



Strong Spirit Strong Mind

Aboriginal ways to reduce harm from
alcohol and other drugs

**Making Sense and
Supporting Change:
a guide for our people**

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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 and families, sacred songs, language, communication, sacred sites and environment.




Our people have belonged to this land for 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 our people did use substances that affect the way we think, feel and behave. But the use, strength and availability of these substances was controlled by traditional practice, cultural law, and seasonal availability.

Impact of Colonisation

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



Alcohol and tobacco introduced
Whiteman's law - Whiteman's diseases
Acts and policies - Native Welfare Act
Missions - Children taken away
Freedom taken away - Racism

Keeping culture alive where possible
Strength and resilience
New skills and education

With colonisation came drugs like alcohol and tobacco. In those early days there was binge drinking and this led to fighting and other destructive behaviours by some Whitemen. Many of our people watched and learned from these behaviours.

Our Life Today

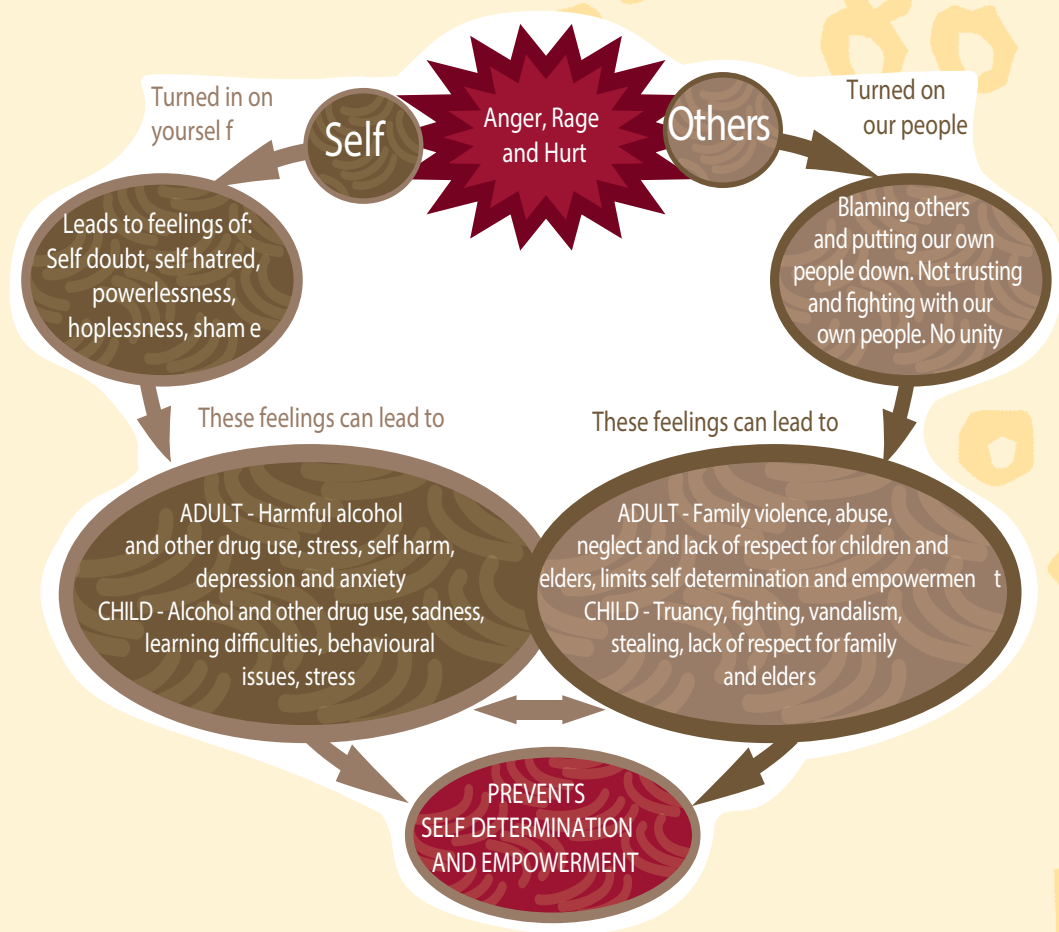
There are many problems in our communities today, such as poverty, poor health, family violence, housing and unemployment. Hazardous and harmful use of alcohol and other drugs can be a part of these problems, and can make these problems worse.



