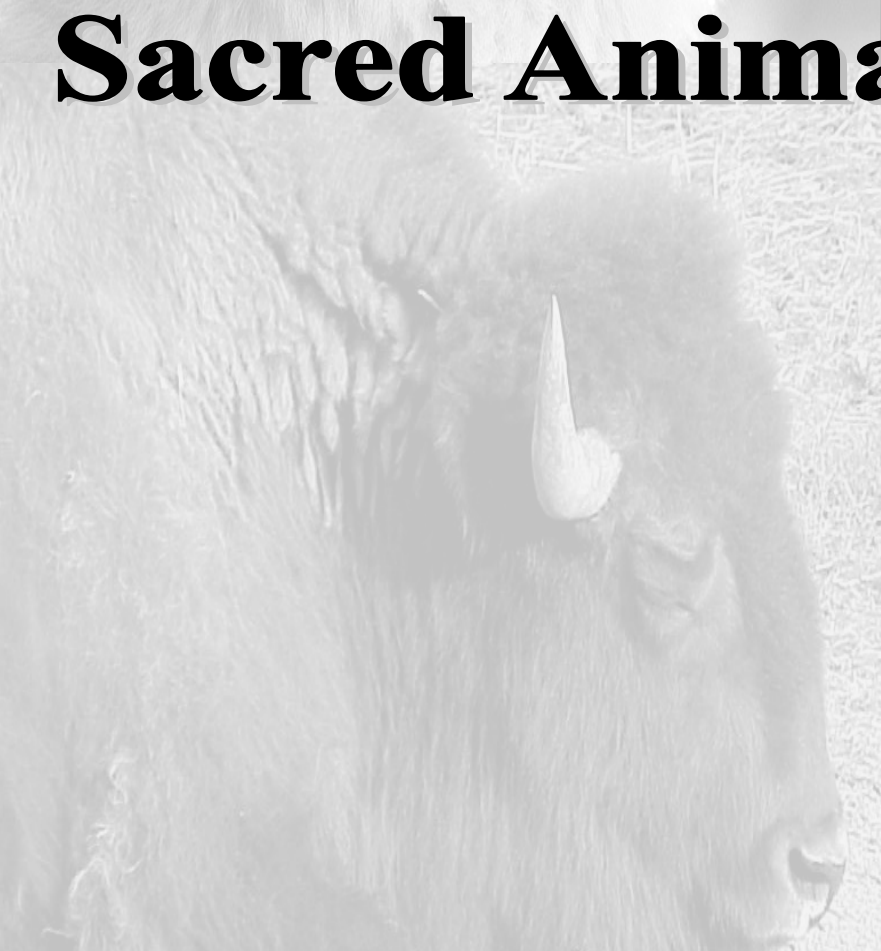




Sacred Animal Teachings



Sacred Animal Teachings'

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Note to Trainees

This manual has been designed and revised to help you facilitate an interactive presentation on the issue of HIV/AIDS present in Aboriginal communities. Try to find a quiet space to read over the material.

Training Goals, Overview and its Importance

Three objectives of Keep the Circle Strong also revised as ‘Sacred Animal Teachings’ are:

- To assist people in realizing the power of their choices
- To make sure that people understand accurate HIV/AIDS facts
- To assess the impact of HIV/AIDS in the Aboriginal Community

Training you to become a part of this interactive presentation should take about 50 minutes.

Sections where trainers are suppose to speak will be marked by *italic print*

Pointers for training will be marked on the side with a test box

Pointers for training of this manual will be in an exact text box along the sides of this HIV/AIDS Youth Prevention Awareness Manual.

You will find a margin on the sides to make notes, as you encounter your own spin on this training tool. You can get electronic copies emailed to you if you contact allnationshope@sasktel.net or it will be posted on our website at www.allnationshope.ca

Do not hesitate to stop your trainer if you have a question at any time.

