

Ningwanuk Meshquajese

Wings of Change

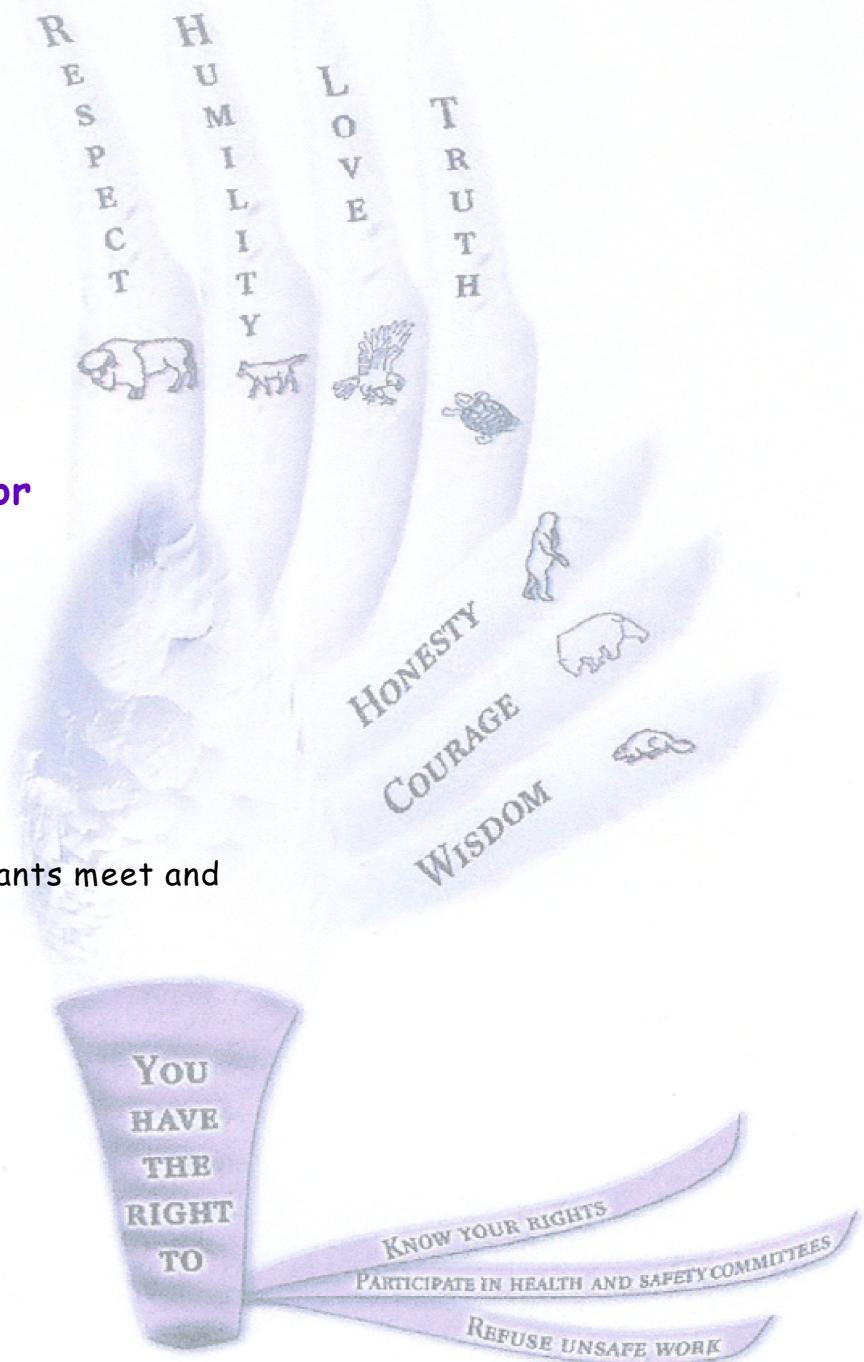
Aboriginal Workers Education and Outreach Project

7 Sacred Teachings + 3 Workers Rights = Path to a Healthy & Safe Workplace

General Information for Sharing Circle Guides

Resources

- ▶ The Circle of Life
- ▶ The Smudge Ceremony
- ▶ Activities to help participants meet and mingle



