



Caring  
Hearts



Beside you through  
grief's journey

A GUIDE TO  
**TRADITIONAL  
HEALING**



# A GUIDE TO TRADITIONAL HEALING

THIS GUIDE HAS BEEN CREATED BY ELDER HARRY  
FRANCIS IN PARTNERSHIP WITH CARING HEARTS.  
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## ELDER HARRY FRANCIS, PIAPOT FIRST NATION

As an Elder, Harry's role is defined not by his age, but the devotion he shows to his community. He is an educator, spiritual advisor, guidance counselor, therapist and traditional teacher. It is a role he cherishes and takes on with great esteem, as he is very aware of the responsibilities that go along with this title.

Harry has been an Elder for many years, recognized by Treaty 4 communities. His role is vital to the physical, mental, spiritual and emotional well-being of those seeking support in both western and traditional approaches, through cultural and spiritual ceremonies.

His prayers have guided countless individuals and families through difficult times and his advocacy has brought clarity, safety and assuredness to many.

One of Harry's areas of proficiency is addiction recovery. He is certified in ***Advanced Counselor Training*** and ***Community Addictions Training*** through the ***Nechi Training, Research and Health Promotions Institute***.

He specializes in crisis management, residential school trauma, suicide, grief, co-occurring disorders and is an authority in Western and Aboriginal therapeutic approaches.

Harry has been working with our organization since May 2018. In his role with us, Harry works in collaboration with the Director of Education to provide sessions on trauma, trauma informed care, intergenerational trauma and self-care and resiliency building.

When requested by a family Harry provides traditional and cultural healing support to families of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls and other Missing Persons. Harry also helps deliver cultural programming at Caring Hearts Camp.

Harry, a Plains Cree, was born and raised on the Piapot First Nation. He is recognized and supported by his home community. He has dedicated his entire life to preserving a culture steeped in historical significance.

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## INTRODUCTION

Like all cultures, First Nations people suffer from many types of trauma, and Intergenerational Trauma. Traditional healing methods have therapeutic effects that can assist with navigating trauma through the mind and the body.

When working with First Nations people who are experiencing Intergenerational trauma, it is crucial to understand the importance of cultural, traditional and spiritual beliefs.

The term “traditional knowledge” refers to the time-honoured cultural practices of First Nations people; whether spiritual, physical, emotional or mental. It includes many spiritual ceremonies. For example, smudging, prayer, feasts, sweat lodges, as well as many more that may be practiced depending on geographical area.

“Traditional healing” is the pursuit of holistic health and wellness through the prevention and treatment of illness. It is the lifelong journey toward self-awareness, self-

knowledge, spiritual atonement and unity with Creation. It is also the lifelong process of understanding one’s gifts from the Creator and the embodiment of life’s teachings that an individual has received.

***The following content has been developed for agencies and frontline professionals based on basic Qu’Appelle Valley Territory Neheyo (people of 4) spiritual beliefs and traditions. The purpose of this guide is to help improve and transform First Nations health and wellness in order to give a perspective and provide an understanding of how life is approached and valued, and the relationship between all living things. All First Nations have similar beliefs but their protocols may differ within families, bands, or communities.***

It is our hope that by providing a better understanding of traditional healing methods for First Nations people, we can help strengthen the overall mental, emotional, spiritual and physical well-being of our province.



## TRADITIONAL PRAYER

Traditional prayers are offered to the Creator, the Grandfather and Grandmother spirit helpers, and Mother Earth spirit helpers. The Earth is our Mother. Whatever befalls the Earth, befalls the sons and daughters of the Earth. The Earth does not belong to us, we all belong to the Earth. All things are connected like the blood that unites one family. We hold respect for Mother Earth because she gives us life.

When we heal ourselves, we also heal our families and our community. Through prayer, we honour and acknowledge our Creator, our ancestors, our grandmothers, our grandfathers, and our spiritual helpers.