This document is important because it will have an impact on the HIV/AIDS in Aboriginal communities. It tries to present the facts about HIV/AIDS in an interactive and culturally sensitive fashion.

Setting the Tone

Tasks:

1. Open up the container for the presentation.
 2. Inform the participants of what to expect.
- Set the climate for the training by creating a safe space.

Resources Needed:

- »» A Closed room
- »» Clear access to a bathroom
- »» Boxes of tissue

Facilitators Preparation:

There should be a minimum of two trained facilitators. Having two facilitators provides support for each facilitator and adds a variety of experiences to the training session.

Procedure:

There are two parts to this section: Please become familiar with this section before proceeding:

Setting the tone

POINTER

Only after you have created this safe environment for the teachings (Setting the tone), you may want to grab your audiences' attention. You can do this either before or after you have introduced them to the objectives of the training.

You will have to start with something immediately. At this point you are welcome to incorporate a personal or community experience that can relate to you and the group.

We placed a medium-sized river stone in the middle of the circle before the introduction

After the introduction, one of the trainers says:

“This stone represents the memory of all Aboriginal people who have died of AIDS.”

This has been a very powerful opening. It reminds us that AIDS has a human face. It also helps to remind us trainers as well as the participants of the importance of this work.

As trainers we can sometimes forget the importance of our work, why we began doing what we do. When we remember why we began doing what we love doing. We are more effective because we are driven by passion.

For the audience, this opening is a reminder that AIDS is real and AIDS kills people. The stone is a vehicle, a witness of these things. It's an object that we can feel. The stone speaks silently of the sorrows and of the losses associated with today's topic.

Additional Notes:

If the same trainers are offering many sessions in a row, they may want to alternate the opening stories to help them stay centered. Another suggestion is to smudge.

If appropriate, you may want to incorporate drumming, singing, and dancing at this point, as the element that will “wake your audience up from their dream.” As one hypnotist once remarked, the challenge today is not to induce a trance in people but to wake them up. This is a thought to keep in mind before anything.

Setting the Tone

Part I

Before you begin your HIV presentation ‘Sacred Animal Teachings’ we suggest you create a safe environment for the group.

1. A safe physical environment

We recommend offering the training in a closed room where the group can remain undisturbed for the entire training-prevention awareness session(s). Suggest youth to use the washroom, get a drink, and walk around a bit before you start. Explain that this is due to not having disturbances during the training session.

2. A safe emotional environment

Rules of respects and confidentiality have to be stated at the beginning. All participation is voluntary: nobody should be forced to participate in the interactive parts of the training.

3. A safe learning environment

Lots of information is going to be shared between the trainers and the trainees. All questions are important. Everyone in the group benefits from the explanation of any misunderstandings people have about HIV/AIDS. Therefore, try to create an environment where your participants feel comfortable asking questions. There is no such thing as a stupid question.

4. A safe spiritual environment

The training is based on the traditional teachings and the beliefs in spirituality. The Aboriginal tradition respects a person’s spiritual experiences more than teachings. The Teachings are simply a map for the seeker, and is not the journey.

Participants should be reminded that they are spiritual beings on a human journey.

Setting the Tone

Remember before starting your presentation, it is important that a safe space for teaching has been created.

Your tasks include: introduce the format of the training program, how long it will take, its objective and the importance of the training.

You can begin by saying something along the lines of the following:

Today we will do many things together we will play, we will reflect and will discuss important issues for Aboriginal people. The focus will be on HIV, the virus that causes AIDS.

We will have about 50 minutes together, including the introduction we are going through right now.

Today, our objectives are:

- 1. To help you realize the power of your choices.*
- 2. To make sure you understand the true facts about HIV an AIDS.*
- 3. To create awareness of the deadly impact HIV is having on the Aboriginal community in Canada.*

You being here is important. Aboriginal people have survived many challenges, especially in the last 500 years. In one of the saddest moments of history, the Aboriginal people were victims of biological warfare, in what is now Canada. Have you heard of the “infected blanket?” Smallpox-infected blankets were given to Aboriginal people, as a way to kill them many Aboriginal people died that way.

