

Acknowledging Indigenous Cultures and Healing Together

The first stage is **Where We Are: Acknowledging and Celebrating Indigenous Cultures and Healing Together. Quadrant #1** sets the foundation for the meaningful and spiritual work contained in this Bundle.

It explores the use of five integral ceremonies useful in preventing violence against Indigenous women and girls: Naming ceremonies, Rites of Passage ceremonies, Sweat ceremonies, Sharing Circles, and Giveaway ceremonies. These ceremonies are common to many Indigenous communities, identities and ways of life. They can be used to help bring healing from trauma and pain, by bringing Indigenous men and boys back to their inherent ways of being.


Elder involvement is suggested to provide the wisdom, knowledge, and ceremonial guidance to assist in the healing processes that respect Indigenous worldviews.

A general overview of ceremonies is provided in [Background on Ceremonies on page 22](#), to highlight the benefits of ceremonies for strengthening identity and community.

Experiential Teaching: Creation of a Medicine Bundle



Creation of a Medicine Bundle for participants can complement teachings in the *Walking In Her Moccasins* Bundle. Since a Medicine Bundle is a very personal and sacred object, we believe the creation process should follow its natural course with the guidance of a culturally-competent facilitator that possesses knowledge and understanding of the teachings in the Medicine Bundle. The resources found online pertaining to Medicine Bundles are often of very poor quality and have very little to do with the type of bundles proposed here. The Medicine Bundle may contain medicines, sacred items used in ceremony, or other symbolic items meaningful to participants meant to heal wounds. The sacred medicines offered in the Medicine Bundle may also be used in everyday life. The Medicine Bundle may cleanse and release negative energy and thoughts, which may be inhibiting individuals from living in healthy ways. The sacred medicines may enable users to gain vision in their life. A Medicine Bundle may be created using a sacred wrapping such as an animal skin, cloth, or a blanket. Facilitators may create their own Medicine Bundle to model for participants, and then spend time with participants at different stages of *Walking In Her Moccasins*, creating individual Bundles with various items of importance. An Elder or spiritual leader can provide insight on how to respect and care for the Medicine Bundle and its contents. To learn how to make a Medicine Bundle, visit: <http://www.instructables.com/id/Leather-Medicine-Bag-or-Pouch/>.



Background on Ceremonies

The creator gave us ceremonies, rituals and prayers in order to help us connect to our understanding of the spirit world⁶. Ceremonies are significant and sacred to all (hu)mankind and, therefore deserving of respect⁷. Part of showing respect is understanding the protocol and the laws of each ceremony as well as recognizing that all the First Nations have been given a way to pray, each different but similar⁸.

Ceremonies are an integral part of Indigenous communities, identities and ways of life. They reinforce the collective bond Indigenous individuals have with their first mother, the Earth. They act as a reminder that all forms of life are interconnected and that it is beneficial to be in a continuous relationship of respectful exchange with all living beings. From a First Peoples' perspective, the Great Spirit manifests itself everywhere, in every living being, and is instrumental in providing guidance and nurturing human's spirituality, which is why we give thanks. There are a great number of diverse ceremonies that exist, each with unique purposes and benefits. Some contain Indigenous holistic healing practices shaped by customary approaches, beliefs and knowledge systems. Others allow expression of gratitude for the life the Creator has given, for seasonal harvests, bountiful hunts and/or to honour or assist individuals through periods of transition. Rites of passage are a form of transitional ceremonies that provide initiation into the growing responsibilities in life. As Aimee Bailey shares with the following example, ceremonies can reaffirm our roles and responsibilities towards each other (men and women):

Pipe teachings of the Anishnabe from Algonquin territory describe their ceremonial pipe as having two parts: the bowl and the stem. The pipe bowl symbolizes female power and it is derived from stone, which represents the ancestors; the pipe stem symbolizes male power and is derived from the wood of trees, representing the standing people. Joining the bowl and stem, the female and male, together ignites the life or sacred spirit of the pipe; the smoke is its breath⁹.

The potential of ceremonies to revive or reignite our traditional roles and responsibilities towards each other is immense. Some participants may not have experience or familiarity with Indigenous ceremonies and cultures, and therefore delivery of ceremonial content needs to be facilitated with all participants being equally familiar with the purposes and meaning of ceremonies. Ceremonies can be used to engage Indigenous men and boys and raise awareness about how some western constructs, social norms, and philosophies have been pulling us away from a model of exchange that is mutually beneficial, based on love and respect for Indigenous women and girls. Traditional healing practices and ceremonies are usually conducted in a circle (talking, sharing, healing or spiritual circles) providing a safe communal

6. Knight, Diane, *The Seven Fires, Teachings of the Bear Clan* by Danny Musqua, Many Worlds Publishing 2001, p. 43

7. Ibid.

8. Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre, *Cultural Teachings: First Nations Protocols and Methodologies*, Saskatoon, SK, 2009

9. Bailey, Aimee, *Anishnabe 101: The Basics of what you need to know to begin your journey on the Red Road*, 2000. *The Circle of Turtle Lodge*, p. 55.

space, which acts as a safe environment for the reassertion of collective solidarity. Fostered through a traditional healing and therapeutic lens, the main objectives for Indigenous men and boys taking part in the ceremonial activities are:

- a) Explore and unlearn violence as a behaviour;
- b) Reflect on the principle of responsibility and how it relates to their actions;
- c) Create desire for personal change; and,
- d) Foster commitment to a healthy social life.



