



ELDERS STORY PROJECT

**A LEARNING AND
HEALING TOOLKIT**

*Photo Credit:
Arts Commons - Kim Gordon*

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The term ‘Grandparents’ is used to refer to wisdom keepers, in contrast to the term ‘Elders,’ which is a Western colonial construct. In Indigenous languages, the closest translation for wisdom keepers is ‘Grandparents,’ a term that more accurately reflects their role in preserving and sharing traditional knowledge, as well as

their expertise in navigating the intersection of Western and Indigenous worldviews. In this context, you will notice a shift in this toolkit and, more generally, within the EKCS, from the commonly used term ‘Elders’ to the more culturally appropriate term ‘Grandparents,’ as endorsed by our leaders within the EKCS.

INTRODUCTION

The Elders Knowledge Circle Society preserves, protects, revitalizes, and shares wisdom from Indigenous Grandparents and Knowledge Keepers.

Our ways
of knowing

“

Initiated and led by a group of Grandparents and Knowledge Keepers, the Knowledge Circle plays a key role in preserving Indigenous culture, enhancing the capacity of our community's Grandparents, and strengthening relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous groups.

Many of the Grandparents and Knowledge Keepers who are a part of the Elders Knowledge Circle Society are considered “technical” Grandparents who have lived experience,

hold cultural knowledge, are Storytellers and Language Keepers. Grandparents and Knowledge Keepers in the circle come from many Nations, including Blackfoot, Îlethka Stoney Nakoda, Dene, Cree, Métis, Inuit and more. The Elders Knowledge Circle Society is a Grandparent-led collective that operates from an Indigenous governance model that is different from the Chief and Council governance model imposed on First Nations people by the Crown.

We're passing knowledge on to them, to those young people. And we're also engaging with those Western agencies, those Western organizations that are stepping into our circle. Because now we're following two different types of systems, the Western and the (Indigenous) oral system.”

Pat Daigneault



United Way

Indigenous communities recognize Grandparents and Knowledge Keepers after they have participated in ceremony and cultural teachings for a number of years, and rights and teachings are transferred to them from other Grandparents. Grandparents are committed to living what they teach, helping others, and working to improve individual and community well-being. While Western and Indigenous education are not viewed or honoured in the same way, respected Grandparents and Knowledge Keepers are recognized for their Indigenous knowledge, and practicing Indigenous ways is a way of life.

THE OVERARCHING GOALS OF THE ELDERS KNOWLEDGE CIRCLE ARE:

- Create a sustainable model to protect, revitalize, and share oral knowledge and practice;
- Bridge the gap in cultural understanding and reconciliation to allow the transfer of knowledge to the next generations;
- Serve as a centralized resource for Western organizations (public, private, and non-profit) to consult with Elders and Indigenous communities using appropriate protocols;
- Establish a centralized place where knowledge and wisdom from Indigenous Grandparents and Knowledge Keepers will be preserved, protected, revitalized, and shared.

LEARN MORE AT:



Reg Crowshoe: “Who is the Elders Knowledge Circle Society & What does it mean to be a Good Relative?”
<https://www.eldersknowledgecircle.com/esp-introduction>

This introductory handbook and the supplementary resources were developed to accompany other resources (books and videos) developed by The Elders Knowledge Circle Society to support healing, learning, and engagement about the legacy of Residential Schools. Please take care and be gentle with yourself if you are finding the information included here difficult and/or triggering.

In May 2021, the unmarked graves of 215 Indigenous children were located by ground-penetrating radar at the former Kamloops Indian Residential School. While honouring the truth,

recognizing these missing children and their undocumented deaths retraumatized many Indigenous Peoples, residential school survivors, families, and communities. The trauma (whether direct or inter-generational) led to anger for some Indigenous Peoples. The Elders Knowledge Circle Society was formed in response to the growing number of unmarked graves being identified at Residential Schools across Canada to help survivors, families, and communities heal. While honouring the past, Elders and Knowledge Keepers are passionate about connecting with youth to pass on culture and language, and look forward to the future.

WHAT DO YOU WANT THE INDIGENOUS YOUTH TO LEARN FROM THIS PROJECT?



Their language, who are they, where did they come from. Our natural laws came from Creator. He gave us those songs and those stories, like from our star legends, there’s a whole bunch of information that’s there that hasn’t been tapped. But we got transfer rights in the Okan the Sundance and the Thunder Medicine Pipe, the Thunder Medicine Pipe go way back centuries. Those songs are still practiced the same as back in the 1700s.”

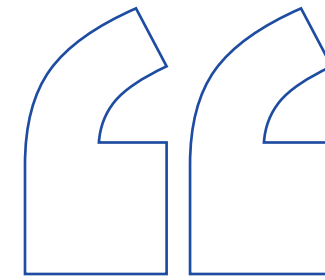
Rose Crowshoe

WHAT DO YOU WANT THE NON-INDIGENOUS TO LEARN FROM THIS PROJECT?



