

What's Up With My Mob?

Aboriginal
Transgenerational
Trauma

Educational DVD
& Workbook

WHAT'S UP WITH MY MOB?

Educational DVD & Workbook

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Dadirri

Edited version adapted from the writings of Miriam Rose Ungenmerr

Dadirri. A special quality, a unique gift of the Aboriginal people, is inner deep listening and quiet still awareness. Dadirri recognises the deep spring that is inside us. It is something like what you call contemplation. The contemplative way of Dadirri spreads over our whole life. It renews us and brings us peace. It makes us feel whole again. In our Aboriginal way we learnt to listen from our earliest times. We could not live good and useful lives unless we listened.

We are not threatened by silence. We are completely at home in it. Our Aboriginal way has taught us to be still and wait. We do not try to hurry things up. We let them follow their natural course - like the seasons.

We watch the moon in each of its phases. We wait for the rain to fill our rivers and water the thirsty earth. When twilight comes we prepare for the night. At dawn we rise with the sun. We watch the bush foods and wait for them to open before we gather them. We wait for our young people as they grow; stage by stage, through their initiation ceremonies. When a relation dies we wait for a long time with the sorrow. We own our grief and allow it to heal slowly. We wait for the right time for our ceremonies and meetings. The right people must be present. Careful preparations must be made. We don't mind waiting because we want things to be done with care. Sometimes many hours will be spent on painting the body before an important ceremony.

We don't worry. We know that in time and in the spirit of Dadirri (that deep listening and quite stillness) the way will be made clear.

We are like the tree standing in the middle of a bushfire sweeping through the timber. The leaves are scorched and the tough bark is scarred and burnt, but inside the tree the sap is still flowing and under the ground the roots are still strong. Like that tree, we have endured the flames and we still have the power to be re-born.

Our people are used to the struggle and the long waiting. We still wait for the white people to understand us better. We ourselves have spent many years learning about the white man's ways; we have learnt to speak the white man's language, we have listened to what he had to say. This learning and listening should go both ways. We would like people to take time and listen to us. We are hoping people will come closer. We keep on longing for the things that we have always hoped for: respect and understanding.

We know that our white brothers and sisters carry their own particular burdens. We believe that if they let us come to them, if they open up their minds and hearts to us, we may lighten their burdens. There is a struggle for us, but we have not lost our spirit of Dadirri. There are deep springs within each of us. Within this deep spring, which is the very spirit, is a sound. The sound of Deep calling to Deep. The time for rebirth is now. If our culture is alive and strong and respected it will grow. It will not die and our spirit will not die. I believe the spirit of Dadirri that we have to offer will blossom and grow, not just within ourselves but in all.

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***"When we engage in a relationship with our inner selves
and listen to the ancient wisdom of the land and our Ancestors,
we begin a journey of healing
our bodies, our spirit, our families and our communities"...***

Spirit Dreaming

1. EDUCATORS INSTRUCTIONS

45 minutes

Watch the DVD



20 minutes

What is Transgenerational Trauma?

2. WHAT IS TRANSGENERATIONAL TRAUMA?

"It's different things for different people, but it's the unresolved wounds, or wounds where the hurt hasn't been resolved. It's the continuation of practicing behaviours which that hurt causes, to the generations to come"

... Aunty Nancy Walke

Learning Outcome 	Attain a broader understanding of what transgenerational trauma is and how it was created.
Discussion Topic 	What do you understand to be transgenerational trauma?



Educator Notes....

**Transgenerational trauma
is created when layers upon layers of trauma are experienced by individuals,
or collectively by a community.**

**It is when trauma is experienced repeatedly so negative behaviours begin
to manifest because there is no opportunity
to engage in a healing process.**

Transgenerational trauma began at the point of colonisation and continued through the years with assimilation and Stolen Generation policies. All of these experiences greatly affected the wellbeing of Aboriginal Peoples, and still impact on our Peoples today.

