner made to be violent with you. You have a right to support, healing, and retaking control of your life. As Indigenous people we know we heal together.

SUPPORT GROUP AND CONFIDENTIALITY

Because many women are in very dangerous situations, we must insist on confidentiality in the support group. A breach of confidentiality could result in, not only hurt feelings, but someone getting physically injured. No matter how we feel about another woman and her behavior, we need to act as sisters and support each other in the basic human right of safety.

"I thought I could safely express myself in support group. I talked about my mother-in-law because we lived with her and she would always take up for her son, my husband.

"It made me angry. It was a bad situation having to live with my in-laws and I talked about it in support group. One of the women attending the support group went back and told my mother-in-law everything I said. My husband and I decided to get back together and when I went back my mother-in-law and sister-in-law beat me up. When I complained to my husband, he beat me up too. I really need the shelter's help, but I don't know if I should trust any of the women who are there. I thought we were supposed to help each other as sisters."

If you feel someone in the support group has broken confidentiality and are reluctant to approach that person directly, please bring your concerns to an advocate or the group. We want the support group to be a place where women are safe, respected, and respectful. Safety allows us to trust and be trusted. In a safe environment, we can learn from each other and grow together.



SPIRITUALITY

You are in crisis and may wish to look for spiritual guidance and direction. Advocates are available to help you connect with a spiritual/religious person of your choosing.

We can assist you in finding a safe place to participate in the sweat lodge if you would like to participate in this activity during your stay at the shelter. Please speak with an advocate if you need help in locating a sweat lodge, transportation, childcare, etc.

The sweat lodge can be very helpful to you in finding balance. All Native cultures have ceremonies whose purpose is to help a person heal, find strength or purpose, etc. If you have never participated in Native ceremonies and rituals before or you haven't had a lot of information about Native culture, history and values, we'd like to suggest that you consider becoming more informed and involved. Many of our people have found healing and help in everyday life through our ways as Native people.

Our history as Native people has been filled with pain. We are a wounded people, as individuals, households, families, communities, and nations. Our elders tell us that understanding and knowing ourselves as Native people will help us to be strong and proud and will lead us to make good lives and relationships.

We strongly recommend that you get some information about our ways of healing as Native people and think about beginning to learn some things from our culture that can help you in your everyday life.





SECURITY

The shelter has a security system, so we are all safe. A camera in the system allows us to see who is outside and an intercom will let us talk with anyone at the door. All advocates and staff are trained about the security of the shelter and will not let anyone who does not have legitimate business or has not been authorized to enter the shelter. Male staff may come to the shelter and they are bound by the same confidentiality as the advocates.

During daytime working hours, advocates will answer the door. After hours, please do not open the door unless you are certain the person on the other side of the door is a woman in crisis. To protect your confidentiality and that of the other women and children in shelter, do not allow non-shelter residents in the building at any time.

TELEPHONE

Due to limited funding, the shelter may not have advocates on duty 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. We also believe you are capable of taking care of yourselves when staff are not around and there are security and safety measures in place. There is a telephone that is available just for women staying in the shelter. This phone will place outgoing calls only. This telephone is blocked for long distance calls so please ask an advocate to help you if you need to place a long-distance call.

This line is not a business number and after-hours emergency calls will not ring into this phone. Advocates' phone numbers are listed on the wall by the telephone. You are free to call 911 or the local police department and request a safety check if you have concerns that your partner might be trying to get into the shelter.

You are free to use this phone for business and personal calls. Please be mindful of the needs of your children while you are on the telephone. If you stay up late into the night talking on the phone, that's your business. However, you are responsible for getting up with your children in the morning. Please keep your phone calls short during business hours since other women might need to do their business, too.

We will not put telephone calls through to you, including calls from



agencies such as social services, law enforcement, etc. Telephone callers will be told that we do not confirm or deny whether a person is in the shelter or not. We also advise callers that they are free to leave a message but again, posting a message does not mean the person is in the shelter. It is up to you if you return the call. If you would not like to receive messages or don't want to know if certain people have called and left a message, let the advocate know. You do not have to talk with anyone you don't want. No one will monitor your calls and, again, it is up to you who you choose to talk with. So, if you don't want to talk to someone, it is your right to just not return the call.

This telephone policy is standard in our shelter because there have been instances when a caller said they were someone they weren't and if we hand you the phone – you might be talking to your abuser or the sister of your abuser who told us they were your brother or cousin. Since we can never be sure, it's best just to take a message and you can decide if you should return the call. Please let any social workers, counselors, etc., know about this policy so they know to just leave a message.