Our ways of being resilient is just as strong as white man ways. We have our Smudge, we have purification, we have our paint, we have our Elders to make Smudge for you and tell stories and help you heal. We got to teach our young people that it's normal, it's not something that they should be ashamed of or hide. Go out and talk to Elders and and even in the public purify yourself... I think those are so important, those are what's gonna carry our ways forward, because they're normal, they're just as strong as that white men healing."

Reg Crowshoe



When we work to understand a perspective [different] from our own, and then examine that understanding with an eye to finding connections with our own perspective, or our own worldview, we begin to create an ethical space. The key is to parallel these world views in a way that does not diminish either, and that honours both. This new way, which reflects a deep understanding of varying perspectives and values, can result in an ethical space that transforms the way we work together."

Reg and Rose Crowshoe

Dr. Reg Crowshoe explains how ethical space is a place where traditional oral practices and Western written practices are respected and parallel, providing people with a safe space to build understanding, learn and work together in harmony, bridging the gap between cultures, and activating meaningful reconciliation. This introductory handbook provides Indigenous and non-Indigenous Peoples with some information and resources that may help you on your healing and/or learning journey. Some parts of this handbook may be more relevant for

Indigenous Peoples (for example, Indigenous Healing and Ceremony); however, some introductory information is also included here for non-Indigenous Peoples to learn more about Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and doing.

To share their stories, knowledge and experience, the Elders Knowledge Circle Society has partnered with several organizations, including Arts Commons, Calgary Counselling Centre, Calgary Public Library, Ernst and Young, United Way of Calgary and Area, and the University of Calgary.



Truth and reconciliation—

*the truth
comes first;*

we have to try to get the truth first
before any reconciling can be done.”

Francis Melting Tallow

ALL MY RELATIONS— A FIRST NATIONS LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT



We acknowledge that we are all Creation's beings, and that as such we are all relatives. We honour and respect all of creation. We are thankful to our Mother, the Earth, for she gives us all that we need for life. Everything around us has spirit and we are in harmony with all forms of life, including people, animals, fish, birds, insects, trees and plants, medicines, rocks, rivers, mountains, prairies, the sun, the moon, the stars.

“It is thoughts and peaceful energies that we breathe life into when we do the land acknowledgment.”

Jackie Bromley

We acknowledge that we are all Creation's beings, and that we are all related. Leading up to September 22, 1877, multiple ceremonies took place before the making of the Treaty between the Blackfoot (Siksika, Kainai, and Piikani), the Tsuut'ina, the Îlethka Stoney Nakoda, and the Crown. This is known to the Canadian Government as Treaty 7. To the First Nations this was understood to be a peace Treaty and a land-sharing agreement. For the Crown, it was a way to acquire land and to assimilate First Nations. A year prior, the Indian Act had been passed—but the Treaty did not mention how this would affect Indigenous Nations. Over time, Calgary became home to Métis, many more First Nations, and Inuit.

“Did you know that Canada was already occupied by independently thriving Indigenous societies? In fact, the land around Calgary had been occupied by Indigenous People for over 10,000 years. With each wave of settlement, many Indigenous Peoples were displaced from their traditional lands and ways of life.”

Jackie Bromley

→
**LEARN
MORE
AT:**



Jackie Bromley: “What is a Land Acknowledgment?”
<https://www.eldersknowledgecircle.com/esp-landacknowledgment>

“

Our stories are carried

in the land,
in the rocks,
in the rivers,

and then the whole environment coexisted
in such a way that there was harmony
between all beings within Creation.”

Jackie Bromley



Making a land acknowledgment is a small but important first step in their reconciliation process between Canada's Indigenous People and those who came later."

Jackie Bromley

WHY IS A LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT IMPORTANT?

Indigenous peoples have always practiced land acknowledgments when visiting other Nations. A land acknowledgment is an expression of gratitude and appreciation that recognizes the history and continued presence of Indigenous Peoples and their enduring relationship to their traditional homelands.





“

Land acknowledgment in the spirit again of reconciliation, this is a common teaching from many of the Elders is that as human beings we did not just arrive in this time and place on our own. We carry the life stories and lived experience of our ancestors.”

Jackie Bromley

→
**LEARN
MORE
AT:**



Treaty 7 Land Acknowledgment, Calgary Public Library
<https://calgarylibrary.ca/connect/indigenous-services/land-acknowledgment/>



University of Calgary, Office of Indigenous Engagement,
 Cultural Protocol
<https://www.ucalgary.ca/indigenous/cultural-teachings/cultural-protocol>



Land Acknowledgment, Calgary Foundation
<https://calgaryfoundation.org/about-us/reconciliation/land-acknowledgement/>



We still respect the Treaty because it’s so sacred to us.”

