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Traditional Teachings

A Journey from Young Child
to Young Adult

Resources used in development of the production of
Traditional Teachings can be found at
www.skprevention.ca

(Sexual and Reproductive Health - First Nations Traditional Teachings)

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Acknowledgements

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Traditional Teachings was created by the Saskatchewan Prevention Institute with support from the Office of the Treaty Commissioner and encouragement from the Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technology.

The Saskatchewan Prevention Institute extends its gratitude to the following for their guidance, expertise, and dedication in the production of Traditional Teachings:

Harry LaFond, Executive Director, Office of the Treaty Commissioner, member of the Muskeg Lake Cree First Nation, Board Member of Saskatchewan Prevention Institute

John Spyglass, Teacher and storyteller, and member of the Mosquito, Grizzly Bear's Head, Lean Man Nakota First Nation

Sylvia McAdam, Teacher, author, storyteller, and member of the Big River Cree First Nation

Anthony Towstego, Producer, Director and Edit Supervisor, Thomega Entertainment Incorporated

Shannon Scott, Camera Operator and Editor, Artistic Imagery Productions

Simone McLeod provided artwork for the cover of the DVD and the booklet

Kevin Pee Ace and Simone McLeod generously provided artwork between the chapters

Beauty Faulkner and Janet Symon composed and performed "The Healing Heart and Soul" song

Carol Glazer, Project Coordinator, Saskatchewan Prevention Institute

5. What marks the time when a girl becomes a young woman? When a boy becomes a young man? Are there teachings and practices that guide a girl or a boy as they become a young woman or man?
6. Are there ceremonies that a family and community hold to celebrate a girl's transition to woman and a boy's to man?
7. Who in the family and community is responsible for teaching girls and boys and young men and women about their sexuality and maturing into young adulthood? What and how are the children taught about becoming young adults in a family and community?
8. If you had the opportunity to teach parents about raising their boys and girls to young men and women, what advice would you give them?
9. Growing from a little boy or girl to a young man or woman is discovering that your body changes and you begin to think differently. What are the teachings that help young men and women have a healthy view of themselves as a sexual person?
10. What are the values, traditions, and laws that young men and women need to learn about sexual maturation and responsibilities?
11. When do you teach a young man or woman about being a father or mother? What do you teach a young man about becoming a father and a young woman about becoming a mother?
12. If the young people are abusing drugs and alcohol, how do they learn that it's not healthy for them or their families? What advice do you give them when they ask for guidance?

It is important to prepare the audience for the possibility of the discussion triggering emotions. Guidelines for confidentiality and permission to leave the room should be established at the outset. Arranging for a counsellor to be available during and following the discussion is also a good idea.

Dedication

Traditional Teachings is dedicated to the memory of Elder Velma Goodfeather (1943-2012). Velma was from Standing Buffalo Dakota First Nation and is held in high esteem across Saskatchewan. "*Oyate Wayakepewin*" ... *They go to her for guidance.*

Traditional Teachings: A Journey from Young Child to Young Adult

captures the knowledge, worldviews, and experiences of seven Elders and a Knowledge Keeper who are members of Saskatchewan's Cree, Dakota, Dene, Nakota, and Saulteaux First Nations.

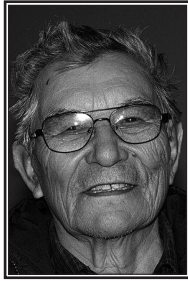
The oral histories of First Nations people in Saskatchewan have many similar teachings about child rearing and the journey from young child to young adult. There are differences in traditional teachings among the First Nations and it is important that due regard be given for each specific First Nation. Further guidance regarding traditional teachings, ceremonies, and responsibilities can be sought from respected Elders and Knowledge Keepers from the specific First Nations.

The Saskatchewan Prevention Institute and its partners on the project would like to extend sincere gratitude to the Elders, Knowledge Keeper and Storytellers who have graciously shared their traditional teachings, their wisdom, and their stories for this project:

Elder Velma Goodfeather, *Standing Buffalo Dakota First Nation*
 Elder Francis McAdam, *Big River Cree First Nation*
 Elder Juliette McAdam, *Big River Cree First Nation*
 Elder Daniel Musqua, *Keeseekoose Saulteaux First Nation*
 Elder Thelma Musqua, *Keeseekoose Saulteaux First Nation*
 Elder Joe O'Watch, *Carry the Kettle Nakota First Nation*
 Elder James Sylvestre, *Buffalo River Dene Nation*
 Knowledge Keeper Jessie Sylvestre, *Buffalo River Dene Nation*
 Storyteller Barry Ahenakew, *Ahtahkakoop Cree Nation*
 Storyteller Sylvia McAdam, *Big River Cree First Nation*



