



**STRONG SPIRIT
STRONG MIND**

Supporting Change in Culturally Secure Ways for our People

Aboriginal ways of reducing harm
from alcohol and other drugs





The terms Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander; and Indigenous, in describing the first Australians, are used interchangeably to maintain accuracy with respect to other preceding documents and initiatives, and the term Aboriginal, more broadly used here, should be taken to mean Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander, and Indigenous peoples.

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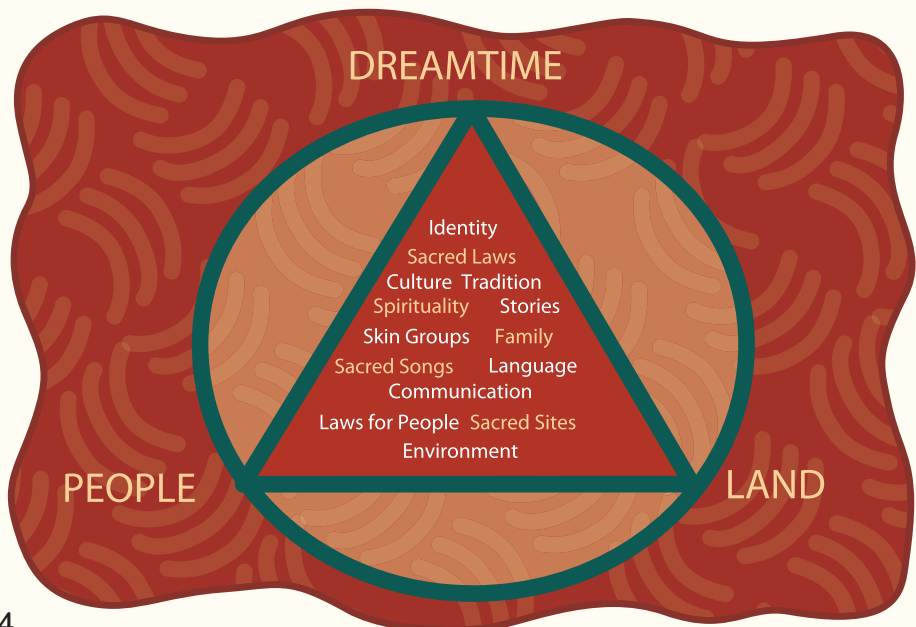
Dreamtime People Land

From the Dreamtime came the people and the land. From the Dreamtime came the laws for our people and the country. These laws guided us on how to look after each other and look after our country. From the Dreamtime came our identity, sacred laws, culture, traditions, spirituality, stories, skin groups, family relationships, sacred songs, dances, languages, communication, sacred sites and environment.

Our people have belonged to this land for tens of thousands of years.

With one feeling, one spirit and one mind, working together we developed systems of care, control and responsibility which ensured the survival of our people, our communities, our culture and our country.

Before colonisation we did use substances that affected the way we thought, felt and behaved. But their strength, availability and usage was controlled by traditional practices, cultural law, lore, and seasonal availability.





Law versus Lore

Aboriginal peoples of Australia had a complex system of law long before the establishment of British law in Australia. This system of law describes the governance structures of traditional life. Consequences and problems regarding traditional law were handled by Elders. Aboriginal lore, in this document, refers to cultural lore. A set of customs, stories, songs and dance passed down from the Dreamtime which governed all aspects of traditional life.



Impact of Colonisation

Colonisation had a huge impact on our people. The ways that had kept our culture strong for tens of thousands of years were not understood by non-Aboriginal people. During colonisation our ways started to break down. Families were separated and our children taken away. We weren't allowed to care for, or stay on country, practice our laws and culture, or speak our languages. But our people were resilient and we stayed strong where we could, we learned new skills and we survived.

With colonisation came the introduction of new drugs like alcohol and tobacco. In those early days binge drinking was common and this led to fighting and other destructive behaviours by some non-Aboriginal people. Many of our people watched and learned from these behaviours.



Our Life Today

There are many problems in our communities today, such as poverty, poor health, domestic and family violence, housing and unemployment. The harmful use of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs can be part of these problems, and can make these problems worse.

