

Fostering Resiliency with Indigenous Children and Families



Monique Gray Smith

The Ripple Effect

“A Ripple effect works because everyone influences everyone else.

Powerful people are powerful influences.

If your life works, you influence your family.

If your family works, your family influences the community.

If your community works, your community influences the nation.

If your nation works, your nation influences the world.”

The Tao of Leadership

Physiological Responses to Stress and Trauma

NEUROTRANSMITTERS INVOLVED IN STRESS REACTIONS:

If the brain judges a situation to be "dangerous" it responds by releasing:

***Epinephrine:** Mobilizes the body to cope. Regulates heart rate, breathing, muscles, blood sugar increase for energy, pupils dilate, blood clotting increases, white blood cell activity increases, blood flow increased to muscles and brain, decreased to peripheral blood vessels. Digestion and elimination is speeded up. Intended as a *temporary* imbalance to cope with an emergency.

***Cortisol:** Releases more sugar into blood for energy, and speeds up tissue repair. If supplied on an ongoing basis it will have damaging effects on internal organs.

***Norepinephrine:** Induces "hypervigilance" and enhances problem solving skills of cortex, attention increase while concentration decreases. This provides a state in which you are alert to everything, but cannot focus on one thing.

***Serotonin:** Creates calm, relaxed, "content" state, mood is modulated. If an individual experiences a great deal of stress or trauma, serotonin may no longer be naturally released.

***Endorphin:** Nature's pain killers. Also induce calm, relaxed state and feelings of well being.

***ACTH (adrenocorticotrophic hormone):** Reduces immune system response. The body thinks/needs energy for survival so it shuts down the immune system and uses the energy for survival. Over long term, this has a huge impact on the body's ability to fight disease and can result in Immune Deficiency diseases.

****Some of the Auto-Immune illness's we are seeing on an increasing level amongst our people are: *Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, Crohn's Disease, Lupus, Fibromyalgia, Insulin Dependent Diabetes, Young Onset Diabetes, Juvenile Arthritis, Multiple Sclerosis, and Rheumatoid Arthritis.*

4 Blankets of Resilience

Until people learn new ways they will raise children the way they were raised. The early years are a window to introduce new ways.

Indigenous worldview and the importance placed on relationships naturally compliment the fostering of resiliency for children. This requires a concentrated focus on positive and nurturing relationships with family, caregivers and community members. It also requires focus on fostering the relationships with all aspects of the child's world: the environments where they spend their time (home, Grandma's, daycare, etc.) their relationship to the land, their relationship with their emotions and ability to express them,

It is through these relationships that children will develop and strengthen their sense of self and security in their world...thus strengthening their resiliency and ability to adapt, grow and change throughout childhood and the rest of their lives.

The symbolism of the blanket is important in many Indigenous cultures across Canada and around the world. While there are some negative historical associations with blankets, such as small pox, the positive symbolism is important for us to focus on. Blankets have been used to protect and keep us warm, to trade, to wrap around couples when they marry, represent families and clans and to tell stories and legends for generations and generations. It is in this spirit that we have chosen blankets as the metaphor of creating a new future for our children—one where their resiliency soars and they thrive!

Our people have many beliefs and teaching regarding children. One of the common beliefs is that children are gifts from the Creator. Children represent the future of our families, communities and nations and are usually found at the centre of all circles. We are often reminded by elders to make decisions with children and future generations in mind. The four blankets of resiliency reflect these teachings.

One way to think of children and resiliency is to imagine them with four blankets wrapped around them. These blankets protect them, guide them, root them in who they are and where they come from...ultimately fostering their resiliency.

For more information, please see *The Ripple Effect of Resiliency: Strategies for Fostering Resiliency with Indigenous Children*.
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4 Blankets of Resiliency

Resiliency is the ability of individuals and systems (families, groups, communities) to cope successfully in the face of significant adversity or risk. Resilient people, families, programs and communities seem to manage and even become *stronger* under difficult conditions.

Resiliency has limits ~ no such thing as a “superkid” or a child who is invulnerable. **All** children and families have the ability to learn new skills to become resilient.

Four Blankets

SELF

FAMILY

COMMUNITY

CULTURE, LANGUAGE & CONNECTION TO THE LAND



Thoughts, insights, what I want to remember...

