

Retreat: Talking circle Handouts
“Finding the Medicine Within Yourself to Help”
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Perfect Daughters (Adult Daughters of alcoholics)

Native Women have always had power within their Tribes, historically we have taken on some outside cultures diseases, gender values, gender beliefs, and may have limited our own personal growth and ability to live a Joyous and for filling life. For 30 years, I have facilitated Native Women’s groups, and have found The Perfect Daughter Syndrome to be the biggest challenge. A resource for great Healing is from Dr. Robert Ackerman and these worksheets have been adapted to what Native Women face in everyday day life, on and off the reservation.

Understanding Oppression and “The Perfect Daughter Syndrome”

- Do you ever find yourself exhausted, not able to say “No”, and guilty for not meeting everyone’s needs?
- Are you attracted to high-risk relationship?
- Are you ever overwhelmed with your schedule? And expected to organize family or community events?
- Do you take on too much responsibility?
- Are you still trying to have a relationship with your Mother or Father? Or is the person you married or your domestic partner just like your Mother or Father?
- Do you feel different from other Native Women?
- Are you very self-critical, and do you struggle with perfection?
- Do you feel as if something is “missing” in your life?
- Are you unsure of your parenting skills, but don’t know why?
- Do you have relationship problems and are always attracted to the wrong people?
- Are you incredibly competent in some areas of your life, but feel vulnerable in other areas?
- Do you secretly try to hide your low self-esteem?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, then you may have unresolved issues from your childhood that still affect you today. Native women, who choose a Wellness path, must re-look at repeated self-

defeating patterns in relationships (romantic, siblings, child-parent, co-workers). So, if you choose moving through the deeper wounds, really feeling them, forgive, and moving on.

Getting started by understanding some of our behaviors:

Common themes of Childhood Trauma can leave us with the following feelings and Issues (Sexual Abuse, Parental Alcoholism, Divorce, Eating disorders, Reservation Violence):

<u>Characteristic</u>	<u>Indicator</u>
Learned helplessness	Losing the feeling that you can affect or change what is going on
Depression	Unexpected emotion, agitated, anxious, feeling flat
Emotionally constricted	Numbness and shutdown as a defense against overwhelming pain and threat and a lack of range of expression of emotion
Distorted reasoning	Convoluting attempts to make reason out of senseless pain
Loss of Trust and faith	Deep rupture in primary, dependency relationships and breakdown of an orderly world
Hyper vigilance	Anxiety, waiting for the other shoe to drop, constantly scanning environment and relationships for signs of potential danger Or repeated chaos
Traumatic bonding	Unhealthy bonding style resulting from power imbalance in relationships and lack of other sources of support
Loss of ability to take in Support	Fear of trusting and depending upon relationships and emotional shutdown
Loss of ability to modulate Emotion	Going from 0 to 10 and 10 to 0 without intermediate steps, rashness, loss of control, black-and-white thinking
Easily triggered	Stimuli reminiscent of trauma like yelling, loud noise, criticism or gunfire trigger person into shutting down, acting out or intense emotional states
High-risk behavior	Sexually acting out, thrill seeking, fighting relationships risks, gambling
Disorganized inner world	Disorganized object constancy and

Desire to self-medicate	relatedness, fused feelings like sex/anger Attempt to quiet and control turbulent, troubled inner world with drugs/alcohol
Survivors guilt	From witnessing abuse and trauma and surviving, from “getting out” of a particular family (moving from the reservation)
Development of RIGID	Dissociation, denial, splitting, withdrawal aggression
Cycles of reenactment	Repetition of pain-filled dynamics (same relationship chaos, different person)

Childhood lessons learned if your Mother was Alcoholic

- I am angry with my mother.
- I wanted to love my mother, but she and her behavior kept pushing me away.
- I learned to be disappointed and disgusted with my mother, and I have difficulty respecting her.
- I learned how to be responsible for my mother’s duties, and I resented always being in charge.
- I was denied information about my own sexual identity, how to be a woman and how to prepare for my future roles.
- I was unhealthy ways to relate to other people.
- I experienced poor parenting skills, and I am unsure of my own parenting skills.
- I find it difficult to trust other women.
- I felt abandoned and let down.
- I am not sure of how to give and receive nurturing, because I was not nurtured.

The seven issues that daughters of alcoholic mothers most commonly focus on are role models, relationships, parenting, identity, trust, trying to please and shame.

Childhood lessons learned if your Father was Alcoholic

- I still want to understand my father. I still want his acceptance and approval.
- I want to love him, but I hate what he does.
- I have a low opinion of marriage and relationships. I fear I cannot find a successful relationship.