Francis Melting Tallow



Blackfoot Crossing (Glenbow Archives NA-1237 – Glenbow Foundation, Calgary, AB)



We never surrendered the land, we never surrendered anything. It was a Peace Treaty, is how we understood, and that’s how we, we believe in it, you know. This way we really respect spirit of the Treaty.”

Francis Melting Tallow

**WHAT IS A TREATY?
WE ARE ALL TREATY PEOPLE.**

A Treaty is a formal and legal agreement between cultural groups, nations, states and/or countries. Eleven numbered treaties were signed across Canada between First Nations and the British Crown (and/or Canadian representatives) for both parties to live in peace, to share the land, and have equal prosperity and opportunity. By extension, all Canadians residing on Treaty territories are Treaty People and parties in the agreement between First Nations and the Crown.

Treaty 7 was made at the Blackfoot Crossing of Bow River in 1877 and covers southern Alberta. Treaty 7 is an agreement between the Crown and Siksika Nation, Piikani Nation, Kainai Nation, the Îlethka Stoney Nakoda Nation, consisting of the Chiniki, Bearspaw, and Goodstoney Bands, and the people of the Tsuut’ina Nation.

→
**LEARN
MORE
AT:**



Francis Melting Tallow: “What is Treaty?”
<https://www.eldersknowledgecircle.com/esp-landacknowledgment>

PLACES TO
EXPLORE IN
TREATY 7:

1	Blackfoot Crossing
2	Head Smashed in Buffalo Jump
3	Writing on Stone
4	Tsuut’ina Museum and Cultural Centre
5	Siksikaitsitapi Medicine Wheel (Nosehill Park)
6	Chiniki Cultural Centre
7	Okotoks (Big Rock)
8	Buffalo Pounds
9	The Confluence
10	Glenbow Museum
11	Galt Museum and Archives Akaisamitohkanao’pa
12	Calgary Public Library

WHO ARE
GRANDPARENTS
AND KNOWLEDGE
KEEPERS?

Grandparents and Knowledge Keepers have earned rights and responsibilities and are recognized as Grandparents or Knowledge Keepers by their community. Their knowledge is lived, and that knowledge is shared or transferred with permission to pass on to others. Grandparents are the encyclopedias and walking libraries of Indigenous nations, in all their diversity. Grandparents often provide guidance, may oversee ceremonies, and/or share teachings of their language, beliefs, customs, values, and traditions.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT
TO PROTECT SACRED
STORIES/INTELLECTUAL
PROPERTY?

While the Elders Knowledge Circle Society has shared content in this handbook, in their book, and in their video, not all shared knowledge or ceremonies can or should be documented. Face-to-face discussions, following protocol, are encouraged to explain how the information will be documented and utilized. Traditional Teachings must also be protected from cultural appropriation. Should you re-tell a Grandparent’s story or experience, it is always best to acknowledge them by name.



Our culture comes from the spirit, so knowing that practices and protocols are what protects our Intellectual Property, such as songs, through those practices, so we’ve always had a belief and our own version and understanding of Intellectual Property.”

Alice Kaquitts

→
LEARN
MORE
AT:



Alice Kaquitts: “What is Indigenous Intellectual Properties?”
<https://www.eldersknowledgecircle.com/esp-governance>

INDIGENOUS
GOVERNANCE AND
INTELLECTUAL
PROPERTY

Indigenous Governance is equivalent to natural laws, the Creator, our ceremony and prayers. The Smudge always comes first, and Indigenous jurisdiction comes from the Creator. The Elders knowledge is protected by the Smudge or Pipe with parallels with written contracts to protect the knowledge of the Elders Knowledge Circle Society.



In our Culture, the whole idea of

Reciprocity

was also a very sacred teaching that we practice. And that idea of reciprocity needs to be shared, needs to be practiced at all levels, with the many communities, with the organizations as well. When it comes to intellectual property we need to be given credit for sharing our thoughts, for sharing our ideas as well. If you want to share that story in the future, publicly, or with your family, you'll always make a reference to where that story comes from. Say, for example, "My uncle shared this story with me," and you'll name that. So you give your uncle that credit because the story came from your uncle. And that's how practices and protocols operate within our culture."

Alice Kaquits

Indigenous Governance is equivalent to Natural laws, the Creator, our Ceremony and Prayers. The Smudge always comes first, and Indigenous jurisdiction comes from the Creator.

The Elders knowledge is protected by the Smudge or Pipe with parallels with written contracts to protect the knowledge of the Elders Knowledge Circle Society.

