



TALKING CIRCLE: TRAUMA AND HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN TRIBAL COMMUNITIES

QUESTION AND ANSWER SUMMARY

Intergenerational and historical trauma have existed for hundreds of years within Tribal communities. Understanding this history as well as the impact of complex trauma on survivors of human trafficking is critical to supporting their healing process. During a virtual Talking Circle on June 9, 2022, titled, “[Trauma and Human Trafficking in Tribal Communities](#),” Desiree Coyote, [the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation](#), Guadalupe Lopez, [Violence Free Minnesota](#), and Lu-Anne Haukaas, [Southcentral Foundation](#) shared their knowledge and experiences.

This document reflects the perspectives of the panelists and not necessarily views held by the Human Trafficking Capacity Building Center or the U.S. Department of Justice. It is not intended to be comprehensive resource on the topic. It offers panelist written responses to participant questions that were not answered live during the webinar due to time limitations. Editor’s notes are included in a few areas to provide additional information not stated by the panelists.

Watch the [recording of the live moderated discussion](#) for more panelist insights on this topic.

What are the characteristics of at-risk individuals? How to identify them for prevention?

Human trafficking can happen to anyone. There is no single profile of a trafficking victim. While there is no defining characteristic of a human trafficking victim, traffickers often look for victims with noticeable vulnerabilities such as lack of social support networks, low self-esteem, or financial or housing insecurity. Prevention begins with advocacy, direct services, outreach, and awareness to reach all victims of human trafficking.

There are many resources addressing human trafficking including [10 Ways You Can Help End Trafficking](#), [20 Ways You Can Fight Human Trafficking](#), and the [National Action Plan to Combat Human Trafficking](#). Additionally, the Human Trafficking Capacity Building Center offers no-cost anti-

trafficking assistance to Tribes and Tribal organizations. Contact the Center at contact@ovc-htcbc.org or 1-844-682-0411.

What are the most challenging barriers for survivors to secure housing stability? What unique housing resources are needed for survivors?

There are many barriers a survivor of human trafficking may face when securing housing. A survivor may have a previous criminal history as a result of their victimization. Non-existent or poor credit history create challenges in finding a place to live. Increasing rental costs and lack of availability make it difficult to find affordable housing. Survivors may not be working or have an employment history when looking for a place to live, another possible barrier.

Editor's note: The [Freedom Network Training Institute](#) provides training and resources on housing options for survivors of human trafficking. Request assistance at training@freedomnetworkusa.org or (202) 768-7338. [The Safe Housing Partnership](#) also offers many housing resources. The [Human Trafficking Capacity Building Center](#) also offers no-cost, hands-on assistance. Contact the Center at contact@ovc-htcbc.org or 1-844-682-0411

Do you have any suggestions on bridging gaps to those communities with a lot of historical traumas that make them unsure of outside help?

In order to develop relationships with communities experiencing historical trauma—

- Acknowledge the historical traumas that have happened and continue to happen to substantiate this uncertainty.
- Communicate intentions for working with the community.
- Seek guidance from community members and the governing council about how best to do the work within the community.
- Demonstrate trauma responsiveness. Be consistent, genuine, and present. Recognize defensive behaviors are protective mechanisms.
- Treat every single interaction as a corrective experience on behalf of others who have done harm in the past.

What is the role of U.S. Attorneys?

U.S. Attorneys are responsible for identifying and prosecuting federal crimes in court and are [located in every state and U.S. territory](#). Human trafficking is a crime under federal law, and U.S. Attorneys are responsible for identifying and prosecuting traffickers in federal court. U.S. Attorneys are also involved in responding to the Missing or Murdered Indigenous People (MMIP) crisis by coordinating with federal, state, and Tribal partners in their districts to develop and refine MMIP guidelines tailored to their specific communities.

How is the intersectional piece of pregnant people and mothers with children and the vulnerability that creates as well as the opportunity for generational healing and prevention of trauma being addressed and prioritized?

Advocacy around intergenerational healing is still growing, and there needs to be more conversations about how trauma can be transmitted from one generation to the next one. Trauma experienced by adult survivors of sexual abuse is not always addressed. Limited advocacy exists for addressing that previous trauma within healthcare, midwifery, and doulas. There is also a [high maternal mortality rate](#) among Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) mothers. Organizations like [Violence Free Minnesota](#) are advocating and building awareness around infant and mother mortality and domestic violence. Recognizing a woman's body autonomy and their right to make decisions about their own body is intertwined with their health and safety.

