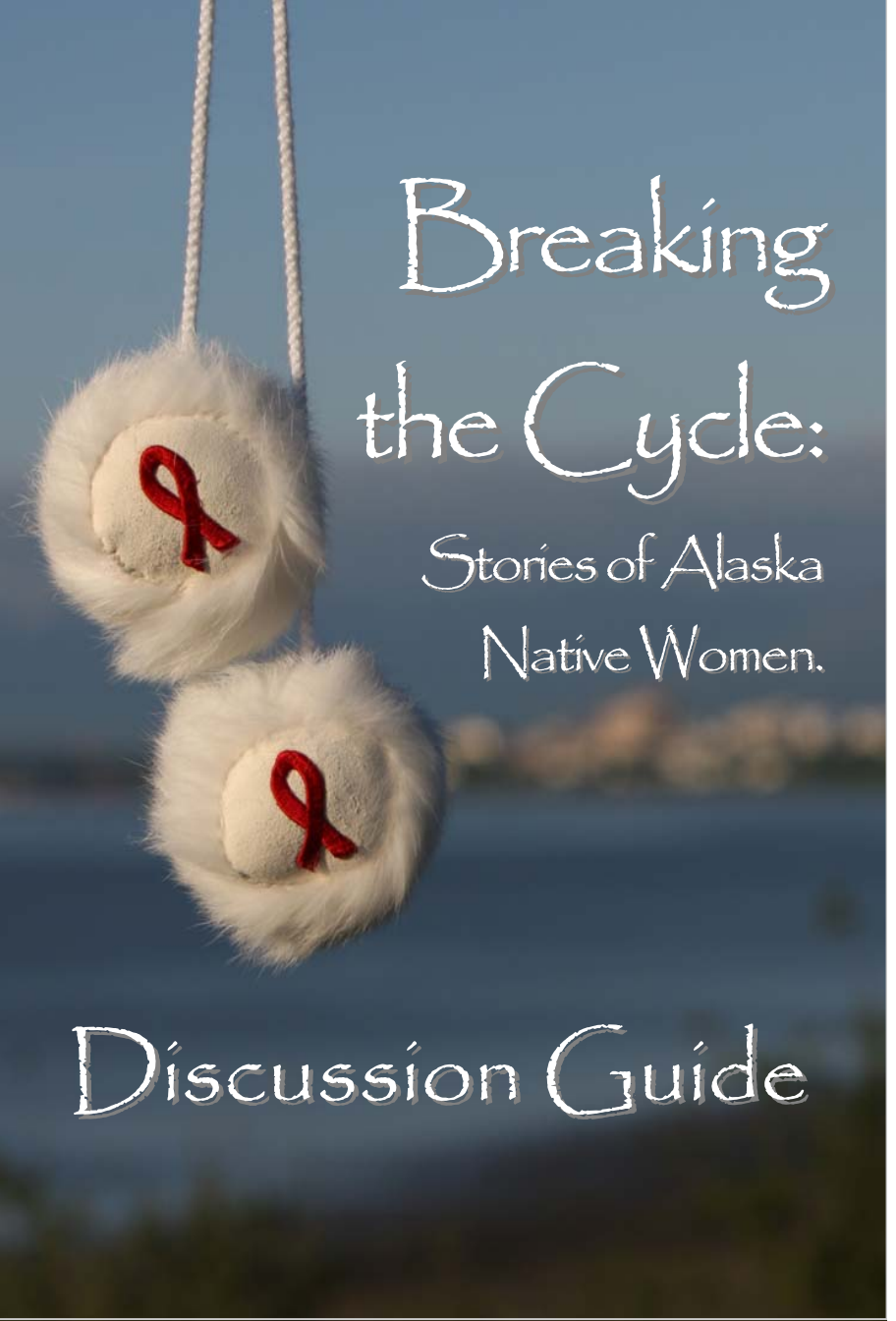




Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium  
Division of Community Health Services  
HIV/STD Program Services  
4000 Ambassador Drive, D-DCHS  
Anchorage, Alaska 99508  
[www.anthc.org](http://www.anthc.org)

For copies contact:  
Michael R. Covone  
(907) 729-2907  
[mrcovone@anthc.org](mailto:mrcovone@anthc.org)  
[www.iknowmine.org](http://www.iknowmine.org)



# Breaking the Cycle:

Stories of Alaska  
Native Women.