Oral Policies: Smudge, Stories, Songs, Pipe, Language, the People and the Circle we follow. As Indigenous People we believe in Creator's power, the Smudge and our Spirit is tied to the Smudge. If we misappropriate our oral policies there are consequences to those actions. Eg. Treaty Songs are held by Knowledge Keepers who have been transferred the rights to carry and sing those Songs.



When you make reference to Intellectual Property, in our worldview, intellectual often refers to the thoughts, the ideas, and in our world these ideas may come in many different forms. Say, for example, ideas, thoughts, dreams, often come through dreams."

Alice Kaquits

INDIGENOUS + WESTERN PATHS

moving in parallel



**WHAT DOES BEING A GOOD
RELATIVE MEAN AND LOOK LIKE?:**



To be a Good Relative is how do we survive together how do we work to survive. The trees and the dirt and the animals and the birds, they are made from the same magic dust. They give their lives to help us to survive how do we help them how do we include them in our Smudge, in our prayers to Creator so that they also have a good life.”

Reg Crowshoe

**IF I AM NOT INDIGENOUS, I CAN
CONSIDER MY RESPONSIBILITY
TO SHOW UP AS A WITNESS,
A LEARNER, AND A LISTENER.**

Sitting, listening, making space, interacting, and building relationships with Grandparents or Knowledge Keepers requires humility, patience, and respect. Since the beginning of colonization, Western society has been very extractive, taking knowledge, wisdom, stories, ceremonies, and more for its own benefit.


**LEARN
MORE
AT:**



Rose Crowshoe:
“Why is the Elders Story Project so important?”
<https://www.eldersknowledgecircle.com/esp-governance>



Just being kind, in our word

Kimnapipitsin

means kindness for everybody, for the plants,
the universe, for people, everybody.”

Rose Crowshoe



Arts Commons

An **ally** recognizes that every person has a basic right to human dignity, respect, and equal access to resources. Relationship building between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people requires a certain humility to allow our hearts and minds to accept new, and often challenging, information. Being an ally is about disrupting oppressive spaces by educating others on the realities and histories of underrepresented people.^[1]

^[1] *Calgary Foundation*

An **accomplice** works within a system and “directly challenges institutionalized/ systemic racism, colonization, and white supremacy by blocking or impeding racist people, policies, and structures.” (Opportunities for White People in the Fight for Racial Justice, 2016)

HOW TO ENGAGE WITH GRANDPARENTS AND KNOWLEDGE KEEPERS

It is important to recognize that protocol is different for various First Nations, Métis, and Inuit. If you are not sure about protocol, you are encouraged to ask the Grandparent(s) or Knowledge Keeper(s) respectfully. Efforts are being made to incorporate traditional protocols into everyday practice so that Indigenous ways of knowing, in all their diversity, survive and thrive.

PROTOCOL: HOW TO OFFER TOBACCO AND MAKE A REQUEST WITH AN GRANDPARENT OR KNOWLEDGE KEEPER

If you would like to learn more about the Residential School experience and survivor healing journeys, we encourage you to meet with Grandparent(s) or Knowledge Keepers and invite them to meet with your class or group to share their knowledge and experience. Approach a Grandparent or Knowledge Keeper the same way you would approach a grandparent you love and respect. Be mindful when asking Grandparents or Knowledge Keepers to share their Residential School experience. Some Grandparents or Knowledge Keepers may feel ready to speak about their experience, while others are not comfortable.

When meeting with a Grandparent or Knowledge Keeper in Treaty 7, it’s important to offer Tobacco when you’re asking them to share their knowledge with you. Tobacco is one of the most important medicines to First Nations and Métis people in this area. Offering Tobacco is a sign of respect and shows you’re being sincere and genuine when making your request. The Tobacco will likely be used by the Grandparent or Knowledge Keeper for ceremonial purposes or as an offering to the land.

HOW TO ASK FOR GUIDANCE:

Most commonly in Calgary—recognizing that protocol will vary between Nations and between Grandparents—when offering Tobacco, you want to place the Tobacco on the table and move it in the direction of the Grandparent or Knowledge Keeper while clearly stating your request or asking your question. You must give the Grandparent or Knowledge Keeper the opportunity to deny your request by refusing to accept the Tobacco offered with the question.

They may deny your request because they may not be the right Grandparent or Knowledge Keeper to answer the question or have permission to share that information with you.

If they accept your request, they will pick up the Tobacco and assist/answer you as best they can.



Following the discussion:

It is customary to give a gift and/or honoraria of appreciation to the Grandparent or Knowledge Keeper to show that you are thankful for their knowledge, guidance, prayers, and/or blessings. honoraria is not payment for service, but a gesture of respect and gratitude. While the honoraria should respect the value of what the Grandparent or Knowledge Keeper is offering, there is no standard gifting/honoraria amount, and it is what you can pay or afford.