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 and other drugs our people are changing. We are reducing the harms for ourselves, our families and communities.

How does Internalised Oppression affect us?



Understanding Internalised Oppression

The arrival of the Whiteman 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 and other drugs at hazardous and 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 how Acts and Policies impacted on our families and community over the generations.
- Understanding the on-going effects of grief and loss and how this impacts on ourselves, 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 the 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 gunja, and alcohol 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.



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.



Aboriginal Inner Spirit Model



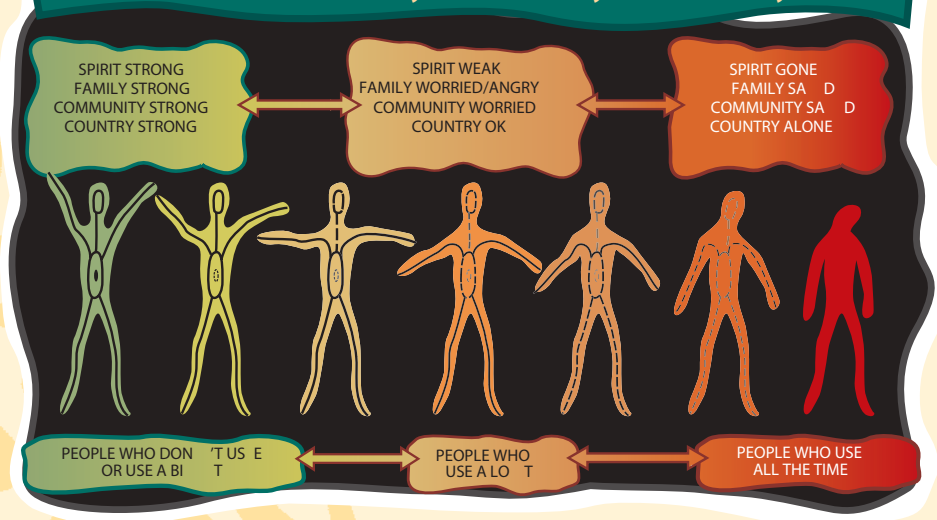
Our inner spirit is the centre of our being and emotions.
When our spirit feels strong our mind feels strong.

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.

How alcohol and other drugs can affect our inner spirit

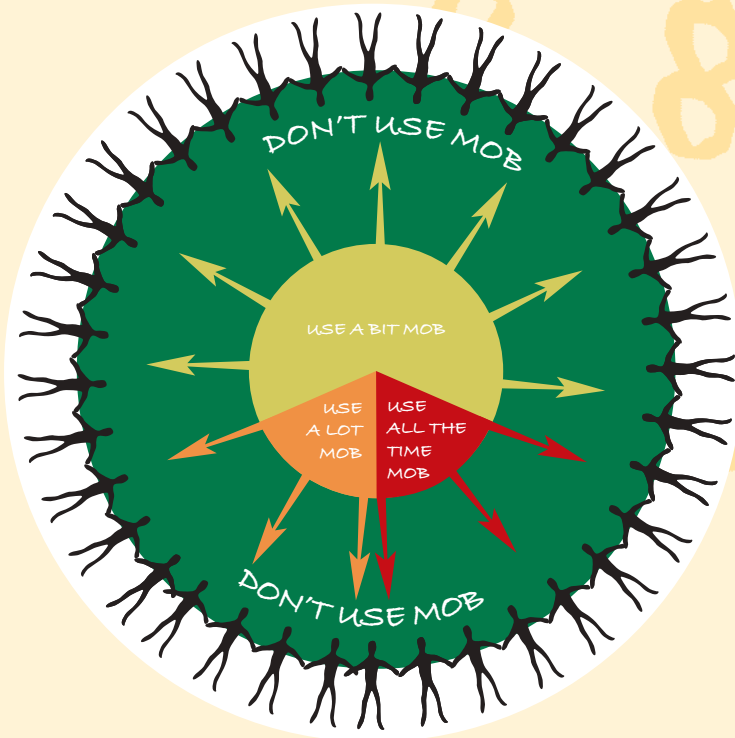
Alcohol and other drugs can weaken your spirit and your connections with family, community and country



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

When we use alcohol 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 and other drugs affect the whole community



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

For example, if someone who uses only sometimes gets drunk and drives a car they may cause an accident and hurt other people – this will affect everyone in the community. Or, if someone is using a lot of gunja they may humbug their family 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 the money which means kids go hungry and bills don't get paid.