Today there is a new infected blanket out there that is killing Aboriginal people. The blanket is invisible; it contains a simple virus. It is present in Aboriginal communities all across the country. It challenges us to look at some things many would rather ignore.

We are here today to help you protect yourself from getting it. We are here so that the Seventh Generation yet to be born have a chance to live.

Ice Breakers – Exercises

Let your imagination and your creativity flow when thinking of which exercises to use. Use the ones you felt are easiest to remember.

Here are a few examples:

- »» Blanket volleyball
- »» Team races – quarter drop, life-safer race
- »» Safer Sex BINGO
- »» Condom race
- »» Handshaking exercise
- »» Self Revealing Quiz
- »» Betty “Boop” Game

Four Sacred Animals Speak about AIDS

Tasks:

1. Discuss HIV/AIDS in the world using the voice of wisdom from the four sacred animals (Eagle, Wolf, Bear and Buffalo)
2. Use storytelling as a vehicle to teach and to entertain.
3. Present the issues of HIV/AIDS in the context of the individual lives linked to the socio-economic and the political.

Resources Needed:

- ◆ Masks or pictures of the four sacred animals
Eagle, Wolf, Bear and the Buffalo

Facilitators Preparation:

- ◆ Whether you are using masks or not to play the animal rather than read the text is better. Say the stories, as you would just like any other story.

Procedure:

- ◆ There are four parts to this section. Please become familiar with each part of this section before proceeding. You may want to break this section in to two, so that each trainer is the lead on a section as they are extremely familiar with their two parts. However both trainers will participate in all four parts.

Four Sacred Animals Speak About AIDS

A. The Eagle Around the World

The first animal that speaks and introduces the rest of the animals is the Eagle. Eagles' gift of vision will take the group to four countries and will share a story from each of these countries. Each story represents a color on the Medicine Wheel.

Eagle Speaks on the Yellow Color

"I am Eagle. As a flyer, I can fly higher than any other bird. For that, I am recognized with the gift of vision. From my view point, I can see the whole world. To tell you the whole story about AIDS, I have to go all around the world; I have to talk to you about the four directions and the four colors of the human race.

Since the sun rises in the East, we will start in the East. The color of the East is Yellow. I will tell you a story of the Asian continent; more precisely I will talk about one country of Southeast Asia called Thailand. Thailand is a beautiful country and has been called the country of the smile because the people of Thailand smile a lot.

However, there is great poverty in some parts of Thailand. For example, in the villages of northeast, many people live from hand to mouth. There is not always enough food to feed everyone in the family, especially during the dry season. So people become quite desperate, looking for ways to make money.

Nisarat is the oldest girl in a poor family of five children: Four girls and one boy. Her name, Nisarat, means Full Moon in her language. When a businessman from Bangkok came to her dusty village looking for young girls, it created quite a stir. He said they could work as maids in the capital.

Her Parents let their daughter go because they were going to bet big money: a lump sum right away followed by monthly installments for up to ten years!

Nisarat's family did not hesitate. Four girls were more than her father ever wished for anyway. So he let Nisarat leave with the businessman and told her to obey everything he said. She was 10 years old.

Nisarat never made it to the capital. She found herself on a southern island called Phuket. There, Nisarat was made to work, but not as a maid as a prostitute. Foreign men mostly from the United States, Canada and Germany, were demanding young girls. Nisarat did not have anybody to turn to. She was very sad but was forced to smile, and when she tried to escape, her pimp beat her up. He said, "next time, I will kill you."

By the time she was fourteen years old, Nisarat had contracted several sexually transmitted diseases including HIV. She was forced to work even when she was very ill.

When her pimp realized she was five months pregnant, she was released and sent to a near by Buddhist monastery.

Today, Nisarat is 16 years old and the mother of a one year old. The baby is HIV negative.

