

PSYCHOLOGICAL FIRST AID



For COVID-19 Frontline Workers in American Indian/Alaska Native Communities

Adapted by the Johns Hopkins Center for American Indian Health
Supported by UNICEF USA

Introduction

Background on Psychological First Aid



Basic psychosocial support skills are important for any intervention and key to maintaining and promoting the health of all communities. Such skills are also essential for many involved in the COVID-19 response as well as other frontline workers, whether they identify as a mental health care provider or not. This guide can be helpful for all frontline workers responding to COVID-19.

This guide was adapted from the Basic Psychosocial Skills Guide, a project by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Reference Group on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings. The project was supported by member agencies of the IASC MHPSS RG, with extensive inputs from COVID-19 survivors and COVID-19 responders from all over the world.

This adaptation was not created by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC). The IASC is not responsible for the content or accuracy of this adaptation. The original English edition 'Inter-Agency Standing Committee. Basic Psychosocial Skills: A Guide for COVID-19 Responders.' License: CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO shall be the binding and authentic edition.

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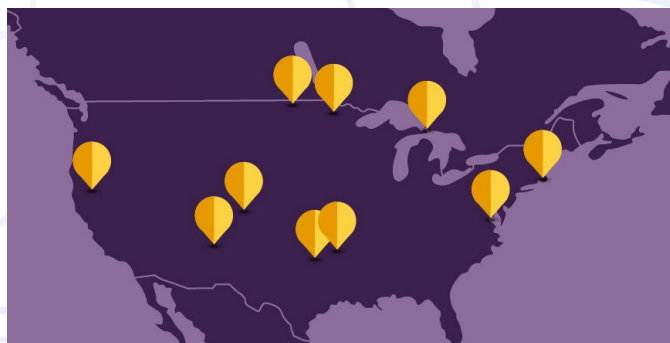
Cultural Adaptation Process for Psychological First Aid for COVID-19 Frontline Workers in American Indian/Alaska Native Communities

The Johns Hopkins Center for American Indian Health (CAIH) convened a Community Advisory Board (CAB) of seven frontline workers, mental health, and public health professionals to advise and steer a cultural adaptation of this guide for American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) communities. This CAB represented a variety of tribes both on- and off- reservation, including urban Native communities, as well as non-Native allies. The CAB provided input and guidance to culturally adapt content to represent Native peoples, values, and community experiences with COVID-19 via regular video conference meetings. We are truly grateful for the contributions from the CAB who made this guide come to life.

The people listed below contributed to adapting this guide:

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We hope that this guide will help support responders, both Native and non-Native, working in all American Indian and Alaska Native communities, including tribal, intertribal and urban settings, as they integrate psychosocial support into their daily COVID-19 responses and make a difference in the well-being of the many people they help during the COVID-19 pandemic.



Project contributors are from the above areas shown on the map.



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Guiding theme

Inspired by the experiences, insights, and cultural values of our CAB, we adapted the guide using a theme of caring for all of our relatives and relations. This theme stems from cross-tribal cultural values of caring for all of creation and all beings, as well as cultural values of survivance and intergenerational strength. Indigenous writer Richard Wagamese articulates this concept:

“I’ve been considering the phrase ‘all my relations’ for some time now. It’s hugely important. It’s our saving grace in the end. It points to the truth that we are related, we are all connected, we all belong to each other. The most important word is all. Not just those who look like me, sing like me, dance like me, speak like me, pray like me or behave like me. ALL my relations. It means every person just as it means every blade of grass, rock, mineral and creature. We live because everything else does. If we were to collectively choose to live that teaching the energy of that change of consciousness would heal all of us — and heal the planet. We do it one person, one heart at a time... we are connected, we are the answer.”

- Richard Wagamese, Ojibwe from Wabaseemoong Independent Nations, Facebook, Feb. 23, 2015.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, we have witnessed incredible examples of how Native communities have embodied this care for their relatives by stepping up in times of need. We hope that this guide will reinforce what we have always known; that caring for all of our relatives is what keeps us, our families, our communities, and our world strong.



Contents

This guide includes four modules. We hope this will help you to build on your existing skills and add some new skills to your toolkit.



Module 1: Your and Your Relatives' Well-being



Module 2: Supportive Communication in Everyday Interactions



Module 3: Offering Practical Support to Community Members



Module 4: Supporting Everyone in Our Communities

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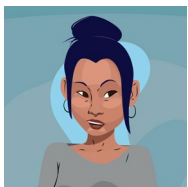
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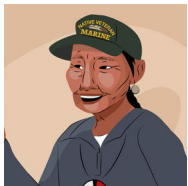
Leveraging the traditions and power of storytelling, throughout the guide you will meet several characters who will help bring the content to life through sharing specific examples of how to apply the knowledge and skills you will learn.



Steven: Steven is a nurse at the Indian Health Service hospital in his community. He lives with his wife and two young children. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, he has had to work longer hours and deal with the stress of his children navigating online school.



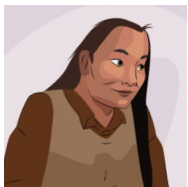
Kateri: Kateri works as a community mental health worker. She lives with her mother, father, and grandmother on a reservation. While there are challenges related to living in a multi-generational home during the pandemic, she is grateful she can care for her family as well as relatives in her community.



Josh: Josh is an elder who lives by himself. Since the beginning of the pandemic, Josh has had trouble getting groceries and medications. Josh misses seeing people in the community and socializing with others in person.



Tamara: Tamara is a supervisor for a group of community health representatives at an Urban Indian Health Program. Tamara supports her team as they transition to working remotely by sending weekly appreciative notes for their hard work.



Connor: Connor lives in an urban area and is an involved community member at the local Native health clinic. Unfortunately, because of the pandemic, he has been facing challenges with getting food for his family than usual. Connor relies on his community support system to keep himself and his family healthy.

Acknowledgments

Design and layout were provided by Design de Plume Inc., an Indigenously-owned creative firm located in the Robinson-Huron Treaty area.

We want to express gratitude to the UNICEF USA for funding the development of “Psychological First Aid for COVID-19 Frontline Workers in American Indian/ Alaska Native Communities.”