Can you talk about epigenetics and how that is another mechanism which transmits both trauma and resilience down to the third, fourth, or even more generations?

The research on [epigenetics and trauma and resilience](#) is still fairly new. However, more and more research continues to show generational survival and passing on some kind inherent survival mechanisms to help future generations. Some of this research includes—

- [Traumatic experiences can leave epigenetic marks](#) that alter the stress response in offspring (911 research - Yehuda, R. et al, 2005, & Yehuda, R. et al, 2009)
- [Mice trained to avoid a smell passed their aversion on to their offspring](#), and their offspring's offspring (Dias & Ressler, 2013)

Aside from epigenetics, there are also other theories of generational transmission including but not

limited to: narrative that we carry to younger generations ([Doucet & Rovers, 2010](#)); storytelling and secondary traumatization ([Palacios & Portillo, 2009](#)); introjection ([Rowland-Klein & Dunlop, 1998](#)); and unconscious channels ([Pickering, 2012](#)).

What would you recommend what to look for or ask when vetting cultural healers?

Ask a wide variety of community members why they recommend a particular cultural healer. Conversations should also be had with the healer's current and former significant others and adult children – and not be accusatory or judgmental. As folks provide input to you, details should not be important. These conversations are opportunities for awareness and education incorporating new insights into our work for safety of all our community members. This is my experience (Desiree) upon arrival to this Tribe. When I was finally at a point where I wanted to work with and utilize Tribal experts and medicine folk, I casually checked with various people in the community about my need to find a Tribal member to provide opening song/prayer at our event. One name rose higher than others. When folks mentioned the name, I would ask why they recommended them (casually not accusatory). During Tribal events or ceremonies, there were folks there, so I would check in with one or two after the event. This process took me about a year to complete ending with a visit with the person's significant other and older/adult children. In that year, most of the people spoke highly of the person in question. However, I did not and still do not use the person based on the word of significant other, their adult children, and one parent. About six months into this process, one female Elder, skilled in language and storytelling, told me in front of this person not to trust them. The parent also told me in front of the person not to trust them which occurred directly after ceremonies. I did not approach the parent. I assumed she was aware of my work and had a desire to protect me. I was, and continue to be, honored by these two Elder women who stood up, spoke up in public to protect me. I have no doubt they protected other women and their lives.

What is the Athabascan word meaning “returning to our true selves” that was gifted to the Southcentral Foundation program this year?

The word is Nu'iju. It was gifted to us by a Dena'ina Athabascan language preserver and leader.

How can we bring awareness to our local Tribal counsel and Tribal members?

Host training or awareness events, post fliers and banners in various public gathering spots, share events on Tribal Facebook and in Tribal and local nontribal newspapers. Offer food, snacks, drinks, and swag to encourage participation in trainings, meetings, and community events. Share the successes and challenges of your community – not scientific information but human lived experiences. Most Tribal leaders are not aware of how much sexual and domestic violence impacts the community; make data meaningful for your Tribal leaders and your community. Linking the issue to our children and youth as a way of engaging community and Tribal leaders. Our community has a Native Youth Leadership Against Violence with our Tribal charter school. The youth increase awareness about the issue in a variety of ways such as painting windows for awareness months, creating and teaching via skits or stories, taking an active role in our awareness walks, etc.

How would you suggest we reach out to our local Tribe/reservation for more information on helping individuals we see in our emergency rooms for sexual assault?

I am glad you recognize a Tribal Nation in your area! Excellent first step. Some medical facilities have outreach coordinators who can be helpful in this process. Connecting with various tribal programs/departments is key. Email and/or a phone call are helpful for a first contact and should always be followed up with an in-person meeting. Share brochures, training, and contact information with the Tribal newspaper, attend Tribal meetings or events, and always connect with their victim advocate. The community-based victim advocate (usually domestic/sexual violence) may be located in Indian Health Services, social services, or public safety. The community-based advocates are the 'know everyone, every service, and who best to contact' people. For Tribal Nations that do not have a community-based advocate, identify folks within their social service department or their Indian Health Services.

Additional Information

Contact the Human Trafficking Capacity Building Center at contact@ovc-htcbc.org or 1-844-682-0411.