Our Aboriginal history, Dreaming and Dreamtime was once passed down orally from family members who were charged with the responsibility and privilege of knowing the "stories". As a consequence of dispossession and Stolen Generations, we have lost much of our history and therefore the ability to talk through our stories with each other.

With the loss of family and cultural beliefs, our Aboriginal People have lost their ability to debrief, or to have the opportunity to talk through events that have been affecting their lives. There was once structure in place to manage trauma and events in traditional ways but are no longer accessible to most Aboriginal Peoples and families.

Ceremonies and rituals that were once practiced to support families and clans in managing traumatic events were lost. What were our people to do with the emotional pain and loss they were suffering? How did Aboriginal people talk about what was happening to them? In most cases local languages were prohibited and practising of traditional customs could lead to death or at the very least, removal from their families.

Transgenerational trauma is created when layers upon layers of trauma are experienced by individuals, or collectively by a community. It is when trauma is experienced repeatedly, so negative behaviours begin to manifest because there is no opportunity to engage in a healing process.

These behaviours can vary from physical ailments through to emotional, social and wellbeing issues. When a person is unable to heal from their trauma, negative behaviours can manifest as a coping mechanism, and can often begin to affect their children, families, and communities. A ripple effect begins that has the capacity to travel through generations.

Transgenerational Trauma is not unlike Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Many Aboriginal Peoples have lived for generations in a total state of PTSD, never having the chance to heal their past, because the present is still a similar experience for them.

Imagine for a moment being a child and living within a community that is on constant alert for strangers. Imagine that the strangers had the power to “legally” kill you and your family, or at the very least have the authority to forcibly remove you from your home and land - for no reason except for the colour of your skin.

Imagine that you survive and some years later you have children, and now you are in constant fear of someone being able to legally take your children - for no reason except the colour of their skin.

Imagine some years later those children grow up - they are dispossessed of land and culture, and even if they were lucky enough *not* to be taken and assimilated, who now teaches them traditional values and beliefs?

"It's when a person has had their personality compromised, diminished or put in a closet, and it goes from one generation to the next generation"... Bilyana Broomley

In today's society transgenerational trauma still continues in the form of deaths in custody and can also be highlighted by the disproportionate number of Aboriginal children in care.



The objective of this story, however is not to place blame on people or make people feel sad. What is intended is to make us think at a deeper level about how our histories – regardless of being black, white or any other colour – impact on our present-day lives and those of future generations.

Until a few generations ago ceremony, rites and traditional teachings were handed down orally by the “Keepers” of such knowledge. Who now teaches each generation their parenting skills and their responsibilities within a community, when their experiences until now have just been to survive?

If you think for a moment about your own personal values and belief systems – where did they come from? Most likely these originated from your family or your community. The “norms” of the day were created within the neighbourhood and guided your values and beliefs.

3. HOW HAS TRANSGENERATIONAL TRAUMA EFFECTED GENERATIONS OF PEOPLE?

*"You wake up every day in the life that you have,
and wonder - how did I inherit this"
... Leanne Phillips*

Learning Outcome 	Attain a broader understanding of how transgenerational trauma has effected many generations of Aboriginal Peoples.
Discussion Topic 	<p>Ask the group to close their eyes for a moment and read the following:</p> <p><i>"Imagine for a moment you are a small child living in a community that is on constant alert for strangers. In your mind, see some of the hiding places where you can hide if the strangers come. Imagine that these strangers have the power to kill you and your family, or at the very least - take you away from your home. Imagine that somehow you survive your childhood and you continually live in fear. Fear of being taken away or maybe you have already been taken and placed into a children's home. Who do you talk to about your nightmares? Who cuddles you when you are scared? Even as a little child, do you understand that this is all because you have different coloured skin?"</i></p> <p>How did this scenario feel for you?</p> <p>Name some of the emotions you were feeling as you imagined yourself as that little child.</p> <p>Discuss examples of how transgenerational trauma may have affected families of <u>previous</u> generations?</p>



Educator Notes....