Even with these problems our people have remained strong. We are healing as a people and our families are strengthening. Our culture is still alive and our spirit is strong.

Through understanding the effects of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs our people are changing. We are reducing the harms for ourselves, our families and communities.



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How does Internalised Oppression affect us?



Understanding Internalised Oppression

The arrival of non-Aboriginal people was the beginning of the oppression of our people. For over two hundred years our people have experienced many forms of racism like having our freedom, choices and options taken away. Our people have heard many negative messages during this time about ourselves, our culture and our way of life. If you are told that you are no good for long enough then you start to believe you are no good.

When we begin to believe the negative messages, we have internalised the oppression. We can hear that oppression talking when we put our people down. Blame and jealousy are all part of this. Hurt and anger that has built up in our families and ourselves is now turned on our own people. It is our people who suffer the most.

Sometimes people use alcohol, tobacco and other drugs at harmful levels to cope with this hurt and anger.

Our people are the only people who can break this cycle

Ways of challenging oppression are:

- Sharing our survival stories and personal experiences.
- Understanding our history and the on-going impacts of Acts and Policies on our families and communities over the generations.
- Understanding the on-going effects of grief and loss and how this impacts us, our families and our communities.
- Being aware about the strength of our spirit, drawing on our cultural wisdom and the skills that we have, and developing new skills needed for our people to heal.
- Working together to build a better and healed future.



Building Strong Futures

As we move towards our future we bring the strengths of the past, a strong spirit, our strong families, our strong communities to heal our culture.

An important part of healing our future is understanding how using alcohol, tobacco and other drugs at harmful levels impacts upon our spirit, our people, our culture and our country. We need to understand this and use this knowledge to help us make better choices.



Aboriginal Inner Spirit Model

Our inner spirit is the centre of our being and emotions.

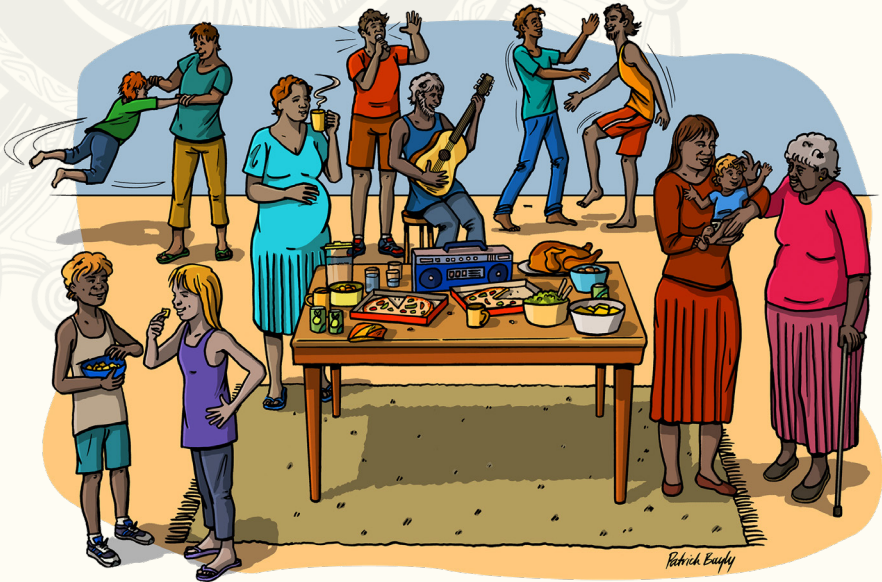
When our spirit feels strong our mind feels strong.

When our spirit feels tangled our mind feels tangled. Strong inner spirit is what keeps people healthy and keeps them connected together.

Strong inner spirit keeps our family strong, our community strong and our country alive.



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When our spirit is strong our mind feels strong and we make good decisions.

