

## **What is Lateral Violence?**

Lateral violence describes the organized, harmful behaviors that we do to each other collectively as part of an oppressed group; within our families, organizations and communities.” It is also referred to as “internalized colonialism” as colonization created a hierarchy based on fear-based power and control techniques, (warfare, genocide, etc.) the male gender and economic power. Superiority of some and inferiority of others was assumed. *Janet Derrick*

- violence is directed sideways at one’s own group (which makes it lateral)
- could also be referred to as ‘indirect aggression’ or a form of ‘bullying’
- generally a behavior exhibited by every Indigenous group, every minority group and groups that have been oppressed. Its’ roots lie in colonization, oppression, intergenerational trauma and ongoing experiences of racism and discrimination.

## **What are examples of Lateral Violence?**

Lateral violence consists of: expressions of rage, anger, fear & terror; looks like win/lose dynamic; acts of ‘power over’; acts of sabotage, gossip, blaming and shaming, judgement, sarcastic humour, backstabbing, jealousy, organizational/agency competition, lack of accountability, discrediting; manipulating, financial greediness, spiritual attacks, playing people off against each other, sneaky mean jokes, family favors, use of innuendo, no respect for lines of authority, ‘you owe me’ attitude, unrealistic expectations, rigid and arbitrary enforcement of rules, and ‘*crabs in the bucket*’ syndrome: a way of thinking best described by the phrase “if I can’t have it, neither can you.” The metaphor refers to a pot of crabs. Individually, the crabs could easily escape from the pot, but instead, they grab at each other in a useless “king of the hill” competition (or sabotage) which prevents any from escaping and ensures their collective demise. The analogy in human behavior is that of a group that will attempt to “pull down” (negate or diminish the importance of) any member who achieves success beyond the others, out of envy, conspiracy or competitive feelings.

## **Why do people use Lateral Violence?**

The root of lateral violence is in oppression; low self esteem & self worth; cannot accept others; confused and unhappy with themselves; stuck in the cycle of oppression; lack of knowledge and awareness; unresolved anger, pain, shame, self hatred (including cultural)  
~ a reflection of anger & frustration, of repression, of being at the bottom of a definitive hierarchy

## **Why do we need to understand lateral violence?**

- 1) Community spirit has suffered; this is reflected in the lack of volunteerism in community
- 2) Recognition and acceptance of lateral violence is often the first step in addressing other forms of violence in the community. Lateral violence is about ‘me’ and not ‘them’ so it is easier to empower individuals/groups to make changes (and of course this empowerment has a ripple effect in other areas)
- 3) Being able to ‘name’ and understand lateral violence gives us more tolerance for dealing with it... and more courage to address it!

## How do we deal with Lateral Violence?

- first need to apply first to self (in lateral violence we repeat the behaviors of our oppressors upon ourselves and act this out in our relationships). Do your own inventory by honestly asking yourself if you 'own' any of those behaviors.
- need to clearly label the behavior as violence to help others understand this kind of mental assault can be just as damaging as physical violence.
- ask for clear information. Before you say anything, consider whether or not you know for sure that it is true. Second, consider whether it is useful. In what way would sharing this build a better community? Third, is it something you would be prepared to say if the person you are talking about was there beside you?
- in your organization, you can model dealing with lateral violence by choosing a term to invoke anytime you 'catch' someone using lateral violence (pineapple, pineapple). This creates further awareness (lateral violence is insidious) as well as an opening for further discussion.
- with your clients, you want to help them recognize and acknowledge the emotional triggers that contribute to lateral violence and how lateral violence is an example of an unhealthy defense mechanism. What are the feelings behind it (defensive, hurt, angry, low self esteem, etc.)? What are other options for dealing with these feelings (self care plan, support system)?
- understand trauma, especially historical trauma and its impacts
- encourage a community response/policy regarding lateral violence
- encourage the celebration of successes, accomplishments
- encourage the resolution of conflicts in a healthy way; have lots of circles

- T** – is it true?
- H** – is it helpful?
- I** – is it inspiring?
- N** – is it necessary?
- K** – is it kind?