This guide is dedicated in loving memory to our Relatives whose lives have been lost to COVID-19 and all of those who have been touched or impacted by COVID-19. Our deepest gratitude to all of the frontline workers whose relentless efforts have supported so many.

About the Johns Hopkins Center for American Indian Health

Founded in 1991 and based in the Department of International Health of the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, the Johns Hopkins Center for American Indian Health supports public health interventions designed for and by Native peoples. Learn more at caih.jhu.edu.

Module 1



Your and Your Relatives' Well-being

As a COVID-19 frontline worker, you play an essential role in supporting the health of all our relatives. It is important to acknowledge that this responsibility may come with many demands and an increase in your own stress. You may be tasked with additional responsibilities and may not have the option to work remotely like others do. Feeling more stress under these conditions is normal; however, it is important to take care of yourself so that you can be a good relative to others.

During this difficult time, you may experience:

- Longer work hours, without adequate resources or protection
- COVID-19-related stigma and discrimination
- Fear for the safety and well-being of you and your loved ones (including exposing others to COVID-19 if you live with family members, friends, or roommates)
- Confrontation with illness, suffering, or death
- Caregiving for family members, including those in quarantine
- Covering for co-workers who may be out sick or in quarantine
- Staffing shortages at work
- Frustrations with the public's compliance with public health precautions
- Additional responsibilities, making it feel as if you cannot deliver fully on all duties



Many people feel stressed and exhausted while working in the COVID-19 response, a normal reaction given the difficult demands of the job. In addition, many American Indians/ Alaska Natives may experience historical trauma related to the impact of previous infectious disease outbreaks or the reminders of the injustices and discrimination Native peoples continue to face.



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Joelle Joyner*

Chronic and increased stress may lead to certain physical, behavioral, and emotional symptoms. You may experience any of the following:



Physical symptoms:

Headaches, stomach aches, changes in sleeping or eating patterns



Behavioral symptoms:

Low motivation to work, increased use of alcohol or drugs, disengaging from connection to family, friends, cultural or spiritual practices



Emotional symptoms:

Fear, sadness, anger

If stress is consistently getting in the way of completing your daily activities (e.g., going to work, personal hygiene care, or difficulty concentrating) or interfering with your relationships with others, consider seeking professional support.



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Case example: Coping with Stress and Misinformation

Steven enjoys his job as a nurse at the local Indian Health Service hospital, and he knows that his work is important to keep his community safe. However, during the COVID-19 pandemic Steven has been dealing with a lot of extra stress. During the day he works long hours treating people with COVID-19. When he gets home and checks social media, he sees family and community members sharing false information that COVID-19 is a hoax. The stress of the COVID-19 pandemic becomes overwhelming and Steven finds himself dreading going to work and he feels overwhelmed. When Steven gets angry and yells at a colleague, he realizes that he needs to take better care of himself. Steven takes a few moments to reflect on why he suddenly dreads the job that he has always loved. He recognizes that he started noticing increased stress when he began spending more time on social media and reading negative messages with false information. To deal with this stressor, he decides to only check his social media once a week. He also starts to take walks and call close friends after work instead of scrolling through social media. After a few weeks, Steven is able to go to work and feel confident that he is treating himself, his colleagues, and his patients with the kindness and respect they deserve.

Can you identify your own signs of stress and stressors? Think of three things you can do regularly to support your well-being, write them down, and share them with a friend.

Signs of Stress

Examples: Constantly worrying, feeling sad, headaches, difficulty falling and staying asleep

Stressors

Examples: Uncertainty about how long the pandemic will go on, added responsibility of schooling children at home, close family and friends getting COVID-19

Ways to cope

Examples: Go for regular walks, call your friends and family, take small breaks throughout your day to do a deep breathing exercise or stretch

The COVID-19 response is a long-distance marathon, not a sprint, and things are changing constantly. Dealing with so much uncertainty can be stressful: practice being kind to yourself and do the best you can.

Checking in with your own well-being is important for the health of your community. The uncertainty about how the pandemic will impact us all may cause anxiety for your friends, your family, and yourself. Feeling anxious or nervous is valid during this time and acknowledging them and finding healthy coping strategies is part of maintaining your well-being.

Caring for yourself

Look at some of the suggestions below to help manage stress. If you do not manage to practice self-care one day, be kind to yourself and try again the next day.

Taking care of yourself is beneficial not only for you, but also for your family, friends, and community. Balancing caring for yourself with caring for others is important because when you are your best self, you can provide your best support to others.

Ideas of ways to care for yourself:

- **Find time for movement**, to eat well, and to get adequate sleep.
- **Practice an activity that brings you joy** or that you find meaningful (e.g., beading, weaving, dancing, walking, stretching, reading, listening to music).
- **Take some time to process your own emotions about providing care to others.**
If you serve a tightknit community, you may have personal relationships with patients and clients. These relationships are deeply valuable but can make it difficult to cope if the person you are helping has a bad outcome. Talk to a coworker, friend, or family member about how you are feeling. It can help to build a support network of other frontline workers, who can relate to what you are going through.
- **Spend time with your family** or members of your household by making a meal together or playing a game.
- **Set realistic expectations for yourself** and recognize personal limits and boundaries.
- At the end of your day, **try making a list of the ways in which you were able to help others** that day, or people/things you are grateful for. Taking care of others is an important cultural value and acknowledging all of the good you are doing for your community can be rewarding.
- **Reflect on your small and large successes**, such as patients you helped recover from COVID-19, and all the other ways in which your work has made pandemic life a little easier on your relatives.
- **Safely reach out to an elder** or trusted spiritual leader to ask if there are any daily practices or cultural values to remember that would help you reduce your stress levels (e.g., water ceremony, daily prayer).
- When appropriate, **use traditional medicines** for smudging or prayer by yourself, with coworkers, or with members of your household.
- Since many cultural and spiritual practices may be on hold due to COVID-19, **returning to prayer and reflecting on traditional beliefs** with your household members could be helpful.



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Circles of Control

When you are feeling stressed, it can be helpful to identify which problems you can do something about and those you cannot. Try filling in the circles of control exercise.



