

Native American Cancer Research Corporation Support Circles Fact Sheet



- 🍲 Many American Indians and Alaska Natives in the past dealt with their cancer diagnosis alone (rarely told friends or even their families)
- 🍲 Non-Natives and American Indians and Alaska Natives do better when they take part in support circles
- 🍲 Support Circles help find resources, emotional and spiritual help for the cancer survivor and loved ones
- 🍲 Now you know. Now you can.

What is an American Indian / Alaska Native Cancer Survivor Support Circle?

- 🍲 A place where:
 - ⊕ American Indian cancer survivors can share their experiences with someone like them who has been there.
 - ⊕ You can learn more about your cancer, your treatment, your recovery, and life after.
 - ⊕ Your culture is respected and valued.

How Does the NACR Support Circle Work?

- 🍲 A series of ~8-12 meetings that local Native cancer survivors determine:

- ⊕ Dates
- ⊕ Times
- ⊕ Locations
- ⊕ Topics

- 🍲 Local Lead NACR Facilitator (Lisa Harjo, Choctaw) coordinates logistics based on what the local survivors request



**Lisa Harjo, MS
Choctaw**

- 🍲 Local Facilitator provides materials, speakers on special topics
- 🍲 Survivors and NACR staff provide healthy foods (potluck keeping in mind diabetes and weight issues of our local participants)
- 🍲 NOTE: 1 of the few support programs evaluated for effectiveness

People came in -- I got telephone calls, they'd write, people would read Bible verses to me, all kinds of letters. There were all kinds of people coming to see me.



**Vincent Bointy
Kiowa
Colon Cancer Survivor**

How do American Indian / Alaska Native Support Circles differ from Non-Native Support Groups?

- 🍲 AI/AN Support Groups:
 - ⊕ Build strongly on our cultural beliefs
 - ⊕ Integrate body, mind, emotions and spirituality (promote healing and wellness such as through the Medicine Wheel or Circle of Life)
 - ⊕ Traditional Indian healers, spiritual leaders and/or elders
 - ✦ Guide and pray with members
 - ✦ Explain "cancer" in relation to our ancestors' challenges and our histories (overcoming difficulties in a good way)
 - ✦ Help us find the good lessons that we should learn from the cancer experience

Example of a Typical Agenda

- 🍷 Opening Prayer and Welcome
- 🍷 Pre-session learning
- 🍷 Topic or Guest Speaker
- 🍷 Personal stories/progress since last week
- 🍷 Sharing
 - ⊕ Healthy snacks
 - ⊕ Laughter
 - ⊕ Tears
 - ⊕ Affection and support
 - ⊕ Arts and crafts
- 🍷 Support for one another in the Circle
- 🍷 Personal Goals / Contracts
- 🍷 Journaling
- 🍷 Post-Session Learning
- 🍷 Closing Prayer

Survivors' Inventory List

- 🍷 Survivors organize their paperwork and documents for family members who may also be caregivers
 - ⊕ Birth Certificate
 - ⊕ Driver's License
 - ⊕ Social Security Card
 - ⊕ Tribal Card / Roll #
 - ⊕ Military Papers / Military
 - ⊕ Doctor Name / Phone
 - ⊕ Social Workers Name / Phone
 - ⊕ Medicine Person
 - ⊕ Herbalist
 - ⊕ List of Prescriptions and dosage
 - ⊕ Hospital Name/Location
 - ⊕ Spiritual Advisor/Clergy
 - ⊕ Vehicle Registration and Ownership Slip
 - ⊕ Medical Insurance/Card
 - ⊕ Life and Accident Insurance/Card
 - ⊕ Durable Power of Attorney for Health Care & Living Will
 - ⊕ Credit Cards
 - ⊕ Real Estate or Rental Papers
 - ⊕ Written Will

Estimated Timing with the Agenda

- 🍷 Duration of most are 1½ -3 hours long (depends on conversations and lengths of participants' stories)
- 🍷 Topic / guest speaker session ranges from 20-45 minutes
- 🍷 Participants do artwork unless sad or angry stories being shared (don't want to invite negative spirits into the artwork)
- 🍷 Sharing personal stories of grief, joy, humor and information (1-1½ hours)
- 🍷 Personal contracts, journaling (½ hour)
- 🍷 Evaluations and recommendations for changes or requests for new topics / speakers(10 minutes)



Examples of Learning Topics

- 🍷 Spirituality and healing
- 🍷 Being a Survivor and Becoming a Thriver
- 🍷 Dietary concerns
- 🍷 Chemotherapy
- 🍷 Radiation Therapy
- 🍷 New Cancer Treatments
- 🍷 Surgery
- 🍷 Pain control
- 🍷 Intimacy and Sexuality
- 🍷 Outlook on life
- 🍷 Cancer American Indian / Alaska Native Cancer Data and Regional/ Tribal Variations
- 🍷 Economic Issues (how to pay the bills)
- 🍷 Benefits of Physical Therapy
- 🍷 Emotional Purging and healing
- 🍷 Follow-up care
- 🍷 Managing Home and Family during Care
- 🍷 Ceremonies and celebrations of life, culture family and community

What are benefits for members?