***We want to thank Elder Alma Poitras from Peepeekisis First Nation, for providing us this prayer.***





## TRADITIONAL CREE PRAYER

nôhtâwînân, kisê – manitô  
Our Father, Creator  
(compassionate spirit)

wîcihinân – mîna –  
kanawêyiminân  
help us and take care of us

anohc ka – kîsikâk  
on this day

niyanân – kitawâsimisak  
we your children

nâpêsisak, oskinihkiwak,  
nâpêwak  
little boys, young men, men

iskêwsisak, oskinihkiskwêwak  
– iskwêwak  
little girls, young women,  
women

êkwa – kahkîyaw – kotakak –  
ayisiyîniwak  
and all other peoples

ôta – askîhk  
here on Earth

kitatamihinân  
we thank you!

Ahiy –Hiy



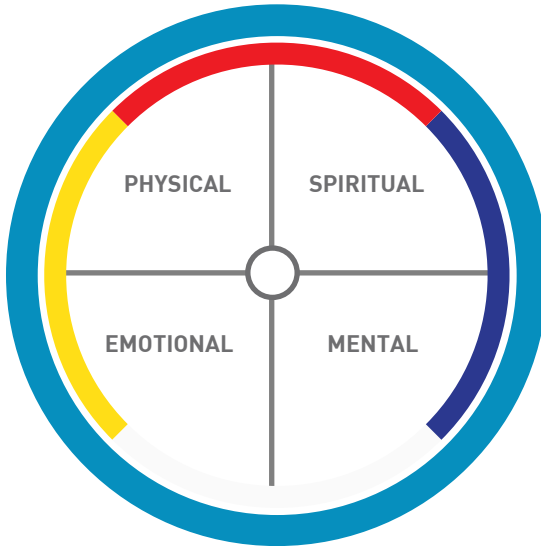
## MEDICINE WHEEL

The concept of the medicine wheel is an important part of the healing practice. The circle of the medicine wheel symbolizes a healing circle. Each of the 4 parts of the wheel represent the necessary elements which are needed to achieve a balance and wholeness within oneself.

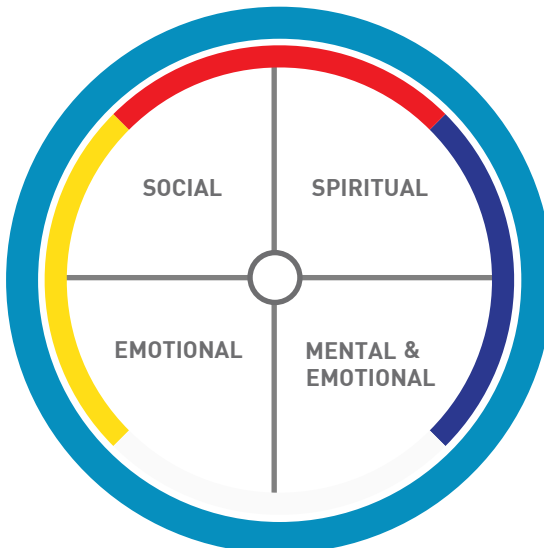
The number 4 is significant to the medicine wheel for the following reasons:

- Basic sacred colours: Yellow, Red, Blue, White (other colours may be used)
- Wellness of an individual: spiritual, physical, emotional, mental
- Directions: North, South, East, West (acknowledging that in order to complete the circle, there are a number of directional combinations such as Northeast, Southwest etc. which all carry the same value to the circle)
- Seasons: spring, summer, fall, winter
- Elements: fire, earth, wind, water
- Stages of life: childhood, youth, adulthood, elder