Working with the Aboriginal Community to Create Healthy Workplaces for Aboriginal Workers

**Ningwanuk Meshquajese – Wings of Change
Aboriginal Workers Education & Outreach Project**

Sharing Circle Guide Resources

General Information for Sharing Circle Guides

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Initial Arrangements: Consider

1. **Confirm the request**
 - What are their expectations?
 - What information are they requesting? Do you understand the request completely?
 - What will be the length of the workshop?
 - How many and what type of workshops will be presented
2. **Obtain Group information**
 - Number of participants
 - What sector of the workforce are they from or are they from a variety sectors.
 - How have they been previously involved with workplace health and safety issues and workplace health and safety committee work?
3. **Prepare an outline and determine support materials**
4. **Discuss your workshop with others to get feedback on your plan, resource materials, supports, etc.**
5. **Review the workshop with the organization/individual who made the request**
6. **Book Workshop room**
 - Breakout rooms, if needed
 - Size of room(s) to accommodate Sharing Circle
7. **Arrange for teaching supports (if needed)**
 - Photocopy access
 - Flip charts/markers
 - Projector
 - Audio/visual equipment
 - Cell phone access
 - Internet access
8. **Remember Accountability - Information requested from participants:**
 - Participant list and contact information
 - Attendance record
 - Evaluation form completed by participants
9. **Keep All Out of Town Receipts**
 - Transportation to, from and within the community
 - Accommodation
 - Meals
 - Submit receipt to Executive Director at OHC (949-0811)

Preparation

1. List topics you will cover and prioritize them.
2. Clearly define the presentation objective
3. Adapt activities to suit each group
 - Have alternative activities prepared
 - Determine where they will be used in the workshop
4. Prepare and review Power Point presentations, slides, and support materials
5. Select or design the handouts to be used
6. Set guidelines for the workshop, eg. breaks
7. Request fruit, juice, cheeses, and other healthy choices as workshop foods. Facilitate a 'health conscious' atmosphere. Have as many traditional foods as are available. If possible, have a feast at the end of longer workshops.

Sharing Circle Set-up

1. Arrive early. Have a few minutes of time to just relax and mentally prepare yourself
 - Stretch and Breathe deeply
 - Personal reflection or prayer
2. Dress appropriately for the group
 - What is the accepted dress in the community
 - Be neat and comfortable
3. Set up all the equipment and materials you plan to use.
4. Arrange chairs in a circle for the workshop
5. If possible get refreshments ready for the participants arrival. A well planned and smooth beginning will enable the participants to feel comfortable and can set the tone of the entire workshop
6. Be yourself
7. Greet each participant individually. You may only say "Good Morning", but acknowledge each individual as they arrive.
8. Try to start on time

Sharing Circle Dynamics

Sharing Circles

Our workshop method is drawn from age-old Aboriginal teachings and learning models. The workshop gathering will take the form of a Sharing Circle rather than the facilitator being the focus and the participants mainly as audience as in a lecture-style setting.

- Begin the circle with a prayer (possibly by a participant or Elder from the community) and a Smudge, if appropriate.
- Be aware of cultural or community sensitivities. If you are not aware of these, state that to the participants. You can ask for guidance, i.e., is the community accepting of 'traditional practices' such as Smudging? If not, what is the practice or custom? Can a Smudge be safely used in the space you are holding the workshop or will it set off the fire alarm?
- Introduce yourself and share something about what brought you to this work. You are 'The Specialist' on your own life story. Exchange stories within the workshop material with your own stories and experiences. No one can tell your life story like you can. A story about your family, friends, neighbours, or another community member is more tangible than one in which you know none of the people involved, their community or their life circumstances. Using your stories adds interest to the workshop and from the participant's viewpoint shows a personal commitment. The workshop is asking for a personal reflection from the participants and your commitment to do so will encourage theirs. In turn, participants will share their stories in the Circle.
- Ask participants to introduce themselves. You may want to use a talking stick, stone or feather.
 - Why are they here
 - What do they hope to learn from this workshop
 - Do they have a goal to achieve
- If the group is unfamiliar with each other you can use the Remember Names Game to help with introductions and to relax the atmosphere (See Facilitator's Guide, Appendix #1, Game 1). For a group familiar with each other you can use the Grandmother Spider Game (see Facilitator's Guide, Appendix #1, Game 4)
- Name tags are helpful.
- Give a brief summary of the topics you will cover, prioritizing them into Headings and Sub-Heading in order of presentation