Supporting relatives who may be experiencing stress

The supportive communication skills described in [module 2](#) may be useful for helping people manage stress. If a person requires more support, the following suggestions may help.

Encourage the person to think of tools they can use to manage stress. People may already have ideas of what to do in stressful situations.

Help them draw on this knowledge by asking questions:

- What has helped you previously when you have felt this way?
- What do you currently do to help yourself feel better?
- Is there anyone you can think of who can help you?
- Are there any activities you enjoy doing that you could do?

If a person cannot think of anything they can do to help themselves, you can make some suggestions such as:

Try a relaxation activity

If someone appears stressed or anxious, slow breathing may help.

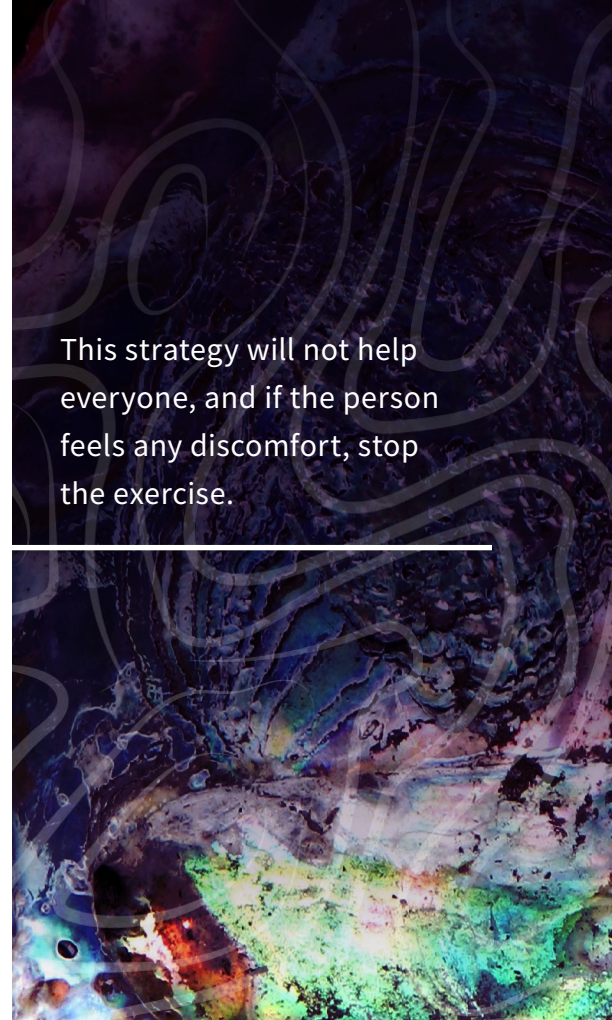
Say:

“I have a technique which can help you to feel calmer when you feel stressed. It involves taking some slow breaths together. Is it okay for us to try doing this together?”

If the person is agreeable, continue:

“Together with me, take a breath in through your nostrils while counting to three. Keep the shoulders down and let the air fill the bottom of the lungs, then exhale slowly through your mouth while counting to six. Are you ready? We will do this three times.”

This strategy will not help everyone, and if the person feels any discomfort, stop the exercise.



When someone is experiencing serious distress

The signs of stress described above are natural and may fluctuate over time. Some of these same signs of stress, such as feeling angry or having difficulty sleeping, can also be indicators of more serious distress. It is important to identify when a person is experiencing more serious distress because they will need a higher level of care. Stress becomes serious distress when it lasts longer, the symptoms feel more severe, and it impacts a person’s ability to take care of themselves, their family, or community (e.g., difficulty functioning at work or school, difficulty performing activities of daily life such as eating or bathing). In a situation like this, it is likely that you will need to refer the person to local mental health services. Signs that someone is experiencing serious distress may include feeling or behaving in the following ways almost every day **for two weeks or longer**:

- Being more withdrawn than usual
- Threatening to hurt others
- Feeling disoriented, as though things are unreal, or outside of their body
- Talking about wanting to harm or kill themselves
- Severe increases in or loss of control of substance use, posing a serious health threat (e.g., overdose, complications, violence)
- So upset they cannot take care of themselves or others



What to do when you encounter someone in serious distress:

- 1. Safety first!** Make sure that you, the person and others are safe from harm. If you feel unsafe, leave and get help. If you think the person may hurt themselves, get help (ask a colleague, call emergency services, etc.). Take preventative measures against COVID-19 infection (e.g., physical distancing) if you can.
- 2. Let them know who you are:** Introduce yourself clearly and respectfully – your name and your role, and that you are there to help. Ask them for their name so that you can address them.
- 3. Keep calm:** Be sure to speak in a relaxed and calm manner, with a gentle tone of voice. and Take some deep breaths if you are feeling overwhelmed. Do not raise your voice, shout, or show any type of hostility towards them (e.g., do not physically restrain them).
- 4. Listen:** Use your communication skills, as described in Module 2. Do not pressure the person to talk. Be patient and reassure them that you are there to help and to listen.
- 5. Offer practical comfort and information:** If possible, offer the person a quiet place to talk, a bottle of water or a blanket. These gestures of comfort will help them feel safe. Ask them what they need – don't assume that you know.