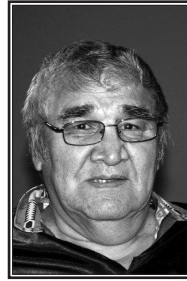
**Elder Velma
Goodfeather**
*Standing Buffalo Dakota
First Nation*



**Elder Francis
McAdam**
*Big River Cree
First Nation*



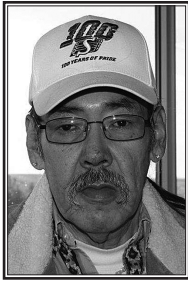
**Elder Juliette
McAdam**
*Big River Cree
First Nation*



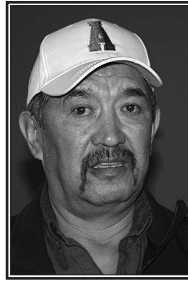
**Elder Daniel
Musqua**
*Keeseekoose Saulteaux
First Nation*



**Elder Thelma
Musqua**
*Keeseekoose Saulteaux
First Nation*



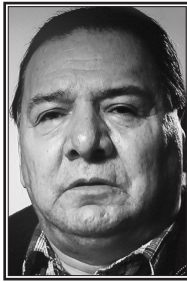
**Elder Joe
O'Watch**
*Carry the Kettle Nakota
First Nation*



**Elder James
Sylvestre**
*Buffalo River
Dene Nation*



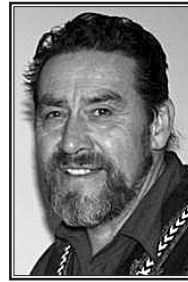
**Knowledge
Keeper Jessie
Sylvestre**
Buffalo River Dene Nation



**Storyteller
Barry Ahenakew**
Ahtahkakoop Cree Nation



**Storyteller/Moderator
Sylvia McAdam**
Big River Cree First Nation



**Moderator
Harry LaFond**
Muskeg Lake Cree First Nation

How to Use the DVDs

The DVDs are designed to be used as a resource by teachers, youth support workers, health care providers, family members, Elders, and Knowledge Keepers as they share traditional teachings with children and youth.

Traditionally, boys and girls were taught separately about their sexual development and responsibilities. For ease of use, the two DVDs are organized into chapters separated by First Nation and by male and female Elder or Knowledge Keeper.

It is suggested that the user watch the DVDs before deciding which chapters to share with young people. As the chapters vary in length from three minutes to thirty seven minutes, the user could choose to pause the viewing of a chapter to discuss a tradition, teaching, law, or ceremony shared by an Elder or the Knowledge Keeper.

The following questions were used as a general guide by the moderators in their conversations with the Elders and Knowledge Keeper. You may wish to invite local Elders or Knowledge Keepers to share their own knowledge and teachings with youth in relation to these questions. You may also consider using these questions as points of discussion with your audience.

1. In Cree, ohpikinawasowin is the word used to describe childbirth and the concept of child rearing. In your First Nation culture, what words do you use when talking about child rearing and the parent-child relationship?
2. If the main purpose of child rearing is to make sure that children experience and maintain a balanced life and know who they are, what do we expect from parents in the process of raising their children?
3. What are the most important teachings that guide a child through the various stages of childhood? Are there special ceremonies that a family and community hold to celebrate the stages of childhood?
4. What do First Nation parents expect from their children?

Young mothers and fathers are taught to respect their children, to nurture them, and to keep them safe in their homes. Young parents learn the importance of being role models, as they are expected to pass on the traditions and laws that they learned in their childhood. As parents, they are to teach their children the values and virtues of Honesty, Humility, Truth, Wisdom, Love, Respect, and Bravery that are the spiritual foundations for a healthy and productive life.

The Elders and Knowledge Keeper refer to the harm that young people can do to themselves by using drugs and alcohol. They talk about young people having thoughts of suicide and how important it is for them to reach out to their family, an Elder, or respected community member for guidance and support. The Elders talk about the importance of young people reconnecting with their history and their traditions as they seek their place in the world.

You will hear the Elders and Knowledge Keeper speak in their own First Nation language before translating their thoughts into English. They speak of the importance of teaching children in their language of origin, as their culture, traditions, and family values are embedded within their language.

The Elders and Knowledge Keeper explain that understanding spirituality from a First Nations perspective is the foundation for all the traditional teachings and knowledge. The teachings shared by the storytellers provide insight into the different stages of the human journey that begins with an Indigenous understanding of the Creator. They speak of beginning each day with prayer and guidance from the Creator and how spirituality guides a person's life.