## Discussion Guide

**Special Thanks to:**

Andrea Gusty  
Velma Wallis  
Liz Sonnyboy  
Diane Benson  
Elsie Boudreau  
Selena Moose  
Barbra Franks  
Beth Saltonstall  
Kathy Graves  
Jessica Leston

**In Memory of:**

Elizabeth 'Cookie' Rose  
Ella Outwater



**HIV/STD Program Services**

Michael R. Covone, MSW, MPH, CHES  
Theresa "Tiny" Devlin

**Behavioral Health and Rural Services**

Xiomara Owens, MS

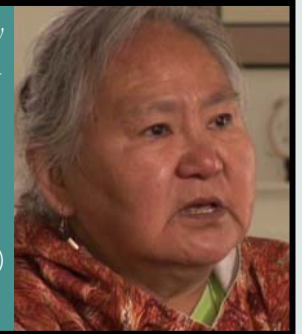
*Some Elders once told me that we teach our children before they're born. We teach them how to be loving and respectful while they're in utero, and then we teach them throughout their lifetime...*

~Kathy (Athabascan)



*I treasure all the teachings from my grandparents, the instructions from my parents and my aunties... They helped me in my life and gave me those life skills that I need today to have a good life.*

~Liz (Yupik)



*My culture believes in the community. In being a part of a community. When you know who you are it grounds a person in knowing who they are and what they could be and how to live a very fulfilling life.*

~Selina (Inupiaq)





*I think a lot of families build on each others' strength... they're together in the good times and the bad. That's where you get your strength from; that's history and it doesn't stop. It's contagious because that's how your taught.*

*~Barb (Tlingit)*



*If we can allow ourselves, as the person who has been victimized, to receive warmth, a gesture of kindness, or love... It's our job to open up to that~ and it's the community's job to give it. That's what build community.*

*~Diane (Tlingit)*



*I think traditional teaching is really about what it means to be human. What it means to be a real person~ to be connected to your sense of spirituality, to each other, to the land, to everything. We're all connected.*

*~Elsie (Yupik)*

# Breaking the Cycle: Stories of Alaska Native Women.

## Discussion Guide

## Dear Viewer

We created the DVD **Breaking the Cycle: Stories of Alaska Native Women** to be community members can use to begin a dialog about critical issues facing Native women today. The DVD provides an opportunity to learn from personal stories of Native women that touch on themes found throughout the histories of Native people.

Some viewers may choose not to talk about 'community secrets' while others have been waiting for permission to discuss these difficult issues. Although some of the topics detailed in this DVD may not reflect your personal experiences, they portray difficult times that many of our Elders lived through. By learning about our past, we can better understand some of the behaviors we see today.

The stories shared by women in this DVD reflect their own personal experiences—is some cases experiences they have never talked about before. Each of these women shared willingly to help others deal with these difficult but important issues.

You're invited to be an active participant in these conversations, both as a speaker and a listener. We encourage you to use this Discussion Guide to help encourage dialogue in your communities. It is when our stories are told that we are given new opportunities to contribute to the development of healthier individuals, families and communities.

In response to the sensitive content of these stories, viewers are encouraged to seek counseling or other forms of emotional support if they experience symptoms of distress or would like to address these issues further.

## Addressing Stress

Long-term exposure to stress can lead to serious health problems. Chronic stress disrupts nearly every system in your body; it can raise blood pressure, suppress the immune system, increase the risk of heart attack and stroke, contribute to infertility, and speed up the aging process. Your ability to tolerate stress depends on many factors, including the quality of your relationships, your general outlook on life, your emotional intelligence and genetics. Below are a few elements of your life that influence the ability to manage stress.

1. **Your support network:** A strong network of supportive friends and family members is a significant buffer against life's stressors. On the opposite side of the spectrum, the more lonely you are, the greater your vulnerability to stress.
2. **Your sense of control:** If you have confidence in yourself and your ability to influence events and persevere through challenges, it's easier to take stress in stride. People who are vulnerable to stress tend to feel like things are out of their control.
3. **Your attitude and outlook:** Stress-hardy (resilient) people tend to have an optimistic attitude. They tend to embrace challenges, have a strong sense of humor, accept that change is part of life, and believe in a higher power or purpose.
4. **Your ability to deal with your emotions:** You're extremely vulnerable to stress if you don't know how to calm and soothe yourself when you are feeling sad, angry, or afraid. The ability to bring your emotions into balance helps you bounce back from adversity.

