

# Transitioning into post-secondary: A guide for Indigenous students

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CENTRE FOR INNOVATION IN  
**CAMPUS MENTAL HEALTH**



Canadian Mental  
Health Association  
Ontario

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# Section 1: Introduction

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## Welcome! Boozhoo! Shé:kon!

Making the decision to further your education into post-secondary is a huge milestone. This resource will provide you with tools, information, and resources to help prepare for your journey into post-secondary.

### Learning objectives:

- Explore what the student experience may be like as an Indigenous student in post-secondary
- Identify tips and best practices on budgeting, food, wellness, and housing as a student
- Recognize and understand the type of services and supports that may be available for Indigenous students on/off campus
- Learn how to take care of your mental well-being using a holistic and Indigenous approach

### How to use this toolkit

As you go through this toolkit, there will be reflective questions, activities and helpful resources to guide your transition journey into post-secondary. Additional worksheets are separately attached to download and print to make notes or reflect upon the content. Any resources mentioned throughout the toolkit can be found in the resource section at the end of the toolkit.

### Positionality

Megan VanEvery belongs to the Seneca Nation and Turtle clan residing within her community of Six Nations of the Grand River. In her role as the Indigenous post-secondary knowledge and research lead at CICMH, she brings with her lived experience and work-related experience supporting Indigenous students in post-secondary. Megan relies on her Haudenosaunee teachings in the work that she does, such as keeping in mind the future generations to come and how her work will impact them. If you have any questions and or comments, please email Megan at [mvanevery@campusmentalhealth.ca](mailto:mvanevery@campusmentalhealth.ca).

## **Preface**

The concept of the transition resource was a passion project by Megan from CICMH. Her combined previous work experience with Indigenous high school students and post-secondary students inspired the need for the creation of a transition resource. There is limited knowledge on what to expect when entering or transitioning into post-secondary among Indigenous students. The purpose of this toolkit is to provide Indigenous students with the knowledge, supports, and resources available to be successful.

## **Land acknowledgement**

CICMH, is in Toronto, Ontario, on Treaty 13 territory, and the traditional lands of the Anishinaabe, Haudenosaunee, Wendat peoples, the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Chippewa, and people who may still be unrecorded.

At CICMH, we strive to be an active participant in the reconciliation process, as we acknowledge the intergenerational impacts and harms that continue to impact Indigenous students, staff, and faculty on post-secondary campuses. We will continue to move forward in a good way to acknowledge and respect Indigenous perspectives and wholistic approaches to health and wellness.

## **About CICMH**

### **Our mission**

To engage and support Ontario post-secondary campuses in their commitment to student mental health and well-being.

### **Our vision**

Mental health and well-being across Ontario's post-secondary campuses.

## **What we do**

CICMH is working with its partners and constituents to:

- Build the knowledge and skills of front-line staff and student leaders in post-secondary institutions to increase their capacity to address the mental health needs of students.
- Foster innovation in collaboration that promotes systemic responses in the post-secondary system to address the mental health needs of students.
- Develop strategic partnerships to leverage external knowledge, resources, and relationships that address the mental health needs of students.

## **Indigenous Institutes Consortium (IIC) acknowledgement**

CICMH would like to acknowledge a Wellness Resource developed and co-created by members of the IIC, staff at Kenjgewin Teg, Regional Assessment and Resource Centre (RARC), and Finding Our Power Together. Additional support and materials were provided by Thunderbird Partnership Foundation. “*Pathways to Wellness: an Online Wellness Resource for Indigenous Students*” was designed as an interactive resource for students to manage their mental health and overall wellness. Through relationship building with the IIC, we will be extending and building off the Wellness Resource to include the experiences of college and university students. Please note, throughout the toolkit we have repurposed some of the content and information from the IIC’s Wellness Resource.



### **Nia:wen, Thank you**

CICMH would like to express its gratitude and is very thankful for the support and collaboration efforts made with members of the IIC, Marsha Josephs (Executive Director), and Anna Zecharia (Research Analyst). CICMH would also like to send its appreciation to members of the Indigenous Advisory Circle for their thoughtful contributions:

Bradley Gibson (Toronto Metropolitan University), Cynthia Belfitt (Laurentian University), Greg McGregor (Georgian College), Jacob Hill (Conestoga College), and Natasha Young (University of Guelph).

### **Background**

According to Statistics Canada (2022), five per cent of new entrants to post-secondary were Indigenous students. Specifically, in the province of Ontario, 26 per cent identified as new Indigenous students entering an undergraduate degree (Statistics Canada, 2022). Similarly, 23 per cent of Indigenous students aged 25 to 64 had successfully obtained a college certificate/diploma and 16 per cent obtained a university degree (Melvin, 2023). As more Indigenous students enter post-secondary education, adapting the IIC’s online Wellness Resource will help ensure they are well supported throughout their education journey.

# Section 2: Preparing for the journey

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Beginning a new chapter in your life is exciting! As you transition, there will be some challenges, new experiences, and rewarding opportunities that you will face while attending college or university. Despite these challenges, as you go through this toolkit you will find helpful resources and supports offered on and off your campus to promote health and well-being. This section will help prepare you for your journey into post-secondary and outline some key things to keep in mind as you make the transition.

The Ontario Native Education Counselling Association (ONECA) has developed great transition resources for Indigenous students entering post-secondary. For example, they provide resources specifically for students transitioning from “high school to post-secondary” and from “post-secondary to post-secondary”, such as college to university (ONECA, 2023d). ONECA’s resources can provide further insight and information that can be used alongside this toolkit. You can find these resources and more in the resource section.

## **Pursuing a post-secondary education**

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Making the decision to enhance your learning is an important milestone in your life. Obtaining a degree or certificate is a big accomplishment. With the knowledge and skills you will acquire, you will be able to help your community and/or benefit the lives of First Nation, Métis, and Inuit people. You will become a role model for future generations of Indigenous youth wanting to pursue higher education.

## **Leaving home and/or your community**

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Depending on your academic journey, you may need to relocate to a different city or community near your new post-secondary institution. This may mean moving far away from supports, your home community, and possibly your friends and family. For instance, you may have to take a plane or drive a few hours away from your loved ones. These experiences may seem overwhelming and challenging depending on your personal circumstances at home (family obligations, finances, etc.). As you go through the toolkit, we have included some resources that offer recommendations and tips to overcome those obstacles and barriers in the resource section. With moving to a whole new area or city, you may not know anyone and feelings of loneliness may develop. As you read through the section on homesickness, we hope you find the tips on how to manage it helpful.

## **Entering post-secondary**

As a new student entering post-secondary, it can seem daunting and a bit scary. We hope the following sections will offer helpful resources and words of encouragement. The academic environment and post-secondary culture may look and feel a lot different than past experiences such as high school, college (if you are transitioning to university), or the workplace. There may be different expectations of you as a student, an increase in the amount of coursework and exams, and challenges balancing your time. ONECA has created useful videos on what to expect and how to prepare when making the transition to post-secondary, which can be found in the resource section.

To help better prepare you on what to expect during your academic journey in post-secondary, your college or university may offer summer transition programs or summer orientation workshops. These workshops and programs allow you to meet some of the Indigenous student centre staff and other first year Indigenous students, get a tour of the centre, and familiarize yourself with other campus services.

### **Campus spotlights**

To learn more about these workshops, events and more, you can review the resource section found near the end of this toolkit.

#### **McMaster University**

##### **- Gaq̓adaḡihwahni:ya:s transition program**

For two weeks in August, McMaster offers a full course (three-credit) option in the fall, students will explore culture, university life, and academic skills while using Indigenous values and ways of learning. Students will have the opportunity to meet some of the staff, including the Elder in residence, and learn key skills like reading, note-taking, and writing. Students will also have the chance to engage in crafts and fun activities!

#### **Western University**

##### **- Indigenous student orientation day**

During orientation, students will meet other first year students, Indigenous student centre (ISC) staff, learn about resources and services offered on campus, and meet some of the Indigenous student leaders! Depending on the program, there may be a campus tour, lunch, and an off-campus outing.

#### **Cambrian College**

##### **- Indigenous transition program**

For two weeks in August, students will get to know the Cambrian community while discovering what services are available to help support them throughout their college journey. Students will have the opportunity to meet a few of the program coordinators and faculty, become familiar with the systems they will learn in (Moodle and myCambrian), and discover what learning strategies will work to be a successful student!

## **Fleming College**

### **- Bishkaa: Orientation and mentorship program**

This orientation program begins in August and continues as an ongoing peer mentorship program available to Indigenous students throughout the school year. It is a great opportunity for students to connect with Indigenous Student Services staff, other Indigenous students, and build friendships and cultural connections.

## **Cultural identity**

Depending on your life journey, you may either have a connection to your Indigenous roots, are slowly reconnecting to your Indigenous traditions and culture, or are disconnected from your Indigenous culture and feel lost and do not know where to start. That is completely okay! Many people are on a similar journey as you! Taking the step to reconnect and learn more about your cultural background, traditions, and values is a very meaningful and powerful thing you can do to improve your well-being (Connect with Culture for Life, n.d.).

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**Indigenous advisor:** *“The phenomenon of identity is important. It even seems to be an intergenerational phenomenon. Students have been “self-identified” by their parents for many years, but they don’t know where their origins come from.”* (Centre for Innovation in Campus Mental Health, (CIMCH), 2024, p. 44)

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### **Helpful tips/suggestions (Connect with Culture for Life, n.d.):**

- Take a language class
- Sit and have tea with an Elder
- Take part in a cultural activity/social/ceremony
- Listen to traditional oral stories
- Reconnect and spend time on the land, in nature
- Learn traditional teachings, customs, practices, and values
- Learn a creation story

## **Indigenous stories**

One way to reconnect and stay connected to your culture while at post-secondary is through story telling. Oral tradition is a common practice within Indigenous customs and can be used as a form of healing. As traditional stories are often embedded within teachings, listening to traditional stories may help with guidance, perspective, and/or feelings (The National Centre for Collaboration in Indigenous Education [NCCIE], 2020). Please feel free to watch video clips and/or listen to podcast episodes which you can find in the resource section at the end of this toolkit.