Nisarat is one of the lucky ones: she receives free HIV medications from a charitable organization. She earns some money in sewing cooperative for HIV positive mothers and their children. Now, she leads a quiet and peaceful life in the monastery.

Nisarat has only one dream. She hopes to live until the age of 33, when her child is an adult. She wants to be sure that what happened to her will not happen to her little girl. She wishes it would not happen to any child.

There is a big sex industry in Thailand. It caters to the desires of foreign tourists who want to have sex with children or teenagers. Like Nisarat, the children often get HIV from having unprotected sex because they have no choice in the matter.

When they are HIV positive, some of them are allowed to go back home to die of AIDS. Some are taken in by charities. The others end up dying on the streets, alone and forgotten.

Some law-makers do not agree and say: "It brings money and tourism to our country. Without it we would be poorer."

This was a story from the East.

Eagle Speaks on the Red Color

This is a story about the red people in Canada; his name is Jay. He left his reserve in Northern Ontario at the age of 16. He knew he was gay and it was not safe to be gay on the reserve. With no education or skills, alone and without support, he never found a job. Instead, he found poverty: sleazy rooming houses, petty drug dealers, violence and addictions. A year and a half after leaving his reserve, Jay was a homeless cocaine addict. He didn't care about the risk of his life by sharing needles, and he certainly didn't care about having safe sex.

In 1997, Jay was sent to jail for theft under \$5000 and resisting arrest. He spent ten months in prison. In December of 1998 recently out of jail and with nowhere to go, Jay made a collect call home. He learned that his father had left the household and his mother was in recovery for alcohol addiction. His two sisters and beloved grandmother all wanted to see him for Christmas so Jay headed north to his reservation immediately. He stayed there for three months. During that time, Jay abused alcohol regularly and also had unprotected sex with a dozen people.

When he was back in Toronto, Jay fell ill. He found out that he was HIV positive after going for an HIV test at a shelter. A few weeks later the shelter's doctor told Jay that he not only tested positive for HIV but he also had AIDS, Hepatitis B and C, as well as tuberculosis.

Jay died of AIDS in October 2000 at the Casey House in Toronto. His mother kept the cause of his death a secret so no one of Jay's sexual partners on the reserve know that they could have been exposed to all of the infections Jay had. And they have yet to be tested for HIV. All of them have had other sexual partners since then.

The band council is struggling with the issue of AIDS education on the reserve. Some people say, "AIDS is a white man's disease." Others say, "AIDS can wipe us all out."

The band council will decide next week whether or not they will allow AIDS education on the reserve's high school.

Eagle Speaks on the Black Color

This is a story about the black people on Swaziland.

His name is Vusi Matsebula. He lives in a mountain kingdom called Swaziland. It is a tiny country located between South Africa and Mozambique. In Swaziland, it is believed that one person out of four is HIV positive. One of these people is Vusi Matsebula.

Eight years ago, Vusi met a young woman at a party. He slept with her that night. A week later she phoned Vusi and said, "you are going to die. You have HIV and you got it from me." Vusi thought it was a joke. He didn't know anything about HIV. Nobody every talked about it in Swaziland. Eventually, Vusi went for a blood test, which confirmed the telephone conversation. He was HIV positive. Vusi was 22 years old.

He had planned to attend college that fall. Instead, Vusi found himself in the HIV underground. And at first Vusi kept silent. He was depressed. He lost weight. He felt ill. He even considered suicide.

But then he decided to live and a nurse told him, "there are other people like you, they hide but they exist." So Vusi joined secret meetings for people with HIV/AIDS.

In Swaziland, people are murdered for being HIV positive. Vusi Matsebula was the first person in Swaziland to speak about his condition and he is now 30 years old. He walks around with a t-shirt that says in giant block letters: HIV POSITIVE.

Vusi Matsebula is busy talking about HIV and AIDS in schools, on the radio and television. He wants to bring the secret of AIDS in to the open. This worries the government of Swaziland.

