



Principles in best practice for counselling Indigenous clients

Working with Indigenous clients requires a true understanding of the generational trauma experienced by Indigenous people as a result of invasion and the impact that this has had on Indigenous people in Australia. Reflecting this understanding within the context of a counselling session with an Indigenous client will create a counselling environment that is empathic, respectful, engaging and culturally safe.

It must be stated that there are no best therapies or therapeutic models for working with Indigenous people. Indigenous people are not a homogenous group, which makes it difficult to provide specific guidelines on how to work in a culturally appropriate manner. It is ultimately about the therapist and their ability to provide a culturally safe space for Indigenous clients to tell their story and for the healing process to begin.

The following principles have been developed by the Victims of Crime Bureau. The Bureau recommends that counsellors should endeavour to:

- have a detailed knowledge of the psychological and emotional experiences faced by Indigenous families when they have become a victim of violent crime and an awareness of the personal, social, interpersonal and practical issues associated with such trauma
- demonstrate a combination of verbal and non-verbal cues to indicate deep listening skills. This will be demonstrated through allowing the client to tell their story and demonstrating comfortableness with periods of silence without interruption
- have an understanding of the diversity of Indigenous communities and yet the strength of a shared identity
- have an understanding of the importance of families and the extended family unit and understand how this may impact on disclosing violence
- be aware of the generational trauma experienced by Indigenous people and that in the context of counselling over a current violent event, other traumatic events previously experienced may resurface
- be aware that confidentiality is extremely important to Indigenous clients and needs to be considered when establishing the setting for the counselling sessions
- employ a flexible therapeutic contract and details of attendance due to factors of family, transport, mobility that may interrupt the counselling sessions
- have an understanding of the trauma associated with the removal of children and the impact of institutionalisation on attachment and the effects this has had on each generation
- have an understanding that Indigenous people require more time to tell their story and therefore will allow this time to be given
- have an understanding that sometimes the true nature of the presentation will not be revealed until the end of the counselling session
- understand that in many instances clients will prefer to have a support person attend the counselling sessions with them and this should be offered and discussed.

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Artwork: **Family Collecting Yams** by Leanne Tobin (Darug nation). Writer: Vanessa Worrall (Wiradjuri nation), Victims of Crime Bureau.

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