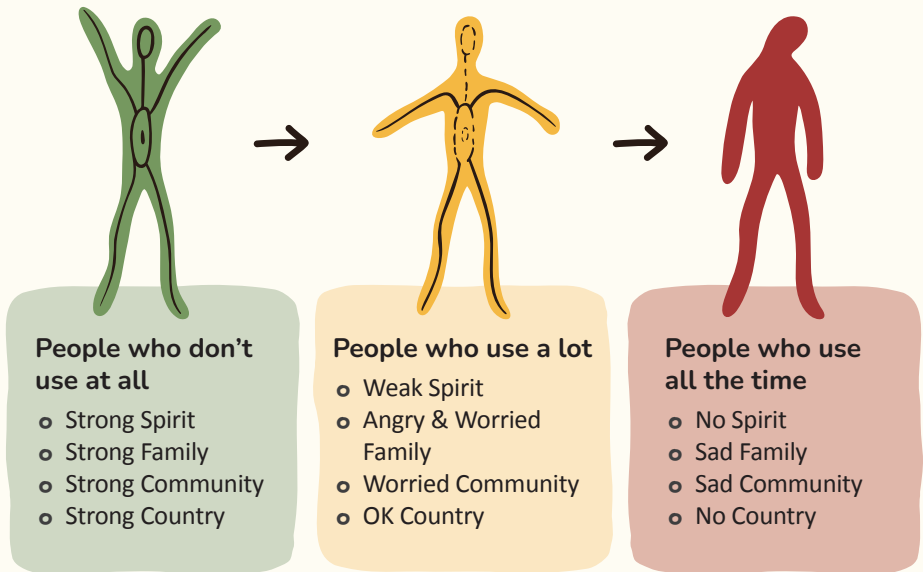
Strong inner spirit is what keeps our people healthy and connects them together.

Strong inner spirit keeps the community strong and our country alive.

Strengthening our inner spirit is a step towards a healed future.



How alcohol, tobacco and other drugs can affect our inner spirit



Our way of being healthy is to look after ourselves by making good choices, and to care for our family, community and country. Alcohol, tobacco and other drugs can tangle and weaken our spirit and mind. This can affect our emotional, social, spiritual and physical wellbeing. This can weaken our connection to family, community and country.

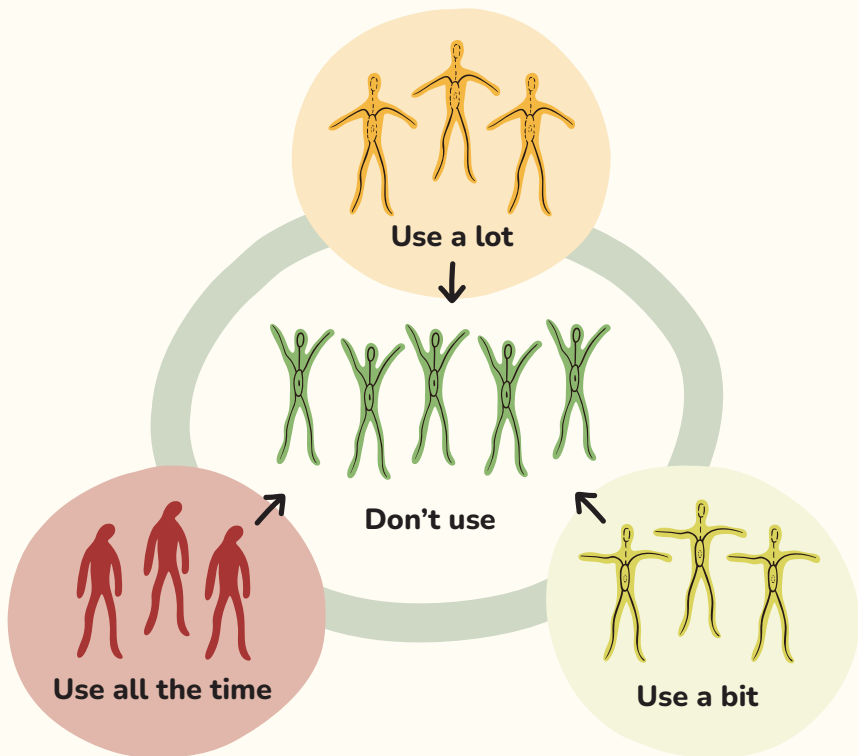
When we use alcohol, tobacco and other drugs in harmful ways our spirit becomes weaker and our thinking gets tangled. But if we stop or reduce our use, our spirit can grow strong and our thinking becomes clear again.