Please do not answer the business phone unless an advocate asks you to volunteer. Instruct your children that they are not to answer the telephone.

PLAY AREA

Your children are free to move about the house, except for office areas and other women's rooms. Please remind your child(ren) to pick up after themselves as age appropriate. Older children will be assigned specific responsibilities in helping to keep the house in order - just like they would have chores at home. It is healthy for children to have those responsibilities and to feel that they have important jobs in helping out. Everyone - women and children – can work together in putting some order to the house before bedtime.

Your children are free to play outside if you feel it is safe enough. We have a fenced area for children to play in, so depending on the age of the child, please supervise accordingly. If you are concerned that your partner might attempt to kidnap the children, please let the advocates know so we can help you and make sure the children are in an enclosed, safe area to play.



Please realize that if you allow your children to play in outside public areas where they can be seen by passersby, you might risk having your stay at the shelter become public knowledge. Since many people are related, anyone seeing your children will lead them to believe that you are staying at the shelter.

VISITORS

While the shelter has a “No Visitors” policy, we also understand that you might want to arrange to have agency personnel, relatives, or friends pick you up. If an agency person, relative, or friend is going to pick you up for an appointment or needs to see you on business, please advise the advocate on duty of those arrangements. If the helping person or friend comes to the shelter and we are not aware of any prior arrangements, they will be told that we cannot give them any information about whether you are here or not. If your plans change, please let us know.

Please do not ask your partner to pick you up here. If you’re going to see your partner, please arrange to meet somewhere else.

You are also free to make arrangements ahead of time to meet a relative or friend somewhere close by or, if space permits and we can maintain the confidentiality of other women in the shelter, we may be able to make arrangements for you to visit with family and friends in the shelter. If we cannot maintain the confidentiality of other women in the shelter, we will not be able to allow visitors. If that happens, please do not be offended. We understand that this is a time when you need family and friends and we will do our best to help you get the support you need, however, all women in the shelter have a right to confidentiality.

If you have school-age children, please let them know that they cannot bring friends or relatives into the shelter. While we try to make the atmosphere of the shelter as homey as we possibly can, we cannot guarantee the confidentiality of other women and their children staying at the shelter if your children bring in outside children. From time to time, advocates and other staff might bring their children to the shelter. The advocates or other staff person is responsible for ensuring that their children will not breach your confidentiality. Advocates and the staff know that there are severe consequences for breach of confidentiality.



[Note: An advocate will visit with you about our complete confidentiality policy which includes a few exceptions for extreme situations. The booklet *Privacy, Confidentiality & Privileged Communication- Keystones to Safety*, also talks about these concerns.]

Again, this is for your safety and protection and to ensure the confidentiality of all women and children in shelter. We cannot monitor who is safe for you to see and not see. If you wish to visit with someone, it is really better if you can leave the shelter to do so.

If you wish to stay in contact with friends, relatives, and agency people, let them know when you leave the shelter.

YOUR ACTIVITIES OUTSIDE THE SHELTER

You are free to come and go as you please. We do not have a curfew time. However, we do ask that you consider your own and your children's sleep needs and are considerate of other women and children in the shelter.

For example, if you return at 3:00 a.m., another woman has to get up and open the door for you, your children have to get up and go to school, and other women and children are unable to sleep because of your activity. Please use your judgement and be aware that shelter advocates will let you know if your actions are a problem.

Please let an advocate know if you are leaving the shelter and when you will return. We're not trying to be nosy. We may need this information in case of emergency, i.e., the school calls and tells us your child is sick, etc.

If you leave the shelter for any reason, you must either take your child(ren) with you, make arrangements with another woman in the shelter for childcare, or make private childcare arrangements. You are not obligated to babysit others, so please feel free to say no. If another woman in the shelter agrees to babysit for you, please return when you say you will. We encourage you to be helpful to each other.



Everyone needs to be considerate and not take advantage of someone's good nature or inability to say no. Ask an advocate for help if you feel pressured to care for other women's children and don't know how to refuse. Please do not be offended if an advocate talks with you about problems with your childcare arrangements.

HOUSE MEETINGS

There is a house meeting every evening. This is a time to share any concerns or suggestions you might have. We ask you attend since household responsibilities will be decided between all of you for the following day. If you choose not to be at the house meeting for whatever reason, we expect that you will be ok with whatever task is assigned you. Please complete your house responsibilities before you leave the house the next day. It may also be possible that you will need to check throughout the day to see if your assigned tasks need to be done again.

The house meeting is the time to let the advocates know what your transportation and appointment needs are for the next day or within that week. Letting the advocates know ahead of time will be very helpful so they can plan and make sure your needs are met.