**Crisis Hotline: 1-800-273-8255**

## Symptoms of Distress

Stress is a normal response to events or information that makes a person feel threatened in some way, puts high demands on a person, or forces a person to adjust to a new way of thinking or being. People experience and express stress in a variety of ways, including, though not limited to the following:

### Cognitive Symptoms

- Memory problems
- Unable to concentrate
- Poor judgment
- Seeing only the negative
- Feeling anxious
- Constant worrying

### Physical Symptoms

- Aches and pains
- Upset stomach, diarrhea, constipation
- Chest pain, rapid heartbeat
- Nausea or dizziness

### Behavioral Symptoms

- Isolating oneself from others
- Procrastinating or neglecting responsibilities
- Increased use of alcohol/drugs
- Nervous habits (e.g., pacing, nail biting)
- Changes in eating and sleeping

### Emotional Symptoms

- Moodiness
- Irritability or short temper
- Unable to relax, agitation
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Feelings of loneliness
- Feeling isolated
- Depression or a general sense of unhappiness

Source: [helpguide.org/mental/stress\\_signs.htm](http://helpguide.org/mental/stress_signs.htm)

## Note to Facilitators

This is a companion Discussion Guide to the DVD, **Breaking the Cycle: Stories of Alaska Native Women**. When the DVD is played it displays a choice of three chapters: 1) Breaking the Cycle; 2) Discussion Video; 3) iPod Statements. The first chapter is the full 30 minute presentation. The second chapter (the focus of the Discussion Guide) is a 40 minute presentation with more in-depth interviews of each topic to generate discussion and personal reflection. The third chapter is a collection of digital affirmations that can be used in mobile media devices.

The Discussion video chapter is organized into seven segments: 1) Acceptance, 2) Identity, 3) Risky Behavior, 4) Dignity, 5) Sexual Abuse, 6) Recovery, 7) Hope and Healing. We hope you will also talk about Sexual Health in the closing discussion.

We suggest having at least one facilitator. The facilitator does not need to be an expert on the topics presented. The role of the facilitator is to create a safe space that will allow for open discussions. The group can make their own ground rules, but we suggest they include: 1) Respect for all participants, 2) An opportunity for everyone to speak, 3) Respect for those who may not want to talk, and 4) Respect for confidentiality\*. All group members, including the facilitator, are also encouraged to check-in with each other to see if anyone is experiencing emotional distress in response to the material presented. A list of potential symptoms of distress has been included near the end of this booklet.

\* Confidentiality does not apply to abuse of an elderly person, a minor, or other dependents; this must be reported to the proper authorities.

## Group Dynamics

**Elders:** It is important to consider inviting a healthy Elder to the group discussion. Elders may be able to speak to topics in addition to providing opening and closing prayers.

**Group membership:** Although many of the topics can be discussed in family settings, some groups may benefit from restricting the presence of young children.

**Circle set-up:** Setting up the group in a circle format provides for comfortable interactions and orderly discussion.

**Group support:** Invite participants to set up a 'buddy system' where participants check-in with each other to see if there are unresolved issues that may need further discussion or personal counseling.

## Group Processes

**Meeting commitments:** The group can decide to watch the entire video in one meeting (which may require time limits on discussions), or to watch individual segments over multiple meeting times.

**Community-minded:** Although personal stories may be told, it is important to keep group questions and discussions directed towards the community.

**Future- focused:** Encourage the use of words or questions that are future-focused and encourage healing and moving forward.

# SEXUAL HEALTH

Elsie talked about sexuality being a healthy and normal part of life.

**Note: This section does not have a corresponding video segment, but we feel there are some overarching themes about sexual health in the video that a group could address.**

- What is the difference between an unhealthy and healthy sexual relationship?
- How can we promote a sense of sexual health at the individual, family, and community levels?
- What are some Traditional Ways that we're taught to understand our sexuality?
- What are some of the ways we can maintain our sexual health throughout the lifespan?

*"Show respect to others- Each person  
has a special gift."*

# HOPE AND HEALING

Liz talked about the value of forgiveness, trust and the importance of healthy relationships

- Each of the speakers had a theme of how to move beyond the impact of historical trauma towards a vision of healthy Native families and communities. What are some ways you can be involved in this with your family and/or community.
- Liz encouraged us to 'heal together.' How can we encourage healing in individuals? In families? In our community? Between generations?
- Some traditional values of Alaska Natives are spirituality, creativity, humor, respect for the land and a unique worldview. What are other values that can help in the healing process? How can we apply them to healing the Native families and communities?
- What are some steps to healing that were addressed in the video?

*Take care of others—You cannot live without them.”*

## Group Activities

**Community values:** Identify and discuss traditional values of your people and culture. Understanding these values can set a tone of how the group can address the topics. The Native Knowledge Network website has listings of Traditional Values for most of the Native groups in Alaska. [www.ankn.uaf.edu](http://www.ankn.uaf.edu)

**Community resources:** Make a list of mental health resources and contact information of available support in the community.