ADDITIONAL WAYS TO SHOW RESPECTFUL MEETING ETIQUETTE WITH GRANDPARENTS INCLUDE:

- Before a meeting, arrange and pay for parking if required and provide Grandparent(s) or Knowledge Keepers with directions.
- Greet Grandparent(s) with a soft handshake (vs. a firm handshake).
- Go in a clockwise direction around the room to allow participants to introduce themselves and where they are from.
- Let Grandparent(s) or Knowledge Keepers know why they are at your meeting and the information you would like to learn from them.
- Do not rush Grandparent(s) or Knowledge Keepers and build in extra time for discussion and storytelling.
- Understand that clear decisions may not be made at one meeting but could take several sessions.
- Provide water/coffee/tea, snacks, or a meal for Grandparent(s) and if offering a meal, Grandparent(s) should be served first.
- You may need to make transportation arrangements with the Grandparent(s) and or meet them in the parking lot if they are unfamiliar with the meeting location.

INDIGENOUS CEREMONY AND HEALING

Ceremonies and protocols differ from Nation to Nation and from one person to the next within their own Nation or Band. For many Indigenous Peoples, connecting or reconnecting to culture and ceremony is healing. Indigenous Peoples may participate in traditional healing and wellness through ceremony (for example, sweats or healing circles), plant-based medicines, art, song and/or dance.



At a time in my young life, I wanted the lodge, I wanted ceremony, because then later on in my life I got a Pipe, I got songs, I got rights and privileges to do lodge, rights and privileges to help people. And today we have what we do here today, this gathering we have here today. We have our own way of healing our own People. Not only our own people, but also Western People.”

Pat Daigneault

→
**LEARN
MORE
AT:**



Patrick Daigneault: The importance of ceremony
<https://www.eldersknowledgecircle.com/esp-ceremony-healing>

PRAYER AND SMUDGE

Ceremony and prayer can be healing. It is respectful to ask a Grandparent to open and close a meeting, workshop, event or ceremony with a prayer.

Smudging changes the energy of a space and most often takes place at the beginning of a gathering, creating a culturally safe space. Using Smudge for medicinal purposes and spiritual ceremonies is a frequent practice that involves prayer to invite the Creator into spaces for further guidance into the discussion and work for the people involved/impacted. The smoke from burning sacred medicines like sweetgrass, cedar, sage, tobacco or fungi in small amounts has cleansing and healing powers and carries people's prayers to the Creator.



Ceremony and Identity Video from Native Counseling Services of Alberta:
<https://voicesoftheland.org/digital-heritage/ceremony-and-identity>

PIPE CEREMONY

The Pipe is very sacred to First Nations people. In the past, a Pipe Ceremony was used to open negotiations between different Nations where participants would be truthful, respectful and abide by the decisions and agreements that were made during the meeting time (to seal a Covenant or Treaty). Pipe Ceremonies continue in the same way today, where two parties agree to make a commitment to work together in a good way. Tobacco that has been blessed through prayer is normally used for the ceremony. Men, women, and children may be asked to enter and join the Circle for a Pipe Ceremony in a specific way. In a Pipe Ceremony, the Pipe is passed to participants in the circle for them to either smoke or touch it.

POW WOW AND ROUND DANCE

A Pow Wow is a gathering where First Nations Peoples come together to dance, sing, feast, visit with old friends, and make new ones. Pow Wows often occur during the summer months, and the dancing and drumming to Mother Earth's heartbeat are a form of healing. There are different types of dances, such as traditional, fancy, grass, jingle, and more. The outfits worn by dancers reflect this and are known as regalia.

There are different kinds of Pow Wows; each one will have unique characteristics and traditions related to the area. The most common types are traditional Pow Wows, and competition Pow Wows: competition Pow Wows offer prizes for those dancing and drumming; traditional Pow Wows focus more on everyone being able to participate in and experience the Pow Wow.



Calgary Public Library

Each Pow Wow will have a schedule which often includes a Grand Entry, dance competitions and specials, and Closing Ceremonies. Listen to the emcee as they talk about the Dances being performed, the origins of the songs, when you may be asked to stand, and more. When the emcee announces an Intertribal Song, that means everybody can join in! (Indigenous and non-Indigenous Peoples).

A Round Dance is a Traditional Gathering of numerous Nations open to everybody in a community and is intended for healing, remembrance, and bringing people together to celebrate life. Round Dances often take place in the winter months and can last all night!

At a Pow Wow or Round Dance, there may be times when it is not appropriate to take photos. It is always best to ask permission before taking photos. Please do not touch a dancers regalia.

