

WELCOME TO CIRCLE

THIS GUIDE IS DESIGNED TO HELP YOU UNDERSTAND “WHAT IS CIRCLE?”

HOW TO ENTER A SPACE: PREPARE THE HEART, MIND, BODY, AND SPIRIT

The longest journey you can take when coming to know Indigenous Knowledge is **listening from your heart** rather than your mind. We gain knowledge from being open to receiving information that is shared. The concept “listening to hear” (McGloin, 2015) is explored in allyship scholarship, and it requires holding the information that has been shared for multiple meanings to come forward rather than immediately responding or reacting.

We need to **practice silence** after receiving knowledge so the meaning can be constructed. Affective listening takes patience, practice, and kindness. When teachers and students hear stories and different perspectives on racism and colonization, they must consider how their own perpetuation of colonization affects what is heard.

What is heard are values, beliefs, and perceptions sifting through the shared information. **Uncertainty is normal**, and we must approach engagement with Indigenous Knowledge/Culture without an agenda or expectations.



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UNDERSTANDING PROTOCOL

The term protocol includes many things, but overall, it refers to ways of interacting with Indigenous persons or People in a manner that respects traditional ways of being. Protocols are not just manners, niceties, tact, rules, or specific codes of behaviour - they represent a culture's deeply held ethical system. They may differ vastly from one Indigenous culture or community to another and can be highly complex and multi-layered.

General Process for Circle:

- It is respectful to **introduce oneself at the beginning** with who you are and where you come from. This means your family's cultural and geographical background prior to settlement in North America. This allows for a deeper understanding of your family lineage and situates you in relation to the person or people you are interacting with.
- It is important that the circle of people **listens respectfully to the person speaking**. There is usually an object, the 'talking stick' and whomever has this object is the *only* person with the responsibility of speaking. Everyone else has a responsibility to listen *actively* and *respectfully* to the speaker. This means being present in the moment, NOT to be thinking of what you are going to say.
- The person who is speaking should **'speak from the heart'**. Circle is an emotional and physical exercise that can evoke feelings/empathy. Don't be afraid to cry, our bodies were designed to cry so it is perfectly natural; it is a release/cleansing of something in your Mental/Physical/Spiritual/Emotional self.
- **Shared communications should be kept in confidence**, especially if personal. The circle encourages inclusivity giving everyone an equal chance to speak if they wish to do so. At the same time, the circle requires confidentiality; what happens in the circle stays in the circle. You can share your story when you leave, but we cannot have reconciliation without truth, and for people to feel safe to share we must respect each other and not share anyone else's stories outside of the circle.

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WHAT IS A TALKING CIRCLE? A BRIEF HISTORY

Talking Circles originated with First Nations Leaders - the process was used to ensure that all leaders in the tribal council were heard, and that those who were speaking were not interrupted. Usually, the Chief would initiate the conversation, with other members responding and sharing their perceptions and opinions of the topic under discussion.

Many Indigenous cultures use sharing/talking/conversation/healing circles. However, they aren't used by all Nations. For example, the Haudenosaunee governance structure uses a circle structure that has very specific protocols of 50 Chiefs in a circle (representing all clans and nations) and 50 Clan mothers as well.

Talking circles of discussion circles represent an approach to learning that encourages dialogue, respect, and social discourse. The nuance of subtle energy created from using this respectful approach to talking with others provides a sense of communion and interconnectedness. When everyone has their turn to speak, when all voices are heard in a respectful and attentive way, the learning atmosphere becomes a rich source of information, identity, and interaction. Many talking circles are traditionally 'opened' through a prayer and smudging. A sacred space is facilitated by these reverent acts and observances.

The circle itself is considered sacred. First Nations people observed that the circle is a dominant symbol in nature and has come to represent wholeness, completion, and the cycles of life. Indigenous ways of knowing use and interpret the circle in many distinct ways but they all include the same good intention.

Everything in circles; cycles.

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TALKING PIECES

Circles are typically characterized through the use of a talking piece, this may often be known as a talking stick, talking stone, talking feather, etc. There are several varied objects that are used by different First Nations peoples to facilitate the talking circle. Some people use a talking stick, others a talking feather, while still others use a peace pipe, a sacred shell, a wampum belt, or other selected object.