- Set guidelines for the workshop
 - Emergency exits and procedures
 - Breaks
 - Attendance
 - Seven Sacred Teachings - display poster on wall (Respect, Humility, Love, Truth, Honesty, Courage, Wisdom)
 - Acknowledge those who arranged the workshop
 - Restate the length of the workshop
 - Inform the participants if they will receive a credit or a certificate

- Preplanning is necessary, but does not mean you cannot deviate from your plan. Your workshop should be flexible. For example, if there is or was recently an incident in the community involving some of the information/material that you planned to present later in the workshop, you might want to move it up to address the current issue. You should be ready to 'switch gears' and change or reorganize your workshop to fit the conditions or atmosphere.

The Four H's

Honour each individual in the circle for his/her knowledge and experience and for what they bring to the Circle. Each participant in the circle/workshop is there for a reason; each one brings gifts that can be brought by no one else. Sometimes a 'shadow' or disruptive person is present. Treat them the same as everyone else in the workshop. He or she has a reason for being there. Disregarding disruptive behaviour often is sufficient to defuse it.

The four H's are: **Honesty, Humility, Humour, and Harmony**. Use the four H's throughout your work.

Be **humble**. Be yourself. How you conduct and express yourself and your behaviour will reflect in the participant's attitudes and feelings during the workshop. Create a relaxed atmosphere in which participants can express their thoughts and ideas.

Honesty is necessary in your workshop. Know your material but don't pretend to know everything. Have confidence in the group and their knowledge and life experience. Someone could know the answer or a discussion could develop that leads the group to finding the answer together.

Humour - A good chuckle will keep minds open and accepting and create comfort. Nothing can relieve tension like humour.

Harmony is a necessary ingredient in a workshop. Participants expect and require a feeling of safety and security in all areas, mental, physical, emotional and spiritual.

- After everyone in the Circle has had an opportunity to speak, open the circle for discussion. Listening skills are critical in delivering your workshop materials. Listening skills take practice and can be developed. Listening, really listening, to another makes them feel valid and affirms your interest in their learning. For example, a participant asks you a question and is obviously frustrated. Paraphrase their statement or question in your own words and acknowledge their feelings. Ask if you understand them accurately. Seek to understand the participant, to see from their perspective, walk in their shoes.
- Allow time for questions and discussion, don't rush the Circle work
- Take frequent breaks so participants can get up and move around. Breaks give an opportunity not only to rejuvenate, but also to give participants a chance to discuss the material.
- Allow time for participants to fill out an evaluation and/or close the Circle with a discussion/circle to get feedback on the workshop
- If appropriate, have a local Elder, or workshop participant say a closing prayer
- Try to hold a feast or a coffee-gathering after the workshop.

The Circle of Life

The following passage is taken from the autobiography of Black Elk, a famous holy man of the Oglala Sioux, who said in 1930-31

You have noticed that everything an Indian does is in a circle, and that is because the Power of the World always works in circles, and everything tries to be round. In the old days when we were a strong and happy people, all our power came to us from the sacred hoop of the nation and so as long as the hoop was unbroken the people flourished. The flowering tree was the living centre of the hoop, and the circle of the four quarters nourished it. The east gave peace and light, the south gave warmth, the west gave rain, and the north, with its cold and mighty wind, gave strength and endurance. This knowledge came to us from the outer world with our religion. Everything the Power of the World does is done in a circle. The Sky is round and I have heard that the earth is round like a ball and so are the stars. The Wind, in its greatest power, whirls. Birds make their nests in circles, for theirs is the same religion as ours. The Sun comes forth and goes down again in a circle. The moon does the same, and both are round. Even the seasons form a great circle in their changing, and always come back again to where they were. The life of a man is a circle from childhood to childhood and so it is in everything where power moves. Our tipis were round like the nests of birds and these were always set in a circle, the nation's hoop, a nest of many nests were the Great Spirit meant for us to hatch our children. (Black Elk Speaks, pp. 198-200)

The circle is often referred to as the Medicine Wheel or the Circle of Life. It is a way of understanding the world and our place in it. The Medicine Wheel is a circular mirror, which reflects all things. The Wheel is divided into four; the number four is a sacred number.

