

Recognizing the diversity of traditional teachings, language, and ceremonial protocols among our THAC Membership, and IPHCC staff. The following are collective understandings of ceremonial protocols that we respectfully ask you to follow during our upcoming gathering. These are intended to build awareness to those attending gatherings who may not have had opportunity to attend Indigenous events that include ceremony. These are not intended to be exclusionary.

# CEREMONIAL PROTOCOL

## **Abstinence of Substance use**

All participants of the ceremony are encouraged to refrain from use of substances such as alcohol, mind altering or illicit substances on the day of and/or up to 2 days prior to attending a ceremony. In various Indigenous teachings, alcohol and substances that impact clear thinking are considered to carry their own energy that can affect ceremony. Those who are not clean of substances prior to attending the ceremony will not be excluded from attending the ceremony and are welcome to observe. It is encouraged to be honest with the conductor, or ceremony helper, and let them know that you will be observing.

## **Moon Time - Menstrual Cycle**

Often this is referred to as moon time and comes with many teachings. Women on their moon time are held in the highest regard and are honored as life-givers. When on your moon time (menstruating), energetically and spiritually, this is a powerful time for Women, and much respect and care are needed. Women on their moon time are encouraged not to handle sacred items, tobacco or feast food. Women are encouraged to let the ceremony conductor, or ceremony helpers know if you are on your moon time, and direction will be provided. You will not be excluded from attending the ceremony and are welcome to observe. It's important to note that when on your moon-time, you are to only be cared for, especially at ceremonies. This means, you do not help with making feast food, cleaning, or preparing for a ceremony. Others will serve you food and help care for you.

## **Ceremonial Dress**

When attending a ceremony, you may notice a variety of regalia worn by Indigenous participants. These are not costumes, but are important traditional outfits that vary between nations, communities, families and individuals. As a non-Indigenous person, there are a few things to keep in mind when attending a ceremony.

**Skirts** – Women are strongly encouraged by the Grandmothers to wear long skirts during ceremonies or entering traditional and sacred spaces, to acknowledge that sacred connection between women, their gift to create life, and our Mother Earth (Shkawkaamig-Kwe). If you have been gifted with a ribbon skirt, you may wear your skirt

**Modesty** – The Grandmothers encourage modesty in sacred, ceremonial spaces and in ceremonies to show respect to all of Creation and to the other participants. Wearing shorts, short skirts, and cut-off tops is not appropriate. If possible, participants should wear modest clothing during ceremony.

**Hats** – Those wearing hats are encouraged to remove them when in sacred spaces and during ceremony, unless it is part of traditional regalia or affixed with an eagle feather

IPHCC is committed to inclusion and fostering safe spaces for our 2 Spirited community members. We welcome you to “come as you are” and respect your ceremonial dress may not be gender specific.

Some people display their sacred items in a special room on an altar. Others keep them in the bundle until they are ready to use in a ceremony. Some leave their feathers out as these may have been given to them to create calmness in the home. People feast their sacred items four times a year with the seasons or twice a year in the spring and fall. Some people feast them every time they conduct ceremony.

## **Traditional Bundle:**

When handling sacred items, it is important to recognize that all elements of Creation have a spirit, including animals, plants, rocks, water, the moon, and the stars. The utilization of eagle feathers within our sacred bundle, both for personal prayers and ceremonial purposes, signifies our invocation of the bird's spirit for assistance and guidance. Many Indigenous peoples adhere to Traditional Teachings and possess sacred items that serve as sources of support and direction.

A sacred bundle can encompass single or multiple sacred items. It may manifest as a small tobacco pouch worn around one's neck or comprise items bestowed upon a person by spirits, entrusted with their safekeeping for the benefit of the community. These bundles play a significant role in healing and ceremonial practices. It is believed that they contain essential elements necessary for the survival of the Nations.

The Healers responsible for carrying these medicine bundles know they do not possess ownership over them. According to our people's understanding, we do not truly possess anything, not even our physical bodies, which are returned to the earth upon death. Instead, these individuals view the items within them as gifts for the people. The Healers who take care of these bundles have been chosen by the spirits to carry on the teachings, the work and the responsibilities that come with these bundles.

## **Tobacco:**

Tobacco is held in high regard in many Indigenous teachings as one of the first medicines, and/or seen as a gift from Creator as a way to communicate one's prayers with Spirit. Offerings of tobacco are given to the conductors, the traditional healers, and knowledge keepers as a way to honor the spiritual connections taking place, and to honor what they are providing to conduct the ceremony taking place.

## **Sacred Fire:**

To start the ceremony, a sacred fire will be lit by designated firekeepers. A sacred fire is to be respected and only tobacco and feast food should be put into the fire. In many Indigenous teachings, a sacred fire has its own spirit, and fire offers us a way to connect with spirit. Firekeepers are designated to care for the fire. You are encouraged to ask any questions or speak to the firekeeper before putting anything into the sacred fire.

## **Medicines:**

Sage, Sweetgrass, Cedar, and Tobacco are four essential Traditional Medicines employed in ceremonies. Depending on the conductor and the specific ceremony, additional medicines may also be utilized. It is important to note that the handling of medicines is the responsibility of the conductor or ceremony helpers.