

Natural Connections: Embodying Relationship with the Environment

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College of St. Scholastica

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Disclaimer...

- This is an educational resource based on Indigenous wisdom and Western ways of knowing. It includes information and teachings from Anishinaabe Elders, Relational-Cultural Theory, Polyvagal Theory, and Somatic Experiencing. The opinions expressed in this **presentation** and on the following **slides** are solely those of the presenter and not necessarily those of the College of St. Scholastica, Elders, Theorists, and Practitioners.

Background Info...

- Naturally Educated
 - Western edge of MN near the Wild Rice River and Red Rivers
- Traditionally Educated
 - Niiyawen'enh
 - Anishinaabe Elders
- Formally Educated
 - BA in Psychology - MSUM
 - MSW – University of North Dakota
 - DSW – St. Catherine University/University of St. Thomas



CSWE 2015 EPAS

- Competency 3: Advance Human Rights and Social, Economic, and Environmental Justice

...Social workers understand strategies designed to eliminate oppressive structural barriers to ensure that social goods, rights, and responsibilities are distributed equitably and that civil, political, environmental, economic, social, and cultural human rights are protected (p. 7).

- Competency 5: Engage in Policy
 - apply critical thinking to analyze, formulate, and advocate for policies that advance human rights and social, economic, and environmental justice (p. 8).

CSWE Curricular Guide for Environmental Justice

“Social workers engaged in environmental justice work respect the impact of the natural world and the physical and built environments on the health, mental health, and social, spiritual, and cultural well-being of individuals, families, groups, and communities. Like the pioneers in social work, we cannot continue to advocate for social and economic justice without properly attending to the natural world and environmental justice (CSWE, 2020, p. xviii).”

Somatic Literacy: Clinical Collaboration with the Natural Environment

- MSW Level Course: Addresses why and how Social Work should collaborate with the natural environment
- Intersection of Western & Indigenous Ways of Knowing: Anishinaabe Teachings, Polyvagal Theory, Relational-Cultural Theory, Somatic Literacy
- Begins with understanding macro implications of how humanity's disconnection with the environment negatively impact both humans and the natural world & builds micro clinical skills for reconnection



Conceptual Framework

- Integration of Indigenous wisdom & Western ways of knowing
- Import of growth-fostering relationships and somatic literacy in personal and planetary healing
- Collaboration with the natural environment in the healing process

Relationship and the Healing Process: Collaboration with the Natural Environment

Leah Prussia, MSW, LICSW

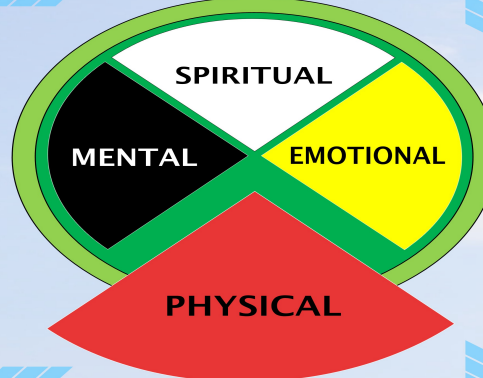
Original Connections

"We are all indigenous to somewhere."
-Andrew Favorite, White Earth Elder

Indigenous Wisdom
Reverence for Earth (Aki)
Relationship with All that Lives
Mutual Respect
Balance



Medicine Wheel



Disconnection

Mind - Body
Isolation
Depression
Addiction
Diabetes
Obesity



Humans - Natural World
Polluted Waterways
Decimation of Sacred Sites
Mining and Oil Extraction
Climate Change

Reconnection

**"Relationship with nature is a formula for
personal and planetary healing..."**
-Leah Prussia

Somatic Literacy: A Tool for Reconnection

- Access Body's Natural Rhythms
- Broaden Awareness of Interoception
- Elevate Mind and Body Cohesion
- Collaborate with the Natural World



Call to Action: Move toward relationship with self, others, and all that lives...