# Section 3: Maintaining wellness

Information from this section is drawn from the IIC’s Pathway to Wellness Course, Touchstone 3 “Seeking Direction”

While attending post-secondary, it is important to maintain a healthy lifestyle and balance of your mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual well-being. This section will explain what balance means in terms of Indigenous ways of knowing and how it can help you manage and find balance in your life.

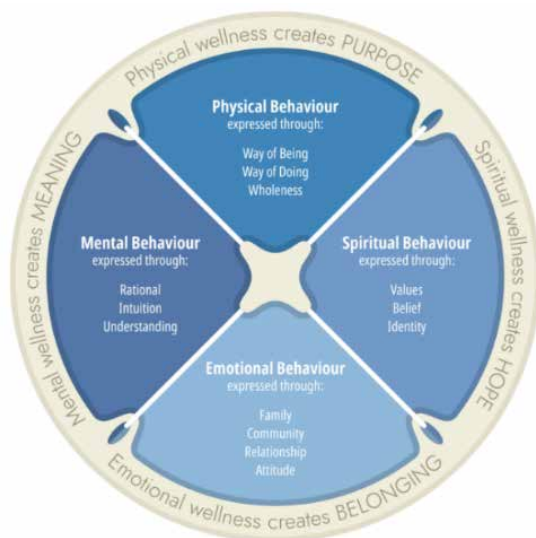
## What is wellness?

Maintaining good mental health involves balancing the demands of life, managing stress, and maintaining a positive outlook. Good mental health is more than just the absence of mental illness; it involves having a positive state of mind, resilience, and the ability to cope with life’s challenges.

According to the Thunderbird Partner Foundation (2020):

Wellness from an Indigenous perspective is a whole and healthy person expressed through a sense of balance of spirit, emotion, mind and body. Central to wellness is belief in one’s connection to language, land, beings of Creation, and ancestry, supported by a caring family and environment. (p. 4).

The diagram below outlines what wellness looks like in a circular form. The circle is considered a sacred symbol within many First Nations teachings. The concept of wholeness and everything on Mother Earth being interconnected is illustrated through the circle (Thunderbird Partner Foundation, 2020, p. 7).



“Indigenous Wellness Framework”  
Thunderbird Partnership Foundation

## **Finding balance**

*The following content is drawn from the IIC's Pathway to Wellness Resource, Touchstone 3 "Wellness Principles: Understanding the Aspects of Wellness":*

### **Mental wellness**

Mental wellness involves maintaining a healthy mind through intellectual stimulation, self-awareness, and positive thinking. In many cultural teachings, the mind is the centre of our thoughts and decision-making processes and caring for our mental health is crucial to our overall well-being. Mental wellness is essential for making sound decisions, solving problems, and continuing our personal and intellectual growth.

### **Spiritual wellness**

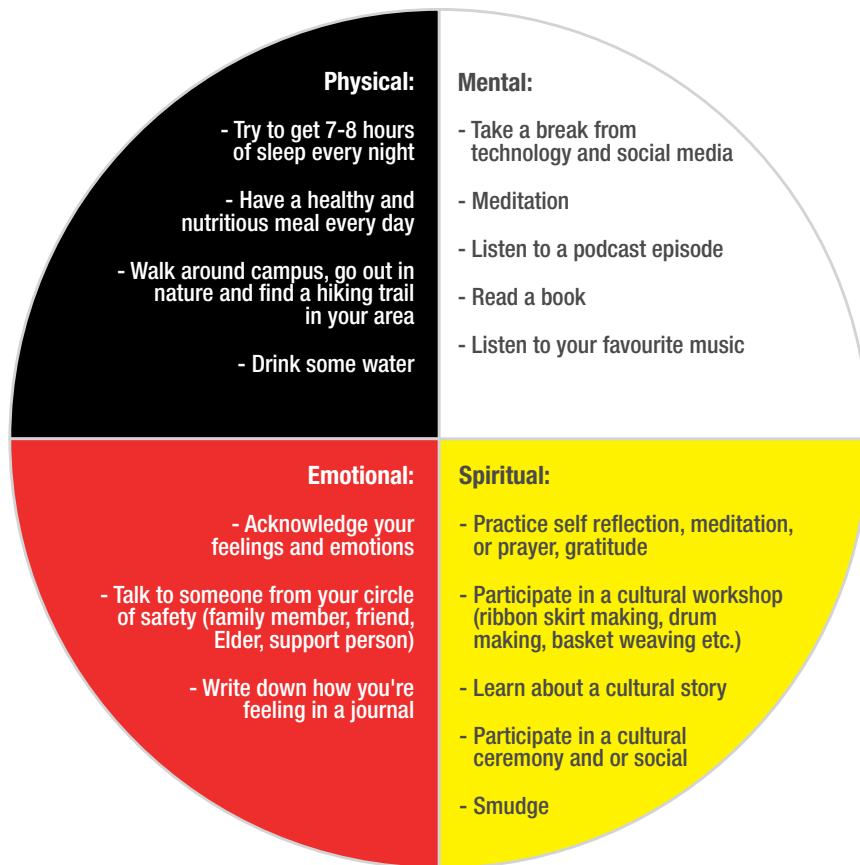
Spiritual wellness is about finding balance and harmony within ourselves and our environment. For Indigenous peoples, this involves connecting with our culture, traditions, and spirituality to find meaning in life. Spiritual wellness provides a sense of purpose and grounding, helping us to navigate life's challenges with inner strength and peace.

### **Physical wellness**

From an Indigenous perspective, our physical body is a vessel of the spirit, and taking care of it is a sacred responsibility. Physical wellness involves maintaining a healthy body through regular physical activity, proper nutrition, adequate rest, and avoidance of harmful behaviours. It is the foundation of overall health and vitality. Maintaining physical wellness ensures that we have the strength and energy to fulfill our responsibilities and engage fully in our everyday activities.

### **Emotional wellness**

Emotional wellness is about being in tune with our feelings and finding healthy ways to express them. In Indigenous teachings, emotions are understood as a form of heart knowledge, connecting us to our inner selves and the world around us. Emotional wellness is crucial for maintaining balance and harmony within ourselves and our relationships, fostering resilience and a positive outlook on life.



### Food as a source of wellness

Proper nutrition is essential for maintaining physical health and supporting mental and emotional well-being. Traditional foods play a significant role in Indigenous cultures, providing both nourishment and a connection to heritage. Eating well supports our body's needs and connects us to our cultural practices and traditions.

### Sleep as a source of wellness

Adequate rest and sleep are vital for physical, mental, and emotional health. They help the body recover and the mind process emotions and experiences. Good sleep is essential for overall functioning and helps us to be more present and engaged in our activities. Please check out CICMH's infosheet on rest and sleep and CICMH's free online course, "Improving Your Rest and Sleep" which can be found in the resource section of the toolkit.

### Movement as a source of wellness

Regular movement is crucial for maintaining physical health and vitality. Physical activity also supports mental and emotional well-being, and traditional forms of movement often have cultural significance. For example, walking on the land, reconnecting with nature and Mother Earth. Engaging in movement keeps our bodies strong and helps to release stress and tension.

## Sacred space as a source of wellness

Sacred spaces are areas where you can connect with your spirituality and find peace. These spaces are important for spiritual and emotional well-being. Having a dedicated sacred space allows us to practice our spirituality and find tranquility amidst the demands of daily life. These sacred spaces may include your bedroom, living room, church, longhouse, dedicated space on campus for ceremonial practices, etc.

## Land as a source of wellness

The land is a source of life, sustenance, and identity. For many Indigenous cultures, the land is seen as a living entity that must be respected and cared for. Connecting with the land promotes physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being, and is vital for grounding ourselves and nurturing our sense of identity and belonging.

## Reflective activity:

Create your own “wellness wheel” using the wellness framework and sources of wellness mentioned above.

- What does wellness mean to you?
- What would your “wellness wheel” look like when integrating these values into your daily routine?
- What activities would you either add or remove to ensure you are maintaining a wholesome balance?

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**Indigenous student:** *“Invite Indigenous elders and healers to work with Indigenous students, needs are different and require a spiritual component to holistic health.” (CICMH, 2023c, p.11)*

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## Community as a source of wellness

Strong, supportive relationships with family, friends, and the broader community are essential for well-being. Community provides a sense of belonging and mutual support, which is central to Indigenous ways of life. Being part of a community strengthens our resilience and provides the support network needed for overall wellness.

## Ceremony as a source of wellness

Ceremonies are vital for maintaining spiritual health and connecting with cultural traditions. They provide a sense of continuity, community, and spiritual fulfillment. Participating in ceremonies helps to reinforce our cultural identity and provides spiritual nourishment and guidance.

# Section 4: The student life

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The sections below outline various experiences you may go through as an Indigenous student in post-secondary. You will find resources for further information and websites to expand your learning in the resource section. We hope these supports are helpful and guide you through the student experience.

## **Type of students**

As you enter post-secondary as a student, you may be coming straight out of high school, transferring from another post-secondary institution, improving your knowledge for the workplace, or returning as a mature student. However you define yourself as a student, you bring your own unique experiences, background, and skillset to the classroom, campus, residence, etc.

## **Time management**

Being a student, you will have to find balance between attending courses/lectures, completing assignments, and studying for exams while trying to have a social life with friends and family. Right now, this may feel overwhelming, and you don't know where to begin.

