

PROTOCOL FOR APPROACHING AN ELDER

A Traditional Elder is someone who follows the teachings of our ancestors. It is said Traditional Elders walk and talk the good way of life. Traditional Elders teach and share the wisdom they have gained of the culture, history and the language. The sharing of their wisdom is healing. An Elder does not have to be a senior but could be someone younger who has many teachings and who has earned the respect of their community by contributing to its spiritual development.

When you go to a Healer, Elder or Medicine Person be yourself, be respectful to them and to yourself. Take tobacco as an offering. Tobacco is meant for that communication between you, the Elder or Healer and the Creator. The tobacco can be in any form. For example, it can be one cigarette from a pack, it can be a pack of cigarettes, it can be a pouch of tobacco or it can be loose tobacco wrapped in a small square of cloth (called a tobacco tie).

Talk to the Healer or Elder explaining why you have come to them. Refrain from taking alcohol or drugs for four days before going to a Healer or Elder. Women schedule their appointments with Healers or Elders for times when they are not on their moontime.

Other gifts can be given to express your gratitude for the help you have received. This may be in the form of an item such as a basket or blanket or it could be money. There are certain protocols specific to each Healer, Elder, or Medicine Person. Many Healers or Elders will have helpers who will convey these protocols to you, for example, they will let you know whether you may receive treatment after chemotherapy.

As our awareness and knowledge of our traditions and culture increases, so does our honor and respect for these ways. This has not always been the case in our communities. There are always those who present themselves as Healers, Elders or Medicine People who have not earned that title and may use the teachings and medicines in the wrong way. It is important for everyone, especially young people to be aware of this and to exercise caution when they seek healing, teachings or advice. It is advisable to consult with people whom your trust to get referrals to respected and recognized Traditional Elders, Healers or Medicine People.