

# #7 Isolation, Alcohol Abuse, and Cognitive Delays

The Chief Tribal Judge asked me to meet with a girl recently seen in juvenile court. This child was 12 to 13 years of age. The Judge expressed concern regarding comments made by the child that she had recently engaged in “butt sex” with her boyfriend. The child further stated that it was safe to engage in anal sex because she would not get pregnant. The girl shared that her “boyfriend” was 10 years old. She had just met him when he came to visit with an uncle and three or four other boys. The boys and the uncle had since left the area to return to the “cities.”

The family lived in a remote reservation area and experienced several areas of difficulty, including transportation limitations, overcrowding in the home, and food insufficiency. Extended family members were known to have significant substance use problems, mainly excessive alcohol use. The girl’s grandmother was the primary caregiver, but she was suffering from chronic health problems. Various family members would come and go from the home. School was a positive place for the girl because she would be fed and cared for. However, she had a history of poor school performance, and it was suspected she experienced developmental delays. The tribal prosecutor scheduled the hearing because of various welfare concerns involving the girl and other children in the family.



## Teaching

American Indian families may face multiple chronic issues that will make prevention and intervention efforts very difficult. Along with these chronic issues, Native youth may experience on-going trauma that is compounded in their daily life. Though incredibly challenging, it is vital to understand that in order for any intervention to be successful, the whole circle of a child’s life must be engaged.