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**LEARN
 MORE
 AT:**



Round Dance 101: What to Know Before Your First Round Dance:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=626MhRI6aFQ>

SWEAT LODGE

A Sweat-Lodge Ceremony is a healing and purification ceremony, performed by itself or as a prelude to other ceremonies such as the Sun Dance, using the natural elements of fire, earth, air, and water to heal and cleanse. Individuals attending a sweat lodge provide the person performing the sweat Tobacco and often broad cloth (it is best to ask the host about appropriate protocol). Some Sweat Lodge Ceremonies are restricted to men, women, children or members of certain clans; at other times, the lodge is open to all. A lodge is formed in the shape of a dome, to represent the Womb of Mother Earth. A fire-pit is in the centre of a lodge, where specially chosen rocks are heated. Participants sit in a circle around the centre pit and a fire-tender passes in heated rocks, which are placed in the pit. The host prays in a sweat and may sing, use rattles, play a drum, or smoke a Sacred Pipe, inviting healing spirits into the lodge. After the ceremony is over, everybody may contribute to and join in a traditional feast, and gifts are provided to the person who performed the sweat prior to the ceremony. Non-Indigenous peoples sometimes also participate and benefit from Sweat Lodge Ceremonies. Not all Ceremonies are always open to everyone. This is not a place for curiosity.

SUN DANCE/ CIRCLE CAMP/ AKOOKAASIN

Traditionally, Sun Dances or Circle Camps are held in late spring or early summer. These are ceremonies that happen in the summer where individuals make personal sacrifices on behalf of their families or community, and together they pray for healing. You must be invited by someone from the community to attend because there are many protocols that must be followed. They are your guide and will teach you how to be in those circles.

DISCLAIMER:

Do your research and ask questions if you are unsure. Ceremony is a powerful place and is meant for healing. Oral protection and validation are important, and the Elders Knowledge Circle Society is a place you can connect to.



Elder Story Project

WOMEN AND CEREMONY

Moon Time refers to a sacred time when a woman is on her Holy Time. Through this cycle, women feel the effects of the Grandmother Moon, similar to how the moon affects ocean tides. Women are respected for their ability to create life and Moon Time is a ceremony to connect with Creator. Because women are considered powerfully connected to Creator during their Moon Time, different Grandparents and Nations may request women not participate in certain ceremonies or use certain medicines. If you are not sure about protocol at a ceremony, pull a female Grandparent or the lead Grandparent aside and let them know you are on your Moon Time and they may guide you with what you may need to do.

Ribbon Skirts are often worn in ceremony or at special events. Traditionally, ribbon skirts are ankle-length, connecting you to the land or Mother Earth. Different color ribbons generally mean something special to the wearer, may be unique to their own teachings, or to each Nation. A ribbon skirt is an expression of womanhood and strength and a symbol of reclaiming identity. Regardless of how you may identify (Indigenous or non-Indigenous), if you are participating in or witnessing a ceremony, you may be encouraged to wear a ribbon skirt or a long skirt.



bowvalleycollege.ca

LAND-BASED HEALING

Land-based activities such as hunting/trapping/harvesting/ fishing, education, ceremony, gathering traditional medicines, and recreation (walking, hiking, camping) recognize that cultural identity is interwoven with and connected to land and water. Connecting with the land increases positive mental health and wellness outcomes.

LANGUAGE

Indigenous Peoples of all ages are re-learning their language. Learning or knowing your language grounds you, impacts your worldview, contributes to healing and your sense of belonging and identity, and helps you connect with Grandparents and Knowledge Keepers in your communities to maintain your culture.

“Language is the foundation of a culture. For Indigenous oral societies, words hold knowledge amassed for millennia. A language also holds the stories, songs, dances, protocols, family histories and connections. Languages also often hold the community’s customary laws that were eroded by the policies of the Indian Act. As many communities move towards a return to self-government, this loss of laws and systems of governance means some communities don’t have that knowledge to draw upon. When a language dies so does the link to the cultural and historical past. Without that crucial connection to their linguistic and cultural history, people lose their sense of identity and belonging.

Indigenous Peoples have been observing and talking about the environment since time immemorial. All of that knowledge, held in the language, is an invaluable source of information about the history of the natural environment, climate, plants, and animals. It is an irretrievable body of knowledge. Science, medicine, governments and resource planners all rely in part on Indigenous traditional knowledge and are all impacted when that irreplaceable storehouse of traditional environmental knowledge is gone. Each language that dies equals the loss of a cultural treasure.”

→
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Why Is It Important to Protect & Revitalize Indigenous Languages?

<https://www.ictinc.ca/blog/why-is-it-important-to-protect-revitalize-indigenous-languages>



Arts Commons - Kim Gordon

HONOURING THE CHILDREN WHO NEVER MADE IT HOME

THE RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL EXPERIENCE

It is estimated that over 150,000 First Nations, Inuit, and Métis children were forcibly sent to 139 Residential Schools, day schools, and industrial schools across Canada. Alberta had 25 Residential School locations, more Residential Schools than any other province in Canada. Each school in Alberta was different depending on the location and the religious affiliation (Roman Catholic, United Church, or Anglican).



