



Creating Culturally Safe Spaces

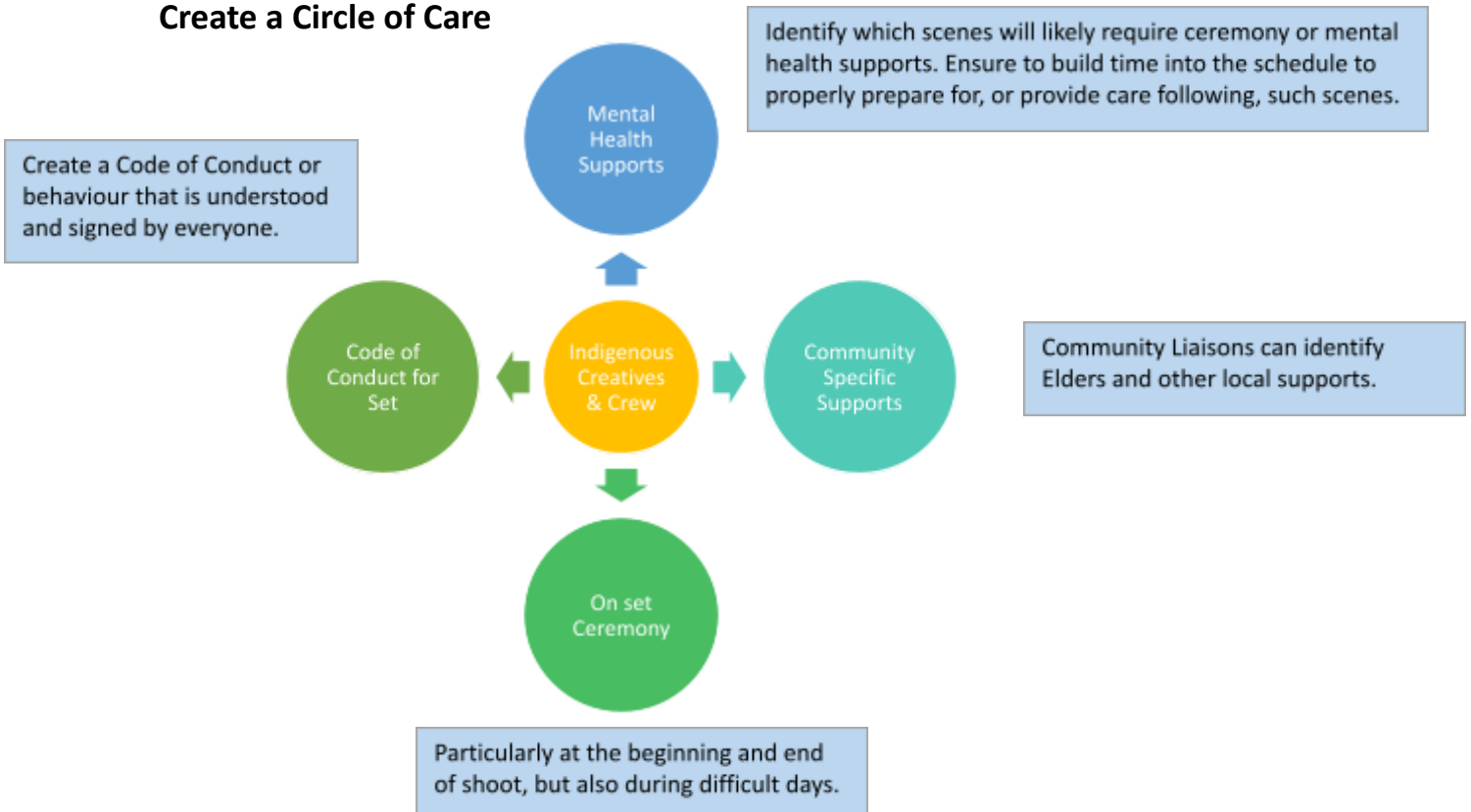
ON SET PROTOCOLS



When you do difficult scenes, there are things you have to put in place for those scenes. Make sure to have spiritual supports on set the whole time. Some scenes may require both spiritual guidance and counsellors. We would do a prayer before going into a scene, all holding each other while asking for support, protection, and guidance. Once those heavy scenes are complete, we would bring people back into their senses - a slow progression from the deep, heavy feeling, to the now and present. This was sometimes done by walking people through an exercise of conjuring a memory that brought them joy, love or safety, and connecting their senses to the memory like smell, sound and touch. And sometimes was done by spiritual leaders who would sing songs meeting people at the emotion they were at, and then slowly everyone would join in singing, and by the third song, people were dancing and laughing. The songs and singing lifting us out.