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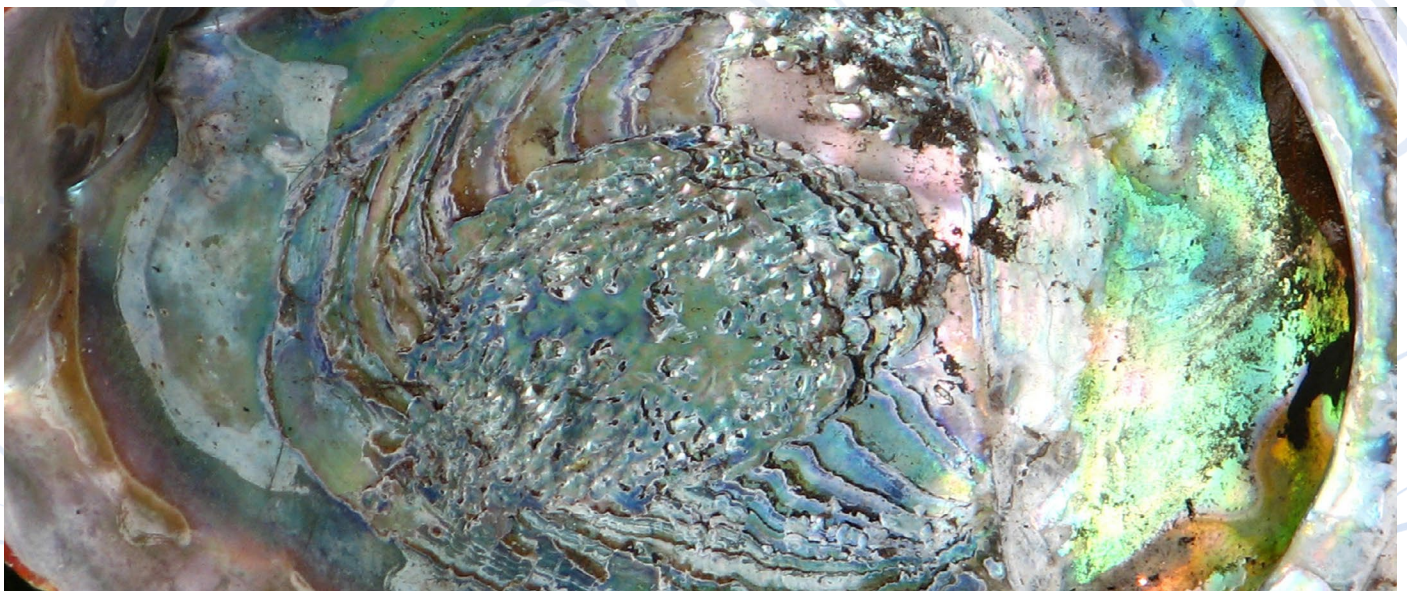
6. Help people regain control:

- a.** If the person is anxious, support them to breathe slowly – see “slow breathing” technique on [page 13](#).
- b.** If the person is out of touch with their surroundings, remind them where they are, the day of the week and who you are. Ask them to notice things in their immediate environment (e.g., “Name one thing you see or hear”).
- c.** Help them to use their own good coping strategies and to reach out to supportive people in their lives.

7. Provide clear information: Give reliable information to help the person understand the situation and what help is available. Make sure that you use words they can understand (not complicated words). Keep the message simple and repeat it or write it down if needed. Ask them if they understand or have any questions.

8. Stay with the person: Try not to leave the person alone. If you can't stay with them, find a safe person (a colleague, a family member, a friend) to be with them until you find help or they feel calmer. If you are talking on the phone, try to stay on the line with the person until they calm down and/or you are able to contact emergency services to go and help directly. Check that they are comfortable and able to talk.

9. Refer to specialized support: Do not go beyond the limits of what you know. Let others with more specialized skills, such as doctors, nurses, counsellors, and mental health professionals take over. Link the person directly with support, or make sure that they have contact information and clear instructions for getting further help.





Mental Health Resources

You are important and loved by your family, relatives, and community. If you are feeling anxious, using substances more than usual, or thinking of ending your life, please consider reaching out for help by using these resources. You are important and play a vital role in your community. Your wellness is integral to the well-being of your relatives and your whole community.

Local resources: list your own local or immediate contacts you trust to help support your and other's well-being. Include phone numbers for emergency services, local mental health services, or other similar resources.

Crisis Text Line (Text “NATIVE” or “INDIGENOUS” to 741741)

Texting this number will connect you with a crisis counselor.

Doing What Matters in Times of Stress

An illustrated guide to stress management and coping with adversity from the World Health Organization.

<https://www.who.int/publications/item/9789240003927>

Indian Country Child Trauma Center at the University of Oklahoma

The Indian Country Child Trauma Center (ICCTC) offers trauma-related treatment protocols, outreach materials, and service delivery guidelines specifically designed for American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) children and their families.

<http://www.icctc.org/>

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (1-800-273-8255)

Confidential, free support for people in distress and prevention and crisis resources, available 24/7.

SAMHSA Behavioral Health Treatment Locator

A secure, anonymous list that helps locate mental health treatment centers and resources near you.

<https://findtreatment.samhsa.gov>

SAMHSA LGBTQ2S Resources

A list of resources to support two-spirit youth and adults.

<https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/nc-lgbtq2s-resources.pdf>

Stress and Anxiety Management for Community Health Workers During Coronavirus

https://caih.jhu.edu/assets/documents/Stress_and_Anxiety_Management_for_CHWs_During_COVID-19.pdf

Stress and Anxiety Management for Providers During COVID-19

https://caih.jhu.edu/assets/documents/Stress_and_Anxiety_Management_for_Providers_During_COVID-19.pdf

StrongHearts Native Helpline (1-844-762-8483)

A confidential, anonymous, and culturally-appropriate domestic violence and dating violence helpline for Native Americans, available every day from 7 a.m. to 10 p.m. CT.

We R Native

A comprehensive mental health resource for Native youth, including resources specifically for two-spirit youth.

<https://www.wernative.org/>

<https://www.wernative.org/my-relationships/sexual-health/lgbt-two-spirit>

Module 2



Supportive Communication in Everyday Interactions

The COVID-19 pandemic is stressful and may cause community members to feel isolated, scared, or confused. You can support the well-being of all our relatives and promote community wellness through your everyday interactions. Your service to your community is important and meaningful!

Supportive communication in person and virtually (by telephone or video chat)

In person:

- **Body language:** This differs from community to community, but overall, your body language can help others feel comfortable with you. Be open and give a friendly wave from a distance or try “smizing” (smiling with your eyes) if you have a mask on. A smile or a friendly wave can go a long way in making a person feel welcome.
- **Humor:** Laughter is medicine. Although the pandemic and work you are doing is serious, you can make jokes when appropriate. Laughing together fosters connection.
- **Tone of voice:** A friendly and welcoming tone of voice can help you create a warm and safe environment and lead to positive interactions with others.
- **Spirit:** When you approach people, be aware of what may be troubling your own spirit, try to start each conversation and interaction with a fresh, present mind. If you are feeling stressed or sense that the other person is uncomfortable or tense, ask if you can start by taking seven deep breaths in and out before beginning your conversation (this can be done while physically distanced¹ and masked).

