

Self-Care Guide

with thanks to the authors:

Dr. Tasha Hubbard, Molly Swain, Sara Howdle



NOTE: This guide was originally designed for the course NS 161: Countering Stereotypes of Indigenous Peoples and has since been adapted for broader application for use during students' learning.

As you move through Native Studies content, you may find some of the material emotionally challenging or triggering. If you're Indigenous, the underlying colonial foundations that are discussed in Indigenous Studies material will likely have impacted and continue to impact you and your community in different ways. You may find that some of the content will bring up memories of these kinds of experiences, which can make engaging with the material especially difficult.

The Faculty of Native Studies recognizes that this is often the reality of doing Indigenous Studies work, we have experienced it ourselves, and we want to encourage you to do what you can to care for yourself as you work through this material.



If you're non-Indigenous, and especially if you are a settler, you may at points experience various kinds of discomfort or defensiveness as you learn about some of the history of colonial violence that has occurred—and continues to occur—against Indigenous peoples in the Americas. We encourage you to sit with this discomfort and to recognize it as the result of coming into new understandings of your privilege and positionality in a settler-colonial society.

Remember that while the lessons may be difficult, there is a difference between personal danger and discomfort. Non-Indigenous people have the privilege of learning about colonial violence against Indigenous peoples from a safe distance. You might be uncomfortable or dismayed, but your safety is not in jeopardy.

For Indigenous, Black, and People of Colour, as well as the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, people with disabilities, ethnic and religious minorities, and many others, stereotypes don't just include microaggressions but also extreme violence. Take time and space to allow these new understandings of the world you inhabit to be incorporated into your worldview, but don't let them immobilize you. Transform these feelings into positive actions that support Indigenous communities and struggles.

Finally, do not place additional burden on Indigenous people by asking them to educate you or assist you with navigating the discomfort and learning journey you are on.

For all students, here are some ideas and strategies that you may want to try to help you navigate emotionally challenging or triggering material.

- Recognize the physical signs of emotional stress.
These can include: sudden or chronic fatigue, anxiety, restlessness, hypervigilance, irritability, nightmares, intrusive thoughts, difficulty concentrating, feeling down or depressed, headaches, and gastrointestinal problems. Pay attention to how your body responds to your learning.



- Be aware of your triggers and how you are reacting to the material, and respect your limits. While we believe you should challenge yourself to engage with the material and the topics that are raised, the work may be uncomfortable for you, so don't force yourself to confront material you know will be harmful to your mental health.

- Build time for self-care into the schedule that you designate for learning. Make it a part of the course for yourself. This can include taking breaks while reading and watching videos, making time to situate yourself before you begin your coursework, and making time to unwind after you've finished for the day. Building work time rituals for yourself (setting up your space, playing a specific song or calming video to start/end your work time etc.) can help keep your coursework a little more separate from the rest of your life.

- Keep your hands busy while you learn, and write, journal, or create some art or music about what you're learning and feeling about the course material. Similarly, move your body in some way: going for a walk or run, dancing, or working out can help with feelings of stress/distress.
- Make a list of things that bring you joy and keep it on hand to refer to when needed. Similarly, do things that bring you joy.



- Reach out to loved ones to share and discuss your learning, or reach out to your classmates to form a reading/study/discussion group or even just to check-in every few weeks. Don't be afraid to ask for support from those around you. If you are a non-Indigenous person, we encourage you to approach other non-Indigenous people, rather than Indigenous people you know, to help navigate your feelings around your learning.
- Do ceremony or take part in a spiritual or religious activity.
- Go into your community and do something positive for others. Do some "community care."



We hope you find this short guide useful. Learning difficult material may be challenging, but it can also be incredibly stimulating, fulfilling, and liberating. While it can sometimes feel crucial to power through tough coursework and gain new perspectives and tools, your physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual wellbeing are paramount. Take care of yourself and you will not only feel better, you will learn better.

As Tanya Ball, Métis instructor and PhD student says,

“Learning about Indigenous stuff is not just a cerebral exercise, it’s embodied, emotional, and spiritual. It should go from your head to your heart and back again.”

Additional Resources

Dockray, Heather. 2019. "Self-care isn't enough. We need community care to thrive."
<https://mashable.com/article/community-care-versus-self-care>

Loyer, Jessie. 2018. "Indigenous information literacy: nêhiyaw kinship enabling self-care in research." In *The Politics of Theory and the Practice of Critical Librarianship*. Eds. Karen P. Nicholson and Maura Seale. Sacramento, CA: Library Juice Press.

Theidon, Kimberley. 2014. "'How was your trip?' Self-Care for Researchers Working and Writing on Violence." *Drugs, Security and Democracy Program Working Papers on Research Security* [2:2](#).

If you are a Residential School survivor, you can access support and referrals through the National Indian Residential School Crisis Line at **1-866-925-4419**.

If you are a Residential School survivor or a relative of a survivor who has experienced the effects of intergenerational trauma associated with Residential Schools, you may be eligible for free mental health services. You can find more information here: <https://www.sac-isc.gc.ca/eng/1581971225188/1581971250953>

The Hope For Wellness helpline and online chat provides culturally safe and immediate counselling and crisis intervention services for Indigenous people. Call **1-855-242-3310** or visit: <https://www.hopeforwellness.ca/>

This Crisis Services Canada page includes information about local crisis intervention and support resources by province that anyone can access: <https://www.crisisservicescanada.ca/en/looking-for-local-resources-support/>

If you are in school or have a job with health benefits, know what those benefits are and how to access them. If you do not have additional benefits, you may still be eligible for subsidized or free mental health support. Research in your area to find out what is available.