



Genetic Memory

How Trauma Can Change DNA

Targeted Resources for Tribal Child Welfare, April 2018

Emerging science is pointing to a broader understanding of genetics and what many indigenous cultures have long believed: past memories, experiences, and traumas can be passed on through DNA. The resources below share introductory information on genetic memory (also known as ancestral memory, genetic transmission, or even intuition) and the interconnectedness between genetics and intergenerational/historical trauma, PTSD, and adverse childhood experiences.

[Intergenerational Trauma: Understanding Natives' Inherited Pain](#)

This collection of articles from *Indian Country Today* combines historical/intergenerational trauma resources and emerging scientific proof with personal stories (stories that may be difficult or triggering for some readers).

Included in the compilation are articles such as: [Trauma May Be Woven Into DNA of Native Americans](#) (which introduces epigenetics science and the idea that genes can carry not only DNA, but also traumatic memories) and [We Have to Know It to Heal It: Defining and Dealing With Historical Trauma](#).

[Lasting Effects of Trauma Reaches Across Generations Through DNA](#)

Hear from Amy Bombay, Anishinaabe from Rainy River First Nation and Professor of Psychiatry at Dalhousie University in Halifax, as she discusses genetic memory. "Indigenous elders often say that memory is in the blood and bone, that our stories are passed not just verbally but through a kind of genetic memory."

[Eduardo Duran: Healing the Soul Wound](#)

This podcast features psychologist and author Eduardo Duran as he discusses historical trauma and the soul wound. [Healing the American Indian Soul Wound](#), a Chapter by E. Duran, B. Duran, M. Yello Horse Brave Heart and S. Yellow Horse-Davis, is included in the *International Handbook of Multigenerational Legacies of Trauma*.

[Genetic Memory: How We Know Things We Never Learned](#)

This Scientific American article presents Dr. Darold Treffert's position on "genetic memory". Treffert offers an intriguing review of this concept and why people may know things that they've never learned.

[Can Trauma Be Passed to the Next Generation Through DNA?](#)

This PBS video presents findings from a study that suggests children may be genetically impacted by trauma their parents experienced. The study, released in 2016, focused on a specific gene (FKBP5): [Holocaust Exposure Induced Intergenerational Effects on FKBP5 Methylation](#). Findings demonstrate how life experiences can produce adaptations and chemical effects in DNA that are passed on to future generations.

[The Science of Suffering: Kids Are Inheriting Their Parents' Trauma. Can Science Stop It?](#)

This article looks at inherited traumas through various cultural lenses and incorporates emerging scientific research.

Tools from NCAI

Learn more about genetics research and gain access to tools designed to answer common questions and concerns from the [NCAI American Indian & Alaska Native Genetics Resource Center](#).

You may also be interested in:

[Intergenerational/ Historical Trauma & Adverse Childhood Experiences](#)



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