### **Best practices and helpful tips (Jessie, n.d.; Robert Gillespie Academic Skills Centre, n.d.):**

- 1** Keep a calendar or agenda – To keep track of exam dates, times, classroom locations, assignment deadlines and/or campus events, a well-organized calendar or agenda can help with keeping track of upcoming tasks. You can find free online agenda/calendar apps, worksheets online and/or on your laptop/computer (ex. “mystudylife”, “Power Planner”, “Microsoft To Do”, and “Todoist”).
- 2** Learn to say no – Be mindful when agreeing to do things or engage in extracurricular activities on campus. Over commitment may lead to limited time devoted to studying, writing, and completing course assignments. This can also lead to burnout, lack of sleep, rest and nutrition. Establishing boundaries into your routine can be beneficial to maintain energy, agency, and relationships with friends and family. For example, “I need some time alone, this week has been very busy with classes and work”. Please review CICMH’s “Boundaries” infosheet for more information found in the resource section.
- 3** Do the most important things first - You want to make sure you prioritize your tasks based on urgency and importance. For example, completing your assignment that is worth 30 per cent of your grade that is due in four days will be considered more urgent and important compared to participation in an online discussion worth 10 per cent of your grade.

- 4 Manage your tasks - You might want to break down larger tasks into smaller tasks that are more manageable. For example, a writing assignment may involve research, drafting an outline, multiple revisions, receiving feedback from peers, etc. Writing on a certain topic or argument one by one instead of the whole thing at once can reduce the anxiety and overwhelming feelings.
- 5 Allow time to relax – Remember to take time for yourself. This can include taking a break, going for walk, drinking some water, listening to some music, or chatting with friends/family.
- 6 Set out specific time for tasks – Setting a time to study, draft a paper, or work on a hobby can be effective for achieving better time management. For example, the pomodoro method which involves breaking down study/working sessions into 25-minute intervals integrating breaks in between. If you plan to study from 2 to 5 p.m., commit to that time frame. This may improve productivity and allow you to reward yourself for achieving your goal.

Please consult and review your learning services website for helpful resources on studying, and time management.

*Content below is drawn from the IIC's Pathway to Wellness Resource, Touchstone 3 "Seeking Direction".*

### **Having a school, work, and life balance**

Indigenous approaches to wellness are rooted in beliefs and practices that include the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual areas of well-being. While each Indigenous culture and nation has its own unique teachings and practices, there are common threads that can be found across many Indigenous wellness frameworks in North America.

Living in balance helps you manage stress, improve your relationships, and enhance your overall quality of life. When all aspects of your wellness are aligned, you feel more grounded, resilient, and capable of facing life's challenges.

Creating a wellness routine is about integrating activities into your daily schedule that support your physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual well-being. A well-thought-out routine can help you manage your time effectively, reduce stress, and ensure you are making space for self-wellness and growth.

## Reflective activity:

- *Create your own wellness routine and remember to keep the following tips in mind! How can you integrate school/life balance during the semester?*

*Content below is drawn from the IIC's Pathway to Wellness Resource, Touchstone 5 "Building a Wellness Routine"*

Here is how you can build a wellness routine that works for you:

- **Identify priorities:** Start by thinking about what is most important for your health and wellness. These priorities might include exercise, healthy eating, mindfulness, study time, sleep and relaxation. Write down your top priorities so you can make sure they fit into your daily schedule. For example, if your physical health is a priority, you might decide to include daily exercise in your routine.
- **Plan your day:** Develop a daily schedule that includes time for all your priorities. Planning helps you allocate specific times for different activities, ensuring that nothing important gets overlooked. Set your routine to match your energy levels, accomplishing the most difficult tasks during your peak hours. Use a digital calendar or planner to stay organized and on track.
- **Be consistent:** Consistency is key to making a routine stick. Try to follow your schedule as closely as possible each day. Over time, your routine will become a natural part of your life.

## Assignments & exams

Some of the tasks you will be asked to complete are written assignments, group projects, presentations, and exams during your time in post-secondary. Most campuses have centres or services that provide support in writing, studying, and tutoring depending on the subject matter. Remember these services are available to support you to be successful, do not feel ashamed or embarrassed when seeking services.

Learning Centre (Mohawk College, 2025; Wilfrid Laurier University, 2025b)

- The name of the centre may vary between campuses (learning services, writing centre, academic support, student success centre, etc.)
- These centres provide consultations with writing help (getting topics started, drafting an outline, reviewing your written draft for feedback)
- Workshops on writing tips and studying

- Drop-in hours for writing support
- Tutoring options in areas such as Math, English, and Science (this may vary depending on your campus)
- For one-on-one consultations, you may need to use their online booking system to make a reservation to reserve a spot

Please check out your campus services for more information.

If you are feeling anxious and nervous with exams coming up, please refer to CICMH’s infosheet on “Test and Exam Anxiety” for helpful tips, which can be found in the resource section at the end of this toolkit.

### Reflective activity:

- *Review the tips outlined in CICMH’s Test and Exam Anxiety infosheet*
- *Try to visit your learning centre on campus. Try to find the learning centre services on your campus website. Remember to save or tab their site for future reference*

### Post-secondary culture: The hard truths

The post-secondary experience may look and feel different amongst students. For Indigenous students, this can be eye opening and could feel like a slight culture shock for some. For instance, the culture in university is very individualistic, competitive, and focuses on academic achievement (Interdisciplinary Development Initiative [IDI] in Applied Indigenous Scholarship, n.d.). This may go against many Indigenous beliefs, values, and customs. Depending on the size and location of campus, university and college may have complex systems to access and navigate. However, as an Indigenous student there may be certain barriers and challenges you may face when entering a post-secondary institution. The experiences highlighted below are some hard truths that many Indigenous students face during their time in post-secondary. We have provided suggestions to try and overcome these obstacles.

#### **Classroom environment (Canel-Çınarbaş & Yohani, 2019; IDI, n.d.):**

- Indigenous content is often overlooked, excluded, or minimalized in course content
  - Try to add an Indigenous lens, your personal journey/narrative to the content. This could be reflecting upon how an Indigenous perspective may differ or compare to western philosophy and worldviews. Bringing your lived experience and applying it to the content (if possible)

- o Try to include (if possible) Indigenous authors, perspectives, stories, and/or histories in an assignment or paper
- Curriculum often portrays Indigenous peoples in a historically inaccurate way and something of the past
  - o During class discussion or online forums, share current stories and or events happening within Indigenous communities to highlight the present time
  - o Apply a critical lens and critique the common stereotype of Indigenous people through assignments and/or open discussion
- Depending on the course, often there are low numbers of other Indigenous students in attendance
  - o Don't let this intimidate you, remember you are here to pursue your academic dreams and goals
  - o You are an example for future generations and can share your story with them
- Indigenous students have shared some of their professors may ask them for their input, or thoughts on a matter addressing Indigenous people and or customs which puts them in uncomfortable positions as they are put on the spot
  - o You are not required to provide input on Indigenous customs/content. You could set a boundary with faculty etc. For example, stating, "I'm sorry, I am not comfortable sharing or speaking on this matter." "I'd prefer not to answer thank you".
  - o If you feel comfortable sharing, this is an opportunity to share your narrative and personal journey with the class. Take this chance as an advocate, provide a voice and perspective that is often overlooked

**Campus environment (Canel-Çınarbaş & Yohani, 2019; IDI, n.d.):**

- Lack of Indigenous representation on campus - this can be due to a limited number of Indigenous staff, faculty, and/or students seen on campus.
  - o Try to get involved on campus and explore what your Indigenous student services offer (clubs, workshops, events, etc.)
  - o Connect with Indigenous staff and faculty on campus

- Indigenous culture, values, and ways of knowing are often excluded amongst certain campuses.
  - Seek support and reach out to an Elder, Knowledge Keeper, or your campus' Indigenous student services
  - Reach out to your local Indigenous friendship centre for cultural-related events and workshops
- Indigenous students report negative experiences on campus relating to (Canel-Çınarba & Yohani, 2019)
  - Second-class citizenship – Feeling undermined regarding their academic ability/performance, feelings of being treated differently when reaching out to campus services
  - Denial/dismiss of their experiences – Denying and or dismissing lived experiences of racism, culture, identity, spirituality, and history
  - Racism and discrimination - intellectual othering, segregation in the classroom, inaccurately accused of criminal behaviour/activity, and stereotyping
  - Dealing with microaggressions inside and outside the classroom – Microaggressions are defined as “a statement, action, or incident regarded as an instance of indirect, subtle, or unintentional discrimination against members of a marginalized group such as a racial or ethnic minority” (IDI, n.d., p. 30).

### **How to overcome these obstacles: Best practices**

#### **Microaggressions (McGill University, 2025):**

- Pause and breathe: Become aware of your physical responses - how is your body physically responding to this situation?
- Acknowledge the moment: You may wish to slow down or stop the conversation. Take a moment to reflect and think things through.
- Acknowledge the impact of the microaggression: For example, “I realize you may have meant that as a joke, but it was offensive” or “What you said is hurtful because ...”.
- Write your thoughts and feelings in a journal
- Reach out and speak to a friend or support person you feel safe sharing your thoughts and feelings with

### **Racism/discrimination (ONECA, 2013a):**

- If you had a negative experience using any type of service on or off campus, please make sure to report it. You can reach out to an Indigenous staff member at the Indigenous student centre if that makes the reporting process more comfortable. They will be able to assist you and bring the issue to the attention of the department on your behalf.
- Find support for your emotions if you experienced a negative situation. For example, speak to an Elder, Indigenous staff member, local agency/community, friends, or family to work through your thoughts and feelings.

Remember you are the best self-advocate on addressing issues that are happening on campus. Reaching out to your Indigenous advisor or counsellor is a great way to start the conversation about how you are feeling or what you have experienced inside or outside the classroom (ONECA, 2013a). By addressing the situation now, you are preventing future generations of Indigenous students from experiencing similar situations.

### **Reflective activity:**

- Think about your circle of safety and begin to fill out the attached worksheet “Circle of safety support”. Identify your support network, the people you trust and can confide in. Keep your circle of safety close to you and reach out to them during times of stress, emotional distress, or when you have a negative experience.