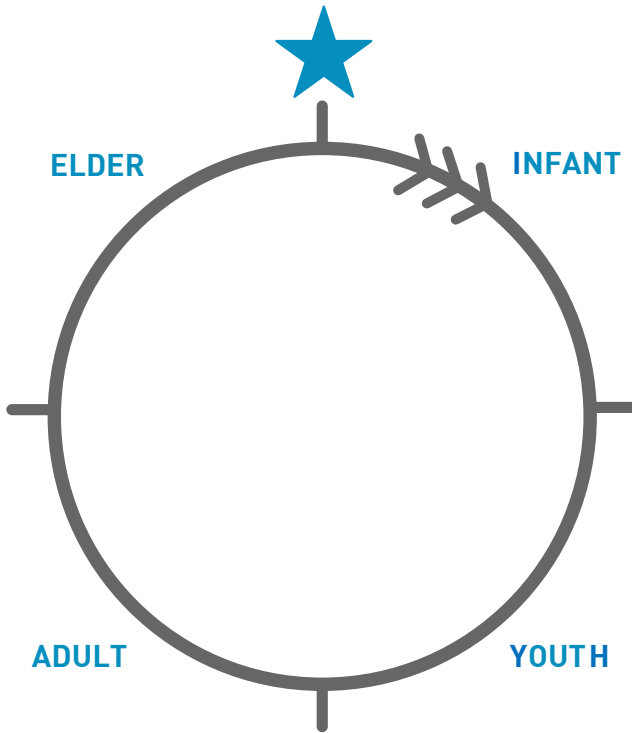
**THE CENTRE CIRCLE OF THE MEDICINE WHEEL BELOW REPRESENTS ONESELF.**



**THE CENTRE CIRCLE OF THE MEDICINE WHEEL BELOW REPRESENTS FAMILY AND/OR COMMUNITY.**



STAGES OF LIFE:







## SMUDGING

Smudging carries our prayers as the smoke rises to the Creator, and his grandfather and grandmother spirit helpers. Some people choose to smudge personal objects to clear negative energy from it, as well as smudging their home to remove any unwanted spirits.

**We smudge to clear the air around us.**

**We smudge to clean our minds so that we will have good thoughts.**

**We smudge our eyes so that we will only see good things.**

**We smudge our ears so that we will only hear good things.**

**We smudge our mouths so that we will only speak good things.**

**We smudge our whole being so that we will only feel good things.**

Smudging may require the following:

- Sweetgrass, sage and a combination of other medicines
- Hot coals or matches
- Shell or other heat resistant bowl or pan
- At times, a feather may be used to fan the fire and to brush down oneself or other participants. *We never use human breath to blow on the fire.* Our gift of breath is given to us as an infant from grandfather wind as a blessing. It is not our right to use this gift for the work that grandfather wind is responsible for.

When a person smudges, he/she will start by lighting the sweetgrass/tobacco/sage, making sure there is smoke generating. Using both hands, or a feather, gather the smoke and spread over oneself.







## SWEAT LODGE ETIQUETTE & INFORMATION

The purpose of the sweat lodge ceremony is to cleanse and purify the mind, body and spirit.

First Nations Elders recommend that each person enters the sweat lodge with appropriateness, kindness, and with prayers. Participants have their own reasons for participating in the ceremony and should undertake the sweat with positive energies, feelings and emotions.

First Nations Elders are role models that exemplify this behaviour and mindset. As in any ceremony, appropriate dress and attire is needed. It is suggested that women wear modest clothing covering the upper and lower body, for example a flannel gown, and carry a towel. Women are also encouraged to sit in an appropriate manner that is suggested to them by a knowledgeable female. It is suggested that men wear modest shorts, such as swim trunks, and carry a towel. The ceremonial person who is conducting the sweat will provide direction at the beginning to clarify where men and women will be positioned.

Out of respect for traditional practices, as well as possible health concerns due to the heat

one is exposed to during the sweat ceremony, women "Moon Time" (menstrual cycle) are not permitted to take part in the sweat lodge. These women are also required to be a significant distance away from the sweat lodge. This protocol is generally followed for all ceremonies. Speaking is permitted during the ceremony when communicating with the ceremonial person asking for prayers, healing or other such matters. Once the ceremony has begun, speaking is not encouraged because this is the time that we dedicate to our spiritual belief and well-being.