Just recently, some law makers said, “all HIV people should be branded.” Others said, “lock them away in camps.” In the end, the Swaziland parliament agreed to ban miniskirts in schools.

Meanwhile, everyday the pages of the national newspaper: Swazi News are filled with obituaries of 20 to 30 year old people who have died of the disease. Their cause of death is listed as a “long illness.”

Eagle Speaks on the White Color

Natalia is a 19 year old, Moscow resident who just got a positive HIV test result. Her life has been difficult at times but she feels that is the worst. Only one year ago, Natalia was the happiest woman in the world.

Natalia’s story is linked to the story of her country. Russia. Natalia was born in a communist federation, which meant that her parents did not have to worry about finding jobs, housing or medical care; everything was provided for them. However, there was no freedom of expression and only one political party. Then all of this changed a few years ago when the federation split. Russia now stands alone, a smaller country in transition from communism to capitalism.

When Russia was a federation it was a police state where crime was very much under control. Now the mafia seems to be everywhere. The problems associated with the free world are quite visible. They include; rampant prostitution on the streets, intravenous drugs use, extortion and intimidation of the citizens by petty criminals. There is also the new high rates of unemployment and homelessness, things that were previously unknown to Russians.

Natalia did not like school very much and planned to quit right after high school. She worked as a receptionist in an import-export business. At 17 years old, she fell in love with one of the company’s truckers, Vadim. Since she was not very happy with her alcoholic family, she rushed into marrying Vadim who was 12 years older than her.

Vadim’s trucking duties took him away for two weeks every month, as he traveled from Moscow to Poland. On the way to Poland, many truckers are exposed to the criminal activities of the new Russia and bordering

countries, such as heroine and prostitution. Like many, Vadim does not realize that Russia is facing a new epidemic that could destroy the country.

Natalia was exposed to HIV and a long list of other diseases by her husband. She also unknowingly married a violent addict.

After she was diagnosed with a sexually transmitted disease and confronted her husband he beat her up so badly that she ended up in the hospital. From there, she was lucky to find a spot in one of the rare shelters for battered women in Russia. The visiting nurse suggested an HIV test because of her STD history. Natalia cried during the counseling session for HIV testing. "Why me?" she thought. "I am only 19. I want my future."

HIV medications are not available to young people like Natalia because she can not afford to pay for them. For her, as for most Russians an HIV test means death.

AIDS has been declared an epidemic in Russia by some officials. The death rate has overtaken the birthrate at a ratio on 1.76:1. The Russian population will drop by 10 million by 2016 because the high rates of addictions and HIV.

ADDITIONAL NOTE:

Life is change and so do our stories. Should you find out a development in the life of Vusi Matsebula, for example, while watching the news one night, feel free to incorporate this news into your version of that story.

Also, even the global stories are continually evolving and your audience may feel inclined to discuss such things as: the new laws aimed at protecting children from sexual slavery; drug addiction and crime in Russia; statistical changes for better for worse in Swaziland; new hope for Aboriginal people in their fight against HIV infection.

In that same vein, do not hesitate to replace one of the stories by another one, perhaps more pertinent to your audience or your community. Do not be afraid to use a personal story if you feel comfortable enough to share with the audience. It is compelling to hear such personal stories because the audience gets to feel the emotions and see a face to the virus.

Four Sacred Animals Speak About AIDS

Part 2 the Wolf: The Facts about HIV and AIDS

The facilitators will now give the teachings of the second animals

Wolf Speaks:

*I am wolf people fear me because they do not understand.
I may look fierce but I am weary of my two-legged brother.
My medicine is strong for family morals.*

Strength is in the family.

*Pride is in the way we raise our young to follow in our footsteps to learn
our teachings.*

In the web of life whether we are male or female we all play a role.

With out the bugs, for example, there is no life on earth.

Everything is important.

For humans, the key is to respect one another.

Do onto others, as you would have them do onto you

The fact you did not consider is changing the outcome like:

“I had noticed some lies in his stories and now I have HIV.”