As a hyper alert and worrying director, I got to see that when you surround your work with space for that, and people who can guide that, you become buoyed by this circle. That is where the magic of community can happen, where we all become a part of the circle, all a part of holding each other. I am very thankful for the Haida community for that gift as they do this so very well. Helen Haig Brown on Edge of the Knife

Create a Circle of Care



Establish a Respectful On Set Code of Conduct

Being Indigenous is about community, relationships and cultural connections. When you're on set, you should feel that community. It is more of a cultural definition of what it is to be Indigenous and what an Indigenous space is. Given the experiences I've had in last few years, we need to adapt to a new definition of what an Indigenous production is. That is not to say everyone on set must be Indigenous, rather it is about space, community and how people are treated. Elle-Maija Tailfeathers, Filmmaker

A code of conduct is a great place to start to establish respectful conduct on set. Many Indigenous filmmakers speak to the need to change film set “culture”, as it is often directly at odds with Indigenous ways of knowing and being.

“In Inuit society traditional leadership is a fluid thing and is situation specific. Where someone has more experience and knowledge, they take the lead. What are we doing? Who has the most knowledge? What is the role? And who takes the lead? It shifts with the situation. In any field you need to be constantly assessing what you are doing and who should be leading – you are not always the one that should be listened to in every situation. When someone knows better than you, you have the humility to be hands off and let someone else anticipate all of the moves. Trust those who know more than you.” Alethea Arnaquq-Baril, Filmmaker

How do you uphold, or hold up, a code of conduct on set?

- Ensure everyone on set knows what their roles will be as early as possible.
- Have a Code of Conduct that is signed by everyone. Begin with the people in positions of leadership and ensure that there are lines of accountability.
- Dedicate a day at the beginning of the process to have a conversation around Indigenous content. Ensure everyone is on the same page and understands how to act in a culturally safe manner. Provide clarification on expectations and requirements for culturally safe spaces.
- Ensure Indigenous cast, crew and/or creatives are not alone or serving as the only Indigenous person on set. Ensure that there is someone they can turn to and say, “Did you hear that?”, or who can speak with/for them if the need arises.
- Encourage everyone to use accurate and respectful language, and to use available online resources to educate themselves to “do their own work”. Indigenous crew members or community members are not responsible for the education of crew.
- Integrate cast / have the appropriate interface(s) in advance of a shoot, through meetings, casting dinners, and rehearsals.
- A number of filmmakers start the day with acknowledgements to create a respectful space and practice.
- Have frequent safety meetings, as required (eg. at times this may be on set, every day). Schedule regular - weekly or even bi-weekly - check-ins amongst Indigenous cast, crew and creatives to see how people are doing.
- Hire as many Indigenous people as possible.
- Having a designated space on set is important.

Hold Sensitivity Reads

In order to ensure that the Director's approach to depicting sensitive subject matter is well considered and balanced, it may also be important to have sensitivity reads with the appropriate community members or elders. Sensitivity reads will unearth ill-informed biases, inappropriate language use, and stereotypes that may harmfully impact the community.

Within Indigenous organizations, it is imperative employers and employees are fully informed and recognize the present day affects of the traumas Indigenous people face. They must use a trauma informed and culturally appropriate approach to their human resources within the workplace.... A trauma informed approach in an Indigenous context must take a culturally appropriate approach. This means knowing, understanding, acknowledging and validating that a person in the workplace has suffered trauma from their lived experiences, including intergenerational trauma.

People with lived experiences or intergenerational trauma can experience hypersensitivity, anxiety, depression and anger manifesting into negative energy. This negative energy can present itself in many different forms. This includes deflection, manipulation, retaliation and ostracism. Hypersensitivity, anxiety, depression and anger can cause alternative realities, skewing individual's perception. When this occurs, the individual must seek Elder support and guidance to manage the situation and their emotions.

Trauma Informed and Culturally Appropriate Approaches in the Workplace, A Native Women's Association of Canada's Initiative by Elder Roseann Martin

Sensitivity reads will also reveal where triggers may arise for cast, crew, or community. Indigenous directors acknowledged that when people are under pressure it – trauma and triggers can be more prevalent.

Designate Responsibility

Indigenous creatives suggested that, in the same way that productions have intimacy coordinators, productions should also have cultural coordinator positions. You may be best served by having an associate producer who handles objects, language and culture-based pieces, does smudges, and takes on everything to ensure cultural safety on set. In order to ensure accountability, it was recommended to have a questionnaire and/or checklist enumerating cultural safety measures, Indigenous content, and process for handling disagreements resulting from racial / cultural positions.

Adapt the practices used in other vulnerable situations (e.g., everyone recognizes you cannot act in the same way with a child on set as you can with an adult); and build upon existing standardized and recognized practices within the production world, applying them to Indigenous cast, crew and creatives. As Helen Haig Brown notes above, make sure that an Elder(s) / spiritual support, therapist(s) / counsellor(s), and/or culturally appropriate ceremonial supplies are available and planned-in in advance of sensitive scenes or processes.