

Offering Tobacco/Request to Speak

- Elders must be offered tobacco every time you ask them to share their knowledge.
 - It is very important to be specific in making your request. In some communities it can be an insult if you proceed to offer tobacco and have not followed their protocol.
 - Get to know the First Nations community and their protocol and processes before asking for assistance or knowledge. There will be protocols which explain the expectations of the person making a request of an Elder.
 - Ensure that you take the time to get to know the people in the community where the Elder resides. By doing so you will discover whether or not the Elder has an assistant/helper.
 - If the Elder does have a helper they must be given the tobacco to carry the request to the Elder. If the Elder doesn't accept the tobacco the person may be directed to another person in or out of the community who can assist with the request. They may also be told to come back at a later date.
 - Sometimes, before the request can be worked on Elders will ask you to abstain from certain activities/actions.
 - When an Elder accepts the tobacco they are accepting the request and will do her/his best to help you.
 - If they cannot do what you are asking they will say so and not accept the tobacco or the helper will come back with the tobacco and say so.
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- The exchange of tobacco is similar to a contract between two parties where the Elder is agreeing to do what is asked.
 - The person offering the tobacco also has obligations tied into the request. Those are to respect the Teachings and the Teacher. It is therefore very important that you are specific with what you are requesting or asking the Elder to speak about or share with you before handing over the tobacco.
 - As noted above - if the Elder can't assist with the request it is appropriate to ask for a referral to another person who may be able to fulfill your request.
 - When giving tobacco, place it in front of the Elder and state your request. The Elder indicates acceptance of your request by picking up the tobacco; this applies to the helper also. NOTE: If you hand it directly to the Elder you do not give him/her the opportunity to accept or pass on your request - it takes away their choice.

Tobacco can be given in a pouch, wrapped in a piece of cloth or even in the form of a cigarette. The minimum amount of tobacco is the amount needed for use in a Ceremonial Pipe, but a pouch of tobacco is still the most common form.

Tobacco is a sacred medicine. Tobacco in its natural form (kinikinik) is most common, but commercial tobacco is also acceptable. Some people have asked if a mixture of 'healthy' herbs or other medicines can be used instead of tobacco - the answer is NO. Whatever your views are on tobacco it is still a sacred medicine to Traditional Aboriginal people.

Classroom/Event

When an Elder/Guest is coming to speak at an event/or in a classroom it is expected that they have someone meet and greet them at the front door. The person(s) will welcome them and walk the guest to their seat or to the classroom. It is suggested that the greeter is at least 10 minutes early and waiting for the arrival of the Elder/Guest.

The Elder/Guest is introduced and welcomed to the traditional territory they are speaking on. In some areas the tobacco is given before the speaker is speaking to teach the importance of offering tobacco for the requested knowledge.

A gift should be prepared for the Elder and it should be given after the Elder/Guest has spoken. There should be a seat and drinking water provided for the Elder.

Honorarium

Elders are never "paid" for their "work" as it would be culturally inappropriate as it appears as though they are "selling" Indigenous knowledge. Traditional Indigenous and cultural knowledge is not, and cannot be owned by an individual or institution.

We must remember that if an Elder has traveled or has had to prepare herbs/ or make herbal remedies this takes time and money. The gift can be monetary in the form of an honorarium. Before the modern era, Elders were given food, clothing and other necessities in exchange for their help and therefore monetary gifts are acceptable if presented as a gift and not payment - in exchange for help.

Elders must never be asked to sign a "receipt" as acknowledgement of their honorarium.