Alcohol, tobacco and other drugs affect the whole community

Everyone in the community is affected when alcohol, tobacco and other drugs are used at harmful levels, even the people who don't use at all.

For example, if someone who only uses sometimes gets drunk and drives a car they may cause an accident and hurt other people. This affects everyone in the community. Or, if someone is using a lot of gunja they may humbug people for money or steal to pay for their drugs – this affects the whole community. Or, if someone is using all the time they may spend all their money which means kids go hungry and bills don't get paid.

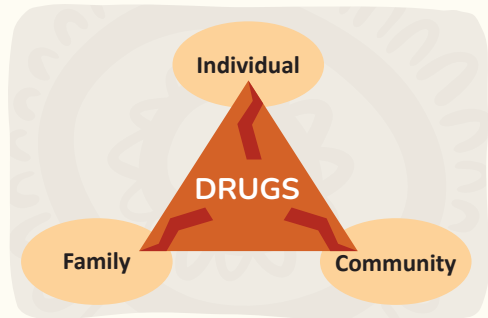


Understanding the impact of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs

Our people live very closely with our families and communities – so the things we do and say have a big impact on everyone around us.

When someone in a family is using alcohol, tobacco and other drugs at harmful levels it doesn't just cause problems for that person – it causes problems and stress for their family and their community.

It doesn't have to be like this – we can take care of ourselves, our families and our communities by making better choices about our alcohol and other drug use.



Understanding Drugs

What is a drug?

A drug is any substance which, when taken changes the way our bodies function and can affect the way we think, feel and behave.

Drugs may be legal (e.g. alcohol, caffeine and tobacco) or illegal (e.g. gunja, ecstasy, meth and heroin).



Why do people use drugs?

People use drugs for a lot of different reasons. Usually it is because they like the feelings that they get when using or because drugs help them manage feelings that they don't want to have.

Sometimes people take drugs to try out the drug or because they want to feel like they are part of the group. Some people take drugs to help cope with their everyday problems, but sometimes that can make their problems worse.





How do people learn to use drugs?

Our people have always learned from their Elders, family and other community members on a day-to-day basis through watching, listening and trying it out. This was true for all areas of life. This is something we have done as a people for tens of thousands of years and this remains a part of our ways today.

By watching, listening and trying out some non-Aboriginal ways our people learned to use alcohol, tobacco and other drugs in harmful ways.

Today our people are still learning by watching, listening and trying it out. However, we now learn harmful ways of using alcohol, tobacco and other drugs from within our own families and communities.

Our children learn by watching us. If we are using alcohol, tobacco and other drugs at harmful levels our children may learn this way of using as well. It is important to think about what we are teaching our children and how we want their future to be.

Types of drugs

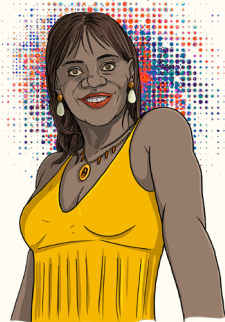
There are four main groups of drugs that affect the brain – depressants, stimulants, hallucinogens and others.

Stimulants – These types of drugs speed you up. This can make you feel happy, brave and deadly. They can also make you feel paranoid, fearful, jealous, angry and suspicious. These drugs can be dangerous. Coffee, tea, cola drinks and nicotine in tobacco are all mild stimulants. Stronger stimulants include meth, ice, ecstasy and cocaine.



Depressants – These types of drugs slow you down. This can make you feel happy and relaxed. They can also make you have no shame, feel down or angry. These drugs can be dangerous and can cause unconsciousness, vomiting and death. Alcohol, benzos (like valium), tranquillisers, heroin and some painkillers are all depressants.

Hallucinogens – These types of drugs can make you see and hear things that aren't there or things that are there may look really strange. Each time you use the effects can be different and be dangerous. LSD or acid, magic mushrooms, mescaline (cactus) and PCP (phencyclidine) are all hallucinogens.



Other - Some drugs belong to two groups. Gunja is a depressant and a hallucinogen. Ecstasy is a stimulant and a hallucinogen. Some synthetic drugs can also fit into more than 1 group.