Return to Relationships

"We need relationships like air and water."
-Dr. Judith Jordan

Relational - Cultural Theory: The 5 Good Things

1. Sense of Zest or Energy
2. Increased Sense of Worth
3. Clarity: Increased knowledge of oneself and the other person in the relationship
4. Productivity: Ability and motivation to take action both in the relationship and outside of it
5. Desire for more Connection: In response to satisfaction of relational experience

References and Acknowledgments

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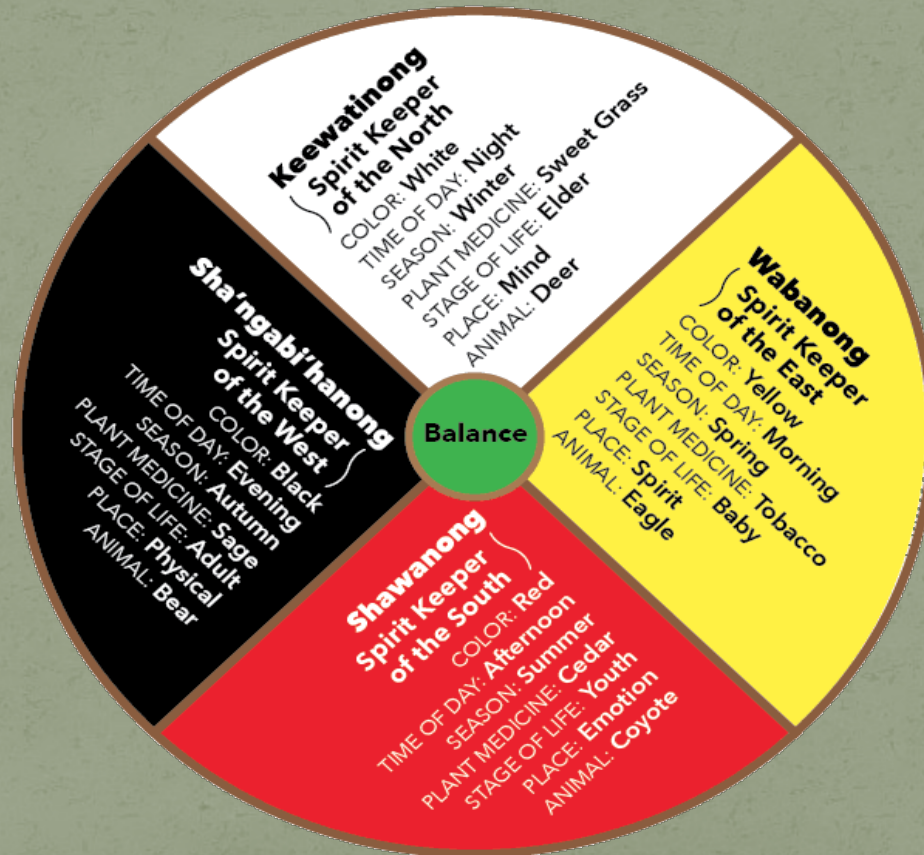
Original Connections

“We are all Indigenous to somewhere...”

Andrew Favorite, White Earth Elder



Medicine Wheel Teachings



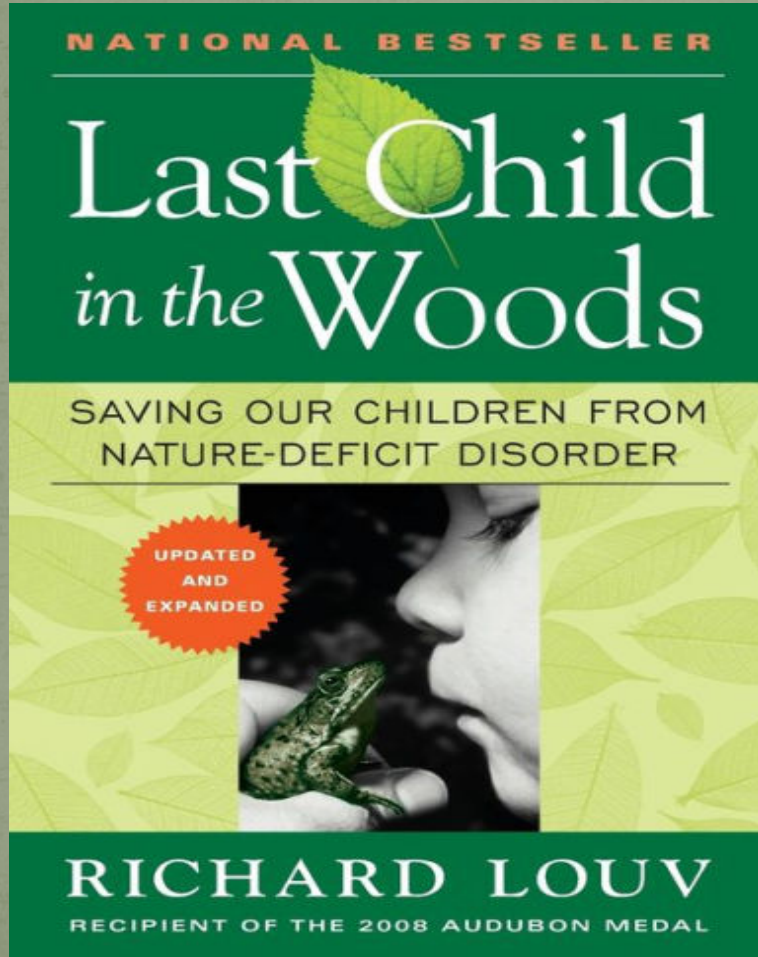
<https://www.kbichealth.org/ojibwe-medicine>