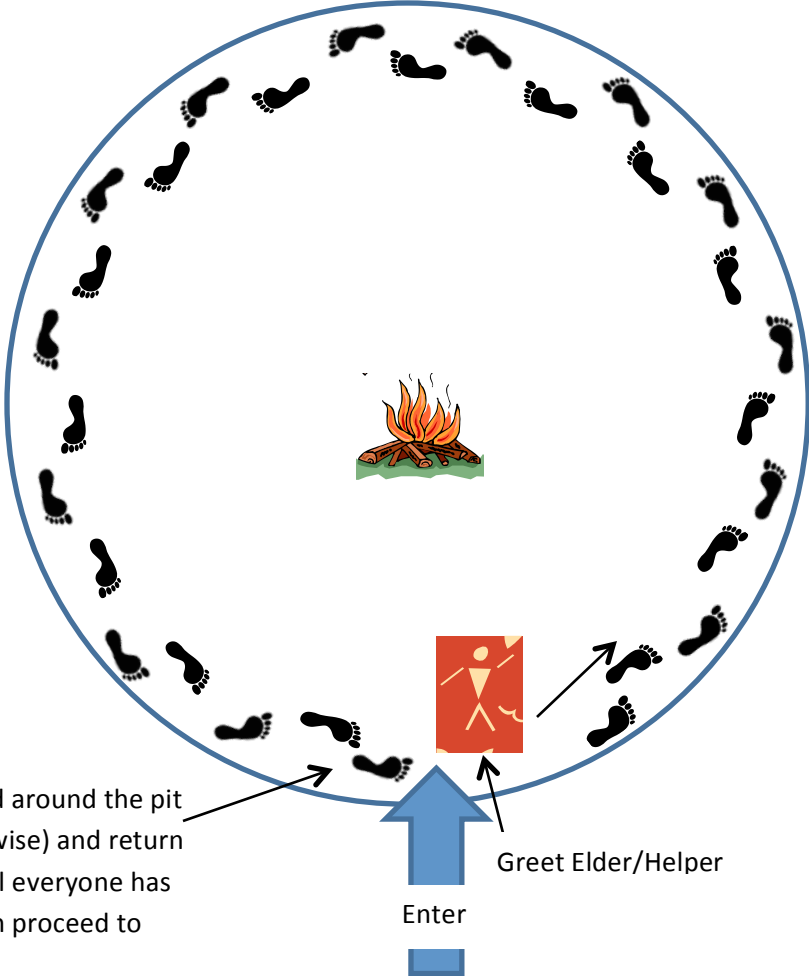
Things to do in preparation, during and after/ a visit to the Sinixt pit House or burial grounds

- Have the audience prepared beforehand. Teach about the talking stick protocol and demonstrate how to show respect when the guest or others are speaking.
- Have them learn a greeting or acknowledgement in the language of mother tribe (Lim Limpt-thank you in Sinixt-mother tribe of West Kootenays).
- Help students/guests brainstorm questions on the topic you have asked the Elder to speak on. This is preparing the audience to show respect towards the topic and especially the Elder/speaker.
- Be specific in your request on the topic of discussion prior to visiting the ceremonial pit house.
- For example: If you wish to know about the Sinixt people and their relationship to this land, their culture, and how they survived you must ensure the Elder and students are both aware that this was the request.
- Provide the teacher with resources about the 1st peoples that you are visiting. In this area books such as "Geography of Memory", "Frog Mountain; Sinixt Survival Legend", "Ghost Peoples", and "A River Lost" are all acceptable.
- Discuss with students how to show respect while they are walking the pathways (such as walking only on the pathways). Do no harm to environment, do not pick up any sticks or dig/pull out any plants. It may be wise to ask the Elder/presenter if there are any other rules that need to be adhered to.
- Prepare a thank you, such as a decorated card, or something that represents appreciation for the knowledge being shared. If you have your honorarium at hand it should be included in the card of thanks.

The Sinixt Pit house

The Sinixt Pit house is located on sacred ground. It is used for ceremonies specific to the Sinixt peoples of this territory.

If the Elder is leading you into the pit house, always remain behind him or her. Enter and move in a counter clockwise direction, this is the Sinixt protocol. (NOTE: Ensure you know the protocol as in other areas people may move clockwise both entering a pit house or a tepee.). If the Elder/helper has stopped at the entry to greet you, ensure that you stop and shake their hand before proceeding (in the counter clockwise direction). Move around the sacred fire, which has been prepared for the visitors and proceed past the Elder at the entryway and then continue to your seating. **Do not put anything in the fire, unless instructed too.**



Once you have moved around the pit house (counter clockwise) and return to the elder, wait until everyone has greeted her/him, then proceed to your seat.