

HOME

FIRE

**ENDING THE CYCLE
OF FAMILY VIOLENCE**

DVD DISCUSSION GUIDE



DEVELOPED BY BEARPAW RESEARCH, A DEPARTMENT OF NATIVE COUNSELLING SERVICES OF ALBERTA



NATIVE COUNSELLING SERVICES OF ALBERTA

Home Fire is the result of a two year research project by *BearPaw Research*, a department of *Native Counselling Services of Alberta (NCSA)*. Since 1970, NCSA has been advocating for the fair and equal treatment of Aboriginal people in the justice system. Led by CEO Dr. Allen Benson, NCSA has become a national leader in Aboriginal social justice. Guided by a Board of Elders, NCSA currently operates over thirty legal, health and education programs in Alberta, including two Section 81 healing centres. NCSA also strives to bring research to life through evidence-based documentary films. The goal of the knowledge shared in *Home Fire* is to contribute to the building of Aboriginal family resilience, including the reclamation of Aboriginal worldview, reconciliation of damaged family and community relationships and self-determination of Aboriginal individuals and communities.

THE DOCUMENTARY – HOME FIRE

Home Fire is a 37 minute documentary film that explores family violence and restorative justice from an Aboriginal perspective. Featuring commentary from Elders, community leaders, and members of the western justice system, *Home Fire* examines the colonization of Canada, historic trauma, the western justice system and grassroots healing programs in Aboriginal communities.

Dr. Patti LaBoucane-Benson is the principal investigator for *Home Fire*, a project that includes a documentary film, discussion guide, radio documentary and public policy research publication. Dr. LaBoucane-Benson brings an extensive understanding of family resilience and historic trauma to *Home Fire*. In 2009, she published *Aboriginal Family Resilience - A Framework for Building Resilience in Canadian Indigenous Families* and this model has informed the services of NCSA as well as many research projects undertaken by BearPaw Research.



The Law Foundation of Ontario
Building a better foundation for justice in Ontario

While financially supported by the Law Foundation of Ontario, the views expressed in *Home Fire* do not necessarily reflect the views of the Foundation.

FACILITATOR INSTRUCTIONS

FACILITATORS: Please make photocopies of the handouts on Pages 2, 4, and 6 beforehand and give to each participant after watching the video.

ONE 1. Introduce the video, *Home Fire*. Issues raised in the video may trigger powerful feelings or emotions in some people. Plan for support to be available. *Home Fire* should be viewed from beginning to end without interruption. It is approximately 37 minutes in duration.

We encourage facilitators to arrange chairs and bring the group into a circle for the discussion that follows the video. Depending on the amount of time you have, you can choose to break down the discussion over a number of different sessions or days. The issues raised in the video are complex and wide ranging.

TWO 2. After the group has watched the video, debrief the group and get participants' first impressions. If anyone is upset or needs support, please arrange for help immediately.

THREE 3. Give photocopies of handouts on pages 2, 4, and 6 in the discussion guide to each participant.

Each handout is designed to be read aloud and discussed by the group as it is being read. At the end of each of the three handouts there are discussion questions that the facilitator will read out loud to the group. The questions are there as a guide. Facilitators and participants are also encouraged to create their own questions.

THE SPIRAL

The spiral is a symbol that helps us understand our interconnected relationship to all beings in the world - animate, inanimate, and spiritual. The interconnected nature of the spiral demonstrates how all living beings are in relationship with each other, and have boundaries that define those relationships.