### **Homesickness**

Depending on your institution, you may have to move away from your home community to attend your post-secondary institution. There may be times throughout the semester when you feel homesick and lonely. Specifically, as an Indigenous student entering a colonial institution, the campus environment may feel isolating and your culture may not be adequately reflected or visible (IDI, n.d). In the next section of this resource (section 5), we outline helpful services and supports available on and off campus you may want to review that may help address feelings of homesickness.

Helpful ways to manage homesickness (IDI, n.d.; Indigenous Student Services Centre, 2024)

- Decorate your dorm, room, and spaces with items of cultural significance to you (traditional medicines, sage, sweetgrass, smudge, drum, etc.), items that remind you of home (pictures, blankets, artwork, candles, etc.)
- Cook and/or eat meals that remind you of home
- Practice ceremonial or spiritual practices (smudging, prayer, long house, sweat lodge, etc.)

- Depending on your campus, attend a free soup day held by your Indigenous student centre (Please consult with your Indigenous student centre for more information)
- Schedule calls with friends and family back home to maintain connection
- Reach out and talk to an Elder and/or Indigenous advisor about how you are feeling
- Engage and participate in on/off campus activities highlighting Indigenous community events and socials (e.g., Indigenous Friendship Centre, workshops, crafts)
- Connect and reach out to your Indigenous student centre and learn about programs, services, and supports available to you

For further reading and information, you can review CICMH infosheets on “Homesickness” and “Loneliness & Connection” found in the resource section at the end of this toolkit.

## **Budgeting & financial literacy**

During your time in post-secondary, you may have to find financial support, learn to budget, and find ways to manage your money. This section provides helpful resources and tips on money management in post-secondary.

### **How to manage your money (ONECA, 2013b):**

- Create a budget - total up your expenses for the month (groceries, monthly subscriptions/bills, gas, transportation pass, parking, rent, etc.). Make sure you include things like entertainment and clothing in your budget.
- For some items, you may want to do some research into how much they cost. For example, reviewing grocery flyers (available online), transportation passes per month/year (bus, subway), and parking permits on campus.
- To understand what money you have to work with per month, you want to total up your fixed expenses (costs that do not change per month- rent, parking, transportation pass, monthly subscriptions). Take your income/funding per month and subtract your fixed cost amount. The remaining amount will be for groceries, entertainment, etc. With these items the price can vary and change per week/month.
- Create a budget worksheet - small purchases add up quickly, so make sure to track your spending. Using a budget worksheet will help ensure you do not overspend. Please review the sample budget tracking worksheet found in the resource section of this toolkit.

- Make sure you are paying the lowest price and using discounts when you can – Compare prices and look for coupons and discounted items whenever you can
- Start saving – Putting small deposits aside each month can add up and create a healthy financial habit
- Remember that you can adjust your budget as needed, and it will take time and practice to successfully manage your finances

**Best practices on spending (ONECA, 2013c):**

- When buying textbooks, always try to buy used or online versions of them. Depending on your campus, at the end of the semester you can return your textbook and receive a discounted refund (but if you write or highlight in the textbook, the refund price will be reduced).
- Keep an eye out for yard/garage sales, and second-hand stores for large purchase items (furniture, dresser, shelving, office equipment, etc.)

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***Campus spotlight:** Laurentian University has established a ‘free store’ where students can come and find free clothes (adult and children), toys/books, household items, and pantry items.*

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- Try to bring a lunch or dinner from home as purchasing these meals can add up quickly during the week
- When buying groceries, look for no-name brands since they tend to be cheaper, use coupons, and look for items on sale through flyers (available online)

The Royal Bank of Canada (RBC) offers a free online course titled “Financial Wellness for Indigenous Peoples”, which teaches you how to manage your money and provides information on how to achieve your financial goals (RBC, 2025). To learn more about this online course, please visit their website found in the resource section at the end of this toolkit.

## Reflective activity:

- *With the information and resources mentioned above, create your own monthly budget planner and spending tracker for the month. At the end of the month, review your spending and savings for the month. Reflect on which areas of your spending can be improved for next month*

## Scholarships/bursaries

Scholarships: Financial awards given to students based on academic (grades) and extracurricular achievements. Deadline submissions vary based on each scholarship (for example you may need to submit before the end of the school year or each semester) (Leonard, 2020).

Bursaries: Awarded to students based on financial need, however, they can also be awarded based on academic achievements (Leonard, 2020).

Depending on the type of scholarship or bursary, it may be non-repayable, meaning you do not need to pay it back. Please review the details and specifications carefully when submitting your applications (Leonard, 2020).

Each post-secondary institution can vary on the type of awards given or offered to students. Please review your institutions list of awards, scholarships, and bursaries available to you. For further assistance or to seek clarification on the type of funding that may be available to you, please connect with your Indigenous student centre or financial officer on campus.

There are also external funding options that you can apply for to help assist with your tuition. Please review the list of external funding opportunities found in the resource section at the end of this toolkit.

## Food

The brain and body use an enormous amount of energy during the day, and we need fuel in the form of food to make them work. When that fuel isn't available, it can start to take a toll on us. Food insecurity is defined as the inadequate or insecure access to food due to financial constraints. (CICMH, 2022).

With the costs of living, food, and tuition on the rise, it may be difficult to manage costs (Indigenous Student Services Centre, 2024). Whether it is your first time away from home or you are looking to find ways to cut costs during your time in post-secondary, this section will highlight resources, tips, and financial support options that may be available or located near you. Remember that these resources and services are available for you during times of need. Please do not feel ashamed or embarrassed when accessing or seeking services on or off campus.

## **Food banks**

Food banks offer free access to pantry grocery items such as canned goods (vegetables, fruit, soup, etc.), pasta, rice, peanut butter, and more. (Western University, 2023). You can access food banks either on your campus or in your community. Please reach out to your Indigenous student centre for more information on hours of operation and access requirements.

## **Access to free and low-cost meals**

Soup days - Depending on your campus, the Indigenous student centre prepares free traditional soups. For more information, please consult with your local Indigenous student centre.

Food vouchers - For students who are finding it difficult to budget for groceries, depending on your campus there may be food vouchers or financial supports offered (Western University, 2023). Please connect with your Indigenous student centre and/or your financial aid office on campus for more information.

Community meal programs - Provide free prepared meals such as breakfast, lunch, or dinner. Services and mealtime can vary based on location. Personal ID and/or appointments may be required, so please review each programs' requirements (Western University, 2023).

To search for local community meal programs available in your area, you may want to use the following terms:

- “free community meals near me”
- “community meals for [insert university or college] students in [insert your location, city, town etc.]”

## **Campus and community resources**

To learn more about these campus community resources please visit the resource section found at the end of this toolkit.

**Cook at home** - Centennial College offers a list of recipes, and video tutorials of meal preparations that are cost effective and budget friendly for post-secondary students.

**Eating healthy on a budget** – The University of Toronto provides tips for budgeting and spending options on grocery items as a post-secondary student.

**Eating healthy** - First Nations Health Authority (FNHA) has a great list of resources and tips to eating healthy, reconnecting to traditional foods and recipes.

## **Housing**

As you make your transition into post-secondary, you may have to locate housing during your time. There are different options to look into regarding safe and affordable student housing or renting options which are outlined below.

### **Campus residence/student housing (Indigenous Student Services Centre, 2024):**

- Allows you to live right on campus with the benefit of being close to all your classes. You also may have the option to have meal plans (depending on your campus) included in the cost. For more information, please connect with your campus residence or Indigenous student services for assistance
  - Note: You may want to start the process sooner rather than later. There may be limited availability and spots gets reserved quickly amongst first year students

### **Off-campus housing (Indigenous Student Services Centre, 2024):**

- This can consist of renting an apartment, townhouse, house, or a room with different students
  - For example, searching rentals on websites such as Kijiji would be a good start
  - Please be aware of rental scams when searching for a place to rent. Please review the “housing” section for more information found in the resource section
- Have a look at the bulletin boards on the walls around campus (landlords may post their rentals with information and pictures)
  - Note: Remember to give yourself enough time to find housing in advance to the start of your semester

If you require assistance or want more information on housing options in your area, here are suggestive search terms:

- “Aboriginal Housing Support Centre in my area”
- “Indigenous housing supports or services in my area”

For further assistance on renting, housing supports, and services available, please reach out to your Indigenous student services on campus. They will be able to provide local housing services and affordable housing programming available to you.

## Campus spotlight

To learn more about these resources at McMaster University, please review our resource section found near the end of this toolkit.

McMaster University - Available on their website, McMaster provides students with helpful resources when choosing their accommodations. Even though some of the content is targeted toward McMaster students, the resources and information are important tools that can still be applied.

- **House Hunting:** provides helpful tips and best practices when choosing accommodations off campus
- **Rental Housing Law:** highlights important information about your rights, lease agreements, and the renting housing laws in Ontario
- **Money Matters:** provides helpful information regarding rental payments, and deposit payments related to housing
- **Housing Scams:** provides tips and best practices when searching for accommodations off campus to reduce your chances of encountering frauds and scams

## Community resources

To learn more about these community resources, please visit the resource section found near the end of this toolkit.

**Ontario Federation Indigenous Friendship Centres (OFIFC):** The Friendship Centre vision is to improve the quality of life for Indigenous people living in an urban environment by supporting self-determined activities which encourage equal access to and participation in Canadian society and which respect Indigenous cultural distinctiveness.

**Ontario Aboriginal Housing Services:** Offers a range of housing rental units in rural and urban areas of Ontario for self-identifying First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people as well as non-Indigenous people.

If you will be sharing a space with roommates during your time in post-secondary, please review our CICMH resources, “How to Get Along with Your Roommate” and “Roommate Agreement Template”. These resources mentioned above can be found in the resource section at the end of this toolkit.

# Section 5: Where to get support?

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There may be a time during your semester when it feels difficult to get through the day, or you feel that you are falling behind in your courses. This section will highlight some of the programs and services that may be available to you on campus or off campus. Remember that you are your best advocate when getting help. It is okay to ask for help; this demonstrates your will and personal strength for self-improvement.