The house meeting is also a time when you can work out any problems that might arise between you as women. Sometimes it is easier to let things slide. However, resentment may build up and the situation may get out of hand. Please deal with things as they come up.

We expect you to deal directly, honestly, and respectfully with each other. This means making "I" statements instead of accusing "you" statements, and no name-calling, yelling, etc. If you don't know how to deal with people directly, we can help you learn the skills to do so.

If you are in conflict with a woman and cannot work it out, please talk with an advocate. It is the role of the advocate during the house meeting to try to assist you in resolving the conflict. If the situation continues, other shelter staff are also available to assist with conflict resolution.

If you choose to not deal with a conflict, you must take responsibility for



that decision. Advocates may bring up issues if you are unable or willing to do so. Please remember that everyone is here for safety and we must all work on trying to get along the best that we can.

LIVING ROOM

The living room is communal space. We ask that you keep the living room picked up, especially if you eat there. We prefer children eat in the dining room, but we also know that many children are used to eating in the living room. Please clean up your mess immediately. It does not make for a pleasant environment to walk into the room and see old crusty pizza and dirty diapers laying around.

The television and VCR/DVR are available for everyone's use. We also have some movies available. If you rent movies, please be sure and rent G & PG-rated movies for your children. If you want to watch something violent, gory, sexually explicit, etc., please do it after the children are in bed. Please be responsible and considerate with movie rentals and return movies promptly.

Please be willing to compromise when watching TV or when using the VCR/DVR. This might mean giving up something you want to watch or recognizing that you have watched what you wanted for a while so now it's time for someone else to watch what they want.

Please watch your children and do not allow them to play with the TV and VCR/DVR.

SLEEPING SPACE – BE FLEXIBLE!

Our sleeping space is limited. We may ask you to sleep in another room, move you to another room or you may have a roommate during your stay. Please recognize that your privacy is limited here, and we are asking you to share, keep an open mind and not be territorial about room space.



We respect what privacy you do have and ask that you respect others and not go into someone else's room uninvited. We also ask that you not leave small children unattended in your room. Let your children know that it is not respectful to go into other's rooms and/or dig around in other people's things.

We ask that you keep your room neat and clean as possible. If you need help getting anything done, please ask. Sometimes feeling depressed, or injuries can make it difficult to do things. We are here to support each other, and you have a right to time and space and support to heal – let us know how we can help. We provide sheets, blankets and pillows while you are here, and you are free to wash them as often as you wish. You cannot kick your roommate out. If there is a conflict between you and your roommate(s), please try to work it out or see an advocate for assistance. If you want to change rooms, please check with an advocate before doing so.

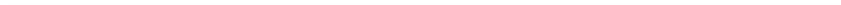
If you have large amounts of money or something that is valuable to you, you might want to leave it in the office area for safekeeping.



You are responsible for keeping track of your belongings.

We are not responsible for lost or stolen items.

We do not advise you to loan or borrow. If you choose to loan or borrow, it is between you as women.





COOKING AND KITCHEN

The shelter will provide food, but you are responsible for cooking for yourself and your children. You are also responsible for cleaning up after yourself and your children. Please wash your dishes, wipe down the stove, sweep, etc. You can talk about cooking and cleaning up as a group at the evening house meeting. Helping each other and working together cooperatively sets a good example for our children. The kitchen is available for your use at any time. However, we again ask you to be considerate of others as to when you cook (middle of the night and early morning hours might not be considerate). If, for whatever reason, you are having problems being able to cook, clean, or do chores, please visit with an advocate. We will provide whatever assistance or accommodations necessary.

You are free to use whatever food is available in the house, and if we are out of something, please let an advocate know. We ask that you use leftovers, and that you cover your leftovers in the refrigerator. This is a health safety regulation. We also ask that you keep the lid on the trash can at all times.

You are free to use your food stamps/SNAP/EBT during your stay at the shelter and make contributions of food to the house or for your individual use. You might want to think about saving most of your food stamps if you are planning to move into your own home. It's smart and wise to plan ahead with your food stamps.

If you purchase snack food, please consider sharing it with everyone staying in the shelter. It's a good opportunity to teach our children about sharing. Generosity is one of our Native values and we don't want anyone (especially children) to feel badly that someone is eating goodies in front of them without sharing.





BATHROOM AND LAUNDRY

For your health, it is important that the bathrooms be kept clean. Overall cleaning of the bathroom may be the responsibility of the person who volunteers to clean the bathrooms as their daily assignment. However, we are all responsible for cleaning up after ourselves.