Synthetic Drugs

Some drugs have been designed to imitate and mimic other illegal drugs. These drugs are heavily laced with many different chemicals and have different psychoactive effects. These drugs are extremely dangerous as buyers do not know what chemicals they are taking. Even the packaging of these drugs states that these products are not intended for human consumption. Side effects from taking these drugs can be really serious and life threatening. They may be known as 'legal gunja' (also known as incense, Kronic or Spice) or 'legal meth' (or known as bath salts).

Mixing Drugs

Mixing drugs from the same group is dangerous as it increases the effects.

- Mixing grog with gunja can make you really spin out; you may vomit or pass out.
- Mixing grog with heroin can slow down your heart rate so much that you can stop breathing and die.
- Mixing speed with ecstasy can make your heart beat faster, you can overheat, become dehydrated and this can even cause death.

Mixing drugs from different groups can make one drug cover up the effects of the other.

If you mix grog and speed you could use dangerous amounts of both drugs without knowing it. This can harm your body and make you very sick.



What does it mean when someone is dependent on a drug?

Being **dependent** on drugs can vary from a mild urge to use to out of control use.

People who become **dependent** on a drug may become **tolerant** to that drug. This means they need to use more and more of the drug to get the same effect or avoid withdrawal symptoms.

When people are **dependent** they believe they have to use the drug to do certain things or feel a certain way.

When someone is **dependent** their body has changed. If they suddenly stop taking the drug they may experience really unpleasant symptoms. This is called **withdrawal** and can include feeling really sad or angry, or physical symptoms like vomiting, fits and cramps. In some cases sudden withdrawal can be life threatening (alcohol and benzo's).

When someone is **dependent** on a drug they may begin to behave in unexpected ways – this can be very difficult for their family and community to manage or deal with.



Ways of reducing harm

The best way to prevent or reduce the problems caused by using alcohol and other drugs at harmful levels is to not use. Often people who are using alcohol, tobacco and other drugs in harmful ways do not want to give up using, but it is possible to do things that will reduce the harm.

For example:

- If you are drinking alcohol stay within the level recommended by the National Guidelines (no more than 4 standard drinks on any one day). If members of your family are drinking you can help them reduce the risk of harm by setting some rules, and providing them with food and water.
- It is safer for pregnant women not to use alcohol, tobacco and other drugs because it can affect their unborn baby.
- When people who use intravenous drugs share equipment they may be at risk of harm from blood borne viruses like hepatitis C and HIV. An important way of reducing harm is to make sure they have clean equipment and never share.



There are lots of ways you can help people to reduce harm – talk to your local Aboriginal Alcohol and Drug Worker, health worker or doctor about ways to reduce harm.

What to do about an overdose

Stay together – don't leave someone alone, stay with them till help arrives.

If someone experiences any bad effects or passes out make sure you call an ambulance immediately.

By doing this you could save their life.

Step 1

If someone has passed out put them on their left side (recovery position) and make sure they can breathe.



Step 2

Dial 000 for an ambulance.

Step 3

Stay with your friend until the ambulance arrives – never leave them alone.

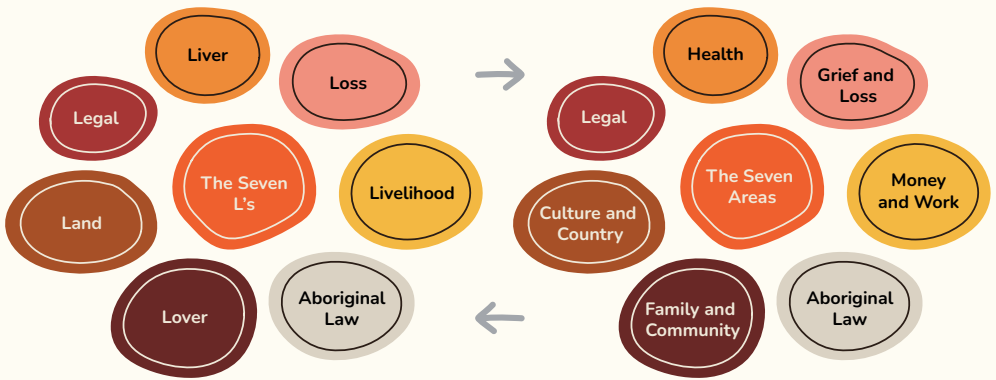


If there is violence, serious injury or death the police will also attend.

