



UNIVERSITY of NEBRASKA
LINCOLN



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BACKGROUND

Sexual violence, or *sil okihan* (Lakota for severe violations of a sexual nature), is a major public health crisis that disproportionately impacts Indigenous relatives. In our research, we have found that during a six-month period, 1 in 4 Lakota middle and high school girls report experiencing sexual violence. Sexual victimization leads to numerous short- and long-term psychological, behavioral, physical, academic, economic, and social consequences. Sexual violence devastates Indigenous communities. The importance of preventing sexual violence cannot be overstated.

Sexual violence among Indigenous peoples is rooted in colonization and multiple historical traumas as well as ongoing systemic racism and oppression. Research has also identified effective strategies to prevent sexual violence, which is perpetrated largely by boys and men (many of whom have their own histories of sexual violence victimization and other traumas).

First, although perpetrators are always responsible for sexual violence, research suggests that empowerment self-defense (ESD) is a powerful strategy in reducing risk for sexual violence. ESD teaches girls and women to recognize risk and resist using verbal and physical skills against a potential attacker (who is almost always someone known to the victim). ESD also more broadly builds girls and women's confidence, self-efficacy, and feelings of worth and mattering. ESD can also be healing to survivors and contribute to social change by transforming rigid gender roles that limit girl and women's potentials. Contrary to some misperceptions, research suggests that ESD is not victim blaming; ESD does not increase risk for physical injury; and ESD does not make girls aggressive or violent. Indeed, the point of ESD is to prevent violence and promote peace.

Second, research suggests that several key factors protect against (or reduce) boys' and men's risk for perpetrating sexual violence. This includes healthy masculinity (including healthy expression of emotion often tied to trauma), understanding the importance of seeking consent and respecting girls and women's voices and boundaries, and bystander intervention (i.e., safety and effectively intervening to prevent sexual violence and changing community norms to be intolerant of sexual violence).

The IMpower program is built on decades of research identify (1) why sexual violence happens and (2) how to prevent sexual violence using developmentally appropriate, culturally grounded, contextually relevant, and gender transformative approaches. Please note that what is below will be adapted to include linkage of course content/skills to Lakota culture, values, and virtues. However, overall structure and content will not change given the importance of program fidelity to ensure optimal impact. Instructors are Indigenous (mostly Lakota) adults.

IMpower Overview

IMpower is a school-based program for K-12 students developed to prevent sexual violence. Based on best practices in prevention sciences, the classes vary based on age and gender. K-5 classes are mixed gender and then middle and high school classes are different for boys and girls. Middle and high school youth can also select the class they would like to attend.

IMpower teaches middle and high school girls how to protect themselves from violence via empowerment self-defense. IMpower teaches middle and high school boys healthy masculinity, bystander intervention, and respecting boundaries. All classes include the tell campaign; we reiterate the importance of reporting and encourage students to “tell and tell and tell” until someone believes them, and they get the help they need.

IMpower for Elementary School Children in Grades K-2

IMpower ESD education for children in grades K-2 rests on a foundation that children at this age are much more aware of and capable of impactful response to unsafe situations than we normally give them credit for. IMpower is implemented in areas where children are exposed to many forms of violence at young ages and our class strategies reflect these experiences. We want children to know that it is ok to resist unwanted attention and touch. We use puppets and skits to teach body privacy, good touch/bad touch, yes and no feelings, saying no effectively, and what to do when that no is ignored. Children learn verbal and physical skills they can use to be safe now and for the rest of their lives.

IMpower for Elementary School Children in Grades 3-5

IMpower class for children in grades 3-5 is a delicate balance between basic fear-free safety strategies progressing to skits outlining common abuse scenarios. Classes for this age group include activities to ensure accurate naming of private parts, good touch/bad touch, saying no effectively, impactful boundary-setting techniques, and awareness and response roleplays that include physical self-defense skills. The class ends with children participating in a full-force drill with their peers and instructors cheering them on alongside the resounding and powerful collective sound of NO!

IMpower for Middle School Girls

Middle school is a time of great transition and as girls’ bodies mature, they often receive unwanted attention. This attention can be very confusing to girls who are not used to being treated objectively or having sexual comments directed at them. This unfamiliarity raises their vulnerability to grooming and predatory ploys. The initial classes focus on awareness and identification of risk as well as verbal skills like saying no effectively, recognizing and

responding to predatory ploys, setting boundaries, warnings of consequences to continued harassment and alerting others to become allies in conflict situations. Later classes focus on physical skills and include close target skills to use when an attacker is too close and not respecting your no or the situation is escalating to unwanted touch or physical violence. Girls are taught the goal of self-defense is to *get away to safety*. ALL physical skills are chosen for their ability to disable an attacker immediately in order to escape quickly and safely.

IMpower for Middle School Boys—Sources of Strength

Sources of Strength (SOS) middle school curriculum was developed to prioritize understanding boys at this specific and critical developmental stage. This is a period of great transition—physically, emotionally, socially, spiritually, and more. Boys will learn skills to manage the unavoidable violence they may be exposed to early in their lives. Boys learn calming techniques, how to resist harmful gender stereotypes, strategies to step out of the cycle of force and avoid the suffocating, dangerous aspects of life in the “man box.” Boys also receive an overview on puberty to help relieve concerns about the changes they are experiencing at this time. They will discuss how peers become an especially important influence in their lives and how pressure to conform to negative social norms can impact their journey to manhood. SOS also focuses deeply on the safety and wellbeing of boys as well as their role in respecting others, including girls. Boys will be challenged to look deeply into their lives and articulate what it means to have ‘a life worth living’ to serve as a guide on their journey to becoming a healthy, happy, peaceful Lakota man.