¹ “Physical distancing” refers to remaining masked and staying 6 feet apart when possible to reduce risk of virus transmission, others may use the term “social distancing.”

By telephone or video chat:

- **Setting the tone:** Try to give a few minutes at the beginning of any call for open conversation. When appropriate, try to connect with people by asking them about how they are doing, their family or their weekend. This can help people who may not be used to communicating virtually feel more comfortable. Try a virtual hug (i.e., putting your arms up to the camera) if you're comfortable doing so or use the seven breaths technique to help the person feel at ease!
- **Your setting:** Make sure the space you are communicating in is a safe place for someone to confide in you if they need to. If possible, try to be in a private and quiet location without a lot of distractions (i.e., without doors opening and closing behind you or other people around).
- **Group settings:** If you have a large group meeting virtually, try to be aware of who may not be participating and, if possible, send them a private chat to ask if they would like to share. Many people may be uncomfortable speaking on a group call because they are afraid of interrupting others. Encourage people to use the group chat function if they do not feel comfortable speaking. You can also set up ground rules at the start of the meeting to help everyone understand how they can participate, what is expected of them, and that you are creating a safe space.
- **Background:** When possible, encourage people to use virtual backgrounds or pictures of their favorite spot in nature, it can be a great conversation starter and a way for those who are uncomfortable sharing their current living situation with others to participate with their video.
- **Traditional medicines:** Many Native health care centers offer smudging or prayer before starting an appointment, but this may be logistically difficult when receiving virtual care. Follow your cultural teachings and, when possible, adapt these practices to fit current circumstances.





Photo credit: Native American LifeLines

Cultivating safe and comfortable interactions:

For a community member to feel supported, they need to trust and feel comfortable with you.

Even if someone appears aggressive or confused, you can de-escalate the situation by approaching them in a kind and respectful way. Below are some suggestions for how to approach relatives in a good way:

- **Introduce yourself:** Clearly introduce yourself and your role and make sure to give others time to introduce themselves. If you feel comfortable and know your tribal language, feel free to use that. It may help others feel empowered to do the same.
- **Be present in the conversation:** Be fully present and keep your attention on your relative.
- **Listen to understand:** Listen carefully to the community member's concerns and try to understand their needs. Do they need space and someone to listen while they vent, or are they looking for help solving a problem?
- **Be aware of your body language:** Personal protective equipment (e.g., face masks, sunglasses, face shields) can make it difficult to show facial expressions and let someone know you are listening. Try to nod to indicate “yes” or shake your head “no” and make eye contact when appropriate. Sometimes people may not be able to see your face because you are wearing a mask. Try to have an ID badge or other marker with your photo so you can say “this is what I look like under the mask!”
- **Integrate your cultural values:** When appropriate and if you have access and feel comfortable doing so, incorporate your own values and teachings into your communication style.

Supporting relatives through listening

Listening is the most essential part of supportive communication. It is no accident that the Creator gave us two ears and one mouth! Rather than immediately offer advice, allow relatives to speak and listen carefully to understand their situation and needs. Do not be afraid to allow silence or pauses in the conversation, it may give the person more time to think about what they want to share. Do not pressure the person to speak if they do not want to. Truly hearing someone's story and concerns may help them feel calm, allows you to offer appropriate help that is useful to them, and may be good medicine that community members need during this difficult time.



Practice being a good relative with these three listening skills:

1. Listen attentively:

- Be warm, open, and relaxed in your face and body.
- Calm your mind, remain quiet, and focus your attention on the person when they are sharing.
- Try to be in a quiet, distraction-free place.

2. Repeat:

- One useful tool is to repeat messages and keywords that a person has said. For example, “I am hearing that looking after your children while working can be overwhelming.”
- Ask for clarification if you do not understand something. For example, “I didn’t quite understand what you said just then, it sounded important, could you explain again?”
- Make helpful comments to normalize silence such as “It’s OK, take your time” or “I’m here when you want to talk.”

3. Show respect, empathy, and care in your understanding:

- Identify and reflect on messages you heard the person say so they know you are listening and understanding them correctly. For example, “From what you have just said, I understand that you are mainly worried about [summarize main concerns], is that correct?”
- Describe what you hear, not your interpretation about how they feel (e.g. do not say, “You must feel horrible” instead ask someone how they feel).
- Make the person feel validated by de-stigmatizing their condition. For example, if someone has contracted COVID-19, you can offer them reassurance that “anyone can contract COVID-19, even those who have been extremely careful.”
- Practice offering genuine help and resources if appropriate. When possible, use warm hand-offs to other services so the person knows they are cared for ([see P. 24](#)).



Module 3

Offering Practical Support to Community Members

Relatives in your community who are affected by the COVID-19 pandemic may have needs that you can help with. Some examples may include:

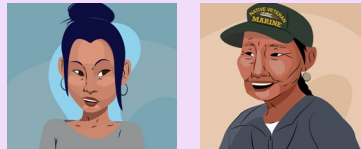
- Information related to COVID-19 (e.g., symptoms, access to treatment, how to care for others, how to keep themselves safe, updates for the local area, impact on work).
- Ways to ensure that dependents (e.g., children) are looked after if the main caregiver is in hospital or isolation.
- Access to alternative burial rituals when someone has died.
- Mental health support due to increased stress and anxiety levels, changing workloads (including children attending online school), grief, and the spread of misinformation.
- Access to food or other essential items and services due to physical distancing and loss of income.
- Unmet spiritual and cultural needs, as gatherings and ceremonies may be on hold to protect everyone's safety from COVID-19.

Providing information

Misinformation and rumors about the COVID-19 pandemic are common. It can be confusing to know what information to follow and what information is false. To provide clear and accurate information:

- Use clear, concise language that will be easily understood by the other people you are speaking with. Avoid jargon or technical language.
- When working with people, validate that they may be feeling overwhelmed and uncertain about the future due to constantly changing information and situations – it is totally normal to feel this way.
- Provide information from reputable sources, such as the World Health Organization, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and Indian Health Service.
- Try to have written materials in relevant languages, including tribal language(s), with visual aids adapted to your community if possible (e.g., pictures of community members wearing masks).
- When needed, have a translator present.
- If you do not know something, practice humility and say you do not know but will look for this information/resource rather than trying to guess.
- Provide information in your own actions. Be a good relative by modeling how to slow the spread of COVID-19: wear a mask, keep six feet of physical distance from others, use hand sanitizer, and wash your hands for at least 20 seconds.