Understanding the impact of alcohol 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 and other drugs at hazardous and 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.

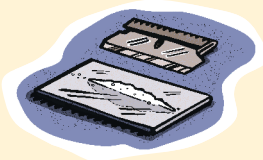




Understanding Drugs

What is a drug?

Drugs that affect our brain can change the way we think, feel and behave. These drugs are known as psychoactive drugs. These drugs can cause physical and psychological changes.



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 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 thousands of years and this remains a part of our ways today.

By watching, listening and trying out some Whiteman's ways our people learned to use alcohol and other drugs in harmful ways.



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

Our children learn by watching us. If we are using alcohol and other drugs at hazardous and harmful levels our children may take on 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 three main groups of drugs that affect the brain – depressants, stimulants and hallucinogens.

Uppers (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, agro and suspicious. These drugs can be dangerous. Coffee, tea, cola drinks and nicotine in tobacco are all mild stimulants. Stronger stimulants include speed, ice, crystal meth and cocaine.



Downers (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 agro. These drugs can be dangerous and can cause unconsciousness, vomiting and death. Alcohol, benzos, tranquillisers, heroin and some painkillers are downers.

Crazy (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. The effects can be different each time. These drugs can be dangerous. LSD or acid, magic mushrooms, mescaline and PCP are all hallucinogens.



Some drugs belong to two groups. Gunja is a depressant and a hallucinogen. Ecstasy is a stimulant and a hallucinogen.

Mixing Drugs

Mixing drugs from the same group can increase the effect.



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 get overheated, dehydrated and this can even cause death. Mixing grog with gunja can make you really spin out; you may throw up or pass out.

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. Sometimes this can be life threatening. This is called **withdrawal** and can include feeling really sad or angry, or physical symptoms like vomiting, fits and cramps.



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.

Ways of reducing harm

The best way to prevent or reduce the problems caused by using drugs and alcohol at hazardous and harmful levels is to not use. Often people who are using alcohol 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. 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 better for pregnant women not to use alcohol 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 – do not let someone go off alone.

If someone experiences any bad effects or passes out make sure you call an ambulance straight away. By doing this you could save their life.

1. If someone has passed out put them on their left side and make sure they can breathe.



2. Dial 000 for an ambulance (police won't come unless there is violence, serious injury or death).
3. Stay with your friend until the ambulance arrives – never leave them alone.



Alcohol and other drugs can affect your life in many different ways

Sometimes people use alcohol and other drugs to cope with problems already in their life, and this can make those problems worse. And 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 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.

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.



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.



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.



Aboriginal Law, Culture and Country



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.

Not looking after and respecting your country.



Legal

You've been busted for drugs.

You've been charged with assaults, breaking and entering, homicides, manslaughter, drink driving, or other crimes while you were drunk or out of it. You have been to jail or have a criminal record.



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 generation issues;

Family members being in jail;

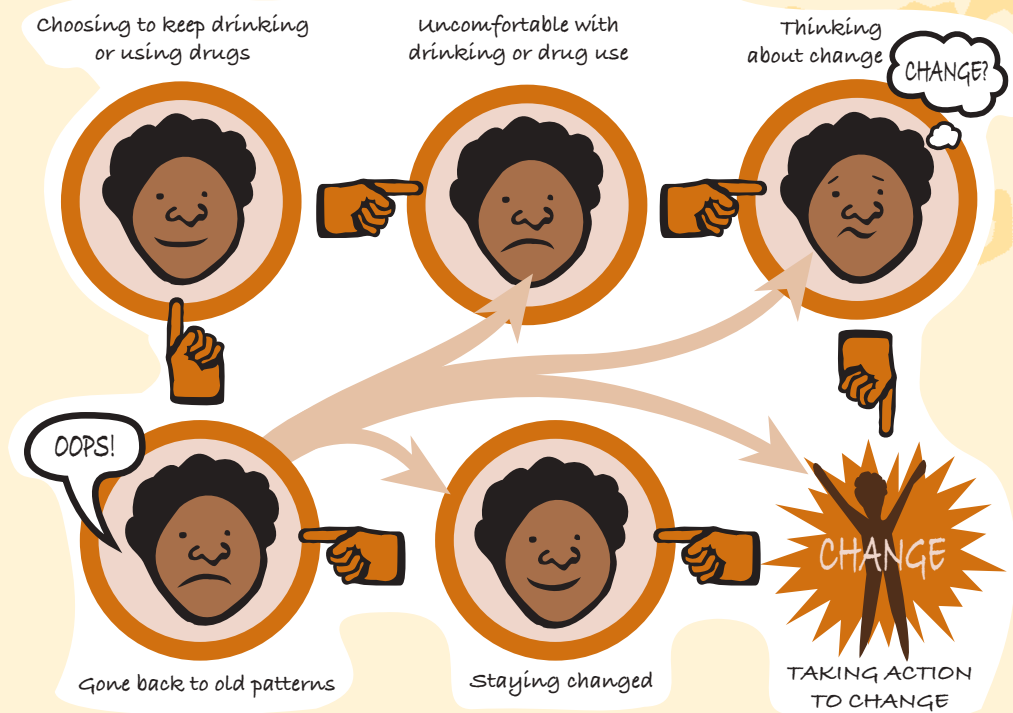
Experiencing painful events within your family and community.