## Group Discussion

The following pages include suggested questions to spur discussion on each topic in the DVD.

### How to use the DVD

1. Gather a group
2. Make sure all resources are identified
3. Go over ground rules with the group
4. Play Chapter Two of the DVD and press pause when indicated on the screen
5. Refer to the questions in this Guide to facilitate discussion about the topic
6. When done, press play to view the next topic
7. Provide support as needed

# ACCEPTANCE

Elsie, Liz, Barb and Kathy talked about identifying, understanding and accepting the ways historical trauma impacted Alaska Natives.

- How do you relate to the concept that unresolved grief gets passed down through generations? How do you think this has affected Native families and communities today?
- How has the integration of western institutions hindered and helped Native families and communities?
- What did you feel when Barb was talking about being sprayed with Lysol at school? How do you think this kind of discrimination affects Native families and communities then and now?
- Liz described the split of her family, what affect would that loss of family have on a community then and now?
- How can the acceptance of historical trauma help create more healthy Native families and communities.

*"Honor your Elders— They show you the way in life."*

# RECOVERY

Selina talked about her addictions, feelings of remorse, and low self esteem. She also spoke about how individuals and the communities can use cultural values in the process of recovery

- How does telling or hearing an individual's story help heal the person, family and community?
- Selena stated, that in order for us to be healthy, we need to "take care of the self... know that you do make a difference... and know that life is more than your feelings." How can we do this at an individual level? Family level? Community level?
- What are more healthy ways families and communities can promote to cope with underlying traumas that lead some to substance abuse?
- What affect do you think these healthy coping strategies would have on Native families and communities?
- What Native traditions do you think should be revived or strengthened to promote recovery for people who abuse substances?

*"Have patience—Some things cannot be rushed."*



# SEXUAL ABUSE

Elsie talked about the need to acknowledge the presence and impact of abuse, honoring our children and families through respect and by talking about issues related to sexuality

- Elsie talked about being sexually abused as a child and how that experience created “filters of guilt and shame” in her life. What did she mean by the term “filters”?
- Why might an individual deny his or her experience with sexual abuse?
- What is the “journey of acceptance” and how does it influence people’s behaviors?
- Elsie stated the fact that “abuse is not a part of our culture or traditions” and “it should not be passed on through generations.” How can we stop this cycle of abuse in Native families and communities?
- What Native traditions do you think should be revived or strengthened to promote the health and healing of those who have experienced abuse?

*“See connections—All things are related.”*

# IDENTITY

Diane talked about the importance of belonging and being part of a group. Selena discussed walking in two worlds.

- As these women have suggested, an individual’s sense of identity is influenced by their life experiences. How might a traumatic experience influence a person’s self-identity?
- Diane suggested that risky behavior can be borne out of childhood trauma. Are there certain behaviors you have seen that may reflect this statement?
- How might the stress of walking in two worlds affect a person’s identity?
- These women talked about the need to reclaim their identities. How might an individual, family or community use cultural values, beliefs, and teachings to help them reclaim their identities.
- How would you describe or envision an individual, family or community with a positive sense of identity?

*“Know who you are—You are a reflection of  
your family.”*

## RISKY BEHAVIOR

Kathy and Elsie talked about self awareness and the differences between conscious and unconscious traumas. They also spoke about coping skills and the impact on relationships

- Kathy described risky behaviors as a result of unresolved grief or trauma of which a person may or may not be aware. How might this perspective change the way you see Native families and communities?
- Else said that many risky behaviors are symptoms of something deeper, like grief or trauma. How can Native families and communities begin to heal those underlying issues?
- Else also says that we need to find ways of thanking our risky behaviors for helping us to cope, but make decisions about keeping healthy behaviors and leaving unhealthy behaviors behind. How does a family or community start this process?
- What are some ways we can discourage risky behaviors and encourage healthy behaviors in our families and communities?

*“Live carefully—What you do will come back to you.”*

## DIGNITY

Diane talked about being devalued and ignored, as well as the need to be believed and respected. She also spoke about the values of dignity and humor

- How does surviving traumatic events affect someone’s self esteem?
- What role does cultural identity play in someone’s self esteem? How does this work for families and communities?
- Diane spoke about the importance of respect and feeling valued. What do these concepts mean to you? How do they influence self-esteem and dignity?
- How can we use the concept of respect to promote a sense of dignity in Native families and communities?
- The women talked about the difference between having been victimized and identifying with being a victim. What does this difference mean to you, and how would understanding this help Native families and communities?

*“Accept what life brings— You cannot control many things.”*