🍵 Circle members:

- ⊕ Receive support and caring from other members and the facilitator.
- ⊕ Learn more about their cancer, treatment, and recovery so they can improve their quality of life during and after cancer.
- 🍵 Learn how to handle the side effects of treatments through diet, herbal teas, and new behaviors.
- ⊕ Find out they are not alone.
- ⊕ Learn to have fun again and make plans for the future.
- 🍵 Learn about resources in the community that can help them.
- ⊕ Build new relationships and friendships with other circle members.
- ⊕ Learn more about themselves and their strengths.

Personal Contracts

- 🍵 Write thoughts, feelings, poems...
- 🍵 Draw, cut or paste pictures
- 🍵 Compose a song
- 🍵 Group art using stones, shells, beads
- 🍵 Focus on your own needs at least 15 minutes per week
- 🍵 American Indian people always take care of their community / family before themselves
- 🍵 Contract is between the participant and his or her God / Creator
- 🍵 Contract is a weekly commitment
- 🍵 Example: I, _____ do hereby promise my God/Creator that I will take 15 minutes strictly for myself this next week; I will take a few minutes to watch a butterfly dance or listen to the beautiful songs of a bird, or look up and see the stars looking down on me.



Survivors' Support – Honor Dance, Denver 2006

Examples of Circle Ground Rules

- 🍵 A Set of directions for conduct and processes throughout the Circle; how people should behavior with one another during and after the support Circle
 - ⊕ Every session begins with the same Circle spiritual blessing or prayer.
 - ⊕ Show respect for others...allow them to tell their story without interruptions.
 - ⊕ Family members and loved ones are welcomed to the group
 - ⊕ Positive supportive comments should take place while arts & crafts are being worked on (i.e., no negativity toward others or ourselves; spiritual pain could feed into our and others= artwork).
 - ⊕ No Smoking in the building or during the Circles.
 - ⊕ Nutritious foods & beverages only (i.e., fruits, vegetables, juices, occasionally sandwiches and other healthy snacks to promote health, healing and good tastes. Please do not bring sodas, burgers, fast-foods, etc. (Remind diabetics to watch their exchanges)
 - ⊕ Circle participants, or their “designee,” determine whether or not to invite a speaker to stay for the rest of the Circle.
 - ⊕ Whatever is said in the Circle stays in the Circle
 - ⊕ No cussing or bad words used during the Circle

Facilitator Qualifications

- 🍵 American Indian / Alaska Native (Indigenous)
- 🍵 Compassionate
- 🍵 Honest, trusted, has integrity
- 🍵 Commitment
- 🍵 Wants to work with cancer survivors / Thrivers and their loved ones

Examples of Issues Local Survivors need to Address

- 🍵 Some Circles “close” the Circles to new participants after the 2nd session
 - ⊕ This is to insure bonding among the current Circle participants
 - ⊕ *NOTE: Newly diagnosed people are referred to one-on-one telephone counseling until the next Circle begins*
- 🍵 QUESTION: Do you think your local Circles should be “closed” to allow for bonding and healing after the first few session?
- 🍵 QUESTION: Do you think men and women should be in the same Circle? What if sexual or intimate issues will be discussed in that session?
- 🍵 QUESTION: Do you think family (or loved ones) who are the caregivers should take part in the Circles?
- 🍵 QUESTION: Should family caregivers have their own Circles?

Facilitators Checklist of what to Bring to each session

- 🍵 Matches
- 🍵 Cedar, sage, sweet grass and/or corn pollen
- 🍵 Abalone shell and a holder for the shell
- 🍵 Healthy foods and drinks (e.g. fruits, vegetables, juices)
- 🍵 Water
- 🍵 Cups
- 🍵 Small Plates
- 🍵 Napkins
- 🍵 Eating Utensils (if applicable)
- 🍵 Name Tents or Badges
- 🍵 Tissue
- 🍵 Arts & Crafts Supplies and Accessories
- 🍵 Pens, Pencils, Notebook Paper
- 🍵 Facilitator’s Notebook
- 🍵 Medicine Wheel Evaluation Forms
- 🍵 Personal Contracts
- 🍵 Journal paper
- 🍵 Handouts (topics)
- 🍵 Referral information
- 🍵 Facilitator business card
- 🍵 Additional items requested by survivors



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