

Last week I had the privilege of having lunch with Dr. Martin Brokenleg, co-author of *Reclaiming Youth at Risk*.

He and his colleagues have become internationally known for their seamless blending of Aboriginal child-rearing philosophies with Western psychology. Their approach is based on creating environments that nurture growth.

I was reminded of a time when I had the opportunity to work in several First Nations communities on the Island. One of the ideas I incorporated at that time, and subsequently used in general populations later, was the concept of the four dynamics that co-exist within human beings.

Each of us is a physical, mental, emotional and spiritual being.

I began to notice the common issue of imbalance within the four elements in the lives of many people. Some people were all physical, while others were all emotion. I met people who were totally cerebral and thinking was god. I also came across a few people who were only concerned about their spiritual side, to the detriment of everything else.

Quite often individuals do not realize they are directing all of their energies in one direction.

Some do realize it but they make the decision to do so because they believe they have chosen the most important part to achieve well-being.

One of the activities I asked people to complete was inspired by the medicine wheel, an ancient indigenous symbol that has many forms and meanings throughout the world.

One common form is that the circle or wheel is divided into four equal parts. Using the most fundamental configuration of the medicine wheel, I would ask participants to name the four quadrants of the circle: physical, emotional, mental and spiritual. In each section, the individual would write an exhaustive list of all the things he or she did to maximize this realm of life.

The objective was to create a visual to identify which areas of life needed more attention. It was very unusual for someone to end the activity with equal contributions in all four areas. This was a very interesting exercise that often raised profound insights.

Dr. Brokenleg and his colleagues have identified the four elements in the circle that support healthy parenting as generosity, belonging, mastery and independence.

Think about your child's development and your parenting style through the lens of generosity, belonging, mastery and independence. What do you do that promotes belonging? What do you do that teaches skills and values? How do you support your child's capacity for independence? Is generosity valued in your family circle?