Case Example: Caring for elders who need access to food or other essential items



Kateri lives in a crowded home in a rural area. One of her neighbors, Josh, is an elder who lives alone. Kateri calls him and asks how he is doing. Josh says he has not been able to buy groceries and pick up his medications. Kateri offers to go to the grocery store and pharmacy to help Josh and keep him safely at home. They decide on a plan to meet just outside Josh's front door, wearing masks and keeping 6 feet apart, so that he can leave money and Kateri can leave his groceries and medications. In this way, they show care for each other as neighbors and relatives, while avoiding physical contact. Kateri finds joy in supporting Josh, and she notices that he appreciates the opportunity to safely connect and catch up during the pandemic. Caring for elders in our communities is good medicine for our well-being and part of being a good relative.

(Illustrations) Copyright: Joelle Joyner



Photo credit: Nina Mayer Ritchie

Referring to other services/resources providing practical support

You may not always be able to help someone if you are overwhelmed or busy, but you can try to connect them with people who can help. For example, if someone is struggling with burial needs, how to care for children when in isolation or quarantine, or an unmet spiritual need, it might be helpful for you to

have a list of all organizations and resources in your area and how to access them (fill in the table below) to refer people to. Try to quickly connect relatives who are in distress or in need of food, water, shelter or urgent medical or social services to ensure their safety. Make sure they get connected to resources by calling with them, giving them printed handouts with relevant information, and checking back in with them to ensure they got connected.

The following page is for you to enter local resources for your community. Please feel free to print and share widely!

Emergency medical services

Phone Number:

How to Refer:

Mental health resources

Phone Number:

How to Refer:

Police, Fire

Phone Number:

How to Refer:

Social services

Phone Number:

How to Refer:

Women's services

Phone Number:

How to Refer:

Child protection services

Phone Number:

How to Refer:

Legal services

Phone Number:

How to Refer:

COVID-19 testing services

Phone Number:

How to Refer:

Food assistance

Phone Number:

How to Refer:

Financial assistance for rent and utilities

Phone Number:

How to Refer:

Burial assistance

Phone Number:

How to Refer:

Local or national spiritual or traditional practices options

Phone Number:

How to Refer:



Helping others to help themselves

For our relatives to stay well and cope during this difficult time, they need to feel that they have some control in their lives. The best way to support others is to help them to help themselves. Building such skills will be useful in other areas of life now and when the pandemic is over.

The STOP-REFLECT-SKODEN*! method can help others learn useful skills to help themselves:

*Skoden is slang often used in Indigenous communities meaning “Let’s go then!”

STOP: Help the person take a pause, and consider what problems are most urgent. Help the person to use the circles of control ([P. 12](#)) to identify and choose a problem that they can do something about.

REFLECT: Encourage the person to think of ways they can manage the problem(s). The following questions may help:

- What have you done in the past to overcome problems like this?
- What have you already tried doing?
- Is there someone who can help with managing this problem (e.g., friends, loved ones, or organizations?)
- Do other people you know have similar problems? How have they managed?

SKODEN: Help the person choose a strategy to manage that problem and try it out. If it does not work, encourage the person to try another solution.

Case example: Tamara and Connor use Stop-Reflect-Skoden!

STOP: Tamara is a community health worker and is helping a community member, Connor. She helps Connor identify his two most urgent problems. Tamara repeats the problems to check that she understands: “You mentioned you are worried about your children starting online school and about getting enough nutritious foods to support your family’s health.” To help Connor choose one problem, Tamara asks, “Are there things you can do about these two issues?” Connor responds that he can think about solutions to both problems. He decides that getting healthy food is the priority right now.

REFLECT: Tamara asks Connor to think of all possible ways to get food safely for his family. She tells him that he can suggest any solutions, even if they seem silly or unrealistic. Connor struggles at first, so Tamara helps him think of ideas. Together they think of the following:

- Visiting a local food bank
- Gathering foods in the local area (following traditional teachings about gathering and harvesting)
- Asking friends or family to pick up groceries for them
- Look online for information from the Urban Indian Health Institute and the Indian Health Service websites to pick affordable, healthy foods
- Using Indigenous eating values to appreciate foods that are available
- Attending a community food drive hosted by a local Urban Indian Health Program



SKODEN: Tamara asks Connor which of these ideas he could try first. Connor decides some of these solutions will take quite a bit of time (e.g., learning traditional teachings about gathering and where to do this nearby). Connor decides that visiting a local food bank is a solution that he can access quickly. Tamara has the phone number to the food bank on her completed table ([see p. 24](#)) that she keeps nearby when meeting with community members. She provides the phone number to Connor and even offers call with him to ensure he understands next steps. In the future, Connor and his family will try some of the other solutions he and Tamara thought of.

Resources: <https://www.wellforculture.com/blog/2020/5/19/what-if-i-dont-have-access-to-ancestral-foods>



Photo credit: Indigenous Strong



Supporting Everyone in Our Communities

Anyone can experience a situation in which they need extra support and resources at different points in life. We need to be attentive to relatives in our communities who may need additional help during the COVID-19 pandemic. Examples of community members who may need more assistance or specific resources:

- People living with mental health conditions, such as anxiety, depression, or those who struggle with substance use
- People living in multigenerational homes or those who are homeless or housing insecure
- Relatives at risk of or currently experiencing violence or discrimination at home (e.g., gender-based violence or intimate partner violence), including women, LGBTQI2S (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning, intersex, and two-spirit) community members, and those with disabilities
- Elders and older adults
- People living with disabilities
- Women who are pregnant
- Relatives with chronic health conditions, such as diabetes, hypertension, or other chronic conditions, who require regular access to health services
- Children, adolescents, teenagers, and their caregivers
- Relatives living alone who may feel lonely, unsupported, or live away from their home or tribal community
- People who may have difficulty accessing services and resources (e.g., those living in rural areas far from healthcare or grocery stores, those without internet access)
- People with limited access to safe transportation, including those who live in remote rural areas, as well as those who may not be able to use urban public transit due to the risk of COVID-19 transmission



A person's need for extra support may not be visible or obvious, so it is important to listen and respond with care and empathy to everyone you encounter.

