



Engaging Indigenous Youth in Mental Health Curriculum

When teaching about mental health in another culture, it's important to be mindful of existing beliefs and perspectives. Through open conversations, you can complement and incorporate tradition or respectfully discuss differing views, always approaching with understanding and respect as an outsider.

Be Mindful, Be Curious, Be Humble

Do Your Research

- Learn about the history, culture, and community you will be working in. How do people greet each other, what are considered polite practices, what is viewed taboo or impolite? What makes this community unique?

Never Assume

- Native American nations, tribes, pueblos, villages, and groups are vast and diverse. Whether or not a tribe is recognized by the federal government or not, each will have their own traditions, teachings, beliefs, and practices.
- Traditions, beliefs, and practices can vary within Indigenous communities, even families. For example: Grandparents may be traditional, while their children may be Catholic, Mormon, or follow another religion.
- Families and individuals may practice traditions from multiple tribes due to having multiple tribal affiliations. For example, a family may have a Navajo maternal lineage and a Zuni Pueblo paternal lineage. These are two very different cultures, and the family may practice both or neither of their teachings.
- Native American tribes have rich and complex histories of governance, interactions, conflicts, and alliances, all deeply rooted in their unique cultures, traditions, and experiences. It's essential to approach these histories with respect and avoid oversimplifications or comparisons. Biases and misconceptions can persist, so it's essential to focus on understanding each tribe's distinct experiences and perspectives.

Vocabulary Matters

- Listen to what people call themselves. Do they use "Tribe," "Native," "Native American," "Indigenous," or perhaps their tribe's name in their native language? While the term "Indian" is commonly used, not all tribes or individuals appreciate being called Indians. Address people with the vocabulary they use for themselves. If you're unsure, "Native" and "Indigenous" are the most widely respected terms.
- The meaning of words varies across cultures. Many Indigenous peoples view spiritual ceremonies, traditions, and teachings as cultural practices, stories, and beliefs, not as religion.
- Eurocentric vocabulary, such as "discovered," "savage," "religion," "primitive," "civilized," "nomadic," and "redskin," can carry negative connotations for some communities, as these terms often reflect biased or misleading perspectives.
- Some words or concepts may be considered taboo until you work with a community. For example, in Navajo, the word "oppression" is avoided, with "resilience" preferred, as teachings emphasize positivity and growth.

Ask Questions

- The best way to learn a culture's intricacies is by asking questions.
- Don't be afraid to laugh at yourself when you make a mistake, as laughter shows humility.
- When you know better, do better. You can't know every tribe's or individual's beliefs, so ask questions & listen.
- Engage with both elders, who offer wisdom, and youth, who enjoy sharing their culture and are forgiving of missteps



How to Start

Find a Community Leader	Application
<p>What are the current teachings, views, current climate around mental health?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Are there already systems in place?• Can you adjust your program to complement or incorporate? <p>What community boundaries or customs are in place?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Some topics, animals, and practices are taboo and should be avoided out of respect. This is community specific! Example: In Navajo culture, reptiles, amphibians, and owls are taboo.• Some topics are only to be taught in specific times of year.• Some topics are to be taught through families or cultural channels.	<p>Does the culture have a preferred method of teaching?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Many cultures teach through stories, art, dance, or play. Engaging your audience through these methods allows you to respect tradition, even if you are teaching a non-traditional subject.</i>• <i>Using culturally relevant methods also allows for the participants to make connections for a deeper understanding of your subject.</i> <p>Are there other community programs that have been successful?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Partner with other organizations already trusted by the community.</i>• <i>Ask for community feedback on what has made other programs successful.</i>

Things to remember:

- Trust is earned.
- Every person has their own experiences.
- Don't generalize.
- Don't make promises you can't keep.

With gratitude to:

Augusta Yazzie

San Juan County 4-H and Youth Development Agent New

Mexico State University

Affiliated member of the Navajo Nation