COSMOS

ENVIRONMENT

NATION

CLAN

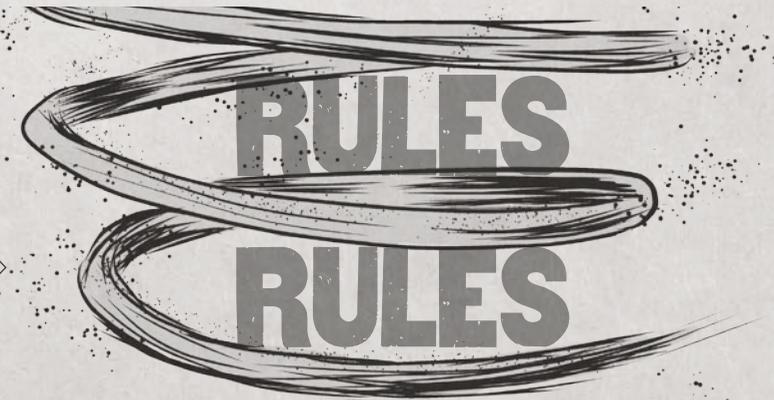
FAMILY

INDIVIDUAL

In a healthy society, we have rules (or teachings) that define our relationships with all living beings, including specific teachings that help us to have good relationships in our families and communities. These rules provide healthy boundaries that ensure people will feel safe, secure and able to live “the good life”. In many Indigenous cultures, these teachings are based upon the values of kindness, caring, sharing, humility, honesty, respect and self-determination.

These rules are represented by the spaces in between each level of the spiral; they provide a structure that keeps the spiral upright and healthy.

For example, in many Aboriginal cultures, there are specific teachings on the roles and responsibilities of parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles. When these teachings are followed, children are raised in an environment where they feel loved and protected. When they become adults, they are able to form trusting relationships with their children.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS – THE SPIRAL

1. What do you think it means to have interconnected relationships?

2. What are some examples of healthy boundaries within family relationships?

3. How do you think that the rules, or spaces between the levels of the spiral, keep the spiral healthy?

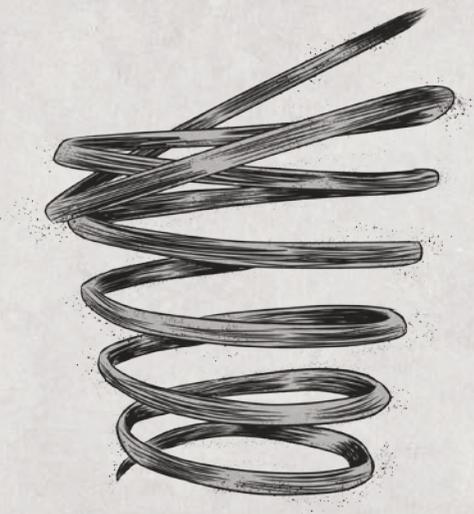
4. In the film, it is said that children are the “*centre of the community*”. What do you think that means?



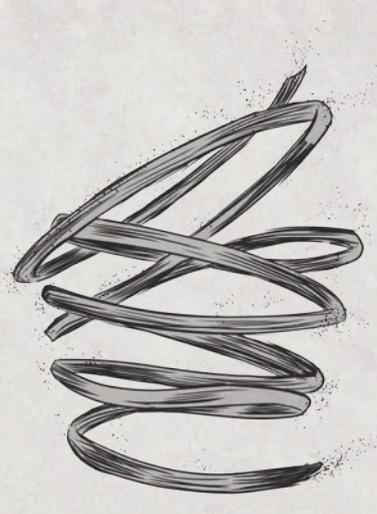
THE COLLAPSE

Since 1763, colonial laws have been passed to assimilate Aboriginal people into British and Canadian society. The abduction of children into residential schools for over 100 years was the government's most powerful instrument of colonization, separating children from their

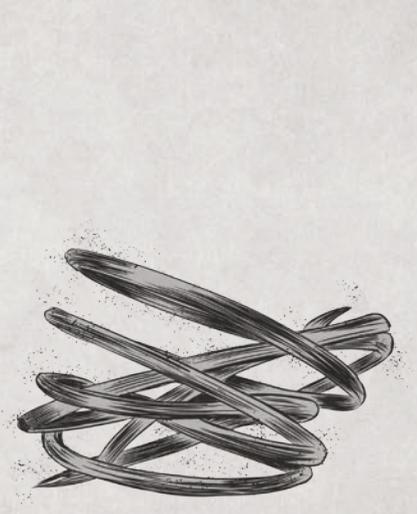
family and culture and re-socializing them into European Christian society. Many children suffered from emotional, physical and sexual abuse in the schools.