Find more information below on how to support people in some of these priority communities:

Supporting people living with mental health conditions such as anxiety or depression, or who struggle with substance use problems.

For people currently experiencing mental health or substance use problems, the pandemic may reduce access to new or ongoing treatment (e.g., therapy, psychiatric care, AA meetings, inpatient treatment, etc.). Across the country, the pandemic may add stress, uncertainty, and isolation from loved ones which may trigger or exacerbate past or current mental health concerns. It may also be difficult for those who are experiencing new mental health concerns to find and access mental health care.

Anyone can experience mental health struggles throughout their life. Extraordinary circumstances such as the COVID-19 pandemic can change substance use and mental health problems or contribute to new ones. To help support your

relatives, you can encourage them to take some time to reflect on how stress is impacting their daily life and well-being. If you are working to support community members who may be trying to change their substance use, ask them to try reflecting on what prompts them to use substances and make a list of alternative activities they can do instead of using substances. If you or someone you know is struggling to manage substance use, consider reaching out for professional help.

Resources for people living with mental health conditions:

- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (24/7): 1-800-273-8255
- SAMHSA Treatment Referral Helpline (24/7): 1-800-622-HELP (4357)
- Supporting Access to Mental Health Services During COVID19 - NCDVTMH <http://www.nationalcenterdvtraumamh.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/NCDVTMH-COVID19-tipsheet-2.pdf>
- Addressing the Opioid Crisis During COVID19 - IHS <https://www.ihs.gov/opioids/covid19/>
- For additional mental health resources, please ([see P. 16](#)).



Relatives experiencing homelessness or housing insecurity

People experience homelessness or housing insecurity for a variety of reasons. The COVID-19 pandemic may add distress for relatives who are housing insecure or experiencing homelessness, especially as shelters and food sharing resources adapt to the pandemic. They may be experiencing challenges such as not being able to access basic needs like food, shelter, water, sanitation, hygiene or adequate health care. It may also be difficult to follow physical distancing rules due to crowded conditions in shelters and homes.

Natural disasters, such as fires or hurricanes, can also impact housing situations. Some people might have to evacuate or end up losing their home to a disaster. People displaced by natural disasters can face challenges such as finding safe, secure housing during a pandemic and accessing food, clean water, or other resources.

Resources for relatives experiencing housing insecurity:

It may be helpful for you to gather local resources in your community to have ready to share with anyone who might need them.

- COVID19 and Homeless American Indians and Alaska Natives - UIHI <https://www.uihi.org/resources/covid-19-and-homeless-american-indians-and-alaska-natives-a-webinar/>
- Interim Guidance for Homeless Service Providers to Plan & Respond to COVID19 - CDC <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/homeless-shelters/plan-prepare-respond.html>
- COVID19 Information for Urban Native Homeless Service Providers - <https://www.uihi.org/resources/covid-19-information-for-urban-native-homeless-service-providers/>
- Housing and Urban Development Resources by State - HUD <https://www.hudexchange.info/housing-and-homeless-assistance/homeless-help/>

People who are unsafe in their homes

Like other emergencies, the COVID-19 pandemic is exposing people who were already unsafe in their homes to increased vulnerability. They may be at higher risk of violence in the home, and pandemic restrictions may be cutting off access to essential protection services and social networks.

Some people may experience reduced access to health, sexual, and reproductive services, as well as maternal, newborn, and child health services. In both the short and long term, they may experience greater economic difficulties, which could further increase their risk of exploitation, abuse, and engaging in high-risk work. It is important that care is taken to meet the specific needs of people who are unsafe in their homes - including pregnant women or those who experience domestic threats.

If you suspect that someone may be unsafe in their home, you can reach out to them and let them know you are there to listen and support them. In reaching out, try some indirect, non-judgmental questions, such as “How are things going at home?” or “How safe do you feel in your home?” or “How does your partner treat you?” The resources below can also help support anyone who is unsafe in their home. It is also important that if you suspect a child, elder, or other person is being hurt or harmed to follow local legal regulations regarding reporting this information.



Resources for people who are not safe in their homes:

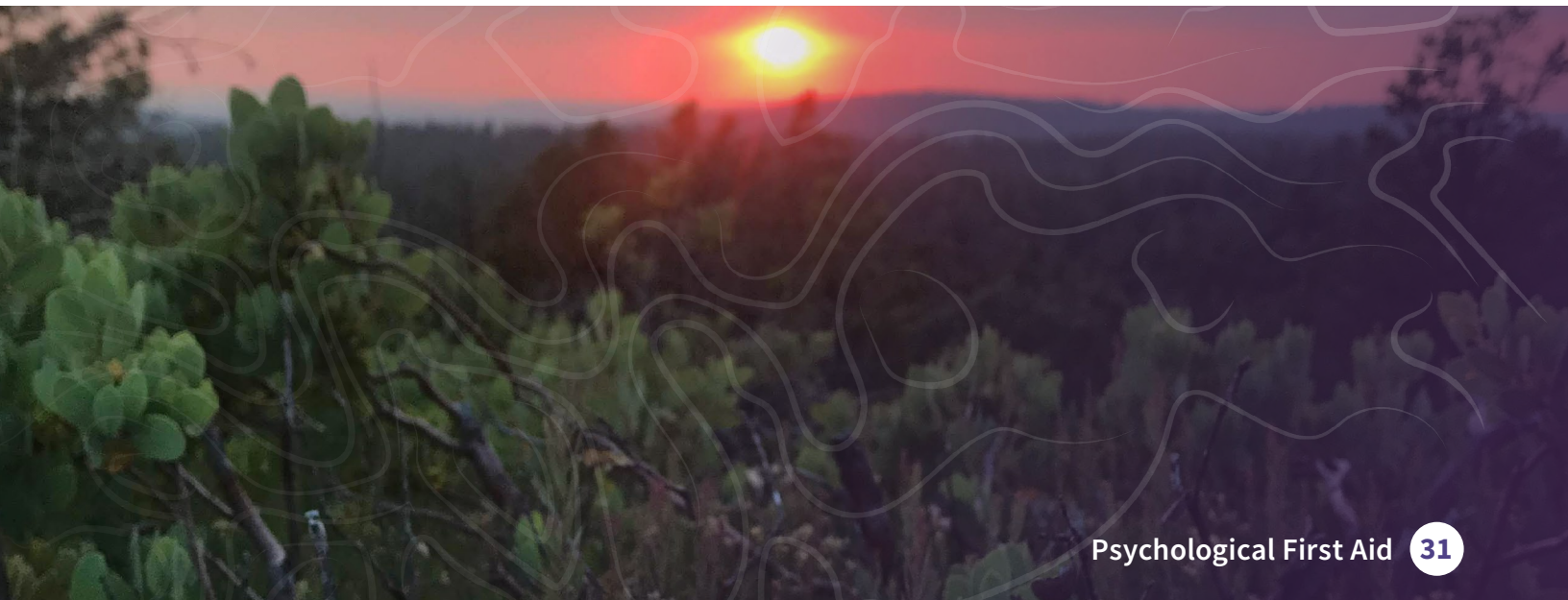
- Staying Safe During COVID19 - National Domestic Violence Hotline <https://www.thehotline.org/resources/staying-safe-during-covid-19/>
- Safety Planning - National Domestic Violence Hotline <https://www.thehotline.org/create-a-safety-plan/>
- National Indigenous Women’s Resource Center (855)-649-7299
- <https://www.niwrc.org/>
- StrongHearts Native Helpline (7am-10pm CDT; domestic/sexual violence): 1-844-762-8483
- National Domestic Violence Hotline (24/7): 1-800-799-7233
- National Sexual Assault Hotline (24/7): 1-800-656-HOPE (4673)
- SAMHSA Disaster Distress Helpline (24/7): 1-800-985-5990

Relatives living in multigenerational or crowded households

People who live in crowded or multigenerational homes may have specific needs and concerns during the COVID-19 pandemic. They may have increased risk of contracting COVID-19 due to a greater number of people who may be coming and going from the home. It is also common for multigenerational homes to include elders, who are at higher risk from COVID-19 infection and must be kept safe. If someone contracts COVID-19, they may have difficulty isolating and quarantining in shared living spaces. Living situations may also become tense as everyone spends more time at home, which may contribute to greater mental health distress. Some people in these situations may need mental health support or help accessing resources such as food, water, or sanitation supplies.

Resources for people living in multi-generational or crowded housing:

- Recommendations and Tips for Multi-Generational Tribal Households During COVID19 -CDC <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/tribal/social-distancing.html>
- Housing During COVID19 - NIHB <https://www.nihb.org/covid-19/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Housing-and-COVID-19-RF-edits-FORMATTED.pdf>
- Staying Safe in Multi-Generational Households - ESRD NCC <https://esrdncc.org/globalassets/covid-19/stayingsafemultigen508.pdf>
- Talking to Youth about COVID19 - NIHB https://www.nihb.org/covid-19/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Talking-with-Kids-About-COVID-final_FORMATTED.pdf
- Our Smallest Warriors, Our Strongest Medicine - JH CAIH <https://caih.jhu.edu/programs/strongmedicine>
- Find more resources to support managing COVID-19 risks in the home on the JH CAIH COVID-19 resource page
- <https://caih.jhu.edu/news/covid19>





Elders

Elders are wisdom keepers and very important in our communities. Elders are at higher risk for serious COVID-19 infection due to their age, which means their immune systems may be less able to fight infection. Elders are also more likely to have an existing health condition such as diabetes or high blood pressure, which may also place them at higher risk for COVID-19 infection. This means extra care and precaution should be taken to protect elders and keep them safe and healthy. Elders may have difficulty leaving their homes and safely accessing basic needs like food, water, and medications. You can support them by helping deliver these items to them while wearing a mask and maintaining physical distancing. Elders may also experience anxiety, fear, and sadness as they cope with isolation from friends, family, and community members. You can support elders' mental health by checking-in with them regularly through phone calls or helping them safely access activities and materials to stay healthy such as books, appropriate physical exercise, or relaxation exercises.

The COVID-19 pandemic can also be difficult for elders who live in nursing or care homes. Workers at these institutions may require additional information and training to ensure that elders' rights and dignity are preserved. Elders who live in these facilities may experience increased isolation and loneliness. You can support elders living in care homes by calling or writing letters to them regularly. Check out the resources on the next page for more information on how to support elders and their caregivers.





Resources for elders:

- Guidance for Providers Working with Elders - JH CAIH <https://resources.caih.jhu.edu/resources/elder-mental-health/>
- Tips for Elders and their Caregivers - JH CAIH https://caih.jhu.edu/assets/documents/Tips_for_Elders_and_Caregivers_During_COVID-19.pdf
- Caregiving for the Elderly During COVID19 - Johns Hopkins Medicine <https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/conditions-and-diseases/coronavirus/coronavirus-caregiving-for-the-elderly>
- Caring for Elders During COVID19 - NIHB https://www.nihb.org/covid-19/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Elder-Care-Factsheet-Final_FORMATTED.pdf
- Refer to the case example on [page 23](#) in module 3 for a description of how you can support elders in your community



You have reached the end of the guide. We hope it is a useful tool for you. We want to share some brief messages of gratitude and support with you from our team to yours.

Thank you for supporting your community during challenging times. You and your well-being are so important!
-Fiona

Thank You for all you have done and continue to do. We are so grateful!
-Emily

Our gratitude for the work you do cannot be overstated- "essential" doesn't even begin to cover its importance.
-Maisie C.

WADO! THANK YOU!
Your heart, strength, and care for our communities is truly incredible.
With gratitude & hope,
Victoria

yootva! (Thank you) for protecting & caring for our families, our Elders, & our communities
- Sophie

Miigwech (Thank You) for caring for our relatives. Your hard work is appreciated more than you know 😊
-Jana

Thank you for helping so many people N. Oddie