*Content below is drawn from the IIC's Pathway to Wellness Resource, Touchstone 5 "How to Seek Support"*

Seeking support is an important step in maintaining your mental well-being and achieving success in your educational journey. Knowing how to effectively access and utilize available resources can make a significant difference in managing stress, overcoming challenges, and staying healthy.

## Asking for help

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Figuring out when you need help and where to ask for it is not always a straightforward process. It can be difficult to determine where, how, and why you are struggling with something. Allow yourself time for introspection and take healthy breaks from the areas that are upsetting or frustrating you. Whether it helps with learning strategies, academic courses, your mental health, financial aid, or anything else, asking for help is a sign of strength! We also encourage you to look up specific supports available at your campus.

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**Indigenous student:** *"I use other traditional methods for my counseling and support" (CICMH, 2024, p. 11)*

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**The following information is for educational purposes only. It should not be taken as medical advice and should not replace a professional diagnosis, treatment, or care.**

*Content below is drawn from the IIC's Pathway to Wellness Resource, Touchstone 3 "Mental Health and Awareness"*

## **What does mental distress look like?**

Just like how we can recognize common aspects of good mental health, we can also identify signs that someone may be experiencing mental distress. Any time you undergo big changes, move away from your community, or take on new challenges, it's important to prioritize your mental health.

### **Common signs of decreased mental wellness can include (IIC, 2024):**

- Isolating yourself from friends, family, classmates, and/or coworkers
- Lower energy than usual
- Sleeping too much or too little
- Eating too much or too little
- Increased use of/dependency on substances
- Racing thoughts
- Lower performance at school/work
- More interpersonal conflicts than usual
- Feelings of irritability, guilt, hopelessness, or worthlessness
- Neglecting hygiene and personal care
- Frequent negative self-talk

**It is important to not self-diagnose your symptoms as this could lead to negative and serious health consequences. It is important to seek out professional advice and treatment.**

## **Mental health disorders**

Everyone will have periods of higher and lower mental wellness as they deal with challenges throughout their lives. Some people may also develop mental health disorders which can be lifelong, episodic, or resolve over time. Just like physical health disorders, mental illness can impact anyone from any walk of life, and there should be no shame in acknowledging challenges or seeking help. Please check out CICMH's free online course, "More Feet on the Ground" which provides tips on how to recognize, respond, and refer someone experiencing mental health concerns. This online course and more can be found at the end of the toolkit in the resource section.

The most common mental health disorders for students in post-secondary are depression and anxiety disorders. If you think you are experiencing depression, anxiety, or any other mental illness, please reach out to health professionals in your community or at your post-secondary institution for support and to explore treatment. Mental illness can often be well-managed through different combinations of therapy, medication, self-management, connection, and community. Individuals with mental illness can live wonderful lives, sharing their gifts and identity with the world.

## Practice self-advocacy

Getting support often takes skills in self-advocacy. Be aware of your rights and what you are entitled to. Do not be afraid to ask for what you need to succeed and stay healthy. Take the necessary steps to follow through with the support plans and advice given to you. This might include attending regular counseling sessions, following a health plan, or participating in academic support programs.

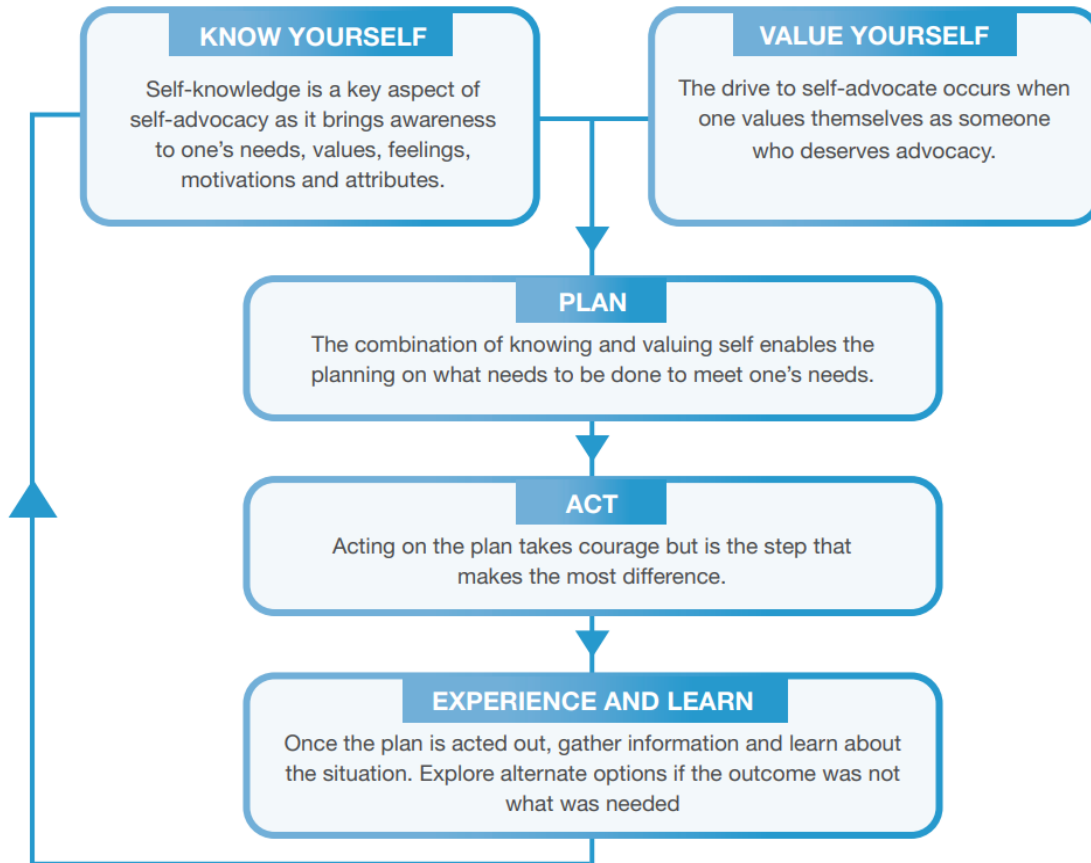


Image retrieved from "Transitioning from Post-Secondary to the Workforce" (CICMH, 2023a)

CICMH podcast: "The Importance of Indigenous Students Getting Engaged on Campus" - Throughout the episode, Sophia shares her experience as a student leader and advocate, highlighting the value of engaging with Indigenous student services on campus. She reflects on the importance of connection to culture, community, and well-being as an Indigenous student in post-secondary, and how these services create spaces of support, belonging, and resilience. You can access the podcast episode and more found at the end of the toolkit in the resource section.

## Services available on campus

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### A) Indigenous Student Centre (Cambrian College, 2025b; Laurentian University, 2025)

The Indigenous student centre provides culturally appropriate supportive services and programming to Indigenous students (Status, non-status, Inuit, and Métis). The type of services offered may vary based on your campus, but may include cultural, individual, academic, and transition support. The Indigenous student centre provides a welcoming and safe space that helps you stay connected to your culture. Please note that the name of the Indigenous student centre may vary from campus to campus. You may want to search the following terms on your campus website to find your Indigenous student centre:

- “Indigenous services”, “Indigenous student centre”, “Indigenous student services”

Type of supports/services (Cambrian College, 2025b; Wilfrid Laurier University, 2025a):

- o Provide a cultural space on campus where students can smudge daily or have a quiet space to reflect
- o Host various activities such as community circles, cultural teachings, drumming, singing, art workshops, potlucks/soup days, etc.

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**Student experience:** *“Cultural practices, crafting, things like that to improve mental health. I attended a ribbon skirt workshop, and I was so happy about it for a month after. Things like that really help with reconnecting and working on self-care. I also met a lot of staff from my institution I didn’t know. It was a great opportunity to meet new people! I feel comfortable with reaching out to staff. Also access to medicines! Easy access!” (CICMH, 2024, p. 18)*

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### Reflective activity:

- Try to find your Indigenous student centre’s webpage on your campus website. Once you find it, save or tab the webpage and try to answer the following questions:
  - o What type of services and supports do they offer Indigenous students?
  - o Who are the Indigenous staff that work there?
  - o Where is the office or centre located on campus?
  - o Are there any upcoming social or information events happening at the Indigenous student centre?

- *Try to find your Indigenous student centre on campus and get familiar with the resources available for you*

### **Staff available**

Unfortunately, smaller campuses may result in a reduced number of staff available to offer specialized supports. It is important to seek resources and/or help from someone who will fully understand you, create a safe space, and instill trust within you. As you navigate through your semester and services on campus, you may encounter change in staff or staff transitioning to different roles in various departments.

Indigenous Student Advisor (Georgian College, 2025; Wilfrid Laurier University, 2025b):

- One on one appointments
- Advocate on your behalf in various situations
- Financial aid guidance (Ontario Student Assistance Program (OASP)), scholarships, bursaries, the Post-Secondary Student Support Program (a federal aid program available to Status First Nation and eligible Inuit students), etc.)
- Assistance with course selection and changes
- Referrals to supports and services available on or off campus
- Provide support for academic petitions and appeals
- Assist with emergency support (financial, wellness, and academic)

### **Elder (Georgian College, 2025; Indigenous Student Services Centre, 2024):**

- Provide one on one support, guidance, and encouragement
- Help students maintain and achieve wellness and life balance through mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual supports
- Bring Indigenous ways of knowing, culture, teachings, and language into post-secondary campuses

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**Indigenous student:** *“I would relate more to an Elder than a counsellor. Elder understands intergenerational trauma and counsellors do not understand what it feels like to be Indigenous student.” (CICMH, 2023c, p. 31)*

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### Indigenous transitions navigator (Laurentian University, 2025):

- Provides support and assistance to first year students
- Delivers a transition orientation program (explores post-secondary life, expectations, study skills etc.)
- Supports developing a workplan for the semester or academic year

### Indigenous counsellor (St. Lawrence College, 2025; Wilfrid Laurier University, 2025a):

- Traditional healing
- Culturally safe approach
- Understanding your Indigeneity (reconnecting to your Indigenous culture)
- Wholistic wellness (mind, body, and spirit)
- Emotional support in areas such as grief, stress, anxiety, etc.