St. Mary's Indian Residential School on the Blood Reserve, south of Lethbridge. (Galt Museum & Archives)

Ten of the 25

**RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS
IN ALBERTA WERE ON
TREATY 7 TERRITORY.**



Some of the stories that in our culture are passed down from the Elders and to make us appreciate life more, life is a gift to Creator. Visit your relatives while they're still here, that's who we are as a people. Love each other and go visit each other."

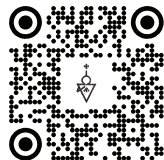
John Chief Moon Jr.

Ten of the 25 Indian Residential Schools in Alberta were on Treaty 7 territory. These were St. Mary's and St. Paul's on Kainai Nation, St. Cyprian's and Sacred Heart on Piikani Nation, Old Sun and Crowfoot (St. Joseph's) on Siksika Nation, St. Barnabas on Tsuut'ina Nation, Morley on Stoney Nakoda Nation, and St. Joseph's (Dunbow) in High River. The last Residential School to operate in Treaty 7 territory was St. Mary's Residential School, which operated from 1926 until 1988 (it replaced the earlier Immaculate Conception Boarding School established in 1898).

For some families, several generations attended Residential School, and the trauma experienced from attending these institutions has had a devastating impact on families and communities.

Thousands of children also died while attending Residential Schools, but the exact number remains unknown due to incomplete records. According to Volume 4 of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's final report, Alberta's Residential Schools recorded 821 school-related deaths, the highest number in the country. These numbers continue to grow as unmarked graves are identified at Residential Schools across Canada.

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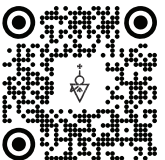


John Chief Moon Jr: "The importance of Intergenerational healing"
<https://www.eldersknowledgecircle.com/esp-residential-schools>

Learning about the history and colonization of Indigenous Peoples and Residential Schools can be difficult. Please watch, read, participate and learn with care. You may find engaging in some of these mindfulness activities helpful along the way:



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Learn about Residential Schools from Grandparents, Residential School survivors, or their family members. Continue to watch, read, learn, and participate from some of the resources listed here:
<https://www.eldersknowledgecircle.com/learningresources>

MENTAL HEALTH AND HEALING



Our mental health changes and fluctuates over time affecting our thinking, feeling, behaviour, and/or mood. If you don't take care of your mental health, you'll often find mental health concerns will have a ripple effect on your physical health. Even if someone has been diagnosed with a mental illness (for example, anxiety, depression, posttraumatic stress disorder, schizophrenia, personality disorder, or addiction), they can be well with appropriate coping strategies, treatment, and supports.

Counselling, as well as cultural and emotional support, is available through the [Indian Residential Schools Resolution Health Support Program](#) for eligible former students and their families. This phone line is available 24-hours a day for anyone experiencing pain or distress as a result of their Residential School experience. Call 1-866-925-4419.

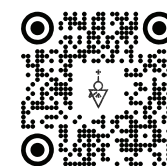
If you're experiencing emotional distress and want to talk, call the First Nations and Inuit [Hope for Wellness](#) Help Line at 1-855-242-3310 or the online chat at hopeforwellness.ca. It's toll-free and open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

[Circle of Wisdom Elders & Seniors Centre](#) provides Indigenous seniors in Calgary and area with programs and support in advocacy, traditional teachings, ceremony, and community engagement.

The [Elbow River Healing Lodge](#) offers a full range of primary care services and visiting specialists to First Nations (Status and Non-Status), Métis, and Inuit people and their families.

[Native Counseling Services of Alberta](#) provides emotional health and wellness support, including: Referrals to healing and wellness programs and supports; Emotional support at community events; Circle Facilitation; and Hearings as requested by Health Canada. Call to speak to a support worker: (780) 451-4002.

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Additional Learning Resources

<https://www.eldersknowledgecircle.com/esp-mental-health>

Visit the Calgary Public Library’s [Wellness Desk](#), available on a drop-in basis. A variety of mental wellness resources are also available to you for free with your Library card.

[Miskanawah](#) also provides a variety of programs and supports for children, youth, adults, seniors, and families.

Additional supports are available through the [Distress Centre, Calgary](#), [Communities Against Sexual Abuse](#), and [Kids Help Phone](#).

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Community and counseling resources may also be found here:
<https://www.eldersknowledgecircle.com/learningresources>

While experiencing changes to mental health or a mental illness can be very difficult, supports and services are available. Indigenous Peoples may seek formal counseling with Indigenous or non-Indigenous trained counselors and psychologists and/or traditional healing and wellness through ceremony, plant-based medicines, art, song and/or dance.



