

Aboriginal Healing Foundation



*Ethics Guidelines
for Aboriginal Communities
Doing Healing Work*

Revised May 2000

Ethics Guidelines for Aboriginal Communities Doing Healing Work

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A Code of Ethics reminds us of our responsibilities to ourselves, our families our colleagues, the public, our clients and our Nations.

The Code of Ethics guides us in the performance of our professional responsibilities and expresses the basic tenets of legal, ethical and professional conduct.

Background

The Aboriginal Healing Foundation, in funding healing projects that address the Legacy of Sexual and Physical Abuse in the Residential School System including Intergenerational Impacts, determined that ethics were necessary if healing is to occur in safety. Safety, whether it be mental, emotional, physical and/or spiritual, is very important for the development of each ethic. If the client or project participant grows to feel safe, then it becomes much easier for that person to engage in the healing process. Healing will not occur if an individual does not feel safe or does not trust the process. As a result, the AHF brought together a core group of Aboriginal people, as a Focus Group, from across the country to discuss and develop ethics guidelines for funded projects doing healing work.

As the Focus Group met it became clear that they were concerned about how their work would look and sound to the varied communities across Canada. They used a circle process to make decisions on the guidelines. As the document progressed, feedback came from the Board of Directors and community members. Some of the wording changed as the document became more focused and comprehensive. As the drafts changed, the essentials of good helping, client and community needs, safety and positive change and growth were at the forefront.

What has been produced in this document is a format and guide for you to fill in the details of the needs of your individual community according to your traditions and beliefs. The Focus Group used a common belief in spirituality, prayer, ceremonies, Elders and the Creator to create this document. Your choice of methods, however, is individual and exclusive to your community.

These Ethics Guidelines are in two parts. Part 1 is the Ethics Guidelines. Part 2 contains stories that help us learn about Ethics. While it is recognised that many non-Aboriginal people have contributed their good work toward Residential School issues, the Focus Group believes that as Aboriginal People across Canada develop their own Ethics Guidelines, healing projects and communities will be able to meet the needs of each project and each community.

Part 1

1.1. Ethics Guidelines

The following Ethics Guidelines describes the rules that should be followed in your healing projects. The goal is to ensure that the healing taking place in your community is as healthy as possible:

- (a) *Programs and Services* must focus on the needs of the people impacted by the Legacy of Sexual and Physical Abuse in Residential Schools, including Intergenerational Impacts.
- (b) *Quality of Service* should address individualised needs of the people involved in programs where he or she is treated with respect and integrity.
- (c) *A Client-Helper Relationship Policy* should address equal and healthy relationships between the client and helper.
- (d) *Client Rights* where consent is obtained will ensure the safety of clients that participate in the funded program. Informed written consent must be obtained by all clients and by guardians or parents of children involved.
- (e) *External Healer Policy* ensures that the necessary background checks are in place when bringing in a worker or healer from outside the community.
- (f) *Knowing your Limits* will address setting limitations for workers based on their level of skill, competency, knowledge and experience. An Admissions Policy to guide staff, clients and programs will address these limits.
- (g) *A Confidentiality Policy* is essential to maintain a level of professionalism by ensuring confidentiality of all information shared by clients. Release of Information and Sharing of Information should have guidelines as well.
- (h) *A Conflict of Interest Policy* ensures a level of professionalism in preventing conflicts of interests. Potential or real conflicts need to be seen and declared.
- (i) *A Financial Accountability Policy* will ensure that all funds are spent in the way they were approved by the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, and the way they were agreed upon by the project managers and community leaders.
- (j) *An Employee Assistance Program* can help project staff get the help they need to stay healthy and well.
- (k) *Grievance Procedures* - projects should produce clear written rules for staff and clients who have complaints. Safety issues should be addressed including the rights of the complainant. Appeal processes and Conflict Resolution should be addressed as well.
- (l) *Inappropriate Conduct and Harassment Policies* should describe appropriate behaviour and establish guidelines between staff, helpers and clients. Policies need to address inappropriate conduct or harassment in the workplace. All policies must comply with the applicable Provincial legislation.