Throughout the ceremony, heated grandfather rocks will be added. The amount of rocks that will be used, is determined by the ceremonial person. It is recommended that glasses, jewelry, earrings and cellphones should be removed. There may be berries, fish or other food offered during or after the sweat lodge. A participant should not refuse the food offered unless there are health reasons such as allergies. The ceremonial person conducting a sweat lodge will bear in mind the health and well-being of the participants. Participating in a sweat lodge ceremony can be difficult at times. Individuals may ask the ceremonial person to allow



them to leave the sweat lodge if they are feeling unwell or feel that they are not able to finish.

A gift of tobacco may be offered to the ceremonial person at the beginning of the sweat for one's own personal blessing and for that of their family. At times, broad cloth can also be offered. The appropriate colours of the cloth should be suggested by the ceremonial person. Generally, a sweat will begin with a pipe ceremony and the ceremonial person's protocol will be followed.

There are songs, teachings, and prayers shared throughout the ceremony. Most commonly, the sweat ceremony will consist of 4 rounds with a break in between each round. At times, additional rounds may be added.

It is important to note that sweat lodge protocols may differ according to the ceremonial person who is conducting the sweat and the geographical area where it is being held.



## FEAST

Feasts are a way of expressing gratitude for whatever one has been given. Women family members prepare the food to be offered, and in doing so must prepare it with a clear mind and positive energy. Traditionally, it was the men who supplied the food and it was the responsibility of the women to prepare it. This practice is still respected and followed today.

It is an important teaching and practice that women are not expected, nor permitted, to help prepare the feast food while they are on their Moon Time. Those preparing for a feast must remember to not experiment and not to taste their cooking. This means the cook must trust her dish will taste great. The reason for this is because a dish of food is set aside as the offering and is offered first before anyone eats. How this first dish is offered may vary from one community to another.

Most commonly, at the start of a ceremony a pipe ceremony is held. Once the pipe ceremony concludes, all food must then be smudged and the young men who will help serve the food will take a small sample of all smudged food to create a spirit dish. A lead Elder will be asked for a special blessing and prayer of the food, for the welfare and well-being of the people and will give thanks

for the event or ceremony. Once the food has been blessed and spoken for, the lead Elder will be served first, followed by the remainder of the people. After all food has been served, a designated elder will give the signal that it is ok to begin eating.

If the feast is for a relative who has passed on into the Spirit World, the food offered at this time may include foods the deceased person liked when he or she was alive. When we honour our loved ones with their favourite food, we are showing them love and respect. We are feeding their spirit.

Feasts, in some instances, are followed by giveaways. Giveaways are gifts that the family has collected throughout the previous year in preparation for remembering a loved one. This is also a way to give thanks to family and friends that supported them throughout their grieving process. Generally, a feast is held on the first year anniversary of the loved one's passing, and again in the second and third years. In the fourth year, a feast is held and then followed by the giveaway. *It is important to note that some may follow a different method.*

Feasts can also be held to celebrate life and can include the work one



does. The essence of a feast is to feed our loved one that has passed into the spirit world, and to express gratitude. It is a common way to say thank you for all the people who may have helped through the different, sometimes difficult, times of one's life.

Here in the **Qu'Appelle Valley Territory**, there are 4 common dishes that are included in the feast:

- Buffalo grease was used in the past. Today, we substitute with beef grease.
- Saskatoon berries
- Crushed, cooked choke cherries
- Buffalo, beef or wild game soup
- Additional food is brought by other participants of the feast





## KEHTEYAK “OLD ONES” / ELDER

Keyteyak, or elders, are very important members of First Nation communities. The term Elder refers to someone who has attained a high degree of understanding of First Nation traditional teachings, ceremonies, languages and healing practices. An Elder is recognized for their honour, their self-respect and their integrity. It is for this reason, elders are devotedly supported by their community. Elders have earned the right to pass this knowledge on to others and to give advice and guidance on personal issues, as well as on issues affecting their communities and nations. First Nation peoples value their Elders and all older people, and address them with the utmost respect.

If you are considering visiting a First Nation community or organizing an event with a First Nation focus, you should consult an Elder for his or her perspective. A certain protocol should be followed when requesting an Elder’s assistance. This protocol may vary from the following guidelines, which would be used for a First Nations Elder.

