



rape and abuse crisis center

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Child Sexual Abuse in Native American Communities

Native culture is based on the Circle of Life.¹ As Native individuals, our culture teaches us that we are all relatives to all things in creation. Compassion and respect are the foundation for our relationships and the Circle of Life. Nurturing children is the responsibility of all people. Yet, many of the threads of the Circle have become broken. Once, where child abuse was unheard of, now Native children suffer the horrible crimes of abuse, neglect, and sexual abuse.

Years ago, many Native children were placed in mission and boarding schools.² Often, this is where many Native children were sexually victimized by their caretakers. The children's pain and fear were increased by the separation from their families and culture. There was no one to tell about the abuse. To survive, many stuffed their feelings and memories to the back of their hearts and minds. Many used alcohol to numb the pain. Never healing, they survived with their secret agony.

Not being able to safely share the secret of their abuse, and not dealing with child sexual abuse within the family became survival tools. If we are not safe and healed, how can we help our own children?

To help our children, we must begin the process of healing. We must begin talking about our own victimization. We must know, and our children must know that abuse is not our fault; it is not our shame.

To renew the threads of the sacred Circle of Life within ourselves, our homes and communities, we must relearn how to nurture ourselves, so we can share the gifts of hope and caring with our children.

It is scary and painful to speak of sexual abuse of children. Yet our spirits cannot be healed without releasing the secrets, the fear, the shame, and the hurt. We cannot die or "go crazy" from crying or sharing our stories. If we get rid of these bad feelings, our hearts will be better able to love, care, be happy, and give good feelings and protection to our children. We can become stronger and enjoy life and our relationships.

References:

1. National Association of School Psychologists:
<http://www.nasponline.org/publications/cq/cq328native.aspx>
2. American Indian Education: http://jan.ucc.nau.edu/~jar/AIE/Ind_Ed.html

24-hour Crisis Line (701)293-7273
www.raccfm.com

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F: Education/Revised Handouts/child sexual abuse in native communities.