OR

“I did not respect myself enough to protect myself!”

My lessons are about respecting one’s body

With my medicine you are better equipped in life.

If you desire to be free of HIV, you may need some of my medicine.

But you need the facts first.

Then you need to have honor and respect...

Discussion of Wolf's Medicine

In mainstream North America, where divorce and separation of families run rampant, we need the teachings of the wolf to bring balance to our lives. Children are being lost to systems, which take their identities and culture away. Suicide, overdoses and tragic deaths all related to the health and social ills of society. Families are struggling to survive.

The struggles you have survived through childhood to adulthood have caused you to make choices in life, which are not good. Having respect for yourself and others become non-existent. Who respected your rights as a child being continually abused? Using drugs to dull the pain has caused you to contract HIV. You need to learn to respect the virus or it will end all. It is with you for life.

In the field of HIV prevention, Wolf medicine comes in handy for the following reasons:

- 1) The facts about HIV include having respect. Protect yourself and respect yourself.
- 2) The very basis for "HIV being 100 % PREVENTABLE." Picking a partner for life.
- 3) Honoring the vows of marriage. Making a choice to go on a healing journey, a journey for life.

FOUR SACRED ANIMALS SPEAK ABOUT AIDS

Part 3 The Bear: Choosing a Course of Action

Bear Speaks

*I am bear. I have powerful medicine.
What I teach the human is how to find the vision within.
Without my medicine, you run around without purpose.
With my medicine, you go to the dark cave and listen to the voice inside
The voice is your spirit.
It will not be heard among the crowds and the noise of the outer world.
To hear the voice of your spirit:
The voice who remembers who you are at all times.
You have to stop the running around.
Stop the body first: then, the mind will follow.
I say: "Stop listen."
It is the way of the bear
For the humans, the cave can be anywhere quiet and undisturbed.
It is in the forests and the mountains, but also in the bedrooms and living
rooms.
It is behind the locked door that says:
Bear medicine will support you in finding your path.
What am I doing on this earth? Why am I here? How will I do it?
Do I want to graduate from high school? Do I want to have children one
day?
Do I want to live to be one hundred? What is my gift to the world?
Do I want HIV to be apart of my path?
Once you have discovered your gift, or remembered your path
You leave the cave and go back to the world,
Walking in confidence like me the Bear*

Discussion of Bear's Medicine

What bear is asking the participants in the training to do now, is to go inside, even if only for a few seconds. There, they may think about one of Bear's questions: Do I want HIV to be apart of my path?

To create this 20 second, 60 second to two minute long space with the training, you may want to use some sound like a drum or a flute, at the beginning and at the end of this time. Or, nature sounds from a cassette/dc playing in the background can indicate the length of the quiet time. A short guided meditation may be used also.

Participants are asked to answer one of the questions during that quiet time. They may also be asked to voluntarily share their insight at the end of it.

In Aboriginal cultures, people are not told what to do as much as are supported in finding their own answers. Bear does not say: "Don't do this or don't do that." Bear only asks: "what does your path want?" If someone wants HIV to be a part of his or her life path, nobody can judge that. Likewise for someone who is already HIV positive and may be sitting in your training. HIV is not evil: it is a challenge, like everything in this life; it has negative aspects that are not to be destroyed but rather transformed.

The gift, the bear is not given once in a lifetime. Rather, Bear is to be invited in our lives regularly. Bear will help us to stay in touch with who we really are by urging us to take timeout of our busy, noise lives.

