

ELDER/TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE KEEPERS (TKK) PROTOCOLS FOR SCHOOLS

SD 73 (Kamloops-Thompson)

School District No. 73 is committed to the success of every student. Inviting Aboriginal role models such as Elders, TKK, into our schools is an opportunity for the sharing of cultural beliefs and traditional practices with students and staff in our schools. The inclusion of Aboriginal perspectives and presence would foster Aboriginal student self-esteem and confidence as well as foster welcoming community relationships.

The rationale for Elder (First Nation, Inuit, and Metis)/TKK Protocol for schools is to serve as a guide and ensure consistent practice when working with an Elder/TKK in a District, school or classroom capacity. This guide provides key points to consider when working with an Elder/TKK (or Aboriginal Role Model) from the community.

NOTE: We have many schools in our District. Please consider this when asking and Elder/TKK so that they do not feel overwhelmed with requests. If you are unsure, please contact the District Principal for support or direction.

Why Involve Elders, Traditional Knowledge Keepers

First Nations and Inuit Elders, and Traditional Knowledge Keepers in particular are integral to the revival, maintenance, and preservation of Aboriginal cultures. Elder/TKK participation in support of curricular objectives develops the positive identity of First Nations, Inuit and Metis students and enhances identity. All students may acquire a heightened awareness and cultural sensitivity that not only promotes inclusion but is one of the key benchmarks for a successful education system for diverse students.

It is important to note that the Elder/TKK designation does not necessarily indicate age. In Aboriginal and Metis societies, one is designated after acquiring significant wisdom and understanding of First Nations/Metis/Inuit history, traditional teachings, ceremonies, healing practice and experience. Elders/TKK have earned the respect from their community to pass on this knowledge to others and give advice and guidance on personal issues as well as issues affecting their communities and nations. Traditional Knowledge Keepers (TKK) are community members who are recognized as having specific traditional knowledge from the community or nation in which they belong. They may or may not be Elders from that community.

Role of an Elder/TKK

An Elder/TKK appreciates the opportunity to share their teachings, and will respond positively when approached with respect and humility. When requesting guidance or assistance, there is a protocol for approaching Elders/TKK, which varies from community-to-community. Please do

not feel intimidated when approaching an Elder, TKK. The potential role of an Elder/TKK could be to:

- Enhance cultural perspectives and share wisdom and teachings;
- Promote awareness of culture and traditions;
- Build and enhance relationships between school and Aboriginal parents/guardians/community by making them feel more comfortable in the school;
- Act as a mediator and promote harmony;
- Act as a mentor and role model for students;
- Promote Aboriginal languages;
- Enhance and enrich classroom lessons and school cultural events with the incorporation of Aboriginal content/perspectives;

How to Access an Elder/TKK

An Elder/TKK can be accessed by contacting:

- Local Aboriginal community agencies such as:
 - Two Rivers Metis Society
 - Kamloops Aboriginal Friendship Society

- Local First Nations Bands:
 - Little Shuswap Indian Band
 - Adams Lake Indian Band
 - Neskonlith Band
 - Tk'emlups te Secwepemc
 - Simpcw First Nation
 - Clinton/Whispering Pines Band
 - Skeetchestn Band

- School District No. 73 Aboriginal Education Department
 - Aboriginal Education Council
 - District Principal of Aboriginal Education
 - Aboriginal Education Worker (AEW)

When Approaching an Elder / TKK

Once you have acquired the Elder's/TKK contact information, and what special gifts he/she has to share, please provide the following information when speaking with them:

- Introduce yourself
- Where you obtained the referral from (i.e., Friendship Society, Aboriginal Community Liaison, etc.)
- The reason for your call
- Your interest in meeting them to further discuss your request at their convenience, gifts/talents, your request and availability.

Some Elders/TKK prefer personal visits versus phone calls. To establish a relationship and clarity of the purpose of the visit, meet with them before they are scheduled to visit your school. Some Elder's/TKK's may be okay with discussing your request over the telephone but usually this practice occurs only when the relationship has already been established, and when there is an understanding between both parties. Be patient when making a request, as you may not always get an answer immediately. An Elder/TKK may wish to think about the request before committing to it. If they are unable to accommodate your request, he/she may provide a name of another Elder/TKK for you to request.

Ask the Elder/TKK if transportation arrangements are required. In most occurrences, transportation arrangements may not be necessary but in some instances you may have to arrange their travel to/from the school.

Ask the Elder/TKK if they require water or snack. If they have dietary or medical needs.

