

A Quick Guide To... Approach

Nsaaknigewin wii nbwaach'iding – opening the door; a spiritual encounter

The interlocking circles in the diagram below represent the interconnectedness of all aspects of your growing relationship with the loved one. Depending on the encounter you are having together, you might travel closer to the heart of this relationship or you might be farther out. Greater detail on these concepts can be found on page 2.

Introducing Yourself

“ease into it and introduce yourself first”

Be respectful and explain who you are and why you are visiting fully before starting any assessments, interviews, or paperwork.

Non-Verbal Cues

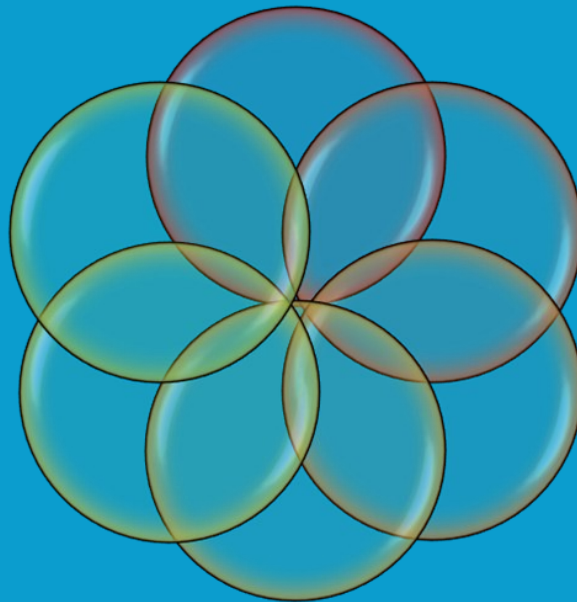
Observe, listen, and be understanding.

Remember that emotions can be seen on the face.

Conversation

“Slow your speech down; speak as slow as they walk.”

Take the time needed to get to know each other, laugh together, and visit.



Understanding

“It takes time and courage to say the complete truth.”

Ceremony

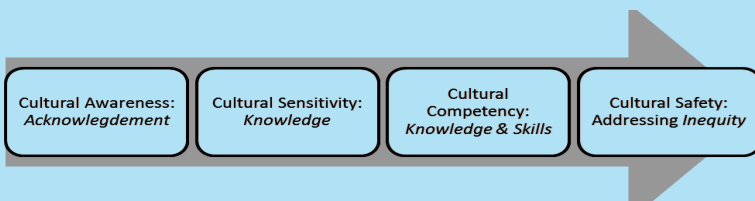
Be gentle and do not make assumptions about spirituality or prayer. The loved one will share what they want to share with you.

Relationships

Many loved ones will feel that *“It’s about belonging to a community”* and describe themselves through their relationships.

Design contributed by Robyn Rowe.

How did you consider health equity in your practice today?



Indigenous people are impacted not only by social determinants of health, but by their historic and ongoing relationship with the Canadian government. While cultural safety might not seem different from awareness or sensitivity, it asks more of health care providers. Providers are asked to

take responsibility for introducing cultural safety into their practice and to address inequities however and whenever possible. You might consider cultural safety as the final destination on a spectrum of learning (above left).

Words matter: loved one

The term *“loved one”* to describe a person with dementia may be most appropriate for use with Indigenous communities. Elder Jerry Otowadjiwan, teaches that a person with dementia is in need of a lot of love at that point in their lives. They are also loved by someone, whether that person is their caregiver or not. Using the term *“loved one”* reminds us of how we should be treating and respecting a person with dementia.

“The song goes, ‘When that time comes, when my hair turns white, silver, silver hair, will I be able to sound like they sound?’ That’s how the song goes. I wonder if I’m going to sound how they sound, now, when I get there.”
Elder Jerry Otowadjiwan

Introducing Yourself

Be respectful and ease into introducing yourself. Make sure to tell the loved one who you are and why you have come to see them. If appropriate to your background, you may wish to share your spirit name, clan, and a story about yourself. It is important for them to know which communities and families you come from. If it is morning, ask if they had a good sleep, but don’t ask about dreams. The loved one may be more comfortable talking to an older person than a younger person.

“And if it has to be a young person gathering this kind of information, that they ease into the introduction. That they’re not just going in there and asking information, that they really take it casually and indirect, and that they ease into it and introduce themselves first. They talk a little bit about themselves as the young person. What family they come from... all those kinds of things are important.” (Karen Pitawanakwat, RN, Manitoulin Island)

Understanding

Gmoozh’aa gego e-zhiyaad—you feel and you know you are in the presence of the loved one’s energy.

Remember that you are in the loved one’s personal space. Whether you are in their room, house, or apartment, this is their home. Begin by giving the loved one an idea of what you will be asking. Reassure them that you will not press for any answers that they are not ready to share or that they feel are private. Explain also that they are not the only loved one you are visiting, and that you are asking many people for their stories. This way, they will not feel singled out or picked on. The loved one may repeat themselves or need time to think on a question. Certain things may be harder for them to do than they were years ago. If the mood seems off today, offer to return another time. Children and older adults in particular are more sensitive to energy and mood.

Ceremony

Mii go zhiwe ni-mooksemgag waani zhi nbwaach’iding—beginning of a thought; a powerful spiritual time together

If the loved one follows a spiritual path, you may wish to bring an offering of tobacco and a small gift that they will enjoy (e.g. food). It is very important not to interrupt the loved one while they are talking.

“Prayer is connected to the plant life that nourishes our bodies. It is the reason why we continue to walk on this earth, and it doesn’t matter what the belief is – there is only one Creator that is spoken to.” (The Anishinaabe Language Expert Advisory)

Be gentle and do not make assumptions about spirituality or prayer. The loved one will share what they want to share with you.

Relationships

“It’s about belonging to a community.” (Elder Jerry Otowadjiwan)

Be understanding of the importance of family attachments and relationships. The loved one may view themselves as part of a larger whole, with distinct roles based on what they bring to the fabric of their community and nation (e.g. grandparent, Elder, knowledge keeper, storyteller, auntie, etc.). These roles may also be based on their clan.

Independence is viewed in the context of relationships. Older adults are expected to do what they can and receive support as the need arises. Helpers will take on different “pieces” at the direction of the older adult. To be “monitored” or “taken care of” comes with the negative connotation that you can no longer care for yourself.

Conversation

Zhigiizhwewin – dialects; a different way of saying something, understanding is still conveyed

Remember that the loved one may prefer to speak in their first language, and that dialects change by community and region. Speak with kindness and respect, taking care not to insult or interrupt. Remember that humour is good for the spirit. Some of what they are sharing may be difficult to share, or not have been shared in many years, be patient.

“We’re not used to talking about ourselves. We are a humble people.” (Elder Jerry Otowadjiwan)

Non-Verbal Cues

Pay attention to the non-verbal cues the loved one is communicating. Observe how they look when they are thinking or working hard to remember something. Listen to the tone of their voice. Are they comfortable, joking, or sharing something especially important? Be understanding of trauma and the loved one’s response to trauma – emotions can be seen on the face.

“As soon as they nod their head that means you have to be quiet for a little while, because they’re in thought. They want to put it in a way that is going to come out right, whatever they’re going to say... They’ll look down and stop for a while, then when they’re done, they’ll look at you.”

(Elder Jerry Otowadjiwan)