### Peer mentor (Georgian College, 2025):

- Senior level student who provides guidance and support
- Assists in navigation of supports

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**Indigenous advisor:** *“The sooner they [Indigenous students] begin to access services, the better equipped and connected they can be.” (CICMH, 2024, p. 50).*

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- ✓ **Important tip:** Remember to tab/save the dates on a calendar for upcoming deadlines for course withdrawal, tuition payments, exam schedules, reading week, etc.

For more information or to book an appointment online, you could search “academic success advisors” or “academic advising” on your campus website to find your academic advisor.

## Reflective activity:

- *Take the initiative and introduce yourself to one of the Indigenous staff members on campus either through email or in-person, whatever feels most comfortable to you.*

### **B) Accessible Learning (Cambrian College, 2025a; CICMH, 2023; Western University, 2025a)**

“Accessible learning services provides supports and services to students with a variety of disabilities and conditions may be eligible for academic accommodations, including conditions that are permanent, temporary, episodic, chronic, etc.” (CICMH, 2023b, p. 42).

Accessible learning services provide reasonable academic accommodations based on your needs as long as it meets the requirements of the course and program. \*Please note that it is highly recommended and encouraged for students to register at the earliest moments (preferably before classes begin in every semester). The type of services and accommodations may vary based on each campus, so please consult your campus accessibility advisor for more information. Below is a list of some of the services and supports that may be available to you.

- Testing accommodations (e.g., writing exams in a quiet location, extra time when writing exams)
- Access to bursaries (e.g., specifically for those students with disabilities)
- Advisor services (e.g., check in with students, assist with application process)
- Classroom supports (e.g., accessible versions of PowerPoint slides and other documents on course websites)
- Assistive technology (e.g., braille textbooks, computer equipped with special software)
- Learning strategies (e.g., instruction for students with learning disabilities and attention disorders, learn to understand your unique pattern of cognitive strengths and weaknesses)
- Assessment services (e.g., assist with setting up and organizing learning disability assessments)

### **Information required to submit for accommodations:**

- An Identification Placement and Review Committee (IPRC)/Individualized Education Plan (IEP/PEI)
- A recent Psycho-Educational Assessment
- Relevant medical records
- High school transcript
- Previous accommodation letters

Please note that submitted documentation needs to be completed by a regulated health care professional, references a diagnosis of your condition, outlines the functional impacts you will experience in an academic environment related to your disability, and outlines your accommodation needs (Western University, 2025b).

**Types of health care professionals (CICMH, 2023b):**

- Physicians (medical doctors)
- Psychologists
- Psychiatrists
- Occupational therapists
- Physiotherapists
- Registered psychotherapists
- Social workers
- Nurse practitioners

If you have difficulties trying to acquire or find the required documentation, please seek assistance from your accessibility advisor for help with documentation and submission questions. Please consult the “FAQ for Students” page found in CICMH’s Accessibility and Accommodations toolkit in the resource section of the toolkit.

To help locate your accessibility services on the campus website, you may want to use the following search terms:

- “accessible learning”, “accessible education”, “accessibility services”

**C) Student Wellness Centre**

The student wellness centre provides services and resources to support your mental and physical health throughout your semester. Your wellness department on campus may be referred to other names such as:

- “student wellness centre”, “counselling services”, “health and wellness centre”

**Types of services offered (Seneca College, 2025; Western University, 2025c; Wilfrid Laurier University, 2025c):**

- Counselling services: offers individual or group counselling to support emotional and mental health needs. Depending on your campus, one on one appointments, consultations, and drop-in or walk in appointments may be available. Appointments can be done in person, over the phone, or virtually (depending on your campus). To book an appointment or inquire about the type of supports and services offered, please visit their dedicated webpage on your campus website.

- **Medical Clinic:** If you require non-emergency medical care and services, your campus medical services may provide medical assessments, testing, treatment of injury, referrals to specialists, immunizations, sexual health care (testing/treatment), first aid, etc. Medical staff may include physicians, nurses, dieticians, and other health care providers available on campus. To book an appointment or learn more about the type of medical services offered, please visit their online webpage, give them a call, or visit their services in person on your campus. Please check the hours of your medical centre on campus as it may vary day to day.

To find your medical clinic on your campus website, you may want to use the following search terms:

- “health services”, “medical clinic”, “medical services”

Please note when using medical services on campus, you must have a health insurance card such as OHIP or UHIP or other provincial health plan with you. Not all services may not be covered by your health care plan, meaning there may be additional costs you may have to pay (Seneca College, 2025; Western University, 2025c).

### **Reflective activity:**

- *Try to identify the type of medical services your campus offers and think about the following questions:*
  - o Does your campus have health care providers available to setup an appointment?
  - o Where can you access sexual health care, contraception, testing, etc.?
  - o Can you obtain a medical note to excuse your absence due to illness?
  - o What are the hours of your campus medical services?

Please review CICMH’s FAQ sheet for students within the Accessibility and Accommodations toolkit.

## **Services and supports available off campus**

There may be times when you require support or need to seek out services on campus, however due to limited service hours available or a conflict with your personal or course schedule, it may be difficult to access services. If you require supports or services after hours, there are a few options you can seek off campus. You can also speak with your Indigenous student advisor for more information about off campus services and resources in your area. Below are a few examples of where to look for helpful resources and services which can be found in the resource section of this toolkit.

- **Indigenous Friendship Centre:** Most regions and cities have an Indigenous Friendship Centre. The centre can provide culturally safe support services and programming such as healing, wellness information, cultural teachings (drumming, singing), and financial, housing, and family support.
- **Aboriginal Health Access Centres (AHACs):** Indigenous based health care organizations that provide traditional healing, primary care, cultural programs, health promotion programming, and social support services to First Nation, Métis, and Inuit communities.
- **The Southwest Ontario Aboriginal Health Access Centre's (SOAHAC):** Provides wholistic approaches to health care while combining western health practices to their services. Through Indigenous teachings, services address your physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual healing.
- **Métis Nation of Ontario:** Provides resources, services, and supports using Métis cultural perspectives. Please check their website for more information.
- **Métis Nation of Ontario Cultural Commission:** A great resource to gain information, and re-educate yourself on Métis culture, perspectives, and way of life.
- **Tungasuvvingat Inuit:** Offers social support, cultural activities, employment and education assistance, youth programs, counselling, crisis intervention, and more.
- **The Inuuqatigiit Centre for Inuit Children, Youth and Families:** Provides cultural, educational, recreational, and social support services to children, youth, and families to Ottawa's growing Inuit community.

To try and find Indigenous health care clinics or primary care in your area, you may want to use the following search terms:

- “Indigenous health care near me”, “Indigenous health services near me”, “Indigenous medical clinic near me”, “Aboriginal health centre near me”

## A) Mental health services

Please note you can find all of these resources and more in the resource section at the end of this toolkit.

- GOOD2TALK - provides free confidential supports services for students in post-secondary through phone, text, online (chat) and a peer community. You call **1-866-925-5454** or text “GOOD2TALKON” to **686868**, or message Good2Talk online.
- Hope For Wellness Helpline - Provides 24/7 support either through phone or online (chat) to all Indigenous people in Canada. You will be talking to trained culturally competent counsellors available in English, French and some Indigenous languages. Your conversations will be kept private and personal information will not be shared. You can give them a call at **1-855-242-3310** or please visit their website for more information and other resources available.
- Talk4Healing - Offers free 24/7 support, and resources to Indigenous women faced in crises available through phone, text, online (chat). Give them a call at **1-855-554 HEAL (4325)** or visit their website to begin your online chat.
- Kids Help Phone - Support for First Nation, Inuit and Métis youth. Offers free 24/7 confidential, virtual mental health support. You can connect to an Indigenous volunteer crises responder by text or online message by typing “FIRSTNATIONS”, “INUIT” or “METIS” to **686868** for youth and **741741** for adults.
- 9-8-8: Suicide Crisis Helpline - If you are in crisis or dealing with thoughts of suicide or worried about someone else please reach out to **9-8-8**. You will be connected to a trained responder who will listen without judgement, and will provide support and resources to help you.
- Ontario Structured Psychotherapy’s (OSP) Culturally Safe Pathway: provides psychotherapy services and resources to First Nation, Inuit, and Métis peoples in Ontario living in an urban or reserve setting.
- Connex Ontario: Mental Health Helpline - If you feel the need to chat with someone about anything related to your mental health, ConnexOntario can offer that support and helpful resources 24/7. Services can be conducted either over the phone, text, online (chat) or email. Resources available extend to experiences of mental health, gambling and addictions treatment services in Ontario.
- Bounceback - A free program to help manage depression, anxiety, stress and other mental health experiences through working with a personal coach and access to supportive tools and resources.
- Métis Nation Mental Health & Addictions Crisis Line – Offers in person, video call or phone support with a mental health/addictions professional. Special programming is also offered addressing mental health and addictions. Please call either **1-877-767-7572** or **1-800-263-4889 Ext. 7**.

## Reflective activity:

- Identify at least three of the mental health resources mentioned above you would like to learn more about. Think about the following questions to ask yourself:
  - What types of supports do they provide?
  - Do they offer external resources available on their website?
  - Do they offer services in other languages, besides English?
  - Which type of service fits your comfort level? Do you prefer to text, chatting online, or talking to a trained professional in person when discussing your personal concerns?
- Remember to keep a list of resources and supports available to you. Save them on your phone, computer, journal etc., so that they're easily accessible.

By combining the resources available on campus with these external supports, you can create a comprehensive wellness plan that addresses all aspects of your health and well-being. Remember, seeking help and utilizing available resources is a sign of strength and a crucial step towards achieving your academic and personal goals (IIC, 2024).

