

# Lateral Violence Presentation

## 1) What is lateral violence? *brainstorm*

- **Provide definition** “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.

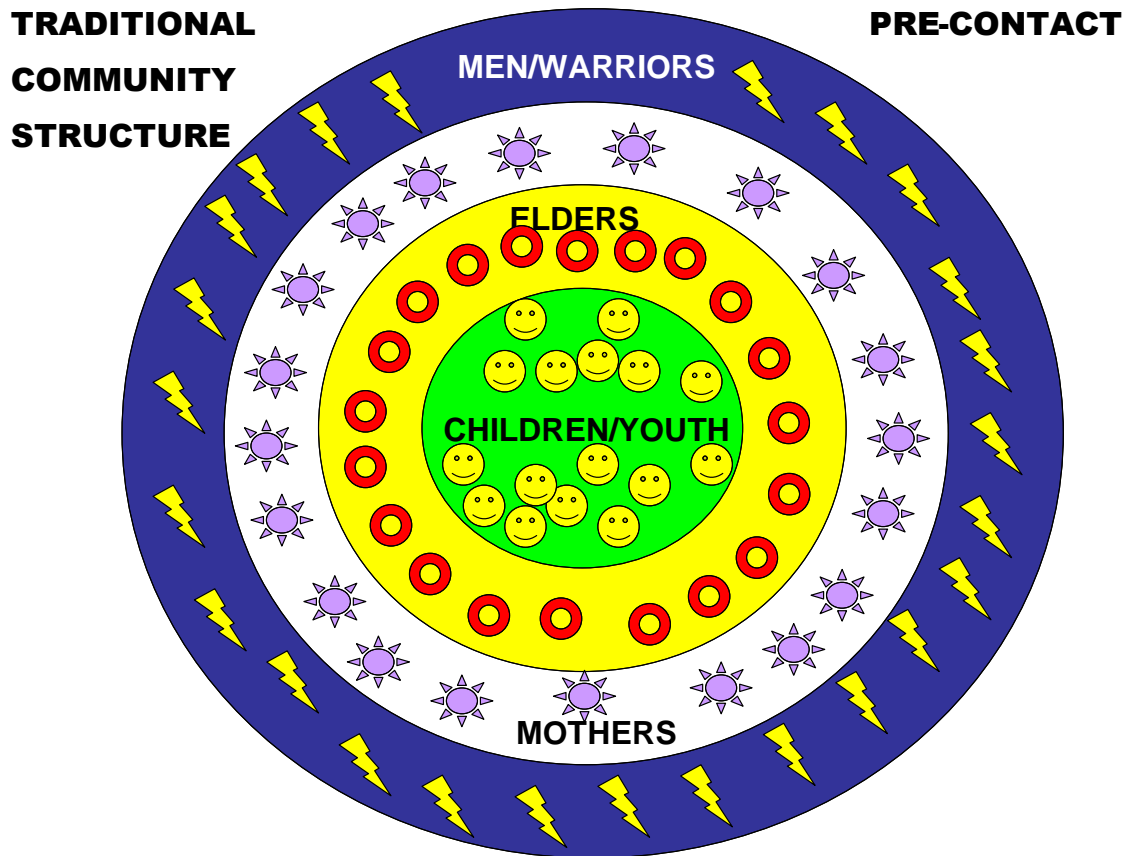
(what about collateral violence... includes all the above however also includes the many others who get on board with the lateral violence)

- **Examples of lateral violence:** 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, ‘crabs in the bucket’ syndrome (*describes 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?** root is in oppression; low self esteem & self worth including a loss of belonging; cannot accept others; confused and unhappy with themselves; stuck in the cycle of oppression; lack of knowledge and awareness; fear of abandonment; 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!)

**Exercise: Understanding How Lateral Violence is Epidemic in Aboriginal Communities**

Set up the room by physically moving participants into a traditional community structure (prior to contact)



- as each group is identified (from the center out), participants are asked to volunteer.

- they are asked to share perhaps a memory of these times, and what it felt like to be a child
- When the mothers are introduced, the collective responsibility of shared parenting should be emphasized, also how woman shared in traditional governance and distribution of food within the camp
- When the Elders are introduced, talk about their role as teachers, as mentors, as ceremony holders and medicine people, as traditional knowledge holders and proficient story tellers
- When the men are introduced a discussion about the warrior role, including governance, peacemaking, provider and protector
- all the groups are collectively asked how they feel and what they see. Generally the response is about the children being in the middle and how everyone is protected. Plus how they can see everyone else around the circle. Reference ceremony.