Personal Environmental History

Adapted from: Erickson, C. L. (2018). *Environmental justice as social work practice*.

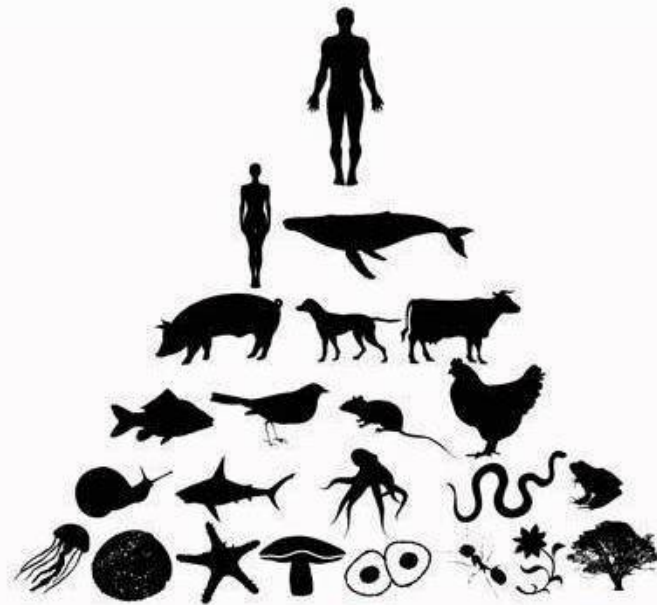
- Who taught you how to be in relationship with the natural environment and what does that relationship look like? How does your body respond when you remember the sounds, smells, sights, and interactions of that time?
- How did the natural world impact your life when you were a child – as an adult? What do you notice as far as sensations when you reflect on the impact as a child – adult?
- In what ways do you remove yourself from a relationship with nature? What sensory cues arise when you think about this disconnection? In what ways do you engage in a relationship with nature? What starts to happen in your body as you envision connecting with nature?
- What do you want for your future relationship with the natural world? As you imagine this relationship, what do you notice in your body?

History of Humanity's Disconnect

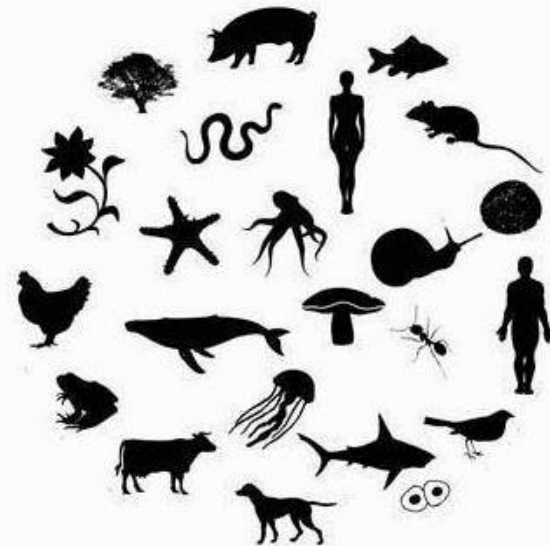


Teach your children well

Relational Shift



ego



eco



SustainableMan.org

Results of the Disconnect

- Isolation
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Loneliness
- Nature-Deficit Disorder
- Attention Deficit Disorder
- Addiction
- Diabetes
- Obesity
- Spiritual void



Returning to Original Relationships

We need relationships like we need air and water.

