

## **Why Social Justice Is Key to Addressing Intergenerational Trauma**

The cycle of intergenerational trauma in Indigenous peoples and communities is linked to colonial control, chronic trauma, and complex post-traumatic stress disorder. We can't have effective dialogue about healing from intergenerational trauma until we talk about ending chronic trauma. Ending chronic trauma means ending colonial oppression and creating the conditions for social justice within society.

We can't have effective dialogue until we're speaking the same language. Here's what all the words mean:

### **Stereotypes**

A false or generalized idea or conception of a group of people that results in an unconscious or conscious labelling or categorization of each member of that group, without regard for individual differences. Dominant groups use stereotypes to confirm the supposed inferiority of marginalized peoples.

### **Prejudice/Bias**

A state of mind that casts those different from oneself in an inferior light, without actual evidence. It is a thought process.

### **Discrimination**

Discrimination is an action that is taken to limit the freedoms and activities of others; it happens on individual, systemic, institutional, and societal levels. Discrimination is the active manifestation of a prejudiced or biased state of mind.

### **Systemic/Institutional Discrimination**

Actions by institutions and systems that are constructed to keep dominant groups in power and shut out marginalized groups. These systems and institutions control social, cultural, religious, or moral traditions and ideas that reinforce the power of the dominant group at the expense of other groups.

### **Ethnocentrism**

An inclination to view events from the perspective of one's own culture, with a coinciding inclination to diminish other groups and regard them as inferior (e.g., the idea that European peoples "civilized" the West, without regard for the perspective of the Indigenous population).

### **Oppression**

The fact that some people have more social power and access to privilege than others leads to oppression of less powerful groups. In Canadian society, less powerful people include those who fall outside of the white, heterosexual, middle-/upper-class, able-bodied "norm." Oppression happens when less powerful people are shut up, ignored, shut out, seen as "abnormal," and looked down upon. Oppression comes in many forms (e.g., sexism, racism, heterosexism), and people can experience different kinds of oppression at the same time.

Oppression also occurs on a systemic level, based on the way that societies and the world have been created and are maintained to suit the needs, desires, and wants of powerful groups. Systems that have historically run in oppressive ways include the mass media, schools, all levels of government, policy-making institutions, religious organizations, and corporations. Oppression is a form of economic, social, and political exploitation that affirms a system hierarchically arranged as superior and inferior. There is a gross imbalance of power in this system.

### **Racism**

Racism is an ideology that organizes, preserves, and perpetuates the power structures in a society. It creates and preserves a system of dominance based on the concept of race and is communicated and reproduced through agencies of socialization and cultural transmission, such as the mass media, schools and universities, religious doctrines, symbols and images, and art, music, and literature. Racist ideology is based on a set of implicit or explicit beliefs, false assumptions, and actions that suppose the inherent superiority of one racial group over another. Individual racism is one person's act(s) of racism, whereas systemic racism is the ongoing unfair distribution of power combined with institutional practices, policies, and procedures. "Power" is defined as control of and access to economic, political, educational, and social resources and structures.

### **Colonialism**

An encompassing process by which a foreign power dominates and exploits an Indigenous group's resources, wealth, labour, and cultural-linguistic assets. It is often supported by racist dogmas about the inherent superiority of colonizing groups and inherent inferiority of colonized groups. Colonialism also refers to a specific era of European expansion into non-European territories between the 16th and 20th centuries. The ongoing, long-term manifestations of colonialism – e.g., the effects of globalization – are referred to as neo-colonialism.

### **Cultural Appropriation**

Consciously or unconsciously seeking to emulate concepts, beliefs, or cultural practices – or adopt cultural symbols and objects – that are foreign to a particular framework, individual, or collective. To appropriate means to incorporate into one's being the cultural expressions, forms, lifestyles, rituals, or practices about which there is little basis for direct knowledge, experience, or authenticity. It is also the superficial appreciation of a culture (often for profit) without regard to its deeper meaning.

### **Identity/Culture**

Personal identity is a self-concept that comes from one's knowledge of one's membership in a social group, and the resulting sense of value and emotional significance. Cultural identity is the sense of importance and attachment one has to a group, along with positive or negative feelings about being part of that group. "Culture" is a collective expression of identity. Identity is subjective – it is a sense of coherence, consistency, and continuity of self, based on both personal and group history. How people identify individually and within groups is varied and full of complexities; to understand identity as a one-dimensional

phenomenon (e.g., “all Indigenous people are spiritual”) is essentialist. For oppressed peoples, identity operates within a matrix of domination.

**Internalized Oppression**

When a person or group believes that the stereotypes and assumptions that society holds about them are true. Internalized oppression can involve self-hatred and shame about one’s own identity or ethno-cultural group.

**Marginalized**

The status of groups who do not have full and equal access to the cultural, economic, political, and social institutions of society and are therefore less powerful.

**Ally**

Someone who challenges themselves and others about the oppressions, discriminations, and barriers that other peoples face, although they may not personally face a particular barrier or form of discrimination or oppression themselves. Examples of allies are straight allies (heterosexual people who stand up against homophobia to support lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, and queer people and their rights) and Indigenous allies (non-Indigenous people who stand up against racism, colonialism, and colonial oppression to support Indigenous people and their rights). To be an ally requires an analysis of oppression: an understanding of power dynamics, looking at who holds power and privilege, and who is kept from it through various forms of oppression. Employing this analysis involves challenging systems of dominance and looking for solutions to make society more equitable.

**Social Justice**

Creating an equitable society through the redistribution of wealth, opportunities, and privileges within that society.