



"Let us put our minds together and see what kind of life we can make for our children."

- Chief Sitting Bull, Hunkpapa Lakota Sioux ¹

American Indian and Alaska Native children and adolescents are descended from and immersed in a culture that is vibrant, resilient, and enduring. When Native youth face hardships, they can draw strength from the courage of their Elders and ancestors to move forward and heal. One of the first steps to healing is getting our Native children out of traumatic situations. This guide gives resources to help Native youth and their families through the process of healing from child abuse.



Child abuse is defined as, "when a parent or caregiver acts in a way that causes a child to be hurt physically or harmed emotionally, or fails to act to prevent such harm."² Childhood maltreatment rates are higher among AI/AN populations than any other racial group in the United States.³ Childhood abuse, including physical violence and neglect, in AI/AN youth is linked to personal and psychological difficulties such as low self-esteem, depression, PTSD, suicide attempts, substance use, poor social relationships, and intimate partner abuse.^{3, 4}

WHAT DO I DO?²

Whether abuse occurred in the past or present, its effects can become even more harmful if ignored. Recovering is a journey, and support from trusted friends, family, Elders, and others in Native communities can help AI/AN youth on the road to a healthy future. Knowing the signs of an unsafe environment may help our Native youth stay safe. Assess the situation and follow your instincts. If an environment feels unsafe, it probably is.

Signs of Child Abuse⁵

- Sudden changes in behavior
- Always watchful, preparing for something bad
- Unexplained injuries
- Lacking necessary medical or dental care
- Does not want to go home
- Steals food or money
- Unusual sexual knowledge

Why Does Abuse Happen?

There is no easy answer to why child abuse and neglect occur. The most important thing to know when wondering why is that the abuse is **never** the child's fault. With the help of trusted adults, helpful organizations, and doctors or counselors, AI/AN youth can find a path of healing.

1. Call authorities immediately.

911 or local police

2. Talk to someone.

A trusted adult or a resource below

3. Seek support.

Support groups in your community/school or traditional healing practices

24/7 RESOURCES FOR YOUTH

Childhelp National Child Abuse Hotline
Call or Text: 1-800-4-A-Child (422-4453)

Crisis Text Line
Text: NATIVE to 741741

StrongHearts Native Helpline
Call, text, chat
1-844-7NATIVE (762-8783)

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline
Chat or Call: 1-800-273-TALK

References

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