

## American Indian Life Skills Development Curriculum

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### Description

American Indian Life Skills Development Curriculum (AILSDC) is a Native American based framework for life skills development and suicide prevention. Generalized to be accessible to all tribes, it is based upon an earlier intervention, the Zuni Life Skills Development Curriculum (the two titles are sometimes used synonymously). Like many life skills programs, AILSDC strives to instill self-respect and self-esteem, teach communication and conflict management skills, encourage goal setting and future planning, etc. In addition, the AILSDC has a specific focus on self-harm and suicide, both in understanding personal issues conducive to suicide such as depression and loss of hope, and suicide awareness and prevention or intervention in others.

Developed to address the observation that Native American adolescents are more than three times at risk for suicide than general US adolescent population, AILSDC is a school based series of 25-60 individual lessons. Students participate in culturally relevant, experiential learning exercises 2-3 times per week over 20-30 weeks. The program was designed to include the classroom teacher and tribal community leaders to conduct the highly interactive sessions in an educational setting while making them culturally relevant to the specific tribe. The program facilitators are encouraged to include and enrich the AILSDC with personal experience and tribal culture, including use of the tribal language where possible.

The core life skills development activities focus on self-esteem; identifying emotions and stress; increasing communication and problem-solving skills; recognizing and eliminating self-destructive behavior; and setting personal and community goals. The suicide prevention mechanisms include reduction in depression and hopelessness instilled by the life skills and cultural teachings and from two specific units on suicide.

The first suicide prevention unit focuses on the causes of suicide, including grief and coping, issues specific to young Native Americans and suicide, factual information about suicide, and recognizing internal signs and symptoms of suicidal thoughts. The second suicide specific section focuses on recognizing suicide signs and symptoms in others and how to intervene. Both suicide sections utilize role playing and scripted vignettes to engage the participants and imbue a sense of the very real gravity of suicide ideation and subsequent attempts.

The individual sections of the AISLDSC are:

- Section 1: Who am I? Building self-esteem
- Section 2: What am I feeling? Emotions & stress
- Section 3: How can I communicate with others and solve problems effectively?
- Section 4: How can I recognize self-destructive behavior and find ways to eliminate it?
- Section 5: Why do people attempt suicide?
- Section 6: How can I help my friends who are thinking about suicide?
- Section 7: How can I plan ahead for a great future?

### Characteristics

- Population

- Gender – male and female
- Ages – 14 – 19 years old. Many individual sections are marked as appropriate for Middle School Students
- Races – Native American
  - Originally developed for Zuni Pueblo Native Americans, it was modified to be accessible by all Native American tribes, and includes numerous places where it can be adapted to the customs of the tribe that implements the program. Current adaptations include:
    - Northern Plains Tribes
    - Young women of the Blackfoot Tribe
    - Sequoyah High School in Tahlequah, Oklahoma,
    - A Cherokee Nation boarding school with students from 20 tribes across the country.
- Risk, Protective & Causal Factors
  - Hopelessness (risk)
  - Suicide prevention skills (protective)
- IOM Category (level of care)
  - Universal - general population of Native American high school students.
    - Many individual sections are marked as appropriate for Middle School Students

### Effectiveness

In addition to the generally positive outcomes of a life skills program, compared to the students in the comparison group, the students who participated in the AILSDC program showed improvement in suicide specific outcomes:

- Significantly fewer feelings of hopelessness;
- Higher levels of suicide awareness and intervention skills;
- Better problem solving skills for mild suicide crises, but not for serious crises.

### Program delivery

The AILSDC is designed as a series of approximately 60 individual sessions delivered during the school day two-three times a week over 20-30 weeks. The program is delivered by teachers and tribal community leaders. The AILSDC incorporates general Native American beliefs and topics into a general life skills development program and has multiple places where individual tribal beliefs, practices, culture and language can be inserted to customize it for the tribe. The program uses multiple teaching and experiential techniques and activities with an emphasis on scripted role play for the suicide prevention components.

### Considerations for use in Idaho

This well-regarded, evidence-based program could be implemented for relatively little cost by tribal schools or public schools with Native American students. The overall life skills program is a natural fit for health classes, social studies and Native American cultural programs. Perhaps the biggest challenge in implementing the AILSDC in Idaho is finding time in the school day to dedicate to the program, as most schools in Idaho are overburdened and underfunded. However, the AILSDC program is highly customizable, offers many life skills beyond suicide prevention and intervention, and could conceivably combine or replace similar elements of current high school offerings.

### Training & costs

The AILSDC can be delivered using the well developed program manual, which may be viewed by going to: <http://www.amazon.com/American-Indian-Skills-Development-Curriculum/dp/0299149242>, and then by clicking on “Look Inside!”

Implementation costs would be fairly low if delivered in-school as designed. There is an initial startup cost to tailor the generic program to the beliefs and practices of the specific tribe if desired, but once completed, the primary cost is classroom time for the 60 sessions over a two – three month period, as well as office and activity supplies.

While training is mentioned as available, no specific training information could be located. Please contact Dr. LaFromboise, the primary program author, for more information.

### Dissemination & support

A complete and thorough curriculum and program delivery manual is available for \$30:

- <http://www.amazon.com/American-Indian-Skills-Development-Curriculum/dp/0299149242>.

A number of supplemental materials are described and listed below. However, we could not locate a source for them. It may be that they can be ordered using information in the AILSDC curriculum manual.

- American Indian Life Skills Curriculum: Lesson Observation Guide
- American Indian Life Skills Development Curriculum: Teacher/Community Resource Feedback
- American Indian Life Skills Outcome Survey
- American Indian Life Skills Training Evaluation

No specific program support information could be located. Please contact Dr. LaFromboise, the primary program author, for more information.

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### Other program synopses

- SAMHSA NREPP: [http://www.nrepp.samhsa.gov/programfulldetails.asp?PROGRAM\\_ID=118](http://www.nrepp.samhsa.gov/programfulldetails.asp?PROGRAM_ID=118)
- OJJDP: [http://www.dsgonline.com/mpg2.5/TitleV\\_MPG\\_Table\\_Ind\\_Rec.asp?ID=635](http://www.dsgonline.com/mpg2.5/TitleV_MPG_Table_Ind_Rec.asp?ID=635)

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