

7 Steps to Decolonize Your Practice

Throughout colonization, land has been taken, Indigenous practices and ceremonies have been outlawed, and people have been displaced. Children were stolen from their homes and forced to attend residential schools, where many suffered abuse, and their languages, ceremonies, and ways of life were disallowed.

These events created a loss of connection to culture, practices, medicines, ceremonies, land, and traditions. This disconnection continues to impact identity, physical and mental health, and spirituality. Despite the oppressive realities of colonization, Indigenous knowledge, practices, languages, culture, and ways of being remain strong.

We encourage you to honour the resilience of Indigenous peoples and contribute to the revitalization and strength of their enduring practices and wisdom. One way you can do this is by using the seven steps below to actively decolonize your helping practice.

1 Research and acknowledge the history of colonization.

- Understand the history of the land you work and live on.
- Determine how you fit into this history.
- Acknowledge and understand the effects of systemic oppression, power imbalances, and colonization on the human condition and on all our relationships.
- Acknowledge how oppression and trauma can impact mental health.

2 Know yourself and understand your limitations.

- Pay attention to cultural influences and differences.
- Recognize the importance of your own intersecting identities, privileges, and experiences as they relate to your own wellness and your work as a therapist.
- Participate in your own trauma healing, and improve your capacity to support those who have been impacted by colonization.

3 Understand that you have been educated in and are working within a Western, Eurocentric system.

- Recognize the limitations of Western counselling methods and modalities.
- Expand your notions of wellness and learn about wholistic and relational cultural modalities that move away from an individualistic focus.
- Challenge the inequalities present within mental health care systems.

4 Build relationships with Indigenous peoples in your area and learn about Indigenous culture.

- Learn about Indigenous helping practices.
- Connect with Indigenous service providers, Elders, and knowledge holders, and build collaborative relationships.
- Participate in and invite opportunities for reciprocal learning within your practice.
- Consider and implement wholistic models of health and well-being.
- Create safe spaces where everyone can show up authentically, including you.

5**Offer services that address oppression and colonization trauma.**

- Destigmatize mental health and challenge dominant beliefs.
- Acknowledge, uncover, and address intergenerational histories and intersecting identities and how these relate to wellness in your therapeutic process.
- Unlearn patriarchal ways of doing and Eurocentric internalized conditioning. Acknowledge how these patterns inhibit authentic connection.

6**Review the calls to action from the TRC and MMIWG+.**

- Identify the calls to action that directly relate to your area of work.
- Create an action plan to address these calls to action in your workplace.
- Inform yourself of local and national movements that are centred on these calls to action.

7**Continue the journey.**

- Decolonizing your helping practice is an ongoing and active process.
- Practice self-reflection and examine your areas of power and privilege.
- Challenge your implicit and explicit biases.
- Partner with a mentor, coworker, or colleague to encourage accountability.