As generations of children were removed from their families, they were left to feel neither a part of their Aboriginal family and community, nor a part of the broader Canadian community. Colonization was a direct attack on the rules that informed healthy family relationships.



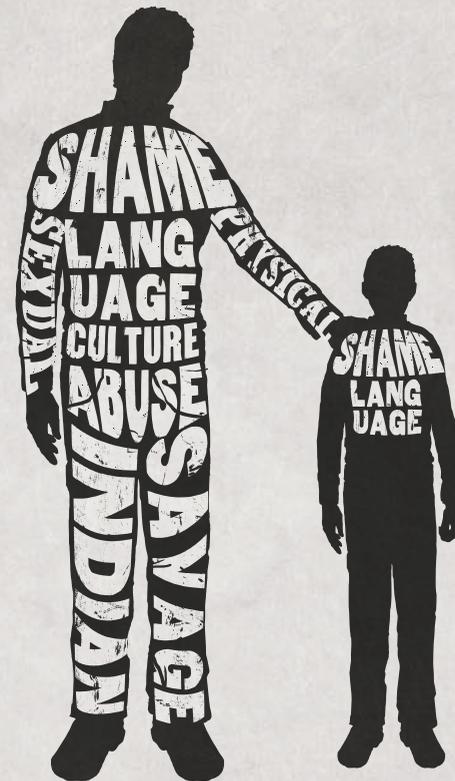
Without the infrastructure of rules, the spiral is weakened and collapses on itself.



The boundaries that define healthy relationships become transgressed and the spiral becomes a tangled, chaotic knot. For many Aboriginal people, this is experienced as family violence as a result of *intergenerational trauma*, including spiritual, psychological, emotional, physical and sexual abuse in families and communities.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS – THE COLLAPSE

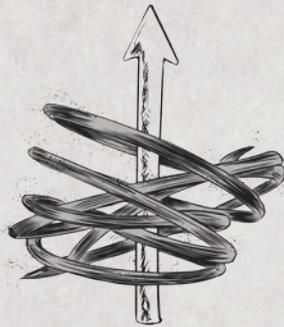
1. If residential schools were one “*instrument of colonization*”, what are some others?
2. If the residential school system was an attack on healthy family relationships, what other relationships in the spiral were attacked as a result of colonization?
3. In the video, intergenerational trauma was portrayed in an animation as an adult touching a child on the shoulder and passing on negative words. What do you think intergenerational trauma is?



Understanding intergenerational trauma and how it is connected to colonization is the key to understanding what programs and interventions are required for healing. Healthy family relationships can be restored. **Hopelessness and helplessness can be overcome.**

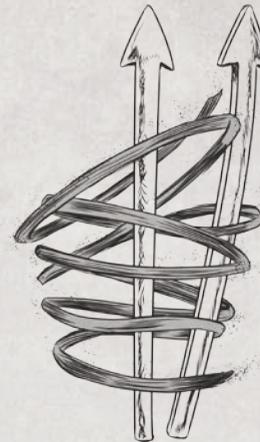
THE REBUILD

Healing and building family resilience requires work and growth in three interconnected components:



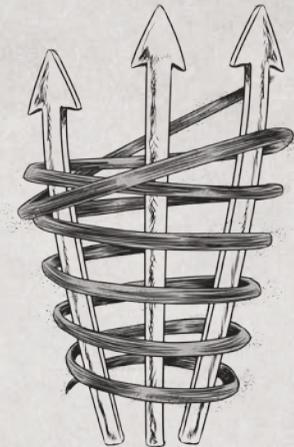
I. RECLAMATION OF AN INTERCONNECTED WORLDVIEW

The first step in the healing process is to reclaim an interconnected worldview and positive Aboriginal identity. Healing begins by learning about the impacts of colonization and understanding the roots of trauma-based behaviour (i.e. family violence).