During Your Meeting with an Elder/TKK

When you meet with the Elder/TKK:

- Introduce yourself and be welcoming by offering tea/water/coffee.
- Give thanks for the meeting and their time.
- Make your request (i.e., "I received your name from our Aboriginal Resource person and in speaking with this person, he/she recommended you as a valuable resource to... At our school or in our classroom we want to build cultural awareness and make connections to the community create an inclusive environment in the school... Are you available to accommodate this request? We would require a commitment of...").
- After you have made your request, the Elder/TKK will ask further questions for more information and let you know if he/she is able to accommodate your request.
- Ask if a gift or honorarium would be appropriate (as some may wish to volunteer their time).
- Explain schedule specifics (i.e., time, number of students, class or setting, etc.).

Cultural Practice: Offering Medicines (tobacco/sage/kinnikinnick)

Offering tobacco/sage/kinnikinnick is a contract and for some cultures, an acknowledgement of payment for services to be rendered. It should be offered when you ask for teaching or direction in a matter of importance. It is showing honour and respect for what is being offered.

When making requests to an Elder/TKK and if he/she accepts your request, ensure you have tobacco/sage/kinnikinnick ties/pouches at hand. It's important that tobacco/sage/kinnikinnick is given first at the initial meeting after the request is accepted OR prior to the start of the session/event and not after, unless you have a relationship already established and this practice is okay with the Elder/TKK. Traditionally the tobacco/sage/kinnikinnick tie is made by the person making the request and given and accepted using the left hand.

NOTE: Sage, sweetgrass, kinnikinnick, or cedar ties are also used as part of the gift (after). If unsure, ask the Elder/TKK.

How Do I Make a Tobacco/Sage/Kinnikinnick Tie?

A tobacco/sage/kinnikinnick tie is made by cutting a small square of broadcloth (a nice pattern or any colour part of the traditional colours from the local community. Some of the more traditional colours of the medicine wheel – yellow, white, black, red, blue – would be a nice touch) and placing loose leaf tobacco or dried sage or kinnikinnick in the cloth square and tie it with ribbon.

- When you are making the tie make sure you are in good spirits.
- Ideally the tobacco should be loose leaf and have no additives.
- Ideally the person making the request should make the tie.
- Abuse of tobacco is considered a grave offence. Tobacco is a ceremonial medicine and only used for ceremonial purposes (i.e., sealing an agreement or prayer offering).

Sage, sweetgrass, kinnikinnick or cedar ties are also sometimes given as part of the gift to the Elder/TKK or the group that has just given a presentation (i.e., dancers, etc.). It is given after the presentation. This can also be given as a tie. Tobacco is not typically given as a gift in this way.

Honorariums / Gifts

Purpose

The purpose of honorarium and gifts, is to acknowledge and show appreciation for the sharing of knowledge and respect for personal time given. Traditionally, food, clothing, or medicines would have been used to gift an Elder/TKK or Guest. Today, items and/or monetary honorarium may be given as a demonstration of respect and appreciation. The practice of giving back is culturally appropriate and is practiced when something is offered and taken (i.e., knowledge, something from the land, etc.) and can traditionally be in the form of medicinal plants (tobacco, sage, cedar, kinnikinnick, sweetgrass). An Elder/TKK or Guest does not have the expectation to receive the honorarium, but appreciates the gesture of what is given. Giving from the heart is what counts. Not all Elders/TKK or Guests will accept the gift, and may voluntarily give their time.

A second consideration from schools and districts is around compensation. Although an Elder/TKK or Guest may never ask, considerations for time and expenses would be respectful.

Below are some ideas for honorarium or gifts:

- Gift (blanket, broadcloth, craft supplies, practical items, etc.);
- Monetary gift/honorarium – check with AEW or refer to AEAC guidelines for honorarium and forms to fill out if needed.

Some things to consider when giving an honorarium or gift:

- Please let the Elder/TKK or Role Model know if a gift or honorarium will be given, or if you are not able to meet the honorarium guidelines. Some Elders/TKK or Guests may prefer a gift over an honorarium; therefore, if possible, ask the Elder/TKK or Guest what their preference would be.
- The honorarium should be ready and presented with a thank you card or in an envelope right after the presentation.
- Tobacco is traditionally a powerful medicinal plant and may also be given, but it is good to enquire with the Elder/TKK or Role Model first to find out if this is appropriate protocol. It is okay to ask the person if he/she accepts tobacco or not. Tobacco is typically given before as an acceptance or contract to help. Sage, sweetgrass, kinnikinnick or cedar are more typically used as a gift.

NOTE: Due to regulations with Revenue Canada, we cannot give Gift Cards as a gift.

Other Considerations

- Explain beforehand about how the school handles checking in at the office, sign in sheets, visitor tags, etc.
- Who should greet them?
- Who is responsible for the visit?
- How to sign out? Etc.