

SD10 Indigenous Elders and Knowledge Keepers Protocol Guide



Indigenous Elders and Knowledge Keepers in the Classroom

Inviting Elders and Indigenous Knowledge Keepers into classrooms provides all students with the opportunity to learn about the important role that First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples have played in the past, present, and future of Canada.

First Nation, Métis and Inuit people are diverse in their languages and cultures, yet, within this diversity, there is a shared Indigenous worldview. The guiding principles and traditional values of Indigenous societies suggests the way Indigenous peoples see themselves in relation to the world. It is a holistic process where learning takes place across different spheres of human experience including spiritual, physical, emotional, and mental dimensions. Worldviews may also consider relationships and experiences of the past, present, and future as interconnected.

Many First Nations share the concept or teachings of the medicine wheel which provides a tool/teaching by taking care of all aspects of oneself. Implicit in this is the understanding that all of life is a ceremony; that the sacred and secular are parts of the whole; that people are whole beings (body, mind, spirit, emotion). SD10 is working to share this perspective with staff, students, and community to foster an atmosphere of respect, understanding and inclusivity. One of the most commonly shared experiences are the various roles held by our Elders and Knowledge Keepers and the ways in which we honour them.

Elders and Knowledge Keepers

An Elder or Knowledge Keeper is a person regarded or chosen by an Indigenous nation to be the keeper and teacher of its oral tradition and knowledge. This is someone who is recognized for their wisdom about spirituality, culture and life. Elders and Knowledge Keepers are sought out for their advice and assistance in traditional and contemporary issues (*Alberta Education, 2008*).

Elders and Knowledge Keepers are important members of our First Nations, Metis and Inuit communities and have valuable knowledge to share with Indigenous and non-Indigenous students in the classroom. Some of this knowledge includes, but is not limited to:

- Sharing cultural perspectives, as well as wisdom and teachings
- Promoting awareness of culture and traditions
- Enhancing and enriching classroom lessons and school events with the integration of Indigenous worldviews and perspectives

When an Elder or Knowledge Keeper is invited to participate in an activity or ceremony in your school, treating them with great respect by following these guidelines.

Before the Visit

- Determine and share the purpose of the visit with your students. How is it connected to the curriculum? Be clear about the intended curricular outcomes connected to the visit so that it is a meaningful experience for all.
- Ensure the guest is aware of the learning that has taken place prior to the visit. Please advise them of your time schedule so that they can adjust their presentation accordingly.
- Elders/Knowledge Keepers never ask to be paid for their work; however they should be acknowledged with an honorarium and a gift for sharing their time and knowledge. Ensure that the honorarium and gift is presented during the visit. (Please consult with your guest to determine an appropriate honorarium amount. If you have any questions, please contact your Indigenous Education Support Teacher.)
- Ask the Elder/Knowledge Keeper if they have any specific needs prior to the visit; Photocopying? Special equipment or supplies? Is there anything the students should know before the visit? Organization of the classroom/space?

Day of Visit

- Prepare classroom space as required. If technical equipment is required, check that it is working.
- Have an Administrator, teacher, or student at the front door to greet the Elder and their travelling companion, if there is one. Do not assume they will shake your hand and wait for them to extend their hand first. Otherwise greet them with appreciation for their time.
- Ensure that the staff are aware that an Elder will be in the building.
- Assist them with their belongings and walk them to the classroom.
- Offer water/tea/coffee. Let them know where washrooms are located.
- Please confirm how the Elder would like to be introduced.
- Acknowledge territory and introduce speaker to students.
- Have student(s) formally thank the speaker and ensure that the gift and honorarium are presented.
- Some Knowledge Keepers or Elders may share deeply personal experiences with students during their visit. Please ask them if they wish to have a few moments in a quiet place to ground themselves after the session.
- If possible, debrief the session with the Elder/Knowledge Keeper.
- Walk the Elder/Knowledge Keeper out and assist them with any of their belongings.

***It is important that the classroom teacher be present throughout the presentation.** Besides being respectful, this behavior also reinforces to students that the guest and the information being shared is important. Teachers also need to be available to address any student behavioural challenges. **Note:** If you are unable to be present, please arrange/rearrange for an alternative date that works for you and the Elder/Knowledge Keeper.

After the Visit

- Debrief the session with your students and do a follow up activity. This is especially important if there was no time for questions or a discussion at the end of the session.
- If possible, debrief the session with the Elder/Knowledge Keeper and share with the Elder/Knowledge Keeper what the students have articulated about their learning.

Acknowledgements

The information in this guide was adapted from the following resources:

- *Aboriginal Worldviews and Perspectives in the Classroom, BC Ministry of Education*
- *Elders Protocol - School District No. 58 (Nicola-Similkameen)*
- *Elders Protocol – School District No. 41 (Burnaby)*
- *FNESC Science First Peoples Teacher Resource Guide – Grades 5-9*
- *Lakehead Public Schools Elder/Senator Protocol for Schools.*
- *University of Alberta Elder Protocol and Guidelines prepared by the Council on Aboriginal Initiatives.*
- *University of Winnipeg Elders Policy and Protocols.*