IMpower for High School Girls

This class offers our most sophisticated level of ESD. Verbal roleplays and scenarios use truthful language to match the threat level for this age group of girls. We examine relationships from an overall view of personal empowerment. High school girls receive three days of verbal self-defense skills that include de-escalation and negotiation skills, saying no effectively, recognizing and responding to predatory ploys, setting boundaries, warning of consequences to continued harassment, and alerting others to become allies in conflict situations. Physical classes include close target skills to use when an attacker is too close, is not respecting your no, or things are escalating to unwanted touch or physical violence. Again, the goal of self-defense is to *get away to safety*. ALL physical skills are chosen for their ability to disable an attacker quickly in order to escape quickly and safely.

IMpower for High School Boys—Your Moment of Truth

The IMpower curriculum for high school boys is based on the search for a new way to present positive masculinity and an approach to sexual violence prevention that is grounded in helping boys to be their best selves. The result of this curricula-designed goal is the concept we call, “Your Moments of Truth” (YMOT). The entire curriculum is built around this one very simple but incredibly powerful concept. A moment of truth is a situation in life when you are put to the test - morally, emotionally, spiritually. With Moments of Truth, something is at stake that has personal importance to you; this provides boys an opportunity to find their inner courage and practice ways to take action if another person is at risk for or is actually being harmed. In YMOT, boys roleplay and practice a host of scenarios to gain confidence and skills in many common but challenging life situations,

including sexual violence. Boys are empowered to recognize the harmful nature of rape myths and resist them, understand and practice consent, and take action to prevent sexual violence that aligns with their heart and their values and Lakota virtues. YMOT, like the other IMpower programs, is rich in opportunities for seamless alignment to Lakota culture, values, and virtues.

All curricula are continuously adapted to include linkage of course content/skills to Lakota culture, values, and virtues. However, overall structure and content will not change given importance of program fidelity to ensure impact

**IMpower Elementary Curriculum Outline:
12-Hour Intervention for Students Grades K-2**

Class 1: Empowerment Self-Defense Basics
Class 2: Five Fingers of Self-Defense and Verbal Skills
Class 3: Weapons, Targets, What's Free What's Open
Class 4: Close Target Skills
Class 5: Boundaries and Strikes
Class 6: Full Force Drill

**IMpower Elementary Curriculum Outline:
12-Hour Intervention for Students Grades 3-5**

Class 1: Empowerment Self-Defense Basics
Class 2: Types of Attack and Verbal Skills
Class 3: Boundaries and Awareness
Class 4: What's Free, What's Open and Close Target Skills
Class 5: Strikes
Class 6: Full Force Drill

**IMpower Girls Empowerment Self-Defense Curriculum Outline:
12-Hour Intervention for Students 6-12**

Class 1: Empowerment Self-Defense Basics
Class 2: Target-Test-Attack, Ploys, Awareness, Intuition, and AAP Scale
Class 3: Boundaries and Verbal Skills
Class 4: Weapons, Targets, What's Free What's Open, and Close Target Skills
Class 5: Strikes and Chokes
Class 6: Full Force Drill

**IMpower Sources of Strength Curriculum Outline:
12-Hour Intervention for Students 6-8**

Class 1: Introduction to Sources of Strength
Class 2: Puberty
Class 3: The Man Box
Class 4: Cycle of Force
Class 5: Situations and Skills
Class 6: Taking My Sources of Strength with Me

**IMpower Your Moment of Truth Curriculum Outline:
12-Hour Intervention for Students 9-12**

Class 1: Introduction to Your Moment of Truth
Class 2: Awareness and Courage
Class 3: Sexual Violence and Consent
Class 4: Intervention
Class 5: De-escalation, Negotiation, and Consent
Class 6: Preparing for Your Next Moment of Truth

Curriculum Fit

The schools serving Oglala Lakota children include schools operated by the state and by the Tribe.

Our curriculum is consistent with the policy and laws for both. First, in terms of the state, South Dakota Codified Law [12-22-6.1](#) indicates that schools should provide “character development instruction.” This includes “honesty, self-discipline, self-respect, sexual abstinence, ...regard for the elderly.” IMpower teaches this code of conduct.

Second, in terms of the Tribe, our curriculum adds further dimensions to the [Oceti Sakowin Essential Understanding & Standards](#) through providing education on honoring our relatives in our everyday behaviors and highlighting how this respectful behavior is consistent with traditional ways and the Lakota virtues. While it contributes to many standards, our teachings specifically strengthen:

- OSEU 2: Identity & Resiliency (standard 2.1) Demonstrate knowledge of the Oceti Sakowin people’s understanding of the interrelationship of spiritual, physical, social and emotional health.
- OSEU 4: Kinship & Harmony (standard 4.2) Describe the traditional behavior patterns, codes of respect and values promoted within the Oceti Sakowin tiospaye.

All our programming includes elements of character development and the ties to traditional Lakota ways and Lakota virtues.