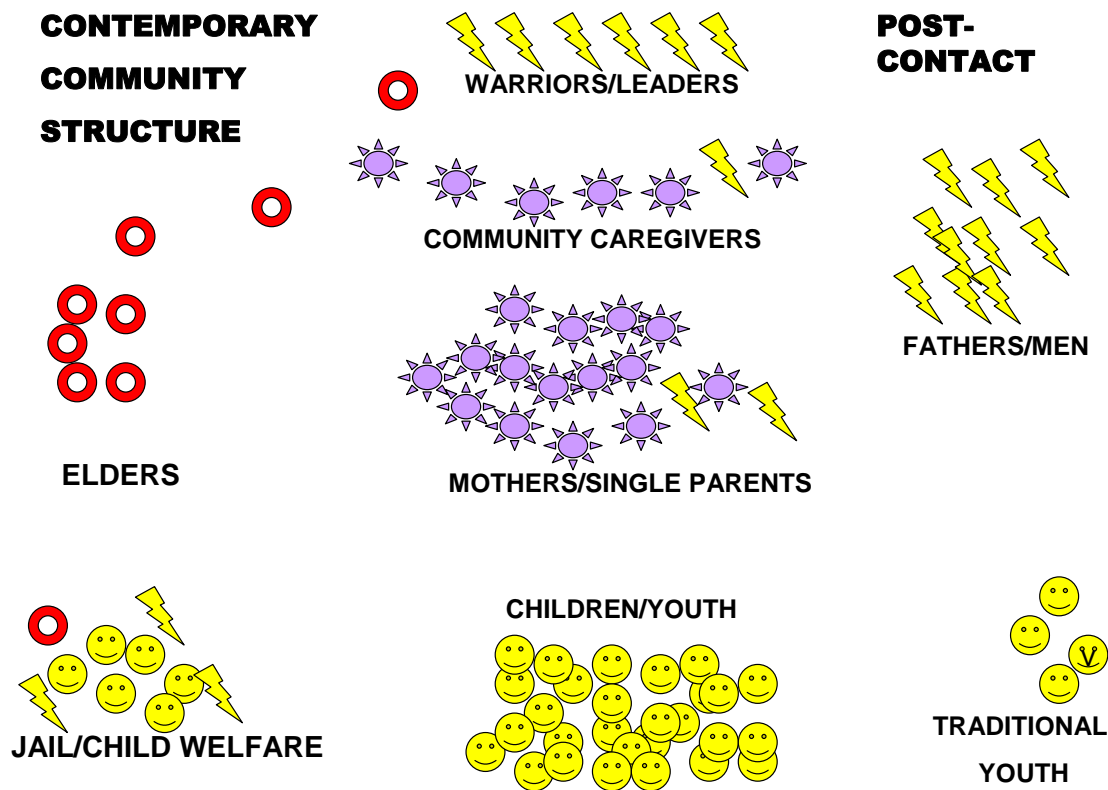
3) As each concept is introduced, participants are moved around the room to different positions (first take the children away, next the Elders, then the men, and then the women)

Introduce the concept of colonization

- beginning of dependency as want/need for trade items is encouraged [tobacco, sugar, needles, glass beads, alcohol]
  - introduction of western values [patriarchy, ownership of land, competition, separation of the spiritual from everything else]
  - also got lots that wasn't asked for, like diseases, alcohol, education, religion [took away cultural symbols and ceremonies], restricted movement due to relocation to reserves, appropriation of traditional resources, Indian act which institutionalized racism and reinforced the supremacy of 'western values' ~cultural shock
- **children removed.....** (some to residential schools, some never returned and later some to the '60's scoop, loss of nurturing & introduction to violence)
  - mothers powerless, drank to self medicate, blamed men/other women
  - no children to nurture, role confusion results, unresolved grief
  - many women involuntarily sterilized, Aboriginal people not considered 'citizens' until 1961 when they were given the right to vote
- **move mothers.....**
  - Elders lost their place, many feel wounded themselves from their colonization experience & blame each other for not doing more, unresolved grief
- **move Elders.....**
  - men powerless, drank, blamed women/other men
  - loss of traditional roles, unresolved grief, racism
  - traditional system of governance [collective] replaced with Eurocentric version [focus on the individual]
- **move Men.....**
- increased vulnerability to violence as depression & vulnerability increase

- children came home to 'foreign' environments with lots of alcohol and 'pagan' practices, parents who couldn't/didn't know how to talk with them [language barriers now] & children had many negative feelings they couldn't express because it wasn't safe to do so (loneliness, anger, shame, abuse experiences)
- lateral violence increased as the sense of powerlessness deepened
- oppression is both collective and individual (loss of relationships & connectedness & much chaos both internally and externally)
- no idea what it is like to be a First Nations person (position of 'shame')

4) Now the discussion is about how the community is portrayed now, with a picture of a transformed, very non traditional community system. Each group is identified and participants are asked about how they feel and what they see from their perspective.



- **where are the children now?** At the back, some almost 'out the door.' What are they doing? Self medicating - drinking, drugging, suicide - trying to belong by joining gangs, being a bully, being bullied, doing whatever they want because no one is really watching (or trying to change their behavior)

- there is a group of traditional youth who struggle, however there numbers are generally small and they are often peer pressured and/or bullied by their other peers. The pressure to conform is strong.

- **where are the Elders?** Displaced, lowest demographic in the community - in old age homes, not needed or valued anymore... perhaps being abused. Some may still be in a position of influence, however their voices are lost. Many feel shame and think they are 'getting what has been earned/deserved'

- **where are the mothers?** They are mostly single parents, struggling to survive – on welfare, self medicating through alcohol, drugs, bingo, in toxic relationships -
- where are the men? Displaced, can no longer provide – high unemployment rates – easy access to self medication, not connected to their children, violence an expression of continued dis-connection.
- **where are the warriors?** The leaders? At the front, looking forward. Can't see everybody behind them anymore, it's no longer about the community and what's best – it's about what they can get for themselves and their family - it's often about \$ and having a job.
- **who are behind the leaders?** The community caregivers. Mostly women, overstressed, overburdened. Does anyone have their back? Everyone is waiting to send arrows into their backs... Are they having any fun?
- those incarcerated & in child welfare are also still present in the community even though they may not be physically present. Their loss is added to all of the other losses, the systemic victimization continues.
- **so what does the community look like now?**
- define intergenerational impacts, can quote 'statistics' then move to what this really looks like in the community
  - include bloodism, blame, little or no volunteerism, no healthy communication, territorial, controlling behaviors [focus on individual not the community], lack of trust, favoritism, quality of services diminished, highly defensive, judgemental & critical, unwilling to change, rigid power structure, fear, bullying, inflexibility and instability

##### 5) So how do we encourage organizations/communities to 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