

# CULTURALLY-BASED PRACTICES

**Culturally-based practices** are culturally-rooted customs, behaviors, values, and beliefs passed down through generations that function as “informal systems of support.” These culturally-based practices form part of a socially dynamic framework of assistance provided by and to individuals by their families, friends, and communities.

A culturally-based practice relies on intergenerational knowledge-sharing of customs, ancestral history and heritage, traditional practices, and relationship structures that function as key elements which provide comfort, security, trust, and healing for the individual and the broader community.<sup>24</sup> These culturally-based practices provide a safe space for individuals to talk about and share their lived experiences without the need for explanation or justification of feelings. There is an innate shared understanding among the community.

Culturally-based practices are deeply ingrained within an individual and a community, so much so that their existence may often go unnoticed as individuals have come to naturally rely on and integrate these practices into their daily life. These practices may be employed daily as part of significant life experiences and/or during times of distress and illness. Sometimes, they are very present and intentional - like building an altar - or they are less visible but evident through the social connections that exist, such as relationships with elders or aunts or communal bonds developed through shared activities such as prayer or healing circles.

## HOW CULTURALLY-BASED PRACTICES IMPACT MENTAL HEALTH

For generations, culturally-based practices have been erased, set aside, hidden away, or utilized in secret. The efforts to erase these practices are a cornerstone of the oppressive and violent actions implemented toward diminishing the history, value, and pride in BIPOC and QTBIPOC communities<sup>25</sup>.

As a result of these aspects of historical trauma, individuals and communities modified their behaviors and actions to keep themselves safe, out of harm’s way, and to protect the practices from erasure. Unfortunately, the long-lasting impact of these behavior modifications resulted in individuals being unaware of culturally-based practices or hesitant to engage in them out of fear.

However, it is important to shed light on and engage in culturally-based practices in order to heal. By learning about and embracing culturally-based practices, individuals and communities can begin the process of understanding the impacts of historical trauma, reclaiming the honor and pride of their ancestors, their historical knowledge, and the power that exists in connecting with one’s community through shared values, beliefs, and customs.<sup>26</sup>

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## EXAMPLES OF CULTURALLY-BASED PRACTICES

Each individual and community has an array of culturally-based practices that forms part of their daily lives and social interactions<sup>27</sup>. It is important to keep in mind that these practices may not be utilized by all individuals or communities. Instead, it is up to the individual to determine what works best for their experience.

Below are a few examples of culturally-based practices utilized across various communities.

PRACTICE	DEFINITION	BACKGROUND	EXAMPLES
Healing or prayer circles	A practice where individuals come together to provide support and assistance to one another.	Historically focused on indigenous practices of communal bonding and assistance, these practices focus on the gathering of individuals where comfort and healing can occur in a sacred non-judgemental space.	A range of activities can occur within the realm of the circle of which some examples include the sharing of personal experiences, breath work, chanting, and collective prayer.
Traditional healers/practitioners	A person who uses culturally-rooted and traditional knowledge to address the well-being of an individual.	Within each cultural group, there are a variety of healers that focus on utilizing practices passed down through generations. Oftentimes, traditional healers are lumped together because they fall outside of the spectrum of the Western medical model. However, healers are unique to the communities they are a part of and engage in a variety of practices from herbalists to spiritualists and more.	Medicine men/women, spiritualists, shaman, and diviners.
Multigenerational households	An intentional practice where individuals from various generations live together in a shared space.	This practice is most often found among families and communities from collectivistic societies where familism, or the emphasis on group unity/cohesion, is dominant.	The group of individuals living within the shared space may vary, but is often made up of grandparents, adult children, and spouses of adult children, siblings, and offspring.
Kinship systems	A system of reciprocal social relationships between individuals who may or may not be blood-related but are connected socially through extended family ties.	Kinship systems are based on the existence of a network of social relationships created between individuals who have shared values and beliefs and who come to form a cooperative support network of shared responsibilities. Oftentimes, kinship systems are created for childrearing, strengthening of familial bonds, and as informal systems of support among a community.	Examples of kinship systems are present across various cultural groups including comadres/compadres, play cousins, aunts and uncles, and godparents.
Storytelling/Oral traditions	Practices focused on the sharing of experiences, ancestral history, and knowledge through verbal communication aimed at preserving cultural customs and values.	The verbal nature of these practices protects individuals from persecution and enables a broad group of people to take the information and share it.	Storytelling often occurs through the delivery of spoken word, poetry, folktales, singing, and an array of performance arts.
Energy healing/clearing/cleansing	Practices based on the belief of dynamic interconnectedness between the individual, their environment, social networks, and energy forces that may affect overall well-being.	Practices tied to healing and cleansing are present across cultural groups and vary in the rituals and forms of implementation. Oftentimes these practices focus on addressing energy changes for the individual, such as imbalances between an individual's external environment and physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being.	A few examples of energy healing and cleansing include smudging, limpias, sweat lodge rituals, reiki, and feng shui.

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