2. RECONCILIATION OF DAMAGED RELATIONSHIPS

The second step is to re-learn the rules and boundaries of healthy relationships. Healing relationships within families, communities, as well as between First Nations and the rest of Canada, is a process that must be undertaken by all Canadians. For some Aboriginal people, going to ceremonies and reconciling their relationships with themselves, their families and their community is an important part of the healing process.



3. SELF DETERMINATION OF ONES' OWN FUTURE

Finally, one of the most difficult outcomes of colonization was the damage to the capacity of Aboriginal individuals, families and communities to self-determine their own future. Healing programs must be created, directed and implemented by Aboriginal people. Successful solutions to intergenerational trauma caused by colonization already exist within the community and for many people, within Aboriginal teachings.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS – THE REBUILD

1. What did the Sts'ailes people do to reclaim their interconnected worldview?

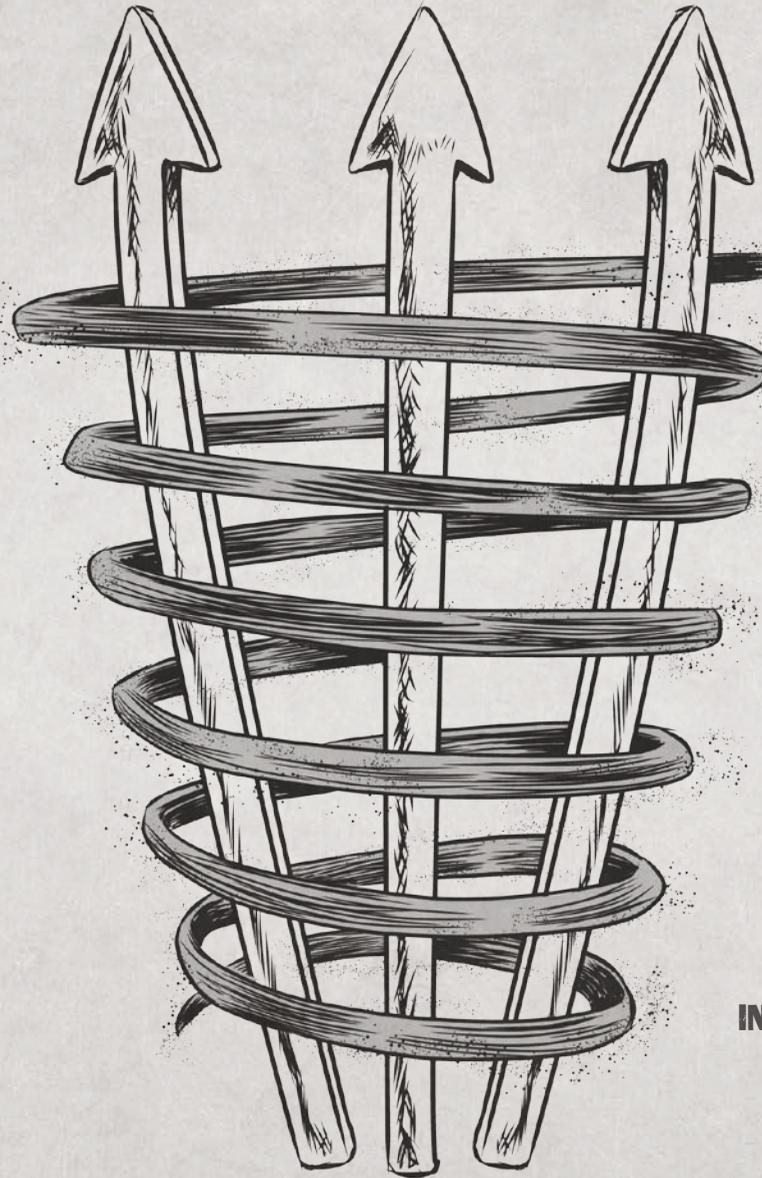
2. What role did reconciliation have in the Mamowichitowin program?

3. What difference do you think it would make for the future of Aboriginal people if every young person in Canada were able to take a historic trauma training program like *Tapwe Warrior*?

SELF-DETERMINATION

RECLAMATION

RECONCILIATION



COSMOS

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FAMILY

INDIVIDUAL

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