Areas of life that are affected by alcohol, tobacco and other drugs

Sometimes people use alcohol, tobacco and other drugs to cope with problems already in their life, and this can make those problems worse. Sometimes it is people's alcohol and other drug use that causes the problems. Sometimes people don't realise their alcohol and other drug use is causing problems for themselves, their family and their community.

Alcohol, tobacco and other drugs can affect your life in many different ways. When your alcohol and other drug use has become a problem it will affect you, your family and your community in one or more of these areas.



Land (Country)

You stop looking after, visiting or respecting country. Sometimes people do not have access to traditional lands or sacred sites. You can feel lonely for country.



Law (Aboriginal Law and culture)

Not keeping your social and cultural obligations. Breaking Aboriginal law when drunk or out of it on drugs. Not respecting, passing on or learning your culture.



Liver (Health)

Your body is getting sick. Your inner spirit is feeling tangled. You may be feeling confused, stressed, worried, sad or depressed, angry or fearful.



Lover (Family and Community Relationships)

Putting pressure on your family. Fighting with your partner, Elders and your children. Your family are worried and angry about your behaviour. Not observing your family and community responsibilities.



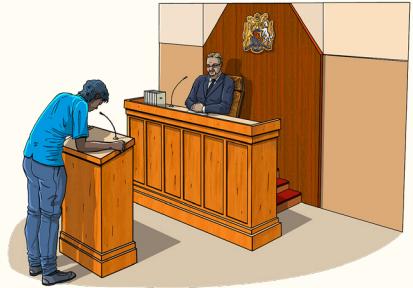
Livelihood (Money and work)

Spending too much money on alcohol and/or other drugs. Not buying food for the family, not paying the rent or bills. Humbugging your family for money. Lose your job or can't be bothered looking for work. Can't be bothered with finishing school or getting a career.



Legal (Problems with the Law)

Being busted for drug possession. Being charged with criminal offences while you were drunk or out of it. You have been to jail or have a criminal record.



Loss (Grief and Loss)

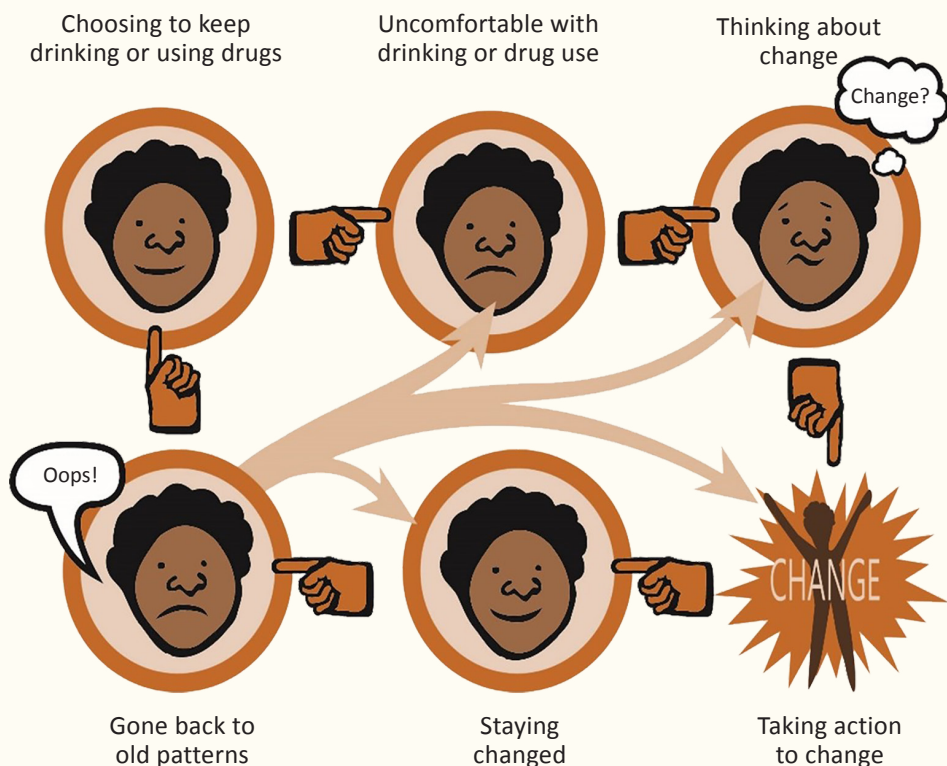
You use alcohol and/or other drugs to cope with issues of:
Family and friends passing away;
Loss of family connections due to Stolen Generations issues; Family members being in jail; Experiencing painful events within your family and community.