The main point of using the sacred object is that whoever is holding the object in their hand has the right to speak. It is important to intentionally select an object that is simple yet meaningful. Indigenous Peoples often use an eagle feather or other sacred object gifted to an elder in the community or passed on through generations.

For non-Indigenous peoples that enter the circle and use a talking piece, it is important to honour the origin of the cultural practice and its teachings.



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TABACCO TEACHINGS

Gratitude and requests often find their accompaniment with tobacco, one of the most sacred medicines with a wide range of uses within Indigenous knowledge. Tobacco is believed to be the first plant the Creator gave to Indigenous peoples. It is the main activator of all the plant spirits and was given to us so that we can communicate with the spirit world.

Offering tobacco in the form of a tobacco tie is a custom that is shared by many Indigenous peoples. Tobacco is offered for many reasons and in many different contexts. It is appropriate to offer tobacco when asking for assistance from an Elder, a knowledge keeper, or a person to offer tobacco.

When the person accepts the tobacco, they are agreeing or signifying their willingness to help in some way. Offering tobacco is a respectful way of asking for assistance and not as symbol of gratitude after help is provided. When someone accepts tobacco, they are agreeing to listen openly and without judgement and to support you as best they can.

It is appropriate to offer tobacco when asking for a song, an opening prayer, a teaching, Indigenous knowledge, or for advice. Though, this should not replace remuneration or honoraria.

Tobacco offerings are also given when we gather medicines, roots and berries, when we take anything from Mother Earth including the animals, it is used in hunting practices. Always put tobacco down first.



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SWEETGRASS BRAIDS

Sweetgrass is one of the four sacred medicines. It is the hair of Mother Earth and is considered a gift from the creator. It represents the kindness, gentleness, and love of Mother Earth - it represents healing and peace.

Sweetgrass braids consist of 21 individual strands. The first 7 represent the 7 generations who came before us and the final 7 represent the 7 generations who will come after us. The middle 7 represent the 7 Grandfather Teachings: Humility, Bravery, Honesty, Wisdom, Truth, Respect, and Love.

The 3 groups individually represent our mind, body, and spirit coming together. Together these 3 make the fourth, showing our interconnectedness to each other, the land, and all living things - all our relations.



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PRINCIPLES OF A GOOD MIND

When we consciously become aware of our thoughts, especially those that are kind and loving, we naturally allow ourselves to become spiritually attuned to the Creator's intentions. The Haudenosaunee believe that attaining serenity requires having a deep spiritual connection. This enables us to use our skills to achieve our purpose on Earth. The Haudenosaunee believe that since the Peacemaker helped us bury our arrows beneath the Tree of Peace, it has been possible to live by the Good Mind's teachings.

According to what our Elders have taught us, cultivating the Good Mind will help our spirit, also known as Orenda, to flourish. Strong Orenda in good minds results in peace. The idea of the Good Mind encourages us to be conscious of our ideas and their purpose, which leads to more compassionate and loving thinking. Every living thing on the planet is interconnected with us, and every one of us is significant in our own way.

The Good Mind entails listening, learning, and loving for the sake of future generations. We must handle everything carefully and lovingly. A Good Mind means a way of being and thinking that is relational and spiritual. The guiding principles enable Good Minds to live in peace and connect to a world where individuals do not resort to war, believe they are more valuable than others, or believe their way of life is superior to another. Knowing oneself and engaging in any necessary healing work to strengthen and maintain your overall wellness can help you cultivate a good mind. Additionally, by depending on your cultural teachings, ancestral wisdom, and other interrelated ties with the land, Creation, and Creator, you can create a good mind in relation to connection with your family and community.

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TWO ROW WAMPUM

To recognize treaty agreements the Haudenosaunee exchanged wampum belts with European settlers. In 1613, the Two Row Wampum recorded the agreement made between the Haudenosaunee and the Dutch government. It is the first treaty in which both sides agreed to respect each other's culture and to not interfere with each other's affairs.

The Two Row Wampum has two parallel lines of purple beads that represent each party – one for the Haudenosaunee canoe and the other for the European ship – that travel the water ways of life, never crossing paths. Each vessel carries the owner's own culture, traditions, language, and ways of life.

