

## FACTSHEET

# TAKE 5: BRAIDING SUPPORTS FOR INDIGENOUS YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH



In 2021, Nicole Ineese-Nash, Director of [Finding Our Power Together](#), and Maggie Stein, MSW Student, hosted a webinar presenting an integrated framework for supporting **Indigenous youth mental health by braiding together Indigenous mental health models, Child and Youth Care (CYC) principles, and Dialectical Behaviour Therapy\* (DBT) practices.**

Developed through research, community consultation, and implementation, this approach offers culturally-safe and strengths-based strategies to meet the mental and spiritual health needs of Indigenous young people, both during and beyond the COVID-19 pandemic. The resource shared during the webinar, [Wiingushk Okaadinige: The Sweetgrass Braid – A Braided Mental Health Approach For Indigenous Youth](#), provides practical tools and guidance for anyone involved in supporting Indigenous youth, including caregivers, educators, community workers, and mental health practitioners.

Here are five key takeaways from this webinar about supporting Indigenous youth mental health:

### 1. Indigenous knowledge is foundational.

The framework is built upon Indigenous mental health models that emphasize **relationality, cultural identity, community wellness, and connection to land.** These foundations highlight that wellbeing is *collective* and *interconnected* rather than solely individual. Supporting youth requires understanding the cultural and historical contexts that shape their experiences. Nicole and Maggie emphasize that generic Western clinical models can feel alienating, culturally unsafe, or simply ineffective if they do not consider Indigenous worldviews and community contexts.

### 2. Colonial impacts shape youth wellbeing.

Nicole and Maggie describe how **systemic inequities, intergenerational trauma, and ongoing colonial structures** influence mental health outcomes for Indigenous youth. Many existing Western therapeutic models can feel culturally unsafe or irrelevant. The importance of acknowledging these realities and creating spaces where youth feel respected, understood, and affirmed is emphasized.

### 3. Braiding in Child and Youth Care (CYC) and Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT) strengthens practice.

CYC approaches, with their focus on **relational practice, everyday contexts, and developmental needs**, are woven together with DBT strategies such as **emotion regulation, mindfulness, and distress tolerance.** This braided approach creates a flexible framework that honours Indigenous teachings while offering practical skills youth can use in daily life.



#### 4. Support is relational and community-driven.

Nicole and Maggie emphasize that *healing* for Indigenous youth is **rooted in connection**: with caregivers, peers, Elders, community members, and the land. Effective support is built through **trust, compassion, and consistent relational engagement**. Rather than positioning youth as ‘patients,’ the approach encourages **co-learning, partnership, and community involvement**.

#### 5. Practice must be culturally safe and responsive.

The need to create spaces where youth feel **respected, heard, and understood** is stressed. This includes **acknowledging cultural identity, recognizing systemic barriers, and adapting support strategies** to align with community values, lived experiences, and local teachings.

\* **Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT)** is a type of therapy that teaches people how to understand and manage their emotions. DBT focuses on helping individuals stay calm during stressful moments, make healthier choices, and build better relationships. DBT uses skills like mindfulness, coping with strong feelings, and communicating clearly with others to support people in accepting their emotions while also learning ways to change unhelpful behaviours.

Finding Our Power Together. (2021, May 10). [A braided mental health approach for Indigenous youth](#) [Video]. YouTube.