

Calling From the Rim: Suicidal Behavior Among American Indian and Alaska Native Adolescents

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CALLING FROM THE RIM: SUICIDAL BEHAVIOR AMONG AMERICAN INDIAN AND ALASKA NATIVE ADOLESCENTS

In the cultural beliefs of Indian/Native nations, the spiritual philosophy concerning one's purpose and existence on this earth is found in his/her relationship to the world and everything in it. This relationship is the gift of the Great Spirit. As children, we were taught that everything around you, the earth and all the natural elements of life, is related.

Symbols such as the circle depict this philosophy, permeate every aspect of Indian/Native culture, and are considered sacred. The circle is especially significant: Within it walk the four winds and therein dwell the spirits of the four directions. These spirits are the guardians who direct us on the pathway of life. The horizontal edge of the circle is as far as one's eye can perceive and represents the rim of the world. Beyond it is known only to our Creator.

The present generation of Indian/Native youth live within a duality of philosophies — those of non-Indian societies and Indian/Native societies. They are caught between two worlds — that of modern, sophisticated technology and the center-of-life philosophy of Indian/Native nations. This dilemma can create barriers and impede natural growth and learning processes as children attempt to cope with their uniqueness. Often the results are feelings and actions of helplessness and despair.

To the individuals whose words are written on these pages, my deepest expression of gratitude. Our children are "calling from the rim." Let us heed this call, work together, and find better ways to nurture them and those who follow. Therefore, we honor both worlds.

IVA L. YOUNG BEAR-ROY
An American Indian mother

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As Director of Office of Mental Health Programs, Indian Health Service, Dr. Scott Nelson encourages research as well as prevention activities in this important subject matter. He showed his support by making monumental efforts to have IHS representation at this conference; however, in the end, due to constraints not under his control, this was not possible.

The planning committee for this conference consisted of the editors as well as conference co-chairpersons, Drs. Don Bechtold and Bill Sack, representing the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, American Indian Child Committee, and Dr. Lemyra DeBruyn, representing the Indian Health Service. Their input and support during the planning stages were instrumental to the conference's success. We would like to extend a special thank-you to Dr. David Shaffer for his specific assistance with the recommendations section of the monograph.

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