## Taking action of your symptoms

**Seeking professional medical advice is important when finding healthy solutions to manage your symptoms.**

*The following section content is drawn from the IIC's Pathway to Wellness Resource, Touchstone 5 "How to Seek Support"*

## Identify your needs

- Assess your situation: Take some time to reflect on your current challenges and what type of support you might need. This could be academic help, mental health support, physical health services, or emotional guidance
- Recognize your symptoms: Pay attention to signs of stress, anxiety, physical health issues, or academic struggles. Understanding your symptoms can help you determine the appropriate type of support

## **Reach out and make contact**

Once you have identified a resource that suits your needs, the next step is to reach out and make contact. For medical, counselling, or academic support, schedule appointments in advance. Use online booking systems or contact the service directly by phone or email. Some services, like health clinics or tutoring centres, may offer walk-in hours. Take advantage of these opportunities for immediate support.

## **Communicate your needs clearly**

- **Be honest and open:** When seeking support, be honest about what you are experiencing. Clearly communicate your symptoms, challenges, and what kind of help you are looking for.
- **Prepare questions:** Before your appointment or meeting, prepare a list of questions or topics you want to discuss. This ensures you cover all your concerns and get the information you need.
- **Follow-up:** If the initial contact does not meet your needs, do not hesitate to follow up or seek additional support. It may take time to find the right resources and people who can effectively help you.

## **Utilize support networks**

In addition to support services, do not forget to lean on your relational support system. Reach out to friends and family members who can offer emotional support and practical advice. Having a strong personal support network is invaluable. Engage with peer mentoring programs, study groups, or student organizations. Peers can provide relatable advice and support based on their own experiences. Seek guidance from professionals such as academic advisors, counsellors, or health practitioners. Professional support can offer structured and expert assistance tailored to your needs.

Seeking support is a proactive step towards maintaining your well-being and achieving your goals. By identifying your needs, researching available resources, reaching out for help, and practicing self-advocacy, you can effectively navigate the challenges of your educational journey. Remember, support is available, and taking advantage of these resources is a key part of your success.

## **Reflective activity:**

- *By using the tools and resources mentioned above, expand your circle of support by adding contact information of services and staff you can reach out to when you need support or are in an emergency.*

# Section 6: Taking care of your mental health

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As you move through your semester during post-secondary, remember to take care of your mental health. As you attend courses, complete assignments, balance personal life, work life and family matters, it is also important to take time for yourself. Having tools and resources around you are essential in helping you find healthy and wholistic approaches to cope and adapt to stressors in post-secondary.

*The following section uses content drawn from the IIC's Pathway to Wellness Resource, Touchstone 3 "Building Emotional Resilience"*

## How to build emotional resilience

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**Emotional resilience** is the ability to bounce back from setbacks and handle stress and challenges in a healthy way. It is about staying strong and keeping a positive outlook even when things get tough. Emotional resilience helps you adapt to change, recover from difficulties, and maintain your well-being.

Benefits of being emotionally resilient:

- Helps you cope: Resilience allows you to deal with stress and difficult situations more effectively
- Improves mental health: People who are resilient tend to have better mental health and less anxiety and depression
- Builds confidence: Overcoming challenges can boost your self-esteem and confidence.
- Supports personal growth: Facing and overcoming obstacles can help you grow and become stronger

Building emotional resilience:

- Develop a positive mindset – Try to see challenges as opportunities for growth. Practice gratitude by writing down things you are thankful for each day.
- Building strong relationships - Spend time with people who make you feel good about yourself. Share your feelings and listen to others.

- Take a moment for yourself - Make sure you get enough sleep, eat healthy foods, exercise, and take time for relaxation and hobbies. Set aside time each day for activities that help you relax and recharge.
- Learn from challenges - Reflect on past challenges and think about what you learned from them. Use those lessons to handle future difficulties.
- Set realistic goals - Break down big goals into smaller, manageable steps. Celebrate your progress along the way.
- Stay flexible - Accept that change is a part of life and try to go with the flow. Be willing to adjust your plans if needed.
- Seek help when needed - Reach out to friends, family, or professionals when you need help. Asking for help is a sign of strength.

### Reflective activity:

- *Think about how emotional resilience will benefit your well-being during post-secondary. What tips do you think can be added to your routine to either build or improve your resiliency?*
- *What kind of supports have you used that have been helpful to you?*
- *When was the last time you did something that you enjoyed?*

### Medicines

During moments of stress, anxiety, and feelings of uneasiness, you may want to consider using traditional medicines to help reduce these feelings. Sacred medicines can be used every day and/or for ceremonies (Anishnawbe Health Toronto, 2000; lehstóserinon:nha, n.d.). “Medicines are the gifts of healing and in all forms, they contribute to mental, physical, spiritual, and emotional health” (lehstóserinon:nha, n.d. par. 3). Below is a description of each of the four sacred medicines, their purpose, and how you can use them in your daily routine. Depending on your campus, traditional medicines maybe available for you to use. Please consult your Indigenous student centre for more information.

### **Tobacco:**

- Tobacco was given as a way to speak with the spirit world. Through offering tobacco (i.e., placing tobacco in the fire), you can communicate your feelings and thoughts. It is given to Elders, knowledge holders, as an offering to express appreciation and gratitude for their knowledge and advice (Anishnawbe Health Toronto, 2000; lehstóserinon:nha, n.d.).



### **Sage:**

- Sage is a stronger medicine that is most often used in ceremonies to release negative energy and thoughts from your body through 'smudging'. The next section will highlight and explain the purpose of smudging (Anishnawbe Health Toronto, 2000; lehstóserinon:nha, n.d.).



### **Sweetgrass:**

- Sweetgrass is commonly used in smudging, similar to sage. The 21 strands braided together illustrate the strength and bond we have for one another but also represent the seven generations before us, current, and future generations to come (Anishnawbe Health Toronto, 2000; lehstóserinon:nha, n.d.).



### **Cedar:**

- Cedar represents strength, comfort, and safety as it provides shelter for many animals. Cedar can also be used when fasting or during a sweat and can be made into a tea or be bathed in for healing and restorative purposes (Anishnawbe Health Toronto, 2000; lehstóserinon:nha, n.d.).
- Seneca roots for headaches and pain (Métis Nation British Columbia, 2021)
- Muskeg tea to relieve fever (Métis Nation British Columbia, 2021)
- Pine and spruce needles to reduce chest and sinus congestion (Métis Nation British Columbia, 2021)



For more information on these traditional medicines and others, please reach out to your Indigenous advisor and or Elder on how to properly use these medicines.

## **Smudging**

Smudging is a cultural practice in which you burn one of the various medicines (cedar, sage, tobacco, sweet grass etc.) to cleanse your mind, spirit, and body. It is a way to remove any negative feelings, thoughts, and energy away from one's body. Smudging can also be conducted in a room, outside, or on campus (Trent University, n.d.).

### **How to Smudge (Trent University, n.d.)**

Cup the smoke in your hands and waft it over yourself to cleanse your body (much like how you would use water to wash your hands and face). It is customary to remove eyewear and cleanse the eyes and head first.

<b>Body Part</b>	<b>Purpose</b>
Head	To cleanse our mind so we may think clearly and in a kind and gentle way
Eyes	To cleanse our sight so we see all things that are good and to look at others in a kind way
Mouth	To cleanse our words so that we may speak in a kind and non-judgmental way
Ears	To cleanse our ears so we can hear all things in a good way and find the goodness through anything negative
Heart	To clear away hurt or negative feelings from our heart

Optional: Some people may choose to also smudge their feet to cleanse their steps, and their back to cleanse troubles and lift the weight of worries.

Please note if you decide to smudge on campus, please consult your campus guidelines and protocols. Protocols are in place to prevent triggering the smoke alarms on campus. For assistance or for more information, please connect with your Indigenous advisor.

Please review the resource section at the end of this toolkit for a short video clip on the purpose of smudging and/or to practice a smudging prayer.

## **Ceremony**

Ceremonies vary from nation to nation amongst Indigenous communities across Turtle Island, and protocols will also vary depending on each community. Depending on your campus, your Indigenous student services may host or encourage participation in various ceremonies held on campus or nearby community. Participating in ceremony is a great opportunity to build your social circle, reconnect

with your culture and through a holistic approach to find balance, and improve your wellness (Trent University, n.d.). Below are a few examples of ceremonies that may be hosted by your campus, friendship centres, or local Indigenous communities (Trent University, n.d. p. 25).

- **Sweat lodge:** Used to purify the body, mind, and spirit. Participants enter a lodge made from maple saplings covered in canvas. The lodge is completely closed and void of any light. Superheated rocks, referred to as Grandfathers, are heated in a fire and brought into a centre pit. Water and medicines are poured onto the rocks, creating a steam bath. Songs and oratory are offered by the conductor.
- **Feasts:** A feast is a ceremony where traditional and other foods are smudged and spoken for in prayer or thanksgiving. A “spirit plate” is prepared, with an offering of tobacco, as an offering to the spirit world. The feast is shared with all participants, usually beginning with the ceremony conductor, their helpers, Elders and Knowledge Holders, and then followed by all other participants.
- **Sunrise ceremony:** Used to celebrate together and give thanks for the day. Usually includes a tobacco offering, water offering, and the sharing of berries.
- **Pipe ceremony:** Tobacco is smoked in a sacred pipe by a pipe carrier. Personal or collective prayers are offered in the ceremony. Pipe ceremonies may take place in association with other ceremonies.
- **Life celebrations:** There are specific Indigenous ceremonies for new births, weddings, adoptions, clan celebrations, fall harvests, memorials, and funeral rites.
- **Music/dances:** Take some time to listen, observe, and participate in traditional songs and dances. For example, folk music, the Red River Jig, a local pow wow, longhouse etc.
- **Church:** Attend for prayer and/or services.