Making changes

When people, families and communities are changing they go through many different stages. If you want to help people to make changes you can ask them what sort of support they need. It is also helpful to understand what stage of change they are at because there are different ways of helping people through each stage.

Stages of change



Your family member or community may not be ready to make changes. However, you and your family can get support to help you cope better with the problems that can come from harmful alcohol and other drug use. Contact your local Aboriginal worker or doctor.

It is important to remember that within a family and community, people will be at different stages of change at different times, which will require more than one approach.

Stages of family and community change

Choosing to live with family and community the way it is



Not happy with issues in family and community



Thinking about making positive changes in family and community



Oops!



Oops!!
Action stopped



Keeping action going.
Staying changed



Taking action to make change in family and community



Choosing to keep drinking or using

Sometimes people are not thinking about changing their alcohol, tobacco and drug use. The good things they get from their use are more important than the problems and they don't see making changes as being of any benefit. Others may not be considering change because change is too hard or they have been unsuccessful in the past. Maybe they are afraid of giving up because their life will change.

Ways in which you can help someone at this stage are:

- Not put them down or judge them for continuing to use.
- Give them information about risks and problems and where to get help.
- Talk about ways to reduce harm.
- Do practical things to help reduce harm.
- Tell them you will support them if they want to make changes.



Uncomfortable with drinking or drug use

Sometimes people have mixed feelings about their use. They may enjoy it, find that it takes away painful feelings or provide other benefits. But they may be starting to experience some not-so-good effects from their use. They are undecided about their alcohol and other drug use.

Ways in which you can help someone at this stage are:

- Talk to them about the good/not so good things for them, their inner spirit, their family and the community (you could use the guide on page 35).
- Talk about how alcohol and other drug use is affecting their inner spirit.
- Offer to support them if they want to make changes.
- Help them to find professional assistance and support networks.

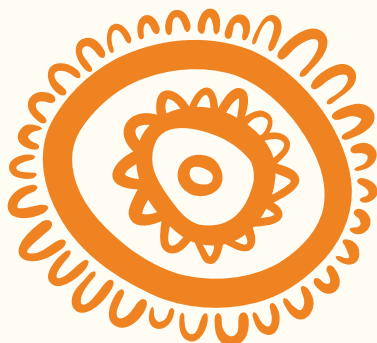


Thinking about change

Often people at this stage are thinking about how to make change because they can see that the not so good things about using are greater than the good things. They have decided to look at ways to make change.

Ways in which you can help someone at this stage are:

- Remind them of the reasons that they want to make change.
- Talk about ways to make change.
- Talk about how changing will strengthen and untangle their inner spirit.
- Help them set goals that they can achieve (you could use Making Changes Action Plan on page 36).





Taking action to change

This is when people have decided to change and are ready to do something about their use.

Ways in which you can help someone at this stage are:

- Support their decision and remind them of the reasons they are making change.
- Help them develop ways that will support them to make change.
- Talk about how taking action will strengthen and untangle their inner spirit.
- Encourage and support them find alternatives to alcohol, tobacco and other drug use.
- Help them to identify high risk times and develop a plan to cope in situations where they may feel pressured to use.
- Develop a family support network which can help them achieve their goals.
- Get information and support to help you and your family understand what they are going through.



Staying changed

People in this stage have successfully changed their alcohol and other drug use behaviour. They have stopped using or cut down their use and have stayed changed for six months or more.