We still got hope, ... and I hope that some of these young children learn little more about the subject of a Treaty and why it’s like that, you know. There’s a lot of questions yet it has to be taught.”

Pat Daigneault

HOW TO ACCESS MENTAL HEALTH COUNSELLING BENEFITS THROUGH NIHB:

You can access mental health counselling benefits from an eligible provider. Every 12 months, an eligible client can receive up to 22 hours of counselling performed by an eligible provider. Additional hours in the same 12 month period may be provided on a case-by-case basis.

For more information on specific benefit policies and requirements, refer to the [Guide to Mental Health Counselling Benefits](#).

Counsellors enrolled with the program generally send claims to bill the program directly with NIHB. Claims processing services are provided by Express Scripts Canada. Information can be found on the [Express Scripts Canada NIHB](#) provider and client website.

If your counsellor does not bill NIHB directly, you may also submit reimbursement requests yourself. Claims cover costs that are eligible for reimbursement under the program as per established fee guides. See [Client reimbursement](#) for more information.

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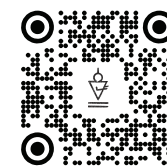
Community and counseling resources may also be found here:
<https://www.eldersknowledgecircle.com/learningresources>

WHERE CAN YOU CONNECT WITH A GRANDPARENT OR KNOWLEDGE KEEPER?

For Calgary and area, you may be able to connect with a Grandparent or Knowledge Keeper by reaching out to:



Elders Knowledge Circle Society



The Elders Knowledge Circle Society here:

<https://www.eldersknowledgecircle.com>



The Calgary Public Library—see the schedule online to drop in or book an appointment here:

<https://calgarylibrary.ca/connect/indigenous-services/elders-guidance-circle/>



Elbow River Healing Lodge (7th Floor, Sheldon M. Chumir Health Centre) has Grandparents onsite who may be able to offer traditional wellness and healing (spiritual, cultural, and ceremonial supports). Call to make an appointment: 403-955-6600.

<https://albertahealthservices.ca/findhealth/Service.aspx?id=1009201&serviceAtFacilityID=1041055#contentStart>

CONTRIBUTORS

SPECIAL ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This Toolkit would not be possible without the generosity of those who shared their lived experiences and stories. We offer our deepest gratitude to all of the Grandparents of the Elders Knowledge Circle Society who have supported the development of this toolkit and a special thanks to Francis Melting Tallow, John Chief Moon Jr., Alice Kaquitts, Rose Crowshoe, Reg Crowshoe, Jackie Bromley, Monica Chief Moon, Diane Meguinis, and Elder Patrick Daignault. Your voices are the heart of this project, guiding all who engage with these teachings.

We also want to acknowledge the Calgary Public Library and United Way of Calgary and Area, whose commitment and partnership have been central to this work. Special thanks to Kelli Morning Bull, Mary Ann Forbes, and Heather Robertson at the Library, and to Joanne Pinnow and Yvette Biggs at United Way of Calgary and Area, whose care and dedication helped carry this project forward in meaningful ways.

We extend our thanks to the many others who have contributed their time, skills, and wisdom: Calvin Racette (Educator guide); Anh Au (Art Director/ Graphic Design); Glynnis Ewashen (Proofreading and Editorial Support); jaqs gallos aquines (Video Editing); and Jarret Twoyoungmen (Videography).

To all those named here, and to the many more who supported this project behind the scenes, hand to heart to you in gratitude. Together, your contributions have helped to bring together a living resource, created in respect and collaboration, to support learning, healing, and connection for generations to come.

HONOURING OUR GRANDPARENTS

We acknowledge with deep respect the Grandparents who are no longer with us. Their wisdom, teachings, and ways of knowing continue to live within this work, carried forward through the Elders Story Project. Though they have journeyed on, their legacy remains present in these pages, in the stories shared, and in the knowledge that continues to guide us.

This Toolkit stands as a reflection of their gifts and a reminder that the teachings of our Grandparents do not end with their passing, but remain alive within our communities, shaping the path for generations to come. We especially honour and remember John Chief Moon Sr., Brenda North Peigan, Donna Kaquitts, Charles Powderface, Daphne Good Eagle, Darryl Brass Sr., William Bellegarde, Anne Kokak, and Phillomene Stevens, whose voices and presence continue to guide this work.

In remembering them, we also acknowledge all Grandparents who have passed on, leaving behind a legacy of knowledge that continues to light the way for future generations.

CIRCLE OF SUPPORTERS

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to the sponsors and donors who make up our circle of supporters. Your generosity and belief in this work ensure that the voices, teachings, and knowledge of our Grandparents continue to be carried forward. Together, we build the strength of community where knowledge, culture, and healing continue to grow.