Opening

Begin with a Smudge Ceremony to acknowledge the Creator and the Four (4) Directions. We cleanse with one or all of the Sacred Medicines. This is similar to the burning of incense by a priest. Participation is strictly voluntary.

The circle handshake can be performed to break the ice. Participants both receive and give a handshake maintaining balance and equality and breaks down barriers between the participants.

Symbols

- psychological symbol, representation, emblem, sign, letter, insignia, musical notation, example, substitute, number, designate

Symbols are a part of life, a part of ritual. They represent and express meanings, feelings experiences and beliefs. They are the language of the Medicine Wheel.

Direction

East	South	West	North
Mental	Physical	Emotional	Spiritual
Earth	Fire	Water	Air
Smudging/praying	Diet	Supports	Ceremonies
Positive thoughts	Exercise	Friends	Prayers
Educating	Walking	Relationships (Healthy)	Listening
New things	Rest	Sharing	Hope
Playing	Sweating	Forgiving	Faith
Giving mind rest	Playing	Dancing	Making love
Making love	Laughing	Hugging	Giving
Letting go	Yelling	Unconditional love	Receiving
Time for reflection	Crying	Expressing feelings	Nature walk
Belief	Singing	Making love	Visiting grandchildren
Laughing	Sounding	Playing	Feasts
Child	Dancing	Smiling	Playing
Innocence	Making love	Crying	Elder-guidance & direction
Foresight	Growth	Accepted	Life & death experiences
New life	Focus on present	Together	Buffalo
Vision	Youth	Participation	White owl
Animals	Learning	Adult	See from all perspectives
New beginnings	Warmth/Sunshine	Darkness/Nighttime	Cold/Snow
Light	Berries	Mystery	Winter
Spring	Medicines	Protection	Wisdom
Rebirth	Wood cutting	Harvest	New Sweat lodge
Sacrifice	Harvest	Bear	Backbone of Nation
Sharing	Leaves drop	Turtle	Extrovert
Affection	High noon	Healing power	Teachers
Spring	Summer	Fall	Winter
	Endurance	Mountains	Thinking/Reflecting
	Discipline	Strength	Rest
	Counsellors	Alternate reality, physical	Tree - honesty
Red	Yellow	Black	White
Redman	Asian Nations	Black Nations	White Nations, movement
Keeper of Mother Earth	Mind	Reason	Movement
	Do not suppress feelings	Hindsight	
	Introvert		
	Kindness, forgiveness		
	Openness		

The Smudge Ceremony

A Smudge is a ceremonial cleansing of one's self. It is done at the beginning and the end of the day, before participating in ceremony and at the beginning of a Sharing Circle. The Smudge Ceremony will help the participants centre or ground themselves.

Smudging unifies the energies and the people within the Circle. It can give strength to a weary person, raise the positive energy of the group and dispel negative thoughts. The smoke carries our prayers to the Creator and to our grandfathers and grandmothers of the Spirit world.

Of the four original medicine plants given to us by the Creator, Sweetgrass and/or Sage are usually burnt in a smudge. It is customary to light the smudge with wooden matches. One should remove all metals, such as watches, jewelry and eyeglasses. It is believed that metals hold, much negative energy.

Sage

- A Woman's medicine
- Women can smudge with female sage while on their time
- Dispels negative energies and brings positive
- Purification over your household door
- Female sage is a smaller plant, male sage is taller and carries the seeds
- Use male sage in thunder and lightening conditions

Sweetgrass

- The hair of Mother Earth
- Dispels negative energy, emotions, feelings and thoughts
- Uplifts the spirit
- Kindness and caring
- Pick in August or exchange gifts with someone for some
- Women should not pick medicines when on their time
- Keeps you safe on your travels
- Sweetgrass braids represent
 - mind, body and spirit
 - past, present and future
 - Grandparents, Myself, Grandchildren

Cedar

- Accepts only positive energy
- Removes negative energy and feelings from the circle, buildings, gathering areas
- Used in sweats for purification