Four Sacred Animals Speak About AIDS

The Buffalo: Living with choices

Buffalo Speaks:

*“ I am Buffalo.
My Medicine is overlooked today but is nevertheless potent.
For I bring forth wisdom.
Without my gift, one goes endlessly around the wheel like a fool without
direction, adding experiences without understanding.*

*Without the wisdom to stay or leave,
To do or not to do,
You are a ghost of yourself.
I am grounded wisdom living in a group.
I know where I stand
I have the wisdom to choose.*

*Although I live in a group,
I don't let the group run my life.
I will listen to the others respectfully
But I don't have to believe everything they say.
When I am in doubt, I pray.
For Prayer is another one of my gifts to humans.”*

Discussion of Buffalo's Medicine:

Buffalo is helping people stand their ground. For the teaching about HIV prevention, Buffalo will bring three different scenarios to the trainees in order to test their knowledge, decisions, skills and wisdom.

The scenarios presented should reflect the life circumstances of the trainees. For example, the scenarios presented here are for high school students living in or close to a reserve. Although the story's lines may not change dramatically for other groups of people the environment and some of the story's details may differ. For example, in the high school scenarios, we have situated one story during the March break. It would be different for a prenatal group where most women are employed full-time. Changing some of the elements of the scenarios will relate them more to your audience.

Scenario 1:

Ron and Tyler have been best friends since kindergarten. Now in grade 11, they go out a lot and love to party together. Tyler has invited Rob to a huge party at his cousin's place. The house will be free from Saturday morning until Sunday afternoon.

The cousin is really cool and Rob and Tyler are made to feel at home. The party is incredible. There are lots of great people around, music and alcohol. Tyler drinks a lot and is getting totally wasted. Rob is more careful with the beer but is still having lots of fun. At around 1 a.m. Tyler starts looking for Rob. When he finds him he pulls him from a group and takes him to a small room. Rob sees that people are shooting up drugs in there. One of them is the cousin and he is smiling. He offers cocaine to Rob and Tyler as a gift saying, "take some of this guys, it is the greatest feeling." Tyler eagerly accepts to be injected with cocaine. He then looks towards Rob and says, "hey man, what are you waiting for?"

Questions to ask your group:

What is the choice that both Rob and Tyler have to make here?

To take one of the greatest risks they can ever; sharing needles.

Are both of them able to make choices?

No, only Rob is. Tyler's judgment is impaired.

What are the risks Tyler is about to take?

To get an infectious disease; to have an over dose; to become addicted.

What can Tyler get from injecting drugs?

HIV, Hepatitis B, Hepatitis C, Syphilis and other blood borne diseases.

What is one thing that could have prevented Tyler from making that choice?

Controlled Drinking

What is likely to be Rob's choice here?

To not go for sharing needles or to take drugs.

What is the risk for Tyler's girlfriend back home?

If they are sexually active, she runs the risk of contracting Hepatitis B and HIV

Scenario 2

Kelly is just about to graduate from high school. She is going away to Florida for Spring break. During her week in Daytona Beach she befriends an American boy her age. Patrick is cute, funny and easy to talk with. They spend a huge amount of time together. Kelly feels that she has always known Patrick somehow and feels very close to him. When the issue of having sex arises one night, Kelly mentions that she shares her hotel room with three other girls. Patrick said that he had a key to an apartment that he knew of close to the beach. When Kelly told him that she didn't have any condoms, Patrick says, "don't worry I don't have AIDS or anything." "Don't you think I look healthy."

Questions

What are the main issues in that story?

HIV and other sexually transmitted infections but also safety.

Kelly is by herself in another country. She may feel very close to Patrick but she doesn't know him very well.

The issue of trust is very important for women.

Women are notorious for trusting too early and easily the people they like or love.

We also don't know if Kelly is using birth control or not.

Out of the Circle: An exercise on acceptance

Tasks:

1. Conclude the presentation
2. Discuss the fact that nobody can put you at risk for HIV except yourself and the choices you make
3. To illustrate that excluding people because they have HIV/AIDS is hurtful.
4. It is also against the Aboriginal traditional teachings to exclude those who do not represent a threat to the community.

Resources Needed:

- ◆ A clock, watch or timer.

Facilitators Preparation

- ◆ None

Procedure

- ◆ There is one part to this section, please familiarize yourself the rules of this section before proceeding.