—Judith Jordan



It is obvious that all of living and all of development takes place only in relationships.
(Jean Baker Miller, 1976)

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Intersection of Indigenous & Western Ways of Knowing



Indigenous Wisdom & RCT

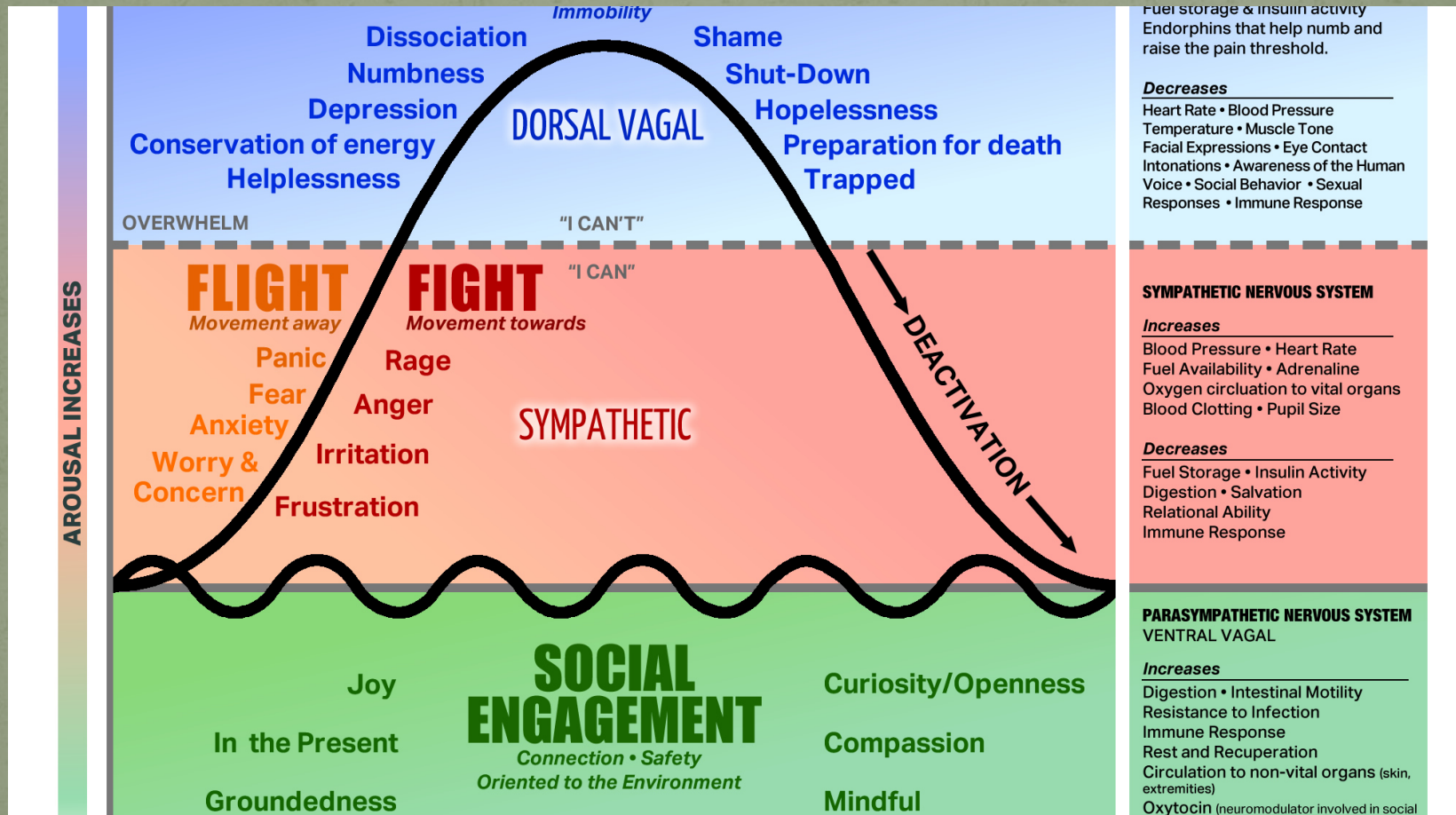
Indigenous Knowledge	Relational-Cultural Theory
Relationship with all that lives...	Growth-fostering relationships
Respect for Aki – Earth and all inhabitants	Mutuality
Reciprocity – give and take	Social responsibility
Future: plan for next seven generations	Resilience
Community-oriented	Alternative to separate-self model of care