**Offerings of tobacco are customary and need to be presented to a ceremonial person, Elder (male or female) to conduct any such ceremony that is being requested.**

Check first with a leader of the Elder’s community to determine the proper protocol.

In addition, an Elder’s time should be recognized and properly compensated as a sign of respect and appreciation. This gift may include an honorarium, cloth, blanket, or clothing.



## OFFERINGS

Traditional offerings are made to the Creator during all ceremonies. Offerings are made to the Creator in exchange for the return of his blessings for life and virtues. Standard items that may be used as an offering can include:

- Tobacco is always offered first and acts as a binding agreement between the person making the offering, the Elder and the Creator. This ensures that one will act in good faith and to the best of their ability to fulfill the work or advice that is being requested. Also, tobacco offerings are given when we gather medicines, roots, cedar, berries, or when we take from Mother Earth including the animals. It is used in hunting practices to put tobacco down first as an offering before taking the animal.

- In the modern day world, cloth offerings have become customary. The cloth represents a form of acknowledgement to the Creator and his grandfather/grandmother spirit helpers in exchange for their blessings in life.

Other offerings may be appropriate depending on the community and the request that is being made.









## DRUMMING

Drumming has been a long-established part of the First Nation culture. The drum is used in many songs such as prayer songs, grieving songs, celebration songs and welcoming songs.

The drumbeat represents the heartbeat of Mother Earth. Drumming is a key symbol and it represents the holistic way of life that is widely promoted among First Nation societies. There are many important healing aspects

the drum can offer, and its circular shape reminds us that we are all related, and that we need to work together to become stronger and to understand and accept the communities around us. Individuals can gain strength from partaking in drumming because it provides a sense of community, belonging, inclusiveness, safety, and stability. With drumming we share and listen to one another. Together within the drumming circle we support each other.

## EAGLE FEATHER

The eagle is the highest sacred animal. It is believed that the Creator watches over all of us through the eagle's eyes. The traditional usage of the eagle feather allows a person to have the opportunity to speak while

others listen. The speaker will hold the feather as a means of holding themselves accountable so that they will speak with honesty, respect and integrity.





## HEALING THROUGH THE LAND

Land-based healing is a necessary component for many First Nation peoples in order to reach a greater level of healing and wellness. In fact, many people and many cultures around the world appreciate the value of disconnecting from the fast-paced world and reconnecting with nature, but for many First Nations people, it is an essential part of our healing. Land-based healing, including fasting, engage the Spirit and support overall healing.

In First Nations' beliefs, land is a living entity. The Earth is recognized as our mother because everything that we need to sustain our life comes from her. The elements of fire

and air are connected to the Earth. She bestows us with materials for our homes, clothes, tools, and medicines. She is the basis of who we are as human beings that include our languages, our cultures, our knowledge and wisdom to know how to conduct ourselves in a good way. If we listen from the place of connection to the Spirit that lives in all things, Mother Earth teaches us what we need to know to take care of her and all her children.

For First Nations people, no matter where we go, our identity goes with us. Where we come from is always critically important.



## SPIRIT ANIMALS

First Nation people believe that animals have spirits and enter the human world to give their bodies to supply food, medicines and other resources.

Animals, are infused with great spiritual significance. The animal world has taught people how to live close to the earth. The connection that has been established between the animal spirit and the human spirit has instilled a respect for the balance of life when following traditional ways.

Given this unified relationship between animals and humans, First Nation people were careful and

respectful of the natural lifecycles of all living things they share the Earth with. They hunted, and collected only what was needed to sustain their families and communities. Every part of the animal was used so as not to take more than what was needed. If more was collected, then it was shared among people within their community, especially with those who were unable to gather for themselves. This practice is still honoured today.

The spirit of any animal may be considered and their meaning is dependent on oneself.







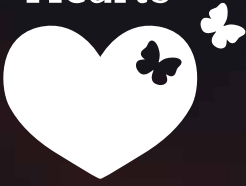








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