Protocols and Customs

The DVD was filmed at Wanuskewin Heritage Park outside of Saskatoon. A pipe ceremony, led by Ross Gardypie and Darryl Chamakese, was held the evening prior to the filming. The ceremony included both solemn prayers and smudging. The Elders and Knowledge Keeper, family members, and other invited guests were in attendance. Following the ceremony, a meal was shared with much laughter and storytelling.

The Elders' and Knowledge Keeper's stories were filmed the next day. Each was presented with a handmade quilt and tobacco as tokens of respect and gratitude for their wisdom and teachings. The quilts were provided by the Office of the Treaty Commissioner and the tobacco by the Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre. In appreciation, the Saskatchewan Prevention Institute provided an honorarium to each of the Elders and Knowledge Keeper.

Protocols and respectful behaviour are important when inviting Elders or Knowledge Keepers to share their wisdom, guidance, and prayers. If you require further information on the protocol to use when approaching an Elder, you may wish to contact the Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre, Office of the Treaty Commissioner, or Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations. Information can also be sought through Saskatchewan's Tribal Councils and First Nations Band offices.

Purpose of DVD

"Oral teaching is very important to First Nations people. That was the way we learned many of our ways of life, our prayers, [and] our spirituality. They [young people] have to be strong; they have to understand [that] they have to have true belief in themselves and everything around them. That's the only way that they'll live a good way of life."

Velma Goodfeather, Standing Buffalo First Nation

Traditional Teachings: A Journey from Young Child to Young Adult captures the values, laws, traditions, and practices surrounding a young person's healthy sexual development and responsibilities as shared by seven Elders and a Knowledge Keeper. The DVDs were created as a resource for teachers, youth, and health care providers. First Nation families, Knowledge Keepers, and Elders may also be interested in using this production in their teachings.

The DVD is a sampling of the teachings and life stories of four male Elders and three female Elders and one female Knowledge Keeper who are members of the Plains Cree, Dakota, Dene, Nakota, and Saulteaux First Nations of Saskatchewan. Two Cree First Nations Story Tellers also share their stories of The Creator's Flame and The Sacred Tree of Life.

The goal of this production is to empower youth to reconnect with the traditional values and cultural practices surrounding their sexual maturation. It is the hope that in hearing these shared stories and lessons, young people will be supported to make healthy lifestyle choices about their sexual and reproductive health.

Content of the DVD

The Elders and Knowledge Keeper share their own traditions and practices of caring for a child from conception through childhood to young adulthood. They talk of leading a balanced life; a life of well-being. Each Elder and Knowledge Keeper, in his or her own way, tells of the most important teachings, values, and laws to help guide a young boy or girl in the transition to a young man or woman and, eventually, to the ultimate responsibility of parenthood.

The Elders and Knowledge Keeper talk about the ceremonies, in the tradition of their First Nation, that are held by families and communities to celebrate the passage from one stage of life to the next. For example, they tell us about the naming ceremony for the young child; seclusion for a girl during her first Moon Time and the meaning of the gifts she receives at this time; and the vision quest or the first hunt for a boy.

Ceremonies help children to understand who they are and their connection with family, community, and nature. The Elders and Knowledge Keeper tell us of the importance of teaching children and young people how to be respectful of spiritual items, such as a drum, a pipe, and feathers, and how to conduct themselves at ceremonies.

Sexuality is a special gift from the Creator and brings the ultimate gift of children. The Elders and Knowledge Keeper talk about the person in the family or community who is responsible for teaching children and youth about their sexuality and guiding them in the development of a healthy sexual self image. They tell us about the interconnectedness of an individual's spiritual, emotional, mental, and physical self and the importance of maintaining a healthy balance with the support of family, Elders, and community.

Traditionally, there was not an adolescent stage. Teenagers were regarded as young men and women and treated as young adults. They were in turn expected to use the skills that they learned throughout their childhood to contribute to the health and well-being of their family, community, and nation. As children matured into young adults, they took on the responsibilities of caring for younger siblings, grandparents, and elder community members in preparation for a binding relationship or marriage and, eventually, parenthood.

Traditionally, young people learned from their parents and grandparents about caring for their bodies, minds, and spirits, including healthy relationships, safe sexual behaviour, and the responsibilities that come with being a parent. Men and women did not become parents until they had learned the skills necessary to nurture and provide for a child.

The Elders and Knowledge Keeper speak about the importance of women preparing their bodies and minds for pregnancy with healthy food and exercise within a supportive environment of peace and happiness. They tell us of the importance of not smoking, drinking, or using drugs. They also discuss how fathers-to-be are responsible for the care of their partner or wife, during pregnancy, by supporting her to maintain good physical and emotional health.