Kiowa language

Kíóñ:dèdàu

Kiowa language

Kíóñ:dèdàu (Good day)

Presented by Joy Macko

May 2026

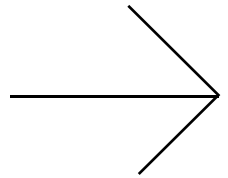
The Past that Persists: Counseling Indigenous Populations Through the Lens of Historical Trauma

Understanding historical trauma

- Ongoing, cumulative intergenerational harm
- Not a single event, but a system of disruption
- Developed by Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart
- Rooted in colonization, displacement, forced assimilation
- Includes cultural suppression and family separation
- Persists because conditions have not fully ended
- Unresolved grief carried across generations

- Life expectancy average 70 vs 78+ years in general population
- Highest rates of fair/poor health (1 in 4 adults)
- Chronic stress and systemic inequality drive outcomes
- Limited healthcare access in many communities
- Distrust of institutions impacts engagement
- Modern conditions reflect historical disruption

This is not just history



Mental health impact

- Higher rates of anxiety, depression, distress
- Nearly 1 in 5 report serious psychological distress
- Lower access to mental health treatment
- Gap between need and care remains significant
- Symptoms often tied to deeper cultural disconnection
- Standard treatment often misses root causes

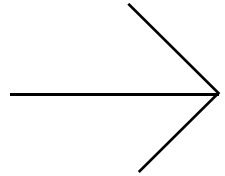
Suicide as a key indicator

91%

- Highest suicide rates of any racial/ethnic group
- 91% higher than the general population (2022)
- Disproportionately impacts Indigenous youth
- Multiple losses within communities are common
- Grief is collective, not isolated
- Ongoing exposure reshapes sense of safety and future

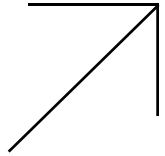
- Learned emotional suppression from survival contexts
- Disrupted parenting and attachment patterns
- Unprocessed grief embedded in families
- Identity fragmentation across generations
- Biological stress response
- Trauma persists without direct exposure

How trauma is passed down



Major frameworks and thinkers

- **Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart**
  - Historical Trauma Response
- **Joseph P. Gone**
  - Aaniih Gros Ventre Tribal Nation of Montana
  - Culturally grounded care
- **Karina L Walters**
  - Native American Women's Health Indigenist Stress-Coping Model
- **Urie Bronfenbrenner**
  - Systems shape individual experience
  - Ecological systems theory (EST) framework
- **Ignacio Martín-Baró**
  - Mental health tied to oppression and power



- Mistrust due to historical harm
- Therapy not seen as culturally relevant
- Limited culturally competent providers
- Geographic isolation and underfunded services
- Western models focus on individuals, not community

Barriers to care

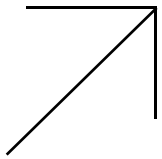
Rethinking healing

- Healing is restoring connection, not just symptom reduction
- Connection to culture, identity, land, and community
- Language, ceremony, and elders play key roles
- Cultural engagement linked to lower suicide risk
- Identity and belonging act as protective factors

Counseling implications

- Move beyond individual pathology
- Acknowledge historical context explicitly
- Center identity, culture, and community
- Adapt approach, avoid rigid models
- Build trust slowly and intentionally
- Practice cultural humility, not expertise

What this looks like in practice



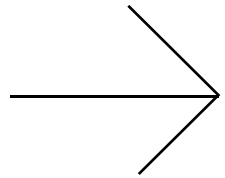
Invite cultural identity into the conversation →

In practice, this sounds like:

• “What role does your culture or community play in how you make sense of what you’re going through?”

• “Are there traditions or practices that feel grounding or important to you?”

Bringing culture into the room (without appropriating it)

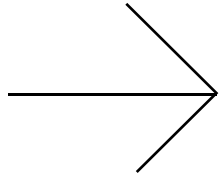


Support the client in reconnecting with existing cultural pathways →

This might include:

- Encouraging participation in community events, ceremonies, or language programs
- Helping the client identify safe ways to reconnect with family, elders, or cultural groups
- Exploring barriers such as shame, distance, or fear of not “belonging enough”

Supporting reconnection without acting as a gatekeeper

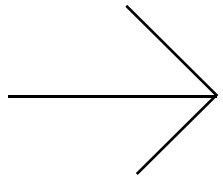


In many Indigenous frameworks, healing is not meant to happen in isolation →

With client consent, a therapist might:

- Encourage involvement of trusted elders or community figures
- Support family or community-based sessions if culturally appropriate
- Recognize that guidance may come from outside the clinical setting

Integrating elders and community when appropriate

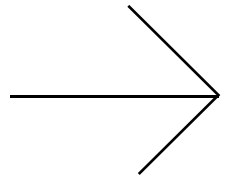


Western therapy often privileges verbal processing. That can be limiting. →

A culturally responsive therapist may:

- Validate storytelling as a legitimate form of processing
- Allow silence without rushing to fill it
- Recognize land, nature, and place as grounding elements

Expanding what counts as "therapeutic"

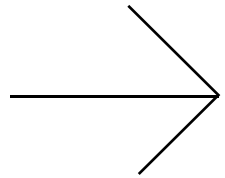


Many clients carry internalized messages shaped by historical trauma, such as: →

- “My culture doesn’t matter”
- “I don’t belong”
- “I have to function in a Western way to be okay”

Therapy can gently challenge these beliefs.

Addressing internalized disconnection

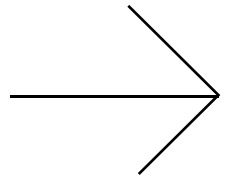


This is one of the most important and most overlooked steps. →

A therapist can say, in plain language:

- “What you’re describing makes sense given the history your community has been through.”

Naming the historical context directly

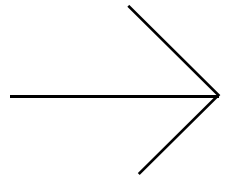


The therapist's role is to: →

- Stay curious
- Follow the client's lead
- Be flexible in approach

Not every client will want cultural reconnection, and that choice must be respected. The goal is not to prescribe identity, but to make space for it if it is relevant.

Collaborating, not controlling



Recommended reading and organizations

Key authors & research	**Journals**	**Organizations**
Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart	*American Journal of Community Psychology*	Indian Health Service
Joseph P Gone	*Journal of Indigenous Research*	Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
Karina L Waters	*Transcultural Psychiatry*	National Indian Health Board

"Indigenous communities are not broken.

These are communities that have endured sustained, systemic disruption and continue to demonstrate resilience, continuity, and adaptation."

Joy Macko

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Peggy Lorraine (1955 – 2008)

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Ahóów (Thank You)