Tobacco

- Giving thanks opens the doorway to the spirit world
- Carries our prayers to the Creator
- Offer tobacco when you pick medicines or harvest anything from Mother Earth. Make an offering before your first pick and after your last.
- Pass tobacco when you wish to ask a question or a ceremony of a Teacher/Elder/Ceremonialist. If it is accepted, the commitment is made to grant your request.
- One package of Tobacco = 1 stem + 1 bowl

You can use all, a combination of the medicines, or one of them for a Smudge. You can also use other herbs and medicines such as Lavender. Place the medicines in your cupped hand and roll into a ball between your two hands. Place the medicine ball in a shell or a clay bowl. It is preferable to use a wooden match or a

candle to light the Smudge, not a lighter. You can, but don't have to have a feather or feather fan to fan the Smudge.

In the Smudging ceremony the smoke from the smoldering plants is cupped in one's hands and used to cleanse oneself. Draw the smoke over your head to your eyes, mouth, ears, down your arms, down the front of your body to your heart and down to your feet, then draw the smoke over the back of your body. Pull some smoke toward your heart and say "All My Relations" and the Smudge-carrier will know you are done and will acknowledge this by saying "Aho". Saying "All My Relations" includes the universe and all of creation in your prayers.

We cleanse our eyes so that they will see

- the truth around us
- the beauty of our mother the earth
- the gifts given to us by our Creator
- the love shared with us through our families, friends & communities

We cleanse our mouth so that all we speak will be

- truthful
- said in a way that will empower positively
- caring and kind
- full of words of thanksgiving for our Creator

We cleanse our ears so that our ears will

- be open to the request of assistance from others
- hear only the good things and allow the bad to bounce off
- hear the music of life which surrounds us

We cleanse our heart so that our heart will

- feel the love the Creator intended for others
- will grow with us in harmony and balance
- be good and pure
- be open to show compassion, gentleness and caring for others

We cleanse our feet so that our feet will

- seek to walk gently and respectfully upon Mother Earth
- walk closer to our loved ones, friends and community and help us flee our enemies
- lead us closer to Creator

We cleanse the area we are in. You can smudge the walls, windows, doorways and corners of the room.

There is a proper protocol around the sacred medicines. If you are not sure, pass tobacco and ask an Elder from the community for advise on protocol in that community. Following are some issues of protocol that you should become aware of:

- The medicines should not be handled by any one under the influence of drugs or alcohol.
- Life-givers should not smudge or be smudged with anything but Sage while they are on their Moon Time. They are already in a purification ceremony and should not participate in two ceremonies at the same time. The Life-givers may be too powerful at this time for the males in the circle.
- A Marking Ceremony can be done to enable the Life-giver to participate in the ceremony or circle.
- In some circles women on their time are included but only Sage is used in the Smudge.
- In some communities pregnant women may be excluded so her energies may be directed toward nurturing her baby. In some communities pregnant women participate and her strength is shared and multiplied by the new life she has created.

Activities to Help Participants Meet and Mingle

Introduction

Remembering Names Game

We are all going on a picnic. What will you bring? Choose an item that begins with the same letter as your first name. Say your first name and the item you are bringing. The next repeats the first person's name and item and says their name and item. The third person repeats the first two names and items and then says their name and item. etc.

Grandmother Spider Game

You will need a ball of string or yarn. Facilitator begins by holding the end of the string and then tossing the ball of string to someone they feel they have a connection to. That person holds the string and then tosses it to another person. This game continues on until everyone is tied into the 'web' or participants see the point. Hold a discussion or Sharing Circle re:

- leave here and stay connected
- treat all like your group, family, individuals, community, the global community
- remember to listen
- listen, repeat what was said and ask if you are 'on the same page'
- accept and identify your own weaknesses and that is your work to do

Other Group Activities

Indian Musical Chairs

Set up chairs. Have a drummer play. The players will try to get a chair when the drumming stops

Re-energize

Divide into groups. Stand in a circle. Put arms straight. Hold hands. Right side = right over others left. Left side = left under others right. You should have a complete circle. One person twists under the arm of their neighbour. All follow. See if you can get turned and untangled.

Do not complain

Do not complain about anything for 24 hours.
Check in the next day
Go around the Circle the following day and self evaluate
Did you make it through 24 hours without complaining
What did you feel?
What did you learn?