“Knowledge is only a rumor until it lives in the
muscle...”

Asaru Tribe - Papua New Guinea

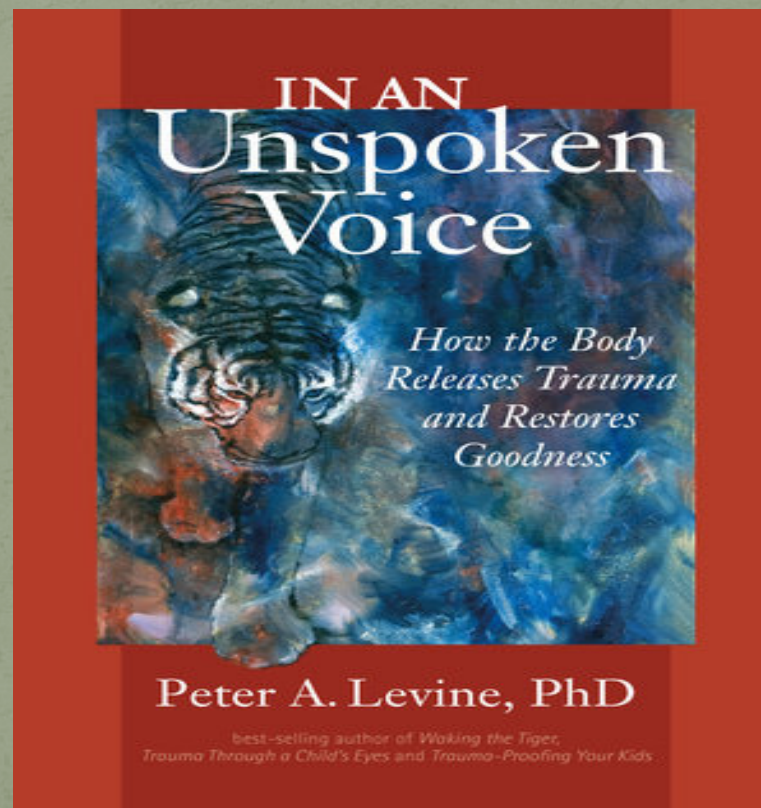


Polyvagal Theory



Adapted by Ruby Jo Walker from Cheryl Sanders, Steve Hoskinson, Stephen Porges, Peter Levine

Trauma Resolution, Embodiment, Reconnection



Natural Rhythms and Resiliency



Somatic Literacy

- Access Body's Natural Rhythms
- Broaden awareness of interoception – felt sense
- Elevate mind and body cohesion through curiosity
- Collaborate with the Natural World



Expand Social Work Approach and Collaborate with Nature...

- Engagement
- Assessment
- Intervention
- Evaluation



Solastalgia

- English term describing place-based distress from a lived experience of unwelcome environmental change to one's home. Glenn Albrecht
- Inability to seek solace from a beloved place that is being desolated – causes algia = anguish or pain
- Hopi term *koyaanisqatsi* - disintegration of human life when out of balance with the world
- Baffin Island Inuit apply *uggianaquq* – friend acting strangely or unpredictably
- Mental, Emotional, Physical, Spiritual hurt due to witnessing harm to one's relative, the natural world
- Vicarious Trauma – symptoms of grief, anxiety, depression...

*It is my hope that personal recovery through connection
and relationship with nature will come full circle and
contribute to necessary planetary healing...*



Memengwaa Miikawaadizi, Mashkawizi, Bimaadizi, Zhawenjige...

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