- I am aware that I have issues with my nonalcoholic mother.
- I have difficulty relating to males positively.
- I learned to tolerate too much inappropriate behavior from males.
- Am I good enough to be loved?
- She who gives away the most is the best.
- I find “healthy” males boring, and the “wrong” available.
- I never received enough attention.
- I missed not having a “father-daughter” relationship.
- I have difficulty expressing anger to my father

The greatest fear that adult daughters express is that they will wind up in a similar relationship similar to their parents. They share their issues and concerns about males in the following ways:

- How to relate to controlling men
- Understanding healthy relationships
- Distrust of males
- Looking for Father in their relationships
- How to have a male friend
- No male is good enough
- Seeking unavailable men
- Addicted to relationships
- Experience Emotional Incest (occurs when a parent shares information with his child that should be shared with the spouse)

The following nine resiliency skills help develop protective factor for Healing:

All resiliency skills are based on self-esteem. You must think enough of your self to try new behaviors and skills. You must believe that not only can your life be different, but that also can be better. Set your goals for yourself high—intellectually, physically, emotionally, and spiritually. No one rises to low expectations. Set your bar high:

1. Resiliency includes knowing what you want. What would your new self look like? How would you like to feel? How many new emotions would you have? Make a list of how you would like to be in your recovery? Do you need to change jobs? Go back to school? Go on road trip? Pow wow all summer?

2. Resiliency includes letting go. You cannot hold on to the past and expect to grow in the future. A person in recovery is not past-oriented, but growth-oriented. Let go of negative emotional baggage, past relationships, how your family should be, living poor, not learning your language, chaotic jobs, let it all go. Letting go makes room for new feelings such as being comfortable with your self, and others. You will have a higher self-worth and more energy.
3. Resiliency includes balance. Your previous life was out of balance. Your new self is searching for balance. Your old adult daughter was willing to go to any limits to accommodate a lot of unhealthy behaviors, which kept you out of balance and a stranger to yourself. Get enough sleep, eat better, meditate, do Zumba, dance, join a support group, date for a year without commitment.
4. Resiliency includes healing. Face your pain and injuries, get doctored, and forgive people who have injured you. Ask yourself, how will forgiving help me to heal? Healing takes time. Do not be too anxious. When you are injured and you return to your normal activities too soon, you risk another injury. Pray for patience. Listen to other women who have gone through this, to get encouragement.
5. Resiliency includes giving. Resiliency means that you are able to find all the things that you missed and then give them to your self. Who has your gift? You do, not this conference, but in your heart, your spirit, and your emotions.
6. Resiliency includes developing your sense of "self." You will know it when you begin to believe and feel that you can be yourself without fear. Celebrate yourself, make peace with yourself, and look in the mirror and say, "I like you." You know you are developing a healthy sense of self when you start to do some of the following:
 - You no longer feel that you must be controlling.
 - You begin to have the kinds of relationships that you always wanted.
 - You begin to feel more and think less about your emotions.
 - You no longer fear your memories.
 - You have internally made peace with people who have harmed you.

- You trust your own judgments.
 - You no longer live in fear of me phobia.
 - You are able to affirm your qualities.
 - You no longer think of your self only as an adult daughter.
 - You are beginning to respect yourself.
 - You are learning to like and love yourself.
 - You can receive love and intimacy from others.
 - You can say “no” to others and “yes” to yourself.
 - You learn to embrace the spirit of recovery.
7. Resiliency includes learning to like you. The most devastating impact from alcoholic families is that they produce people who do not like themselves. If you do not like yourself, you will find living with yourself harder than living with an alcoholic. Celebrate yourself as a survivor and not a victim. Enjoy humor that is not rooted in painful sarcasm. You will improve your relationships because you will feel that you deserve the best and that you have a lot to offer. The perfect you is not codependent. The perfect you is not controlled by others. The perfect you is not afraid of herself.
8. Resiliency includes developing boundaries. Healthy boundaries are made, not born. Establish personal, professional, and spiritual boundaries. A key to autonomy is boundaries. “If you don’t stand for something, you will fall for anything.”
9. Resiliency includes learning to receive. Your greatest barrier to self-worth will be your inability to receive. You can try to change yourself and attend Wellness workshops forever, bottom line know how to accept it. Break down the barrier. You cannot expect others to be able to help you if you insist on doing everything yourself. Letting others into your life and accepting their contributions takes growth. You must be able to receive what you want in order to change. If you want to feel good about yourself, you must be able to receive good feelings. If you want healthy relationships, are you prepared to receive love when it is offered? Can you accept a relationship with a healthy person? Joy, love, beauty, compassion and peace are gifts. Receive them.