



Great Lakes Water Walk

Protocols and Respect

We are extremely pleased to offer the opportunity to gather together from a variety of Nations-Indigenous and non-Indigenous. Each Nation is unique and Indigenous Peoples are diverse in language, geography and cultural customs. The following traditional protocols are offered as guidelines to support a respectful atmosphere

Clothing

Traditional people usually wear more formal attire when attending ceremonies (this would include the Opening and Closing Ceremony, and the Sunrise Ceremony). Men usually wear long pants and women wear long skirts. Dress to honour the occasion as you would if attending an important function or celebration, but also consider the elements, comfort and flexibility. A skirt overtop of pants is one way of being prepared for ceremony at a moment's notice.

Photographs

If you wish to take a picture of a person we encourage you to first introduce yourself to the person and then ask to take their picture.

Timelines

While we have set an agenda, timelines may change. If there are changes in timelines or the agenda, please be patient and respectful. We will do our best to communicate any changes in a timely fashion.

Respect

The Great Lakes Water Walk is respectful of all people, and we anticipate that as an attendee at this Gathering you will be as well. Often it is challenging to understand different cultures and to understand the concept of Indigenous protocols. It is important, however, that even if you do not understand something, please do your best to respect that this is how things are done.

Teachings

Elders and Traditional Teachers often provide teachings in the form of stories that are ‘rich’ but lengthy and will at times pause for an extended amount of time to collect their thoughts. Please allow the Elder to finish their presentation and wait until they ask for questions. Remember that it is the Elders who are sharing their Indigenous Knowledge and it is from their Traditions. Though it may not agree with what you feel is correct, we ask that you refrain from debating with Elders. Please take what information you feel is of value and respect others views.

Moontime (Women’s Teaching)

The Elders and Grandmothers remind us that a woman on her moontime (menstruation) is when a woman is most powerful. It is believed that women sacrifice and give to the people during their moontime. It is a time of purification. Women on their moontime are kindly and humbly asked not to touch ceremonial items or sacred medicines, particularly among the men spiritual leaders.

Language

It is customary to refrain from profanity during all aspects of ceremony including preparations and clean up. It is also customary to never interrupt an Elder at any time when they are speaking.

Medicines

There are four sacred medicines we use in ceremony (cedar, sage, sweetgrass, tobacco) These along with sacred bundles (ceremonial items) are handled only by the holder (Elder, Knowledge Keeper, etc.) unless otherwise asked to assist so please resist the temptation to be helpful and touch these items. Drums/shakers are considered medicine so the same restrictions apply.

Smudging

This is the ceremonial process of burning white sage in a container. The smoke that comes up from the burning medicines is called “smudge” where we draw the smoke over our bodies in sacred reverence and gratitude. It sets our intention, connects us to the spirit world and cleanses our spiritual space. This process is customarily avoided by women on their “moontime”.

Customs

Shaking hands is not customary. Talking loud is usually not done by traditional people. Standing and removing headwear during honour songs/prayer is customary. Silence is valued. Circular gatherings are normal. Clapping is not our normal expression. Long skirts/dresses (past the knee) for women and shirts that fully cover the shoulders/breasts are customary. Men usually wear long pants. Visually offensive images/language on t-shirts is unacceptable. Sitting on the ground on a blanket for ceremony is normal with your legs covered for women or cross legged with your legs covered. We do not touch each other’s hair even in complimentary ways. We never touch someone in regalia (traditional outfits/clothing). Tobacco is given when asking for

anything. It is a show of respect and honouring. Ancestral recognition, territory acknowledgements are mandatory.

Other

Visible garbage is always picked up and deposited appropriately. Assistance/patience is extended to elderly folks and seats are given up for them. All folks are equal in importance in our circles.

Circles are sacred representations of equality and respect. All people are welcomed into the circle.

Round dance

A round dance is a symbolic gesture of unity. It is the process of connecting ones hands with another in circular formation and then moving clockwise to the beat of the drum music being shared. We move until the music ends and proceed to express our emotions with verbal shouts and honour beats on the drum. These dances include all genders, faith backgrounds, religions, identities and ages.

Sacred Bundles

These are gatherings of sacred/ceremonial objects that reflect the owners' teachings, responsibilities, understandings, relationships etc. They are never touched without direct and clear permission to do so. They are never stepped upon and are often situated upon the ground on a cloth or skin. We never step over any of part of the bundle nor use profanity in its presence.

Eagle/other Feathers

Carrying an eagle feather is considered high honour and deep responsibility but there are other types of feathers that hold that same sacred power. It is believed that the feather connects you to the spirit world and is a direct tool of communication. These are never touched or swung around or left unattended. If one should fall to the ground you must NOT retrieve it. There is a special ceremony to pick it up.

Drums/Shakers

These are sacred spiritual tools that are the responsibility of the caregivers who bring them. Men customarily sit at the big drum and women stand behind them in support. Hand drums are used equally by both genders. They are considered medicine and reflect the heartbeat of our Earth Mother. Shakers are said to be the sound of the Creator's First Thought. They are made of many varying materials and are also sacred ancestral objects not to be touched unless permitted to do so.

Final thoughts

These Teachings are kind. Do not despair if the protocols are not strictly adhered to. This is a gentle guide of First Nations' Traditional Practices. If you are unsure ask someone to assist you.