There are three lines of white beads that lie between the purple beads with each line representing friendship, a good mind, and peace. To come to understand the way of life and the way of knowing of those in the other vessel, you must travel over each path one by one and promise to continually maintain the growing relationship. It is an agreement on how to best resolve disagreements while travelling the cycles of life in two different paths.



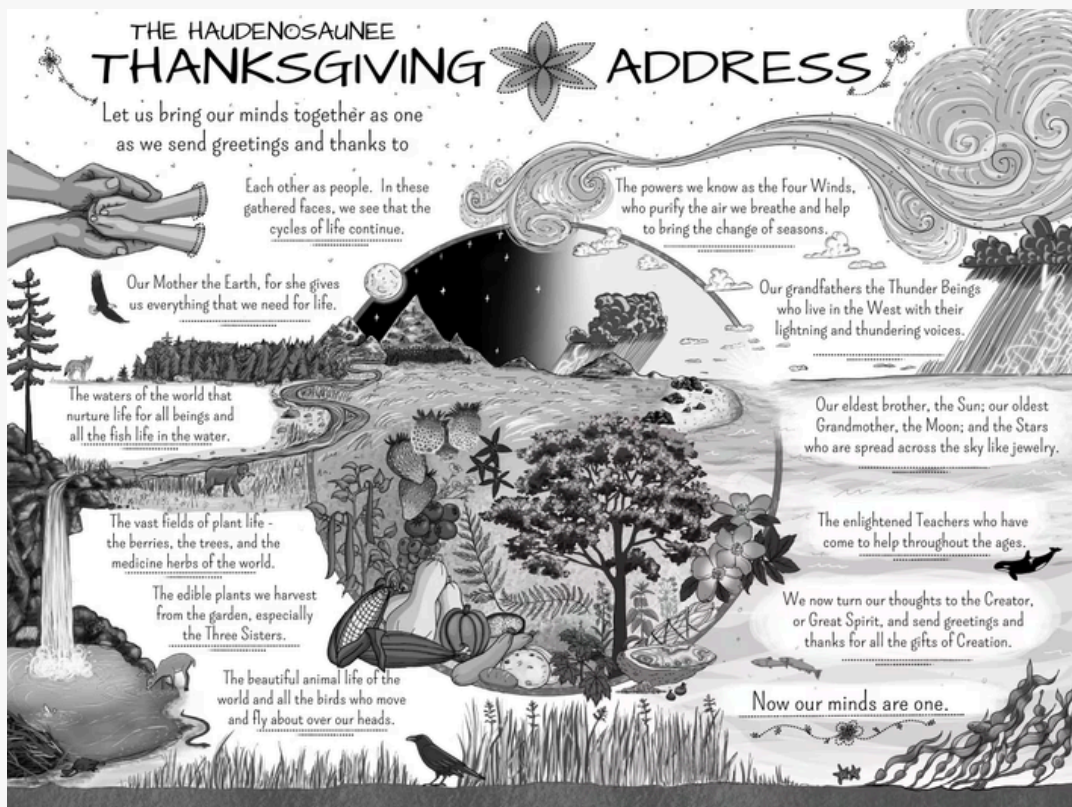
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THE THANKSGIVING ADDRESS

The Thanksgiving Address is an important part of Haudenosaunee social and ceremonial gatherings. Major gatherings typically start and end with the Thanksgiving Address. It is sometimes used individually to start and end the day. The words express thanks for all humans, the earth, the waters, the animals, the plants, and many more.

The Haudenosaunee believe that peace requires gratitude. The Thanksgiving Address is a reminder to appreciate and acknowledge all things. It is a tradition that reinforces the connection humans have to the world around them and allows us to give thanks daily. It acknowledges the multitude of connections human beings have with all other things on and around earth. The Haudenosaunee are grateful and express gratitude for all the gifts that they receive.



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EVERYTHING BELOW IS HYPERLINKED, SO JUST CLICK TO CHECK IT OUT

WANT TO LEARN MORE?

- [Listening to Hear: Critical Allies in Indigenous Studies](#) by Colleen McGloin
- [Talking Circles: First Nations Pedagogy Online](#)
- [Talking Circles; Trent University](#)
- [Haudenosaunee Guide For Educators](#)
- [The Significance of the Thanksgiving Address](#) by Frieda Jacques (Video)
- [Treaty Relations and Two Row Companion](#) by Rick Hill (Video)



LEARNING NEVER ENDS