Ways in which you can help someone at this stage are:

- Continue to be there for them and give them support.
- Continue to support and help them develop ways to deal with difficult situations.
- Talk about the positive changes in their life since they stopped or cut down their use.
- Increase their awareness about how their inner spirit is getting strong, their mind is becoming clear and their connections are becoming stronger.
- Talk about what has been working well for them and encourage them to keep doing it.



Lapse – Oops!

A lapse can happen at any stage. People can just have a little slip and they may get back on track without too many difficulties. For others, they may return to using at harmful levels. You may feel let down, worried and angry. People may lapse several times before they finally stay changed. People can learn from their lapse and this can help them find new ways to stay changed.

Ways in which you can help someone at this stage are:

- Understand lapse is a normal part of changing, they can still get back on track.
- Talk about why they have lapsed and help them to see it as a learning experience, rather than a failure.
- Help identify high risk situations and new ways of coping with these.
- Ask how their inner spirit is feeling and remind them that their spirit and mind will continue to strengthen if they get back on track.
- Talk about the reasons they wanted to make changes for themselves, their family and community.
- Remind them of the successes they have had so far and look at the benefits of continuing to make changes.
- Encourage them to get professional help.



Good/Not so Good Things

Weighing up the good things and the not so good things about your alcohol, tobacco or other drug use helps you to decide whether you want to make some changes.

List the good things about your use for your inner spirit, you, your family and your community

Your Inner Spirit

You

Family

Community

List the not so good things about your use for your inner spirit, you, your family and your community

Your Inner Spirit

You

Family

Community

Thinking about the good and not so good things about alcohol, tobacco and drug use can also be helpful for families and communities who are thinking about making some changes.



Making Changes Action Plan

The thing/s I would like to change are:

These changes are important to me because:

How will these changes benefit my family and community?

How will these changes benefit my inner spirit?

The steps I plan to take to help me reach my goal are:

1.

2.

3.

People in my family or community who support me to reach my goal are:

Some of the pressures that I need to be aware of that might get in the way for me to reach my goal are:

Some of the things I could do if these things/pressures happen:

I will know my plan is working when:

If I need more help I can always contact:

1.

2.

3.



Which people in your family and community can help make some changes?





My support people are:

Getting some help and information

If you are thinking about making changes to your alcohol, tobacco and other drug use, you might need some help or information. Sometimes people don't get help because they feel shame talking about their alcohol, tobacco and/or other drug use. Aboriginal Alcohol and Drug Workers, Aboriginal Health Workers or other health professionals are there to help you. They will not put you down or judge you. They can help you to manage your withdrawals, reduce or stop your use and support you while you make changes. This can be a difficult time but your family, friends and other people in your community can also help you.

For more information and help

Local Contact

Alcohol & Drug Support Line

The Alcohol and Drug Support Line can provide information about culturally secure alcohol and drug services in your area. They are a confidential, 24 hour, statewide telephone counselling, information and referral service for anyone concerned about their own or another person's alcohol or drug use and can provide information, counselling and support. Call backs are available.

Ph 9442 5000 or 1800 198 024 (country callers)

Em alcoholdrugsupport@mhc.wa.gov.au

Web alcoholdrugsupport.mhc.wa.gov.au

Parent & Family Drug Support Line

Confidential, 24-hour, statewide telephone counselling, information and referral service for anyone concerned about a loved one's alcohol or drug use. Parent callers can speak to a Parent Peer Volunteer with a lived experience of their own son or daughter's alcohol or drug use. Call backs are available.

Ph 9442 5050 or 1800 653 203 (country callers)

Em alcoholdrugsupport@mhc.wa.gov.au

Web alcoholdrugsupport.mhc.wa.gov.au

Produced by Strong Spirit Strong Mind™ Aboriginal Programs
www.strongspiritstrongmind.com.au

Booklet design by Nani Creative.

Illustrations: Patrick Bayly, Workspace Design.

The Aboriginal Inner Spirit Model (Ngarlu Assessment Model) was developed by Joseph 'Nipper' Roe, who belonged to the Karajarri and Yawuru people.

Casey, W. and Keen, J. (2004). *Making Sense and Supporting Change: A Guide for our People* (2nd Edition), Perth, Mental Health Commission of Western Australia, 2019. With contributions from Strong Spirit Strong Mind Aboriginal Programs.

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