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- (m) *Healing Methods* must utilize methods that are safe, healthy and that meet the needs of the client, with safeguards in place for trauma, either due to an event or triggering a past event.
- (n) *Spirituality* ensures that the pursuit for spirituality is left to the responsibility of the Elder or Traditional Teacher, who should have the support of the community, and to the responsibility of the individual who makes such pursuits.
- (o) *Screening and Assessment Policy* must address the needs for constant screening and assessment of the healing project workers and the work of the project. This should include an Admission Policy.
- (p) *Upholding the Code of Ethics Policy* ensures that the Code of Ethics your community has developed are followed. It is also important to address and create policies outlining the consequences of breaking the Code of Ethics.
- (q) *Hiring Policies* must address procedures when performing checks on staff, volunteers, external healers or clients. The criminal records check as stated in your contribution agreement is mandatory. A policy with standards should be in place for the Criminal Record Check and Child Abuse Registry Check. An employee Code of Conduct is also suggested (including professional designations, limitations, training, supervision and monitoring)
- (r) *Original Work and Materials Policy* outlines when projects must obtain written permission to use the work of others. Steps and procedures are in written form when testing and doing research.

Healing projects and communities can use these guidelines to create their own Code of Ethics, Standards of Practice, or Ethics Guidelines. When projects or communities do this they will need to include ways to monitor the Code of Ethics and correct those who breach the Code.

Part 2

2. Stories that help us learn about ethics. These stories are strictly fictional. Any similarity to any organisation, band, reserve or to any person, whether living or dead, is strictly coincidental.

2.1 Helping that heals

“RELATIVES”

As children, they played together, laughed, fought, made up and enjoyed the freedom of childhood. As they grew, they went their own way for a time. He moved to manhood. She became a young woman. They attended ceremonies and celebrations in the community and visited relatives they had in common. Although they never spoke of it, they were related to each other in a distant way-as cousins. One day, she glanced at him, looking so handsome and strong, across the circle of their relatives, and his eyes were full of dreams, promises, excitement and warmth that caused her heart to ache. They fell in love.

When the grandmothers came to visit her and the grandfathers went to him, she felt her heart rebel. They spoke gently but firmly, explaining over and over why it was impossible for relatives to marry. She did not want to hear what they were saying. She kept trying to find a way through it, a way for them to be together. Then the oldest and wisest grandmother spoke:

“You may not experience the suffering yourself, you may think it will not affect you, but your children or grandchildren may suffer for your decision. You may never know how many generations may be affected, but those innocent ones will bear the burden.”

Silent now, she felt the loss of her dream. The grandmothers were kind to her and in time she learned to look upon him as a relative. She was there to celebrate when he took a wife from another clan.

In time, she married too. Later on, when she held her strong and healthy grandchildren, full of hope and promise, she knew to thank the grandmothers for helping her to see way into the future and helping her make a good decision.

“ERNEST”

It was not easy for Ernest to ask for help. He was used to doing things on his own. Especially since the reason he needed help caused him so much fear and shame.

His marriage was coming apart and his children showed him no respect. As far as he could tell, he had to make do with this silence—he could not allow them to come close. He loved his wife and children but he couldn't say a word, could not express his feelings. They thought he didn't care.

He knew who could help him - that old couple who travelled around and counselled and sometimes prayed with people. He had heard about them and the good work they did. He didn't even know how to approach them, so he asked his cousin.

“Go to the man first and give him tobacco as a gift” he said. “Tell him you'd like to talk to both of them.”

It took him awhile to find the old man and get him alone for he didn't want anyone to overhear what he had to say. The old man took the tobacco and invited him to visit the next day. “You can come alone or you can bring your wife and children” he said.

When Ernest arrived alone the next day, the old lady greeted him with food and kindness, helping him feel right at home. She paid special attention to him, bringing him tea, seeing to his comforts. Meanwhile, the old man put him at ease with funny stories and tales of their travels.

After the table was cleared and they moved into the small front room to sit on softer chairs, the old lady asked him, “What can we do to help?”

He found it easy to talk to her, he felt she really listened to him. They didn't judge him or take sides. They asked questions but didn't push him to answer if he did not want to. That first time, he didn't say much. But they invited him again and again, always letting him know he could also bring his wife.

One day he told them about the sexual abuse he suffered as a boy and he cried. Afterwards, the old lady wiped his face with a cloth dipped in rose water. She told him how brave he was to tell. Over time, his silence left him. Although he was never a great talker, life got better.