OUT OF THE CIRCLE; AN EXERCISE ON ACCEPTANCE

One facilitator asks the group to stand up in a circle while the other facilitator says, “This is a powerful exercise and the conclusion of your training.” One of the facilitators explains how to play.

Rules of the game

One of the trainers chooses at random six or seven participants and asks them to stand at the centre of the room. They have to form a mini circle of their own and hold to each other tightly, arms around the shoulders of the person next to them. The trainer tells them that during this exercise they are not to let anyone into their circle.

The trainer then chooses another participant and asks him/her to enter the circle. The rest of the group watches.

Pointer

<p>The exercise should not be more than two minutes. Time permitting it may be re-enacted more than once with a new person trying to get into the circle. If the participants are playing the game correctly, it will be demanding for all involved.</p>
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The trainer asks the participant who was trying to break into the circle, “how did you feel being pushed out of the circle?”

You may also ask the participant who was keeping the person out, “how did you feel pushing someone out of the circle?”

So far; all people who have been kept out of the circle have said, “it’s not cool.” Some people who were pushing that one person out have said, “it as fun.”

Concerning the first feedback. It is excruciating for most people to be excluded from a group they have chosen to enter. The time is now ripe for a traditional teaching on the meaning of a circle.

One of the basic principles of all Aboriginal cultures, whether First Nations, Inuit or Metis is the circle. The circle was used widely in traditional cultures in order to facilitate sharing, teaching and learning. At their core, Aboriginal cultures are all inclusive. Everyone had a place in the circle. Moreover within the circle, all were equals.

In today's Aboriginal communities, be they urban or rural, people living with HIV/AIDS are present. They may be at the first stage of HIV infection or anywhere on the continuum. They do not represent a risk to anyone who is protecting him/herself against HIV. The only way to be at risk is to have unprotected sexual intercourse or to share needles with someone who is HIV positive. Once people have been empowered with the knowledge, they know how to stay HIV negative. Therefore the only risk they have is by making poor choices for themselves. The recent practice of excluding people from Aboriginal communities is not rooted in Aboriginal culture.

As Aboriginal people are becoming more aware of their culture, let us remember the value of the circle. In the circle of life everyone has a place, and everyone is a gift. People who are living with HIV/AIDS are also entitled to a place in the circle. There are no reasons why they should be excluded. Next time you hear that someone has AIDS, think of the circle of life; they belong here as much as you do.

As for the people who find it fun to exclude others: they are honest with their feelings. It is true that there is a shadow or dark side to everything. So it is also true of the human heart. To be able to exclude someone from the circle may appeal to the shadow or dark side in us, it may even give us some power. However, it is an abuse of power to use it to harm others. One has to become aware of one's feelings and actions. If they do not serve the greater good, they are bound to destroy the person who carries them.

Evaluations

The evaluation is your only means of knowing if the training was effective. You may have a written evaluation or you may have a verbal one in a circle asking your participants to comment on the training. The circle is an excellent way of ending your training. Reassure your participants that what is said in the circle stays in the circle and that no one is to take anything bad home with them.

Your evaluation helps us learn many useful things. One of the things we were not aware of, at the beginning, is how demanding physically this training can be. We noticed that our evaluation was not as good if we were doing more than two presentations in a row.

The Wabino Health Centre would like to hear from you. We do realize that when you start presenting this material yourself, you will give it your own medicine. Let us know about your experience as a trainer, what works for you, what does not work so well and the solutions you have found along the way. By sharing with us you help us to update and improve Keep the Circle Strong or the revised version Sacred Animal Teachings. For the Seventh Generation yet to be born.

Resources

www.allnationshope.ca All Nations Hope AIDS Network 1-877-210-7622
www.caan.ca Canadian Aboriginal AIDS Network 1-888-285-2226

References

Please refer to the Wabino Centre for Aboriginal Health, Train the Trainer; Keep the Circle Strong, 299 Montreal Road, Ottawa, ON K1L 6B8
613-748-0657 ex 221