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



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!! Action stopped



Keeping action going
Staying changed



Taking action to make change
in family and community

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.

Choosing to keep drinking or using

Sometimes people are not thinking about changing their alcohol 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. For some people continuing to use alcohol and other drugs is more important than stopping or cutting down even when they are having problems. 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 change

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. These may include problems with family and community, health, Aboriginal Law, legal issues, work and money, grief and loss, and country and cultural responsibilities. They are undecided about their 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 29)
- ❑ 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

These people 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 30).

Taking Action to Change

These 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 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

These people have successfully changed their alcohol and other drug use behaviour. This could mean they have stopped using or cut down their use. They have stayed changed for six months or more. They have often taken up new behaviours that replace the old ones.

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 spirit is getting strong, their mind is becoming clear and their connections to family and community are becoming stronger.
- Talk about what has been working well for them and encourage them to keep doing it

Relapse – Oops!

Relapse 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 relapse several times before they finally stayed changed. People can learn from their relapse and this can help them find new ways to stay changed.

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

- Understand relapse is a normal part of changing, they can still get back on track
- Talk about what lead up to the relapse and help them to see it as a learning experience, rather than a failure
- Help them to identify and look at high risk situations and ways of coping with these
- Ask them how their inner spirit is feeling and remind them that their spirit and mind will continue to strengthen if they get back on track
- Remind them of the reasons they wanted to make change for them, their family and community
- Remind them of the success 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 and/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	List the not so good things about your use for your inner spirit, you, your family and your community
Your Inner Spirit	Your Inner Spirit
You	You
Family	Family
Community	Community

Thinking about the Good and Not so Good things about alcohol 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? _____

My short-term goal is: _____

The steps I plan to take to help me reach my goal are:
1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

People in my family or community who can support me 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: _____

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



My support people are:

Getting some help and information

If you are someone who is thinking about making some changes, perhaps you could use some help and information. Or if you have a family member whose use is causing problems for the family maybe you would like some support. Within your own family there may be people who can help you deal with these issues, there is also professional help available. Sometimes people don't get help because they feel shame. Aboriginal Alcohol and Drug Workers, Aboriginal Health Workers or other health professionals are there to help you. They will not put you down. They can help you to reduce or stop your use, manage your withdrawal and support you while you make changes.

For more information and help:



The Alcohol and Drug Information Service (ADIS)

ADIS: 9442 5000 Toll free: 1800 198 024

They can provide information about culturally secure Alcohol and Drug services in your area. They also provide other information, counselling and advice for people concerned about their own or another's drug use. This is a 24-hour, statewide, confidential telephone service.

The Parent Drug Information Service (PDIS)

Telephone: 9442 5050 Toll free: 1800 653 203

Confidential telephone support, counselling, information and referral service for parents.

Produced by the Aboriginal Alcohol and Other Drug Programs



Government of Western Australia
Drug and Alcohol Office

Artist:

Barry McGuire (Mullark), born in Kellerberrin, which is located in the Balladong Nungar Boodja. His artist name is given to him by his family, it was his Grandfather's name and he paints to keep the name alive.

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

Written by Wendy Casey and Jennifer Keen.

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Illustrations by Patrick Bayly, Workspace Design