Selecting a competent individual to lead the ceremony is of the utmost importance. Elders or spiritual leaders may be the best choice, provided they have earned the right to practice and deliver ceremonies. In selecting the ceremony leader, it is important to inquire where they earned their ceremonies and how. This is very important, because if ceremonies are done incorrectly, participants can be hurt mentally and emotionally.

In many Indigenous cultures, it is important to lead any request with an offer of tobacco to the person you are asking to do something on your behalf. This exchange embodies the spirit and sacredness of the request you are making. In the Spirit Naming Ceremony for example, the person you ask to give your name can be offered tobacco. You can make your request and if that person accepts the tobacco, then the ceremony can take place.

Five Ceremonies

Spirit Naming Ceremony

This ceremony aims to reconnect or remind participants of their ancestral connection to their culture and/or community. The naming strengthens the identity of the participant by sharing with them detailed teachings about the meaning of the name, and the roles and responsibilities that go with it. Instilling identity is the first stage of reaffirming the participant's place in his community. Participants need to be informed about the history, value and benefits of naming ceremonies, including how this is tied to local identity. Spirit Naming Ceremonies

can occur at birth, within four- or seven-year annual fasts, or alternatively, when a commitment and dedication to maintain a clean lifestyle involving ceremonies occurs. One of the greatest benefits of Spirit Naming Ceremonies is the way they bring community together to witness the naming of an individual.

Rights of Passage Ceremony

Rites of Passage for boys have the intention of situating the participant in a place of learning their traditional roles in relation to women and girls, and learning more about their true nature and identity. As Glenn Patterson noted, “Time alone permits us to connect with reality, to see what is truly there for us.”¹⁰ Living on the land alone in this way can sometimes be referred to as a Vision Quest, and involves activities such as hunting, fishing and foraging which can be empowering for Indigenous men and boys as well as women and girls. Rites of passage can encourage healthier masculinities, self-efficacy (the ability to succeed in specific situations), self-determination, belonging and identity. Fasting ceremonies are also strong examples of Rites of Passage, utilized widely within Indigenous cultures.

Sweat Ceremony

Sweat Ceremonies are used for purification, cleansing and healing of the mind, body, emotions and spirit. They can be a safe gathering space conducive to sharing and starting the healing process for individuals and communities. As Glenn Patterson noted, “The lodge (INIPI, sweat lodge, sweat house) is a ceremony of purification and a journey within the individual, a place to let go of past burdens and to make room for new life, ideas and visions.”¹¹ Many see the sweat lodge as the womb of Mother Earth. Heated stones are brought to the centre of the lodge, and water is poured on top. Participants are led by an individual that has the teachings to enable them to cleanse their physical, emotional, mental and spiritual self. Enabling Indigenous men and boys to situate themselves in a place of spirituality allows them to learn the sacredness of rebirth, knowing that the power of rebirth is the result of a women’s power. Sweat ceremonies can be useful for participants to reconnect them spiritually with their inherent ways of being. The space is conducive for discussion about original belief systems, the mainstream/colonial belief system, decolonization, history, trauma, and healing. After the Sweat Ceremony is over, a feast typically occurs.



10. Glenn Patterson, personal interview, August 2, 2017.

11. Ibid.



Sharing Circle

Sharing Circles are an essential part of oral traditions of Indigenous communities. It is the traditional way that Indigenous people come together to solve problems. It is a very effective way to remove barriers and to allow people to express themselves with complete freedom. This teaching aims to bring participants together in a sacred practice of listening that enables participants to hear each other's stories, feelings, concerns and life experiences. It is a way to come to an understanding on ways to work together to improve relationships, and to identify ways

Indigenous men and boys can support Indigenous women and girls. The Sharing Circle is like a sweat lodge without a lodge. Sharing Circles can bring healing, respect and openness. It is important that there is a gender balance and equal representation in the circle. Female presence in the circle helps with personal healing for men and boys. Everybody is equal in the circle. A Sharing Circle outline is provided in [Quadrant 2](#).

Giveaway Ceremony



A Giveaway Ceremony is performed at ceremonies and social gatherings to honour visitors who have come from near or far. For the purposes of *Walking In Her Moccasins*, the Giveaway Ceremony is designed as a compliment at the end a ceremony or series of teachings, to acknowledge the work of individuals and communities. Giveaway ceremonies exemplify the principles of sharing, honouring, acknowledging and gratitude. They are meant to act as a method of redistributing wealth and resources among peers. In Giveaway

ceremonies, community members (often elders), present gifts to participants. Often gifts are given to visitors as a show of wealth and generosity. Giveaway ceremonies are important because Indigenous community members are judged not by the amount of possessions or money they have, but how much they give away.



Feasting

Feasting is much more than a sharing of food and good company. For example, for the Indigenous Peoples of the Pacific Northwest coast of Canada, a "potlatch" is a traditional feast gathering which serves as the primary means to bear witness and confirm in public any changes in status, such as marriages, birth, death, or coming of age. Feasts are also a time to come together and reconnect with one another, which can be healing. For the purpose of this Bundle, and in the spirit of feasts, each ceremony or teaching can be accompanied by food. This is to recognize

that when we feed our spirit self, we must feed our physical self. Trauma work is hard work and uses a lot of energy, so keeping facilitators and participants strong is important when doing this work.

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