

# Pathways to Well-Being – pp. 4 – 5

## Background

When health and wellness are considered from Indigenous perspectives, they are thought of from a holistic understanding. All aspects of the self are included in an understanding of what it means to be well, including the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual aspects of a person.

Traditional teachings from various peoples across Turtle Island (North America) teach the pathway to wellness. When one follows these teachings and lives in balance and good relations with all other beings around them, wellness will follow. Different peoples have different teachings and original instructions (e.g., living off the land through hunting, gathering/foraging) to achieve well-being.

**Mental (Mind):** Traditionally, First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples had their own systems of education, and learning happened experientially, by watching and doing and by spending time with Knowledge and Wisdom Keepers. Through the Indian Residential School System, these ways of teaching and learning changed, and were replaced with Western ways of teaching and learning, which resulted in the imposition of the English and French languages, adoption of the Christian faith and traditions, and removal from culture. Today for many Indigenous people, however, education offers the opportunity to support positive changes in their communities, and also offers a connection to culture, language, and the broader Indigenous community.

**Physical (Body):** Physical health happens when we treat our bodies well. This means eating good foods that nourish us and allow us to thrive. For Indigenous Peoples, Indigenous foods offer not only a connection to traditional practices, but healthy options for their bodies. In times of illness, each group also turned to medicines from the Earth around them, and because of this the plants and medicines used by peoples on the East Coast or in the Arctic vary drastically from those used by peoples in the Plains or on the West Coast.

Today, First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples continue to hold various aspects of traditional plant knowledge used for healing. The use of these teachings continues to grow, and traditional practices are experiencing a resurgence across Canada.

**Spiritual (Spirit):** Spiritual well-being comes from the ability to freely practise one's spiritual beliefs. For many Indigenous people, this means being able to connect with and participate in traditional spiritual practices and ceremonies.

**Emotional (Emotion):** Good emotional health can come from loving relationships, having a sense of belonging within your community and/or nation, and being aware of one's own emotions. First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples' experiences of colonization in Canada have created challenges to being able to feel many of the things mentioned above. However, more resources are being developed for Indigenous people to access, and many people embark on a healing journey through language, culture, and ceremony by connecting or reconnecting with their traditional communities.

## Resources

Review these resources to see if there is anything you want to share with your students.

### Websites

- **First Nations Mental Wellness Continuum Framework**—An infographic showing a First Nations perspective on mental health: <https://thunderbirdpf.org/first-nations-mental-wellness-continuum-framework/>
- **Theory: The Four Directions**—An Indigenous holistic perspective on the mind, body, spirit, and emotion is briefly explained: <https://firstnationspedagogy.com/fourdirections.html>
- **Theory: Holistic Balance**—A brief explanation of the concept of holistic balance of the mind, body, spirit, and emotions from First Nations Pedagogy: <https://firstnationspedagogy.com/holistic.html>

### Videos

- **For the Next 7 Generations: The Grandmothers Speak**—A video about the formation of the International Council of 13 Indigenous Grandmothers—Elders, shamans, and medicine women from around the world: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GKGXpK8LXR4>
- **Indigenous Plant Healing—Island Health Magazine**—Elders Barb Whyte and June Johnson discuss the healing properties of Indigenous plants on Vancouver Island: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RANcnlOtR1o>
- **Stories from Our Land Vol. 2—Finding Home**—A short film about filmmaker Nyla Innuksuk's journey to Nunavut to connect with her father who she has not seen in 20 years: [https://www.nfb.ca/film/stories\\_from\\_our\\_land\\_vol2\\_finding\\_home/](https://www.nfb.ca/film/stories_from_our_land_vol2_finding_home/)

### Books

- **Relative With Roots** by Leah Dorion (Gabriel Dumont Institute, 2011) A Métis grandmother teaches her granddaughter how to pick traditional medicines. (Intermediate level)
- **Lana's Lakota Moon** by Virginia Driving Hawk Sneve (University of Nebraska Press, 2007) Two sisters share their grandparents' Lakota cultural traditions. (Intermediate level)
- **The Spirit of the Sea** by Rebecca Hainnu (Inhabit Media, 2014) A retelling of a traditional Inuit story about the spirit of the sea, once a young woman who refused to marry. (Intermediate level)