2.2 Helping that hurts

“ROSALIE AND ANGIE BEAR”

Rosalie sat in her brand new office and arranged the things on her desk for the 100th time that day. She moved the small plaque that she had gotten as a gift from her sister to celebrate her new job a year ago. “Rosalie White Eagle, Social Worker,” it said. Back then, her office was always full of people coming and going.

Now it was silent. Rosalie waited and no one came.

She knew exactly when they quit coming. It was the day Angie Bear stormed into her office, threw the sign at Rosalie, called her a bitch and stormed out again.

She had tried to calm Angie down, but Angie said she would never like her again because of what Rosalie had done.

Rosalie was horrified. She never meant to hurt anyone. Later on, she found out Angie left the rez that very day, moved back to the city and started drinking again.

Rosalie had not meant to tell the story about Angie’s boyfriend who had sexually abused her daughter. It was just that she had been so shocked when Angie told her, she had to tell someone else. How was she to know that her best friend, Betty, would spread it all over the reserve?

“BIG BUSINESS”

Ever since the newspaper said \$3 million would be poured into the northern region for social development, Sacred Circle Eagle Dancing Consulting Firm was well on its way.

Jeff was put in charge of writing proposals for development money-at \$3,000 each.

“Get on that phone, Jeff,” said Ed, the founder and self-appointed President of the firm. “And don’t stop talking until you have the commitment of at least 50 Bands. We ought to be able to shave off a nice chunk of that money just on proposal writing alone. That’s the easy part.”

Ed Two Step Jackson had big plans.

“What we need to do is to start another consulting firm and this is where you come in Rita”. Rita was the firm’s Social Development Co-ordinator.

“We’ll call it ‘Awakening’ or something like that. How about ‘Sacred Awakening’? That’s even better. You get those elders you hang out with and stick them on the letterhead, get a hold of that white psychologist, what’s-his-name, and add him to the list. Get some pamphlets printed right away with lots of circles on them, say we’ve been in business about 5 years.

“Jeff, when you talk to the bands, remember to promote Sacred Awakenings. We ought to be able to write them into every one of these proposals.”

“But who will do the actual training?” asked Rita.

“We won’t worry about that right now. First things first, and right now it’s about getting as much of that \$3 million as possible. Then we’ll worry about the small stuff. Just say we...uh, I mean, Sacred Awakening does sexual abuse counselling, that’s always popular, and healing circles, and don’t forget Residential Schools, that’s the buzz word these days. Well, get to work! I plan to retire when I’m 50”, Ed said with a wink.

“RELATIONSHIPS”

Bill couldn't deny his attraction for Lillian. At first, he had flirted a bit with her. He never thought things would go this far.

She had been coming to him for counselling for 5 months now. It felt right to comfort her when she cried, just to reach over and take her in his arms.

She never protested and today, well, things had just gotten out of hand. He knew she needed his protection. Even though he felt a little bit guilty, he also felt that this situation was different because it was, after all, the Blue Sky reservation. He could afford to bend the rules a little.

Bill Brown worked for a number of small bands in the area as Band psychologist. He liked his work because he got along well with the Indians. They trusted him and he was free to do his work without too much interference.

After he and Lillian got dressed there was an awkward silence. God! She looked so young and beautiful and so defenceless. She didn't deserve to be in that relationship with that ape beating on her.

“You can always come and stay at my place in town,” Bill blurted out, “I mean if you need a safe place, to get away to.” He was surprised at himself, he had not planned to give her his extra key, but now he had.

He was involved and there was no turning back. What the hell, who would know? Who could it hurt? He might even marry her, she was a nice-looking Indian gal.

Summary

Many of the people consulted with in the development of the Ethics Guidelines have stated that healing projects use of a code of ethics is crucial to the success of the project, the safety of the participants or clients and the healing that will occur. Each AHF funded healing project is encouraged to develop their own code of ethics. The use of the AHF Ethics Guidelines will make the task more focused and less time consuming for the healing project.

The following quote from an Elder in the focus group summarises the need for ethics:

“We are going to do some big work, community development of some sort with all these projects. There has to be some workers. But that little guy (the client) is important. As far as I am concerned, he is the most important. All I want is good that the rest can give him. Not suffer like I did.”