We expect you to clean the bathtub after each use and wipe up any water that may be on the floor. Please do not allow your children to play in the bathroom and check on your children so that the toilet gets flushed after each use. These simple steps will help in preventing toys from ending up in the toilet, toilet paper clogs, etc., which will plug up the toilet and make a big mess.

The shelter has a washer and dryer for your use. Please feel free to wash and dry your clothes. Again, we ask that you be considerate of others and not do laundry if it is going to bother anybody. Early morning and late-night hours might be a problem for some so it would be good to bring it up at a house meeting just to make sure there are no light sleepers, etc. Please wash and re-use your sheets, blankets, and towels.

Please read the labels on all cleaning supplies and use as directed. Using the recommended amount will keep your items clean. We've found that using more detergent and having more suds/bubbles do not necessarily make things any cleaner.

GRIEVANCE PROCEDURE

If you feel you have been treated disrespectfully or unfairly, you have the right to file a grievance. Your grievance must be in writing and presented to the shelter coordinator. If your grievance is with the shelter coordinator, you need to give it to the Director. You will receive a response in writing if you are still residing in the shelter or if you leave a forwarding address. If your grievance is with a staff person, please be aware that personnel matters are confidential, and we will not be able to tell you specifically how the situation was dealt with if it is determined that there should be a personnel action.

Any Program staff member is available to assist you in writing your grievance and can be with you in presenting it to the shelter coordinator.



Many of us have not learned to deal with areas of conflict in a good and respectful manner. We understand that it might be hard to approach an advocate and tell her directly and in a non-angry kind of way that something she said or did caused hurt feelings. We would like to encourage you to deal with any issues you might have with advocates as they come up. It's important for us to learn how to deal with problems in a good way. Don't be afraid to sit down with an advocate and tell her how you feel. Naturally, we expect you to be respectful to the advocate just as we expect advocates to be respectful of you.

Wait for a quiet time when you know the advocate can sit down with you. Here are some examples of how you might tell an advocate that what she said or did upset you.

"It's important that I talk to you. I know you were in a hurry, but when I asked you for a ride, you didn't let me know in a nice way that you wouldn't be able to take me. I know you were really busy, but I think you could have said so in a nicer way."

"Could we talk? I know my kids can really be bad. I know you're just trying to help all of us and there's lots of women and kids here, but it just seems like you're always getting after my kids. Is there something about me and my kids that you see that I don't? I'd like us to talk about it."

"I'm having problems with Mary. I know she's been talking about me and I don't like it. I know she gossiped to you about me too. It seems like you favor her."

CHECKING OUT

You are free to leave any time you choose. You do not need to ask permission. We ask that you let us know when you plan on leaving the shelter. We need for you to fill out a simple exit questionnaire that can help us in evaluating ourselves as advocates and we need to know where we should forward any mail. If we don't know your forwarding address, any mail that comes here for you will sit or be returned, unless you call with an address or pick it up. We also hope that we might be helpful to you in planning for your future safety.



Please strip your bed, fold the sheets and blankets, and leave them on the bed. We ask that you do not take any items belonging to the shelter with you when you leave, unless you have asked to take something, or it's been given to you.

If you are moving into your own place and need some help in getting started, let us know. We may be able to help you with kitchen items, food, cleaning supplies, towels or other household items. Again, sharing is our way as Native people. If we have it to share, we will share, so don't be afraid to talk to us about what you need, if we haven't already offered. Naturally, we have to make sure the women who will come to the shelter after you're gone have sheets, pillows, towels, etc., but sometimes we do have extra that we can give you.

No matter what happened when you stayed at the shelter, feel free to come back if you are in danger. We all have a right to be safe. No matter what.



CONCLUSION

In our struggle to create non-violent people, families, and communities, we need to be understanding, kind and helpful to each other. Our Grandmothers and Grandfathers fought and suffered and because of them, we continue to exist as Native peoples. We honor you and your struggle.

We hope you will feel safe here and we encourage you to ask for what you need, whether that means something material or emotional.

We need to learn how to live here together, whether it's in the shelter or out there in our families and communities. As Native people, we are struggling to make safe and healthy lives for ourselves and our children. Let's work together and be respectful, supportive, caring, and helpful to each other.



**Sisterhood is Powerful!
WE ARE ALL RELATED!**





Add program
logo here

515 Lame Deer Ave. Lame Deer, MT 59043 Phone 406.477.3896 Toll-Free 855.649.7299 Email info@niwrc.org



fb.com/niwrc



[@niwrc](https://twitter.com/niwrc)



[niwrc](https://www.instagram.com/niwrc)



[niwrc.org](https://www.niwrc.org)