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**Indigenous student:** *“From when you are little you are taught to respect the fire. What is said at fire, stays at the fire. There is a mutual respect. It would be beneficial to our health. Helpful to have counsellor, medicine man, Elder around the fire. I do better by talking it out. When you hold eagle feather you share what is heavy in your heart.” (CICMH, 2023c, p. 35)*

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To learn more about the different ceremonies available on your campus, please reach out to your Indigenous student centre or advisor for information.

Content below is drawn from the IIC's Pathway to Wellness Course, Touchstone 3 "Physical Health and Wellbeing"

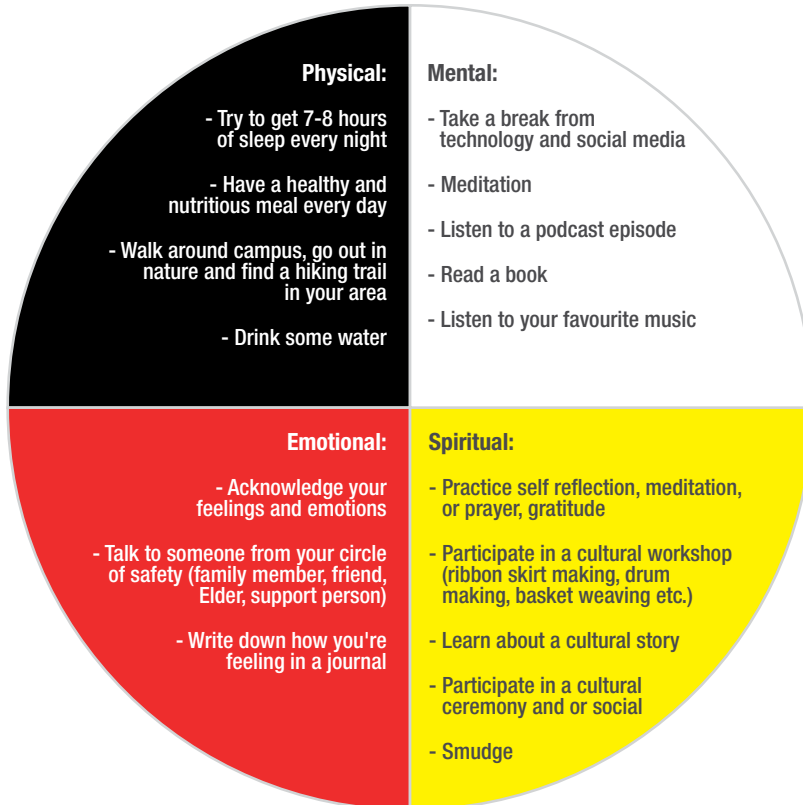
### Returning to the land

Getting back on the land and enjoying the scenic beauty of Mother Earth is a great way to reconnect with nature and your culture. Being outdoors can reduce stress, provide mental clarity, and improve your physical health. Some examples may include:

- Taking a nice walk on a hiking trail
- Going out on the water to canoe or kayak
- Taking some quiet time to fish, hunt, and/or trap during the season
- Building a fire outside

### Maintaining wellness (IIC, 2024; University of Guelph Student Life, n.d.)

As mentioned previously, reaching out to Elders, Knowledge Keepers, using traditional medicines, and/or returning to ceremony are great alternatives to seeking support and addressing your mental health through a wholistic lens. Using the medicine wheel teachings from section 3, the diagram below outlines a suggestive approach to taking care of your well-being.



## Reflective activity:

- Create your own wellness plan using the attached worksheet, referring to the tools and resources mentioned in previous sections.

### Bringing it all together

Throughout this toolkit you have gained valuable information and helpful resources to help with your transition to post-secondary. We hope you can take these resources and implement helpful tools into your daily routine. We hope you have a better understanding of what types of supports and resources are available to you on and off campus and who you can reach out to if you ever need to talk to someone. As you continue with your education journey, remember to keep your circle of safety close and refer to your own wellness plan to stay on track.

*Questions are drawn from the IIC's Pathway to Wellness Course, Touchstone 5 "Putting the Pieces Together"*

### Moments of reflection:

- Think back to your 'why'. What inspired you to choose this educational journey and how will it continue to motivate you as you go forth?
- How will your identified gifts shape the path that you are on? Who are you and what will you offer your community and the wider world?
- What wellness goals do you have to support your health as you walk this path? Where do you seek balance and growth in your own wellness journey?
- How will you nourish yourself throughout your educational journey? How will you incorporate habits and practices that take care of you emotionally, physically, mentally and spiritually?
- How will you connect with your community, your culture, and your inner self as you embark on this educational journey? How will you use these connections to support and enrich you and what will you be able to contribute?

# Resources

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## Budgeting:

[FNMI Student Budget Worksheet](#)  
[Managing Your Money](#)  
[Managing Your Money Part II](#)  
[Money Management](#)  
[RBC course- Financial Wellness for Indigenous Peoples](#)  
[Student Budget Worksheet](#)  
[Budgeting for Student Life](#)

## Community Resources:

[First Nations Health Authority \(FNHA\)](#)  
[Ontario Federation Indigenous Friendship Centres \(OFIFC\)](#)  
[Aboriginal Health Access Centres \(AHACs\)](#)  
[The Southwest Ontario Aboriginal Health Access Centre's \(SOAHAC\)](#)  
[Métis Nation of Ontario](#)  
[Métis Nation of Ontario Cultural Commission](#)  
[Inuuqatigiit Centre for Inuit Children, Youth and Families](#)  
[Tungasuvvingat Inuit](#)

## Cultural Resources:

[How to participate in a sacred fire](#)  
[Traditional Indigenous smudging](#)  
[Connecting With Culture for Life](#)  
[Thunderbird Partnership Foundation](#)  
[Sacred medicines prayer](#)  
[The Four Sacred Medicines](#)

## External Funding Opportunities:

[Ontario Student Assistance Program \(OSAP\)](#)  
[Indspire](#)  
[Scholarships Canada](#)  
[FNIGC](#)  
[Ontario Scholarships](#)  
[Indigenous Student Bursaries Search Tool](#)  
[Metis Nation of Ontario Bursary](#)

## Food:

[Cook at Home](#)  
[Eating Healthy on a Budget](#)  
[Eating Healthy](#)  
[Feed Ontario](#)

## Housing:

[Roommate Agreement Template - Centre for Innovation in Campus Mental Health](#)  
[How to Get Along with Your Roommate - Centre for Innovation in Campus Mental Health](#)  
[Ontario Aboriginal Housing Services](#)  
[House Hunting](#)  
[Rental Housing Law](#)  
[Money Matters](#)  
[Housing Scams](#)

## Mental Health Helplines:

[Kids Help Phone](#)  
[Hope For Wellness Helpline](#)  
[Talk4Healing](#)  
[9-8-8](#)  
[Ontario Structured Psychotherapy \(OSP\)](#)  
[Connex Ontario](#)  
[Bounceback](#)  
[GOOD2TALK](#)  
[Métis Nation Mental Health & Addictions Crisis Line](#)

## Oral Stories:

[Listen to the Knowledge of Elders](#)  
[Winter stories](#)  
[Stories- Traditional Knowledge](#)  
[Tale of Nanaboozhoo and the birch tree](#)  
[Teachings in the Air](#)

## Online Colouring Book:

[Native Wellness Colouring Book](#)  
[Urban Iskewew](#)  
[First Nations Health And Wellness Colouring Book](#)

## Post-Secondary Experience:

[Post-Secondary](#)  
[Experiencing Cultural Safety And Security in Post-Secondary School](#)  
[Healthy Platonic Relationships - Centre for Innovation in Campus Mental Health](#)  
[Student-Parents Caring for Children - Centre for Innovation in Campus Mental Health](#)  
[During a microaggression: Assess and respond as well as you can](#)  
[Making Friends on Campus Part 1 - Centre for Innovation in Campus Mental Health](#)  
[Making Friends on Campus Part 2 - Centre for Innovation in Campus Mental Health](#)  
[The Importance of Indigenous Students](#)  
[Getting Engaged on Campus - Centre for Innovation in Campus Mental Health](#)

## Stress:

[Stress & Anxiety - Centre for Innovation in Campus Mental Health](#)  
[Test & Exam Anxiety - Centre for Innovation in Campus Mental Health](#)  
[Coping with stress using traditional methods](#)

## Time Management:

[Top time management tips for students](#)  
[Three Time Management Tips to Improve Your Productivity](#)  
[Tips for Success](#)  
[Mystudylife](#)  
[Power Planner](#)  
[Microsoft Planner](#)  
[Todoist](#)

## Transition Experience:

[Welcome to Transitions - Transitions - ONECA](#)  
[high school to post-secondary](#)  
[post-secondary to post-secondary](#)  
[Urban Services](#)  
[Remote to Urban - Transitions - ONECA](#)  
[Staying Safe](#)  
[Ontario Universities Indigenous Student Resources page](#)  
[Indigenous Applicant Support \(College\)](#)

## Transition Programming:

McMaster University- [Gaᑏadaᑏihwahni:ya:s Transition Program for Indigenous Learners](#)  
Western University- [Indigenous Student Orientation Day](#)  
Cambrian College- [Indigenous Transition Program](#)  
Fleming College- [Bishkaa: Orientation And Mentorship Program](#)  
Wellness:

## Wellness:

[Loneliness & Connection - Centre for Innovation in Campus Mental Health](#)  
[Homesickness - Centre for Innovation in Campus Mental Health](#)

[The Winter Blues - Centre for Innovation in Campus Mental Health](#)  
[Emotional Regulation - Centre for Innovation in Campus Mental Health](#)

[Rest & Sleep - Centre for Innovation in Campus Mental Health](#)  
[CICMH-AccessibilityAccommodations-Toolkit v2.pdf](#)  
[CICMH Boundaries Infosheet EN V2.pdf](#)

## **E-Learning:**

[Improving Your Rest and Sleep - Centre for Innovation in Campus Mental Health](#)  
[Managing Stress and Loneliness - Centre for Innovation in Campus Mental Health](#)  
[MFOTG: Recognize, Respond, Refer and Reflect - More Feet on the Ground](#)

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