Transgenerational trauma can manifest in many different ways and effect people differently.

Transgenerational trauma is essentially crimes against our humanity. It is underpinned by a legal system that decided over 200 years ago that assimilation, and in some cases annihilation, were the most effective ways in which to manage the Aboriginal People of this land.

After colonisation, the physical and spiritual loss of our land effected Aboriginal Peoples in many ways. We no longer knew who we were or where we were from. An integral part of our culture is identity, and losing this identity affected our sense of self and impacted on our physical, emotional and spiritual well-being.

Our sense of wellbeing was also closely linked to our dreamtime, dreaming and ceremonial rights. Assimilation prevented our people from participating in these ceremonies; hence one generation after the next was denied their right to their traditional spiritual journey.

Over the generations our ability as Aboriginal Peoples to heal from the trauma of colonisation has been hindered by our own sense of helplessness and hopelessness. Many of us were unable to move forward in our lives as the past traumas experienced by our parents and grandparents impacted on our present day lives.

As with post-traumatic stress syndrome, we as a People found it difficult to advance ourselves when we lived in a constant state of fight or flight and hyper vigilance. The effects of this trauma varied for each person and family, however the behaviours we developed to survive these times were passed down to our children.

Some families experienced the trauma of having their children forcibly removed under the legislation that discriminated against them purely because of the colour of their skin.

Some entire clans where wiped out from diseases such as the common cold, that were brought to this country from the colonies.

Some families were driven from their land into small missions and were forced to live with other families from other countries which they were not traditionally supposed to mix with.

*"Trauma is a wound that is in need of healing"
... Yahndi Schepsis*

Some entire clans were massacred because they lived on land that the colonies wanted to claim as their own.

Some families were told if they gave up their Aboriginal identity they would be able to live as equals to other white Australians, only to find that they had become totally isolated as they were not accepted by the white people and not allowed to return to their Aboriginal families.

Some families experienced Station Owners who would only pay their Aboriginal workers with alcohol and basic rations. The consumption of alcohol impacted dramatically on our health and our ability to care for our families.

Some families experienced the trauma of having family members imprisoned for minor crimes, only to die during their incarceration.



Most families experienced ALL of these....

How do a family and a community recover from one of these traumas, let alone all of them?



4. WHAT DOES TRANSGENERATIONAL TRAUMA LOOK LIKE?

*"We are so traumatised – it's just natural for us now"
... Lyle Swan*

<p>Learning Outcome</p> 	<p>Attain an understanding of what the specific behaviours are that are related to transgenerational trauma</p>
<p>Discussion Topic</p> 	<p>Ask the group to close their eyes for a moment and read the following:</p> <p><i>Imagine yourself some years later as a grown up with your own children. What might it be like being a parent? Are you hyper vigilant and do you treat your children differently because of your experiences? Do you keep an eye out for cars that drive by when your children are out playing? Have you ever thought about places you can hide your kids if you need to? Are you trusting of people who come to your house and ask if they can help you? How confident and in control do you feel as a parent?</i></p> <p>How did this scenario feel for you?</p> <p>Name some of the emotions you were feeling as you imagined yourself as that parent.</p> <p>What traits are these parents passing on to their children because of their experiences as a child?</p> <p>Name a few examples of how transgenerational trauma has manifested itself in today's Aboriginal communities.</p>



Educator Notes....

As a result of discrimination experienced by Aboriginal Peoples, transgenerational trauma is only compounded further when services that are considered basic and essential to other non-Aboriginal Australians, are often not available to Aboriginal Peoples.

(following statistics - Australian Bureau of Statistics)

Housing

In Australia, Aboriginal Peoples find it very difficult to secure safe and affordable accommodation in the general rental markets, and as a result Aboriginal Land Councils across Australia are able to provide limited housing to Aboriginal peoples who cannot access mainstream housing options.

- ⇒ Only 28% of Aboriginal families own their own home compared to 67% of all Australian families.
- ⇒ 31% of Indigenous people rely on public rental housing in comparison to 6% of the non-Aboriginal population.
- ⇒ Aboriginal people are 20 times more likely to be homeless than other non-Aboriginal people.

"As Aboriginal People we deal with funeral after funeral and we don't get the chance to get on top of the grief as an individual. We still carry grief and it eats away at us and down the track causes mental health issues, but it's our soul that is breaking"
... Haley Hoolihan

Health

Aboriginal Peoples often do not seek medical advice for many reasons, such as lack of money to attend medical appointments and inability to pay for required medication, lack of transport to attend doctor's appointments, lack of respect from mainstream professionals, and a fear that if they are hospitalised that they may die in hospital.

- ⇒ The life expectancy for Aboriginal people is 15-20 years less than the general population.
- ⇒ 30% of Aboriginal people have been diagnosed with Diabetes.
- ⇒ Infant mortality rate is 3-5 times higher than that of the general population.
- ⇒ General hospital admissions of Aboriginal people are 57% higher than non-Aboriginal people.

Education

Aboriginal young people find it difficult to attain successful outcomes in our educational system. The reason for this is that an enclosed classroom and the methods used within our education system are not conducive to our traditional ways of hands-on learning.

Another issue is the fact that many Aboriginal parents have not had good experiences when they were at school and therefore find it difficult to encourage their children to be subjected to similar negative experiences.

- ⇒ Only 33% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children complete schooling compared to a national average of 77%.
- ⇒ 2% of Indigenous people have tertiary degrees compared with 12% of all Australians.

Employment

Aboriginal Peoples find it more difficult to find employment than other non-Aboriginal people. Issues that affect our ability to gain employment may be the fact that we may not have the educational qualifications required to apply for many jobs, or we are not comfortable in working in mainstream positions where we are at risk of discrimination, or employers not understanding our family responsibilities regarding childcare, funerals and other family responsibilities.

- ⇒ The unemployment rate is 38% for Indigenous people, compared with 8.7% for the general population.
- ⇒ The average individual income for Indigenous people is 45% lower than that of the general population.

Justice

Indigenous people represented one in seven people in prison (14%; ABS 1998) and one in seven deaths in prison custody (14%). In 2011, Indigenous people represented just over one in four people in prison (26%) and one in five deaths (21%). Therefore, the number of Indigenous people in prison appears to have increased at a faster rate than the number of deaths of Indigenous prisoners.

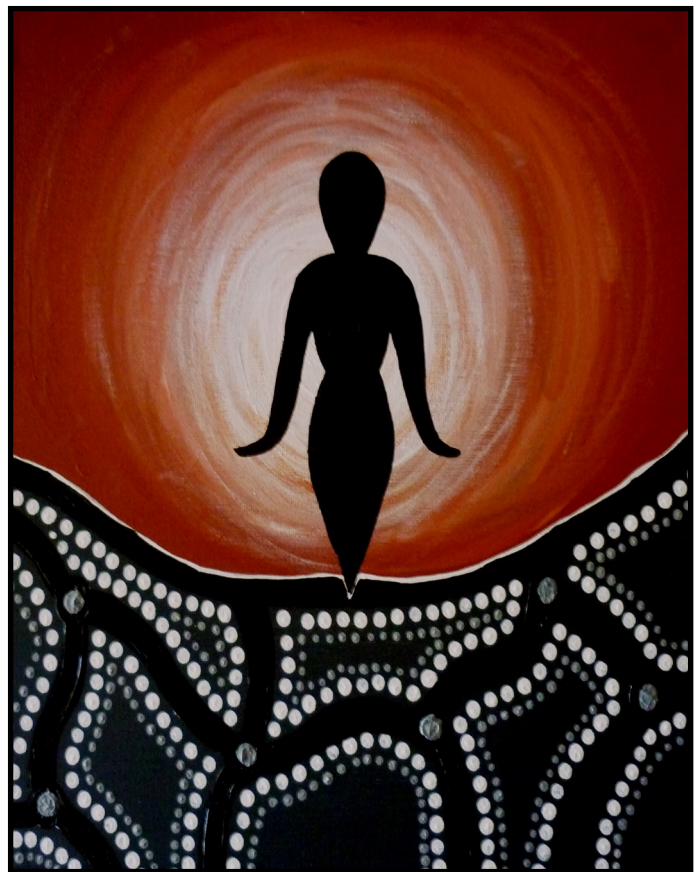
Since 1979–80, there have been 238 deaths of Indigenous persons in prison custody, representing 17 per cent of all deaths to occur in this setting.

In 2010–11, there were:

- ⇒ 85 total deaths in custody (21 Indigenous persons; 25%)
- ⇒ 58 deaths in prison custody (12 Indigenous persons; 21%)
- ⇒ 26 deaths in police custody and custody-related operations (8 Indigenous persons; 31%)
- ⇒ One Indigenous death in juvenile detention.



(Deaths in custody Monitoring Report 20)

Healing and wellbeing programs which address the statistics above have been identified by government as playing a major role in supporting Aboriginal Peoples to address the issues that lead to disadvantage.



5. WHAT IS PREVENTING US FROM HEALING?

"As Aboriginal People we deal with funeral after funeral and we don't get the chance to get on top of the grief as an individual. We still carry grief and it eats away at us and down the track causes mental health issues, but it's our soul that is breaking"
... Haley Hoolihan

Learning Outcome 	Understand the challenges Aboriginal Peoples face and how this affects their ability to undertake a healing process.
Discussion Topic 	<p>Ask the group to close their eyes for a moment and read the following:</p> <p>Imagine now, being that parent again and your children are your life. Imagine you are living in a house which is always full of family and friends who need a place to stay because they are homeless. Your kids are becoming more unsettled each day because of the constant comings and goings of people, and now the kids teachers are complaining about their behaviour at school and are threatening child protection involvement. You feel despair as you have no choice, your hands are tied – Your house is full of family and friends and you could never ask them to leave.</p> <p>How did it feel being that parent and thinking you didn't have any choice in what was happening to your family?</p> <p>What are some of the reasons you can't ask your family to leave?</p> <p>What are some situations that may prevent other parents from seeking support?</p>



Educator Notes....

Joyce says...

As a fair skin Aboriginal person, non-acceptance from both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people adds to our trauma, because at times we are not accepted. We are either too white to be black or too black to be white and we confuse people as they expect us to act differently than we do.

Greg says...

**We have a fear of failure and a fear of success,
but we don't know what to do with success.**

Leanne says...

When Traditional ways of healing are offered – we are not open to it because of it being institutionalised by government and religious bodies. Over time we think there is more professionalism in non-Aboriginal people. As Aboriginal people we are good learners and we've learned what government and religion has wanted us to learn. Consequently, we as a race of people don't have what we need to heal our-

Mel says...

The fear of losing more than what we have already lost can stop us from moving forward. The trauma we experience today is already embedded in the loss we have experienced over generations, but to heal may mean experiencing more loss - loss of family, friends and community, particularly if they are part of the changes that need to be made. It's a difficult decision to remove people from your life... particularly if they are the only ones you have.

Nic says...

If we believe we are worthless and inferior and are forced to believe these things because they have been passed down through generations, then what's the point? It becomes a culture in its own right.



Nancy says...

If you are unloved and have never been cherished or nurtured, it's pretty hard to do that with your own children as you don't know how to do it. Therefore your practices and choices you make may not be the best ones to pass on to your children, who then grow up and can't do it to their own children.

Down the track our People may have the chance to improve ourselves or go somewhere to make good choices, but quite often it can be a few generations before the healing can happen.

6. HEALING AND A WAY FORWARD

""Trauma is a mindset that is inbuilt. We don't think we are good enough and we can't compete with the dominate culture. We need to start seeing ourselves as good people"... Greg Telford

Learning Outcome 	Attain a broader understanding of what transgenerational trauma is and how it was created.
Discussion Topic 	<p>Ask the group to close their eyes for a moment and read the following:</p> <p>Imagine now that you are having one of those rare moments when you are at home on your own. Your thoughts are filled with hopelessness and helplessness and you are distressed at how this situation is affecting your children. You are overwhelmed by these feelings and during a moment of sheer desperation you pick up the phone and call the school and for the very first time in your life – you ask for help.</p> <p>Imagine later that day a person from the local family support agency drops by to visit you. You are asked what you need. No-one has ever asked you what you need before – but for the first time that you can remember you see a glimmer of hope – A real chance to change your life and make a better home for your children, based on what YOU need and what YOU think is best for your family.</p> <p>How does it feel to be asked what you need?</p> <p>What is the likelihood you can make some changes now that you have been offered support?</p> <p>If you could make plans for the future, what might they be?</p>



Educator Notes....

What are the steps to my healing journey?

Personally recognise that changes need to occur and healing needs to begin.

To embark on any healing journey there must first be the recognition that healing needs to occur. Sometimes you just decide enough is enough or sometimes something happens which forces you to make changes in your life. However your decision to make changes occurs – it is still an important step in your life's journey!

Some of the things you may experience are:

- ⇒ Guilt for having found yourself in this situation in the first place;
- ⇒ Shamed because others are judging you because of your circumstances;
- ⇒ Anger relating to why these things have happened in your life;
- ⇒ Sadness for the losses you have already experienced and the future losses of family and friends that may be part of the new changes you need to make; &
- ⇒ Fear regarding the changes that you will have to make to begin your new journey.

Seek assistance from an appropriate support agency

Find a community or government organisation that can help and support you - one that will listen to your needs and has the resources to assist you.

- ⇒ If you don't know any support agencies, ask around for recommendations from friends or family.
- ⇒ If the organisation that you contact can't help you ask them to refer you to another agency that can.

- ⇒ Sometimes you may need to talk to a number of support organisations until you find the one that suits you best and listens to what you need.

Be clear about what you need to embark on your own personal healing journey.

Being clear about what you need can be a daunting task: it's not often in our lives that we feel empowered enough to ask specifically for what we need. Sometimes it can take a bit of time to even work out what you actually want.

- ⇒ Think about what you need to begin to make changes in your life.
- ⇒ Write down a list or talk to someone who is neutral and won't be influenced by other factors.
- ⇒ Be clear to your support worker or organisation that this is what you need to give you the best chance of making positive changes in your life.
- ⇒ Explore your life and look from the outside in... what needs to occur to improve your wellbeing and the wellbeing of your family, and what can you do to make this happen?

Make a commitment to make changes in your life

Each person needs to make a commitment to heal their own trauma and to improve their wellbeing and that of their families and community – no one else can do this for you. Even if you are being forced to make changes because of your situation, if you are not committed to the changes they will only be temporary.

- ⇒ Changes are often challenging therefore find someone to talk to about what is happening for you and how these changes will affect your life and your family.
- ⇒ When/if times get tough have a list of support people who will understand you and not judge you for what you are going through.

Recognise your achievements

Acknowledge each time you achieve a positive result. You have worked hard through this and need to recognise that each small achievement has the potential to make huge changes in your life and those of your family members.



- ⇒ Make down each achievement and put it where you can see them – in your bedroom, on the fridge, etc., as a constant reminder to yourself of your success.
- ⇒ Write down major goals or set milestones and when you achieve each one, celebrate your success with friends or family who support you.
- ⇒ Understand that you are a role model to other friends and family and hold your head high as you work your way on your life's path with a positive outlook for the future.

How do organisations best support individuals & groups?

1. The targeted individual or group needs to recognise that changes need to occur and a healing process needs to begin

To embark on any healing journey the group must first recognise that a healing process needs to occur.

- ⇒ Collectively the group needs to make a commitment to heal their trauma both individually and as a group, thus improving the overall wellbeing of themselves and their communities.

2. Ask what the individual or group needs to enable them to embark on their healing journey

Consult with the individual or group to ensure that the service you are able to offer is what they actually need.

Often services receive funding to provide services that are not wanted, which leads to lack of participation and ultimately reductions in future funding. However another group in another area may have benefited from such programs but the funding may be withdrawn under the assumption that that particular program was not needed in our communities.

- ⇒ Consult with your community and ask them what they want. Your success is going to be gauged by the communities' commitment to your programs or services.

Spirit Dreaming's expertise in providing effective workshops

Spirit Dreaming specialises in creating and delivering healing, wellbeing, education, mentoring and self-improvement programs tailored specifically for Aboriginal Peoples.

Spirit Dreaming primarily uses arts based therapeutic models to provide one-to-one mentoring and counselling for our clients, and has a solid history of delivering workshops in relation to resilience, leadership, capacity building, family violence, lateral violence, mental illness, grief and loss and a range of other related topics that affect our overall wellbeing.

Spirit Dreaming engages clients by using a range of therapeutic models combined with strengths based therapeutic practices to assist Aboriginal Peoples in overcoming the historical, cultural and social barriers which impede Aboriginal Peoples capacity to live healthy and resourceful lives.

The following forms of therapeutic intervention underpin the success of Spirit Dreaming programs:

- ⇒ Arts based therapy is used to create art and reflect on the art products and processes. The clients are able to increase awareness of self and others to cope with symptoms, stress and traumatic experiences. It is based on the belief that the creative process involved in artistic self-expression helps people to resolve conflicts and problems, develop interpersonal skills, manage behaviour, reduce stress, increase self-esteem and self-awareness, and achieve insight
- ⇒ Meditation can be used to allow the participant to view any past situations in the third person. Third person techniques are used to gently allow the participant to review events in their lives, without having to re-live all the feelings attached to the trauma of the event. Within the meditation process the participant can be empowered to change the situation as it happens and to experience the feelings associated with the new outcome.
- ⇒ Narrative therapy is used as a form of counselling. It is a modality that is respectful and non-blaming, and makes the client the expert in their own life. The practice of this technique views problems as separate from people and assumes people have many skills, competencies, beliefs, values and abilities that will assist them to reduce the influence of problems in their lives.

- ⇒ Reality Therapy is another counselling modality that is used that requires the participant to use their ability and insight to solve their problems. It is the participant's understanding of their reality which gives them the strength to find ways to deal with any given situation, in a manner that is empowering and supportive of their needs. Allowing the participant to recount their own version of events is what makes this method of counselling truly effective. Each person has their own way in which they have interpreted any given event. This is their reality and it is paramount that this is respected.



7. OTHER RESOURCES

Resources Available from Spirit Dreaming

All Spirit Dreaming resources are available to download free of charge from the website:

www.spiritdreaming.com.au

Resources include:

Linked Websites

www.ourfamilybusiness.net.au

www.whatsupwithourmob.com.au

www.learningfromalinta.com.au (launched December 2013)

Books

Dusk till Dawn – Women's Family Violence

Scars on the Inside – Elders Family Violence

Living on Mean Street – Children's Family Bullying

Through our Dark Eyes - Aboriginal Community Healing

The Old School Days – Creating pathways between Parents and the Education system

DVD - Digital Stories

Our Family Business – NSW Premiers Dept.

Many faces of Me – NSW Victims of Crime

Recommended Reading

Trauma Trails, recreating song lines: the transgenerational effects of trauma